

ARTICLE 15: *Shall the Town of Guilford hold its annual meeting on the Saturday immediately preceding the first Tuesday in March at 10 a.m. (17 V.S.A. § 2640)?*

About a year ago, I put out a survey to the town asking about people's attendance at town meeting.

62 people responded.

The survey asked:

"What would be the best time for town meeting for you?"

The survey results were:

68% Weekend (specifically 51.1% for Saturday)
26% Tuesday
6% Other day

There is not a day or time that works for everyone, but choosing a time that works for the greatest number of people is just common sense.

Vermont employers are supposed to give time off for town meeting, but

- Not all employers are accommodating
- Not all types of jobs allow for days off (eg. medical fields)
- If you work across the border in Greenfield or Keene, that law doesn't apply
- If you work from home for an out of state business, your out of luck
- If you're self-employed, you might not have the luxury of giving yourself the day off when your customers expect you to be there

It makes no sense to hold Town Meeting at a time that isn't accessible to most people. We are meeting right now in the evening - not at 10am - for this very reason.

Town Meeting is a beautiful tradition. It's an opportunity for townspeople to discuss, debate and vote on town budgets and articles in person. But are we unintentionally

gatekeeping whose voices can be heard by keeping the meeting on a weekday morning? Limiting the amount of time that polls are open is a form of voter suppression. Limiting whose voices can be heard at Town Meeting is also a form of voter suppression. Our community is healthy and vibrant when we allow as many voices as possible to be heard.

Some people have said to me:

"Other towns have changed Town Meeting day and it hasn't made a big difference, so we should keep it on a Tuesday."

In the survey 68% of people said that they would prefer a weekend, but a survey can't predict attendance.

If we change the day and there is no change in attendance, we will only be faulted for sending the message to our neighbors that they are welcome at Town Meeting. If you install a wheelchair ramp to a building and only a few people a year actually use it, should you take down the ramp or consider it a failure? Of course not.

I ask everyone who attends Town Meeting on Tuesday to think of their neighbor who is working and can't attend. Tradition isn't a good enough reason to maintain inequitable access to a town wide meeting. I ask those of you who love and attend Town Meeting to vote to make it accessible to your neighbors and change town meeting day to Saturday.

Thank you.