

Article 16

Budget approval by Australian Ballot

What does Australian Ballot mean for Guilford?

- ▶ Australian Ballot is voting by confidential paper ballot that is submitted into a ballot box and counted (in the same way we process elected officials at this time)
- ▶ Moving to an Australian Ballot form of budget approval would statutorily require the Selectboard to hold an informational public hearing per 17 V.S.A. § 2680(g)

Current method of budget approval

- ▶ Guilford currently utilizes the Town Meeting Style of budget approval
- ▶ In order to vote, registered voters must be physically present at Town Meeting to vote on the budget
- ▶ Town Meeting is held the 1st Tuesday of March with a 10:00 am start time
- ▶ Currently Guilford has 1735 registered voters (November 2023)
- ▶ Historic attendance to Town Meeting has been between 140 and 175 (8% - 10% of total registered voters)
- ▶ Guilford currently holds an informational 'pre-town meeting' to present the budget

Facts about voter participation

- ▶ Current voter registration: 1735 (November 2023)
- ▶ Current Town Meeting participation annually 140-175 registered voters (8%-10% of the registered voter population)
- ▶ Ballots returned during Covid when Town Meeting was prohibited: 700+ (40% of the registered voter participation)
- ▶ This means that a minimum of 30% registered voters who chose to be engaged through Australian Ballot are not participating in Town Meeting

Why Australian Ballot?

- ▶ Voting on the budget by Australian Ballot offers the same voter amenities as would other elections such as early voting, absentee ballots, and ballots delivered by JP
- ▶ Australian Ballot provides voters who are homebound, travelling, without transportation, uncomfortable voting in a public setting, do not have childcare, are unable to be absent from work on a weekday, or simply seek the convenience of a mail in ballot to participate in the public process of approving the budget
- ▶ State of Vermont requires Towns who utilize Australian Ballot to hold an Informational Public Hearing (which is the same as our existing Pre-Town Meeting
- ▶ Town Meeting is currently held at the GCS Gym. If there were a significant increase in town meeting attendance, there will be capacity issues.
- ▶ The goal is to be able to increase voter engagement by making it accessible and equitable to all Guilford voters
- ▶ Many towns in Vermont are exploring this option since Covid due to the increase in voter engagement and engagement

Questions?