

TCC Supports Replacing FTM With All-Day Referendum

Tiverton's 2011 Financial Town Meeting (FTM) is over and it may be our last. The tax rate increase of 2.05% is the lowest increase we've seen in at least 10 years and represents a possible glimpse into a future. A future where all sides of the political debate sense the opportunity that is within our grasp if we can work together in an open and honest debate. As others begin to spin their conspiracy theories, let me state unequivocally, as I did at the FTM, TCC supports the budget Committee's 2012 budget, I did so in writing before the event, did so verbally at the FTM twice, and repeat it again here. Nice job.

The news is not all good. Saturday's FTM started late and almost did not happen at all for lack of the required quorum of 301 voters. In the end, after over 3 hours, only 329 people present determined the budget, tax rate, and important resolutions for our entire town of 16,000 residents. This must change, and most of the town's leadership agrees to this.

Along with the controversies around the FTMs in years past, it is again apparent that Tiverton has long outgrown the antiquated FTM from our times past and now requires a more modern and democratic budget adoption process which encourages many more of us to participate. No longer should the Tiverton Little League have to cancel its games and practices so that, like this year, so a few hundred people take up an entire Saturday morning to pass the recommended budget without a single modification.

We support replacing the FTM with an all-day, secret ballot Financial Town Referendum as many other Rhode Island towns are already using. Rather than having to choose between spending our Saturday morning in the hot high school gymnasium instead of being with family, softball games and other events and obligations, we could swing by our local voting center and spend the 10 minutes it takes to vote, in secret, at any point during the day. We would know what would be voted on in advance, with no last-minute surprises. This is a good idea whose time has come.

Past attempts to tweak the FTM or replace it with Town Council adoption of the budget have been rejected. In 2006, the voters called on the town to develop a proposal to replace the FTM, but that council never brought a referendum proposal to the people. Instead, voters rejected the Town Council adoption proposal. We hope voters will finally have their chance this November at the same time the town considers a library bond. We encourage all town officials to work collaboratively with public input to develop and support the proposal which the Financial Town Meeting Changes Advisory Committee has been working on for almost a year now. Let Tiverton vote on what it asked for five years ago in 2006, and replace the arcane and burdensome FTM with a far more democratic process where thousands more people can participate in confidence and at their convenience throughout the day. It's a step forward for everyone.

Dave Nelson

President of Tiverton Citizens for Change