Some Notes about Representative Town Meeting
May 25 2026
Liz Schlegel, Waterbury Town Meeting Study Committee

Definitions: Direct democracy vs. Representative democracy
https://www.usvotefoundation.org/how-representative-democracy-represents-us

Used in towns in Connecticut (7 towns) and Massachusetts (~25 towns)

In Massachusetts, they refer to Open Town Meeting vs. Representative Town Meeting

- Open Town Meeting - anyone who comes = votes
- Representative Town Meeting - Residents are elected by their fellow residents to vote on issues before the town a/k/a “The legislative branch of town government”

Here’s an in-depth description of what the representatives do from a town in Connecticut:
https://www.westportct.gov/government/elected-officials/representative-town-meeting-rtm/rtm

See also Westport’s RTM FAQs:
https://www.westportct.gov/government/elected-officials/representative-town-meeting-rtm/rtm-faqs

- Elected to represent the community
- Sit on committees
- Follow established rules about what they weigh in on

Broad article about various Town Meeting issues from the Town of Dover VT website here (quite dated but with some good points & definitions):
https://www.doververmont.com/townclerksoffice/page/town-meeting

Town is divided into X number of districts, there are X members from each district

The roles of the Representatives can change depending on the way the town structures it -
Level of decision-making (what do they have a say over?)

Decisions Waterbury would have to make if we chose this version:

- How many districts

- How many representatives from each district
- Amount of power representatives would have
    - E.g. which Selectboard decisions they would have to approve
- How many times a year the RTM would be held

Vermont statute on RTM provides for annual or special meetings:
https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/section/17/055/02640a

- Town voters (rather than representatives) continue to control *the **election of officers, public questions, and all articles to be voted upon by Australian ballot as required by law** or as voted under section 2680 of this title at a prior annual or special meeting, and **reconsideration of articles** under section 2661 of this title shall remain vested in the voters of the town.*

    - Statute defines how many Representatives, how they can be organized, and how the ballot question must be worded:
    - *3) An organizational resolution shall include the following:*
    - *(A) a certain number of elected members, a range of elected members, or a ratio of elected members to the number of voters. However, in no case shall the number of elected members be less than 100;*
    - *(B) a certain number of districts and the boundaries of those districts;*
    - *(C) who shall be ex officio voting members, if any, of the meeting;*
    - *(D) the procedure for conducting the representative meeting;*
    - *(E) specific action, if any, to be taken at the representative meeting; and*
    - *(F) a procedure whereby the voters of the municipality may reconsider any action taken at a representative meeting.*

Also from the Vermont statutes, here is the Brattleboro Charter:
https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/section/24appendix/107/00002.04

It is not clear in statute (as far as I have read) whether we could adopt some of the Massachusetts or Connecticut methods, such as:
- Multi-evening representative town meeting (Monday/Thursdays for several weeks)
- Committees who work throughout the year
- Monthly full RTM meetings open to the public

The process/timeline would look something like this, if we were to recommend this:

- Recommend to Selectboard Fall 2026

- If SB approves, Selectboard creates committee to create structure
- Committee constructs Organizational Resolution (including all the details of how it will work, legal reviews, community education, etc.)
- Selectboard puts Resolution (*shall we change to the structure as described*) to voters Town Meeting Day March 2028 or at a special meeting
- If voters approve, Town proceeds with charter change which must be approved by Legislature (possibly winter 2029?)
- New structure in place by 2030