# WATERBURY TOWN MEETING STUDY COMMITTEE

**DRAFT REPORT**

**10/06/2026**

On December 22, 2025, the Waterbury Select Board voted to create the Waterbury Town Meeting Study Committee (WTMSC) “to explore ways to improve the quality and quantity of citizen engagement in public decision-making at the annual Waterbury Town Meeting through a year-long deliberative study.”

All of the committee's agendas and minutes are posted on the town website, along with additional resources gathered over the course of the committee's work.  The Study Committee adhered to Vermont's Public Meeting law for advisory committees.

The Committee's webpage can be found at:

https://www.waterburyvt.com/boards/waterbury-town-meeting-study-committee

# CHANGE

“A general principle from public-sector change management is that the scale and complexity of a change should be considered alongside the organization's current capacity to absorb it. Changes that are larger in scope, touch more stakeholders, or require sustained administrative follow-through typically call for more institutional stability and lead time to implement well; smaller or more contained changes tend to tolerate transition more easily.”

**January 21, 2026 & March 25, 2026**

- Susan Clark Presentation #1 - Quantity v. Quality of Participation
- Susan Clark Presentation #2 - Summary of Other Town Initiatives

**April 22, 2026**

- Duxbury –Special Guest: Maureen Harvey, Duxbury Town Clerk (Anne Imhoff)
- Cambridge –Special Guest: Adam Howard of Cambridge (Amy Marshall-Carney)

**May 27, 2026**

- Brattleboro –Special Guests: Peter Elwell and Kate O'Connor (Liz Schlegel)
- VT Secretary of State's Civic Society Index Special Guest: Michael Moser, Research Operations Director, The Center for Rural Studies at UVM (Evan Hoffman)

**June 24, 2026**

- Special Articles - (Kathi Grace & Amy Marshall-Carney)
- Morristown – Special Guest: Maggie Cleary, Morristown Civic Project. (Susan Titterton)

**July 22, 2026**

- Improving Town Report – (Valerie Rogers)

**August 26, 2026**

- Moving Date or Time of Town Meeting (Michelle Downing)
- Technology and Audio Accessibility – (Amy Marshall-Carney)

# Australian Ballot

## Benefits of democratic **quantity**

- More people participate
- Quick and easy
- Less public speaking
- Reduces risk of people feeling intimidated or excluded
- Vote is private
- Allows absentee voting

## Downsides of democratic **quantity**

- Eliminates legislative power, rights
- Increased chance of re-votes
- Uninformed decisions
- Neighbors become invisible
- Ballots less inclusive
- Reduces public trust

# Floor Meeting

## Benefits of democratic **quality**

- More citizen power
- Increased sense of community
- Increased communication between leaders & community
- Local wisdom emerges
- Improves democratic skills

## Downsides of democratic **quality**

- Fewer people
- No absentee voting, restricts access
- Risk of groupthink, false consensus
- Takes more time and effort
- Public speaking can be scary
- May reinforce feelings of in-group and out-group (exclusion)

# Structural Changes

| | Recommend Against | Neutral | Recommend in Favor |
|---|---|---|---|
| Australian Ballot for Town Budget | 6 | 3 | 0 |
| Representative Town Meeting | 7 | 1 | 1 |
| Two-Part Meeting - Jericho (Binding Floor Meeting followed by Australian Ballot) | 5 | 1 | 3 |
| Two-Part Meeting - Duxbury (Informational Meeting followed by Australian Ballot) | 5 | 3 | 1 |
| Two-Part Meeting - Waterbury (Informational Meeting followed by Floor Meeting) | 3 | 1 | 5 |
| Time/Day of Town Meeting | 1 | 2 | 6 |

# Non-Structural Changes

| | Recommend Against | Neutral | Recommend in Favor |
|---|---|---|---|
| Improve Town Report | 0 | 1 | 7 |
| Technology & Audio | 0 | 0 | 8 |
| Special Articles | 0 | 2 | 7 |
| Town Meeting Guide | 0 | 0 | 9 |
| Town Meeting Punch List | 0 | 1 | 8 |
| Town Meeting Facilitators | 0 | 2 | 7 |
| Standing Civic Committee | 0 | 3 | 6 |
| Welcome to Waterbury | 0 | 1 | 8 |

# Technology & Audio (1 of 2)

| # | Option | Category | Why (At a Glance) | Approx. Cost | Ease | Impact |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Hybrid Meeting Platform (Zoom) | Remote & Hybrid Participation | Residents can join informational hearings and Selectboard meetings remotely | ~$200-$500/yr (single-host license) | Medium | Small/ Medium |
| 2 | AV & Accessibility Bundle (ORCA Media) | AV, Live Streaming, Recording & Accessibility | Bundles ORCA Media's remote-comment/archive expansion, in-room sound reinforcement, and live captioning to improve reach, audio quality, and accessibility | ORCA: Sound: ~$2,000-$6,000 Captioning: ~$120-$200+ | Easy (but costs $$) | Medium |
| 3 | Portable Sound Reinforcement (Speaker System) | AV, Livestreaming & Recording | Improves in-room audio so floor debate is audible throughout a full gym/auditorium and captured cleanly for the ORCA feed. | Rental: ~$300-$800/event; ~$2K $6K purchase | Easy (but costs $$) | Medium |
| 4 | TV Monitor Display for Warrant Articles | Display Monitors / Visual Aids | Attendees can follow along without relying solely on the paper Town Report. | Rental: ~$300-$800 per event (2-screen rental) | Medium | Medium |
| 5 | Assistive Listening System | Accessibility & Language Access | Delivers clear, direct floor audio to residents with hearing loss via a hearing loop or FM/digital receivers. | ~$2,000-$8,000 (venue-dependent) | Medium | Small |

# Technology & Audio (2 of 2)

| # | Option | Category | Why (At a Glance) | Approx. Cost | Ease | Impact |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6 | AI Live Translation (Wordly) | Accessibility & Language Access | Provides live translated captions/audio for non-English-speaking residents through a low-cost, pay-per-minute pilot. | Tiered pay-per-minute; smallest tier covers one meeting | Easy (but costs $$) | Small |
| 7 | Electronic "Clicker" Voting | Electronic Voting & Ballot Tabulation | Speeds up contested floor votes with instant digital tallies, but needs legal sign-off before adoption. | ~$500-$3,000/event (rental) vs. $20K-$40K+ (purchase) | Easy (but requires legislative authorization) | Large |

# Special Articles

| Option | What it would do | Effort | Impact | Peer model |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Adopt a short written policy | Codify the informal practice (threshold, recurring requests, board role) in one page | Low | High | VLCT model |
| Standard Application Form | Collect amount, purpose, residents served, nonprofit ID for every request | Low | High | Stowe/Montpelier |
| Annual fall deadline | Set a submission date (e.g. Nov 1) so requests align with budget planning | Low | Med. HIgh | Waitsfield/Stowe |
| Evaluation criteria + caps | Define how requests are judged; optional % or 20% growth guideline | Medium | High | Stowe |
| Annual refile + proof | Require updated W-9/501(c) (3) and refile if amount increases | Medium | Medium | Moretown/Richmond |
| Community fund /committee | A review body vets requests and gives voters one recommended slate to act upon | High | High | Montpelier (MCF) /Stowe |

# Next Steps

- Conduct survey to explore day & time options for Town Meeting (WTMSC)
- Discuss Special Articles (Select Board)
- Explore Technology & Audio (Town Clerk/ORCA)
- Revamp “Have Your Say Day” (Select Board)
- Develop Written Materials - Punch list, Town Meeting Guide, Town Report  (Everyone!)

*Thank you!*