

Let the Voters Decide

I last wrote after the public hearing on the Tiverton Tax Cap explaining why I withdrew that ordinance to focus on the Financial Town Referendum (FTR). After that meeting, I was certain that the FTR could be an initiative that Tiverton could rally around, its citizens, public officials, business owners, all of us. I still feel that way. Much of the feedback I have received is very positive; people want to know more. A common concern with the current format is the time commitment and intimidation at the current Financial Town Meeting (FTM). Honestly, who wants to spend four hours in a stuffy auditorium where decorum is close to non-existent and intimidation is a widespread practice?

The Town Council voted Monday night, July 25, 5-2 in favor of placing this referendum before the people on a ballot during a special election on November 8, jointly placed with the library bond question. This will be the first time Tiverton will have the opportunity to vote on a referendum, an initiative designed to encourage more voter participation while emulating the best parts of the current FTM as closely as possible. This effort to reform our antique budget process is an important initiative, and I ask for your support as we prepare for this landmark election.

It comes as little surprise that not everyone supports this and we hope to change their minds. We will rely on the facts, present them and have the public decide at the ballot box. It's worth to note that an oft repeated belief that the voters have consistently voted down this approach is not correct. Substantial efforts researching Town Hall records show that previous efforts consisted of placing the purse strings firmly in the hands of the Town Council. Not this time. The committee working to replace the FTM have made this research available in the public record and can be found online at the town website.

It is important to have a fact-based conversation about this important change, and I strongly encourage an open and honest debate. Some have resorted to plumbing the depths of hypocrisy by challenging this reform effort while they intend to continue their practice of ignoring the R.I. Tax cap law that limits increases to the tax levy. Claiming that a state law, which is in full force across 38 of 39 communities in RI, somehow does not apply to Tiverton, quite frankly doesn't pass the sniff test. Please do yourself a favor and read their comments closely, looking for facts.

The FTR has been carefully drafted to ensure that it follows all established RI State Law to the letter. There will be no more lawyerly posturing or end runs around statutes and regulations as we have seen in the past. Protectors of the status quo somehow don't sense the mounting burden they have placed on Tiverton taxpayers in the last 4 years, and don't seem to care. While no form of government is perfect, I see it as my clear responsibility to change the more onerous parts to the benefit of the many. I hope you will join in supporting the Town Council and the FTR Committee as we undertake to move the Tiverton budget process into the 21st century.

Dave Nelson

Tiverton Town Council

President of Tiverton Citizens for Change