

Article 17

Public question approval by Australian Ballot

What is the definition of a public question?

- ▶ Per 17 VSA § 2103 - “Public question” means any question, issue, proposition, or referendum (whether binding or advisory) submitted or required by law to be submitted to the voters of the State or any political subdivision of the State, for a decision.
- ▶ Examples of public questions:
 - ▶ Shall the Town raise and appropriate the sum of \$35,000 for Guilford Volunteer Fire Department Capital Improvements Fund?
 - ▶ Shall the Town advise the Selectboard to become a Compassionate Community?

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 public question approval would statutorily require the Selectboard to hold an informational public hearing per 17 V.S.A. § 2680(g)

Current method of public question approval

- ▶ Guilford currently utilizes the Town Meeting Style of public question approval
- ▶ In order to vote, registered voters must be physically present at Town Meeting to vote on public questions
- ▶ 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 public questions

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 public questions 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 public questions
- ▶ 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?