

Financial referendum benefits Tiverton taxpayers

To the editor:

Voters For The FTR (Financial Town Referendum) feels a strong sense of obligation to support and maintain a public conversation about the FTR charter amendment recently approved by the Town Council for a vote by the people on November 8. Our grass roots focus is an honest and open attempt to explore all sides of this important conversation, provide factual background, offer resources for research and encourage the informed voter to help chart Tiverton's financial future.

Last week's letter in the Sakonnet Times from Louise Durfee, which offers only a partial summary of the rules and procedures surrounding our current financial town meeting (FTM), goes on to conclude that Tiverton's Town Council is somehow seeking "veto power" over the majority as it applies to exceed RI tax cap law during our budget process. This seems to reference the majority of the current Town Council, and suggests a profound shift from previous town councils. This is serious stuff and a reasoned reply is in order.

Alleging that the laws governing our budget process are vague is an invitation to legal mischief. This approach championed by Ms. Durfee has bitterly divided Tiverton, harmed our local economy, and must be revised for the sake of our future and our own best interests. We need to chart a different course and the proposed FTR helps steer Tiverton in the right direction.

We're now seeing attempts (by those responsible for ignoring the state tax cap law the last few years) to spin the FTR, which puts the power of the ballot box in the hands of the widest possible spectrum of Tiverton residents, as a power grab instead by the Town Council just because it follows state law. We don't buy that argument. It is instead the FTM we have now that provides an open path to keep breaking the tax cap year after year by discouraging participation and disenfranchising voters.

There are dozens of reasons why the FTR is better than what we have now. Knowing in advance what we are voting on and voting in private in just 10 minutes or by absentee ballot top our list. But now add to that list that moving to a referendum means all of our town officials will finally agree to follow the tax cap law, a move that provides more protections to the taxpayers and bring stability for our Town's financial future. Let's be clear: The FTR doesn't change state law one bit; the FTR will help stop the controversy and clarify the appropriate applications of state law for Tiverton.

The proposed Financial Town Referendum would still allow voters to approve large tax increases when emergencies truly exist. However, the convenience of an all-day, private-ballot vote on questions known in advance would allow more taxpayers to register their opinions on the budget. And the fact that the state tax cap law would unambiguously apply to Tiverton as written would ensure that elected officials – who themselves gained office through all-day, private-ballot elections – would stand accountable as an added protection for you, the taxpayers of Tiverton.

Nancy L. Driggs

Tiverton