

Charlotte and Hinesburg Town Meeting Day roundup

Tyler Lederer, Maddy Holden, Ethan Putnam & Courtney Smith | Community News Service
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Alan Norris, 72, outside Hinesburg Town Hall for Town Meeting Day.
Photo by Tyler Lederer/Community News Service

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Hinesburg voters opt for town manager form of government

Voters shoot down Charlotte's two development proposals
School district's \$85 million budget heartily approved

9:40 a.m. — Australian ballot and increased accessibility

Engineer Alan Norris, 72, hasn't been to a town meeting in a while, he said.

When he lived in his hometown of Starksboro, town meetings were more active but now he considers them a dying art.

He likes the Australian Ballot because he believes it "gives more people the chance to have a voice."

He wasn't concerned about much on the ballot, he said Tuesday, but said the school budget was "out of hand" — even though he voted in its favor.

— Tyler Lederer, Community News Service

9:43 a.m. — Voter wants to keep police budget 'in check'

Chelsie Bush, 43, a self-employed metalworker living in Hinesburg, came out Tuesday to drop off his ballot.

Bush felt strongly about "keeping the police budget in check," he said.

He was interested in the budget for the new ambulance service and said, "Hinesburg should have tried to contract with Richmond or another nearby town before deciding to run its own service."

Although Bush believed voting by Australian ballot was the right thing to do this year, he hopes things return to the way they were as soon as possible.

Bush a native Vermonter, said Town Meeting Day and its debate format is really special and valuable to small towns like Hinesburg.

— Maddy Holden, Community News Service

10:38 a.m. — New resident opposes development articles

Brett Towle pulled up in his pickup truck and waved hello.

A University of Vermont graduate, Towle now works at Horsford Gardens and felt strongly about Articles 6 and 7 on the Charlotte ballot.

"The proposed new commercial and residential developments would be adjacent to our property — I don't believe rushing it through now is beneficial to the community," Towle said. He cited changing values and conflicts of interest as other reasons as to why he was opposed.

As a new resident of the town, this was Towle's first year voting in Charlotte.

He said he didn't miss town meeting day and that he felt adequately informed.

He hopes to become more involved in his new community and recently applied for a seat on the conservation commission.

— Ethan Putnam, Community News Service

11:37 a.m. — Informed voters result from in-person meeting



Tina Helzner came to vote Tuesday after a round of tennis, braving the cold in ankle-length leggings.

She voted for Lewis Mudge and said she "missed having Town Meeting Day because it got the community more involved."

Helzner also felt less informed this year because of the lack of an in-person town meeting event, but thought that on the East Charlotte Commercial District changes, everyone was well enough informed.

— Ethan Putnam, Community News Service

1 p.m. — Town Meeting may be different, but pizza prevails

Robin Reid, an Independent Justice of the Peace, postponed her slice of pizza to chat in the parking lot.

Reid, who had been working the polls, recalled Town Meeting Days of years past, where town volunteers could break for lunch together over pizza in the school cafeteria.

Her longtime involvement in the town was apparent as she interjected with cheerful greetings and questions to others entering Town Hall.

Reid was eager to talk about Article 5, which would shift Charlotte Town Meeting Day to a Saturday.

"I really like tradition and think we should maintain it where we've tried to establish it," Reid said, adding that she feels the article's main proponents are older people who've been able to experience the tradition.

Another point Reid drove home was the need for active voter participation beyond the checking of a ballot box. As she moved around to stay warm, she also mentioned positions left open on this year's ballot.

Namely, Reid lamented the lack of candidates running for cemetery commissioner. But in general, she expressed the need to bring younger people into town politics as well as the need to amplify people's opinions.

"Your voice is not your vote," she said. "Your voice is your voice and your vote is your vote."

— Courtney Smith, Community News Service

1:10 p.m. — Charlotte voter open to new development ideas

The sun on the pavement of the Charlotte Town Hall parking lot beat back the bitter cold spell facing voters today.

Michael Haulenbeek, a Charlotte woodworker and native, stopped to speak to his votes in favor of two ballot items that would allow for denser housing and development in the East Charlotte Village Commercial District.

"We can't vote 'no' to all new development, and if we're gonna have new development, I'd like to see it concentrated in village centers," said Haulenbeek, whose business is located in Charlotte.

Asked about the tradition of Town Meeting Day itself, Haulenbeek said he'd learned more on social media and conversations with family for information this year, but does not normally make a day of the ordeal.

"I don't feel like I'm totally missing out this year, but it is an important institution," he said.

— Courtney Smith, Community News Service

