

Ideas

- Providing dinner-type food (perhaps move to a school?)
- Providing free childcare
- Moving the time (start at 6pm?)
- Publicity campaign
- Provide information in easy-to-access ways in advance of the meeting

NEW SUGGESTIONS (2025)

Meredith Childcare Options:

Downstairs in the conference room with games and a movie. The secondary place would be Howden Hall.

Food and Snacks:

Thank you to the Masons. As you all know, the Holley Hall has no kitchen.

Food Truck outside?

Last year, we had around 66 people at the town meeting and maybe 20 on ZOOM. That is not many, considering we have over 3000 residents.

Bi-weekly notices about Town Meetings will be helpful.

Consider a new day and location for future Town Meetings. Starksboro is on Saturdays at the elementary school and has a healthy turnout from the community.

I think these are all excellent ideas. It sounds like the newer, younger citizens want to meet on a weeknight at 5:30ish with food being available to purchase. I believe the current attendees will continue to come to the meeting regardless of the time. Unfortunately, Janet and I have scheduled a vacation with an open ended return date that will be in early March, so I will be unable to support the meal idea.

The Masons will continue to provide snacks and beverages free of charge regardless of the format. I think the idea of selling food is potentially a good idea, but a balance needs to be found where the profit potential is attractive for a group to want to undertake but not so expensive that people won't want to spend a lot of money (affordability is indeed a popular buzzword in VT these days. Perhaps a youth group might be interested in offering babysitting services (Scouts, Young Life, an athletic team...). If I was going to be around, the

Masons would offer to do the food with 3 options such as chicken 'n biscuits or chili or veggie lasagna at the price of \$4 each.

I think the publicity campaign is crucial and I agree that multiple posts on the FPF is probably the best vehicle to get the word out. Personally, I'm not one much for social media, Facebook, Instagram, but for those of you who are, putting the FPF posts on social media can't hurt. Cecil

Clove: Hi, folks. I LOVE Jen's ideas about fun hype many times before Town Meeting Day, and Porter's ideas about voter education. What if we set up a buddy system a week or 2 before, with an experienced Town Meeting goer paired up with each person wanting an ambassador?

According to my survey, Saturday is not the solution. I think the way to go is earlier on Monday, with dinner provided by the Masons (see Cecil's note in Jessica's original attachment). Could the town subsidize dinner to get the price down to \$5 per adult so it would be a more inclusive option? Moving the event to a school where it would be easier to offer a healthy sit down meal with chat, and programs for children, is an intriguing idea.

Hi all,

Thanks Jessica for keeping this in your sights. I agree with Porter and I like the idea of 2 FPF/week with someone talking about why it's important. Keeping it light and funny will be helpful. I bet if we sat down and took a few minutes to brainstorm who we know goes always to town meeting we could create a list of people to ask if they would post for us or if we could interview them and draft a post for them to submit.

Food and sitters will be helpful I'm sure. The potluck lunch in Huntington was always a big success and it's another way of helping people feel like town meeting is theirs and they want to invest in it. As far as I knew it wasn't even coordinated but there was always plenty and a variety of food.

Anybody in town a cartoonist? We could do a What does democracy look like? And have cartoons of humorous interactions at town meeting.

I'm imagining some FPF posts:

Want to learn how to argue with your neighbor while making the world a better place?
Come to town meeting at LOCATION at DATE/TIME. Where you can hash out how many

firetrucks we need, late fees for delinquent property taxes, and who gets the last chocolate chip cookie at the potluck *and still stay friends—maybe even make a new one!*

New in town and looking for friends? Come to town meeting! Meet Bristolites from all walks of life with an even wider range of opinions. Share in the fun and connection of building community and caring for this great place!

Someone once said that you should have a friend of the age of every decade. Do you? Are you missing a decade or two? Come pick your young and old friends at Bristol Town meeting. Hear them out, see their smile and their passion, and connect!...Etc, etc, etc. Anyway, happy to help with any of this!

Jen

Great ideas in the attachment you included! Thank you. Though I'm open to changing date or time, I actually agree that the biggest problem is likely people not feeling it matters if they go, or not feeling included/welcome. I love the publicity campaign idea!! I really think this could be key. I think Susan Clark did a pamphlet about town meeting many years ago that was great (like, coloring book maybe?) I think if we could get 2 FPF posts each week between now and town meeting from DIFFERENT folks in town talking about why it matters etc that would be super. PLUS maybe do some outreach to demographics we don't see much? Parents of school age kids? Renters? New people in town (I would be happy to add something to the welcome packets about what is town meeting and why it is so important to go!)

AND I support food & childcare, so moving to the school would definitely make both easier.

Yes, I'm happy to help, but not be in charge. Let me know what's needed - Porter

Jessica, Thank you for remembering this topic and bringing it back to life in order to encourage more participation in our upcoming Town Meeting Day.

I would be willing to help in some way with taking the mystery out of the operations/procedures/importance of Town Meeting.

Good idea to start with regular/consistent posts on FPF at least to start getting information out and asking for feedback soonest.

Sue Kavanagh

ORIGINAL SUGGESTIONS (2024)

I have a slightly different opinion about how to get more people to participate. I don't think changing the date or time will make much difference. Monday nights work for some and Saturdays work for others. I think people aren't coming because they don't know how valuable and important it is to make a priority.

I would suggest putting energy into a simple but fun year long publicity campaign about the value of town meeting and perhaps recruiting volunteers who haven't come regularly to help with having some food and babysitters. I always brought my kids to town meeting when I lived in Huntington so they could grow up seeing and absorbing civic engagement. Plus all their friends were there.

For me, town meeting gives me hope for democracy. I have left every single one I've attended feeling good and renewed. It's a live example of civic engagement and how to agree without creating division. I always change my mind a few times with each discussion about the articles.

Robert Bernstein was right when he said this on March 4th, we, the residents of Bristol, need town meeting. It's a social bonding event that creates the cohesion we need to survive. We need it to remember that we need to—and can--work it all out together. Town meeting shows us how to do that. I don't think a lot of people know how to do that anymore. They certainly don't see it on social media and in our state and national governing structures.

So my encouragement would be to promote it more rather than fiddle with the logistics. Interview people and post snippets on social media and You Tube and then direct people there to view them. Include quotes from the interviews in Front Porch Forum. Maybe NEAT TV would have some funny outtakes from previous ones that they could get an intern compile to show that we do hard work there but don't take ourselves too seriously. I'm spitballing ideas here but I can imagine there would be some not too onerous things you could do throughout the year to get people thinking about it and planning to go.

Jen Peterson, jen@yogagracevt.com

kavanagh@middlebury.edu

I agree an earlier start time would be a good experiment - and or a Saturday experiment.

Also we need to do a better job of simply promoting town meeting and the function of the gathering. More posts on fpf in the weeks leading up, for sure, and maybe posters/flyers around town at stores.

There must be a way to present the info as a preview in plain language. The formality of the warning format is intimidating. I understand the reasons for the warnings but there are ways to frame the big picture and the components so people can more easily understand the info and their role in voting.

Speaking of voting — Bristol should be way more proactive about encouraging voter registration and clearly reminding people of deadlines and possibilities for voting. Almost feels like a secret. More and more regular encouraging announcements and reminders! Maybe there could be a small team of voting ambassadors who could support the effort?

The thought of moving the event to a school where it would be easier to offer a healthy sit down meal with chat, and programs for children, was intriguing.

Clove
Haviva <clove.haviva@bastyr.ed>

Cecil <cecil@gmavt.net>

Thank you for collating this information on the scheduling of Town Meeting. As a member of the Masons, I think the Masons would be interesting in providing the food for an early supper on Monday if that ends up being the final choice. However, I'm not sure of the logistics of how a meal would be served. Many of the towns that have meals at their meetings often hold their meetings in the school and eat in the cafeteria. Holley Hall doesn't lend itself much in the way of allowing to sit and eat. Speaking for myself, I wouldn't have much interest in eating a plate of spaghetti, or chicken and biscuits, or a Cobb Salad in my lap. Perhaps a buffet menu of hot dogs, finger sandwiches, and light snacks would be something that people could balance on their laps?

knight@gmavt.net subsidize a potluck, recruit babysitters, offer transportation for those who need it, survey the town regarding time of day or day of week for the meeting

Informal Survey Results Re: Changing Town Meeting Day

Clove Haviva • Plank Rd, Bristol

Discussion

On March 7, I asked on FPF: If you did not go to Town Meeting Monday, would you go if it changes to be on a Saturday at 1 p.m.?

Responses emailed to me:

1) yes 2) I would love to see town meeting held on Saturday 3) Absolutely ¹⁰⁰ 4) More than likely, yes. 5) YES. I'd attend Saturday! I used to go when I lived in a town where it was "Town Meeting Day" and all schools and jobs were closed and folks got together to potluck and discuss. People of all (or many anyway) walks of life, sharing a meal, then politely engaging in discourse. I will make a point to start attending regularly, but I would certainly be more likely to come if it was not so late at night! Even more likely if I had the day off by my employer. Why is that not a statewide requirement?

Responses posted on FPF, excerpted here:

1) Nope. As a person in my 30s ... Saturday is the least likely day, and midday is the worst... 2) I'm another person in my 30s. Not Saturdays, because people like to plan trips and fun things to do on the weekends. Maybe instead of starting the Town Meeting at 7pm on a weekday, can we move it up a bit earlier, say 5pm? 3) Starting at 5pm would be great. May give some group an opportunity to sell light dinner (ie, soup, sandwiches, hot dogs or something similar). 4) I've been asking around to see if younger people would go if the time/day was different and there is a mixture of answers. ... a weeknight is preferred... but earlier, perhaps 5 or 5:30. ... perhaps several home-made soups with good bread and butter... 5) When I was a young person growing up here in Bristol, Town Meeting Day was the community event of the year - for all ages. There was no school that day. Businesses were closed. ...it was a school assignment to go to Town Meeting, and there was a report on what we learned that day... we came to be a closer community that honored the big and little needs with good intentions and good arguments. It was face-to-face and heart-to-heart, and there was great respect for all. Food and drink were served and shared - lunch for all! ...maybe we could... re-make it what we always intended it to be? ... I would be there then, and I would bring my knitting.

End responses. The above has me thinking about keeping it Monday, but starting at 5:30 or 6, with dinner available. Organizations who already make dinner in Bristol as a fundraiser,

would you be up for serving us? What is the least expensive, healthy, not too messy dinner you could offer? Cost? How many dinners are you used to making? Cubbers, would you make us pizzas one Monday a year?

What do you all think?

Clove

Trevor Wilson • N. Meadow Dr, Bristol

Discussion

As someone new to VT, I'll admit I missed Town Mtg Day because I didn't have much information or understanding of what it is.... If there was some education for new arrivals...

I wrote him back:

Trevor, poking around, I was surprised to find

[All About Bristol Town Meeting](#)

A Voter's Guide to Town Meeting Procedures

The link to the 1st section to read is this:

<http://bristolvt.org/elections-town-meeting-information/all-about-bristol-town-meeting/>

But then scroll down to see other topics on the left:

- Voting, Elections and Town Meeting
 - [Voting in Bristol](#)
 - [Elections/Town Meeting Information](#)
 - [Bristol Annual Town Report](#)
 - [All About Bristol Town Meeting](#)
 - [How to Run for Local Office](#)
 - [Basic Parliamentary Motions](#)
 - [The Basic Law of Town Meeting](#)
 - [Civility: It's Not Just Robert's Rules](#)

...I had in my head that Town Meeting Day was on Town Meeting Day, Tuesday! Fortunately I
clued in Monday afternoon!...

Clove