

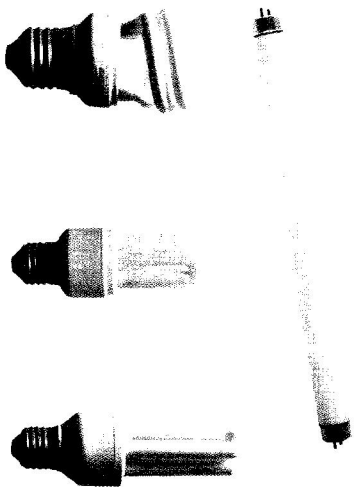
Cold Weather Driving Safety

This This Everyday Safety Tailgate Talk was originally published as the January 2016 "Safety Pins" by Philip E. Spiezio, Safety Officer, Washington County Office of the Safety Officer

Driving is another task that becomes more hazardous during the winter months. Winter drivers encounter many different hazards, such as snow, ice, and reduced visibility. Road conditions can vary widely. Especially watch out for icy patches on bridges and in shady areas.

Here are a few tips that may help to prevent you or somebody you know from being in a car accident this winter.

- Winterize your vehicle—Check tires (consider snow tires), check your antifreeze, windshield wipers, fluids, batteries, etc.
- Be sure to completely clean off your vehicle of snow before driving it—Don't forget your head, tail, and warning lights.
- Drive according to the conditions—Stay well below posted speed limits in bad weather and keep a safe distance from the next vehicle.
- Expect the unexpected—Be ready to reduce speed in case of sudden stops. Give yourself plenty of time to reach your destination.
- Keep your lights on—Make sure other drivers can see you.
- Use safe braking techniques to avoid skidding.
- Always gently steer into a skid to regain control of the vehicle.
- Always drive defensively and never while under the influence of drugs or alcohol!



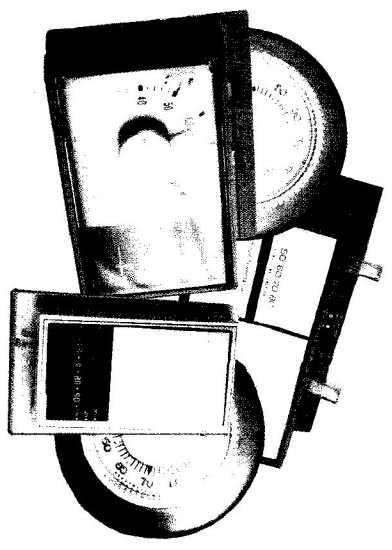
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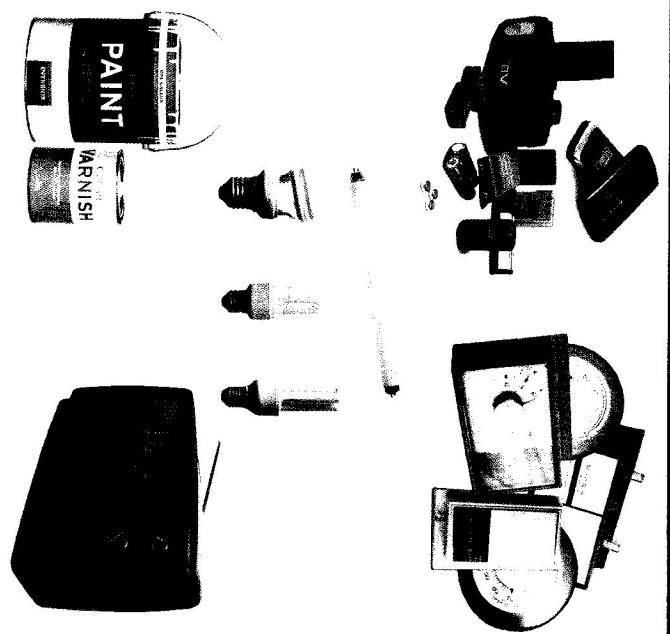
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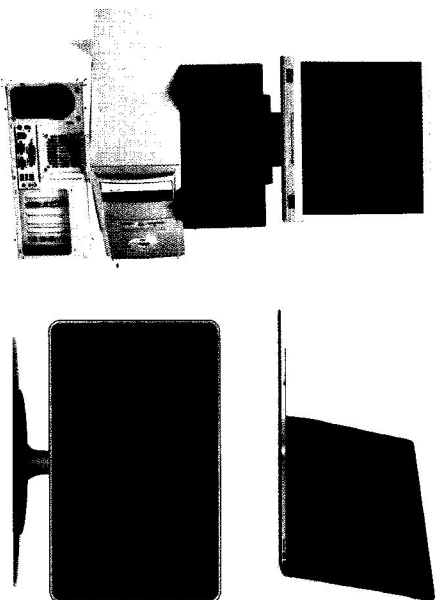
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Chapter 6

PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS: AUSTRALIAN BALLOT

Why do people come to town meeting? If they have a question, they can get answers. They can change their mind

— or someone else's mind.

◆ Shelby Coburn, Stratford town clerk



We have seen that Vermont's town meeting tradition strengthens our communities and enriches our democratic decisions. Comparing town meeting with representative government in the United States, we know town meeting has dramatic advantages for ordinary citizens. Still, town meeting needs to be strengthened.

Now.

Here's why. First, an increasing number of towns are succumbing to pressure to adopt voting procedures that gut town meeting. Second, the population of Vermont towns has increased dramatically, weakening democratic participation. And finally, the actions citizens are allowed to take at their town meetings have been severely reduced from what they once were, reducing the incentive to attend.

Let's deal with these problems, beginning with the one that Vermonters can do the most about today:

The Australian ballot hurts town meeting

In a well-intentioned effort to include more people in decision making, an increasing number of Vermont towns are destroying their town meeting in the process.

The "Australian" ballot is a device that allows citizens to avoid town meeting altogether and vote on warned items on a simple "yes-no" basis. Under the Australian ballot, voters go to the polls, are checked off and use a pre-printed ballot to vote in a booth just as they do when they vote for the president of the United States. (The Australian ballot should not be confused with the "paper ballot," which is simply a vote during town meeting that is

Foreword by Deborah Markowitz
Vermont Secretary of State

*Susan Clark
& Frank Bryan*

REDISCOVERING
THE SECRETS
OF TOWN MEETING
AND COMMUNITY

ALL
THOSE
IN FAVOR

made on paper rather than by raising hands or saying aye/nay. A paper ballot may be used during town meeting whenever seven citizens request it.)

In the beginning, the Australian ballot was used for the election of officers only, and most larger towns now use it for this purpose.

In recent years, however, we are seeing a growing trend to put the town and/or school budget (and sometimes all spending items) on an Australian ballot. A few towns have placed all the warning items on a ballot.

Voicing by Australian ballot is much simpler than going to town meeting.

It is much less time consuming. It is much less public, done alone behind curtains. It is much less threatening—no one ever knows what you think.

The Australian ballot is quick, easy, private, unaccountable and, most important, simple.

It is also deadly.

In a way, the Australian ballot is worse than deadly, because it doesn't kill town meeting quickly. And the execution is dishonest. We are told it

will save town meeting, while the

"With Australian ballot, you won't be able to amend the budget. You can only vote yes or no. Yes, no, yes, no. It's the most intricate conversation you'll ever have."

Paul Gillies, former Vermont deputy secretary of state

reality is that it poisons it and lets it die slowly, sparing the executioner the moment of death and the acceptance of responsibility.

Understand. The Australian ballot takes away your right to legislate—to be part of the lawmaking process—and it

doesn't even replace it with a deliberative body that represents you. It simply allows you to vote

up or down, yes or no, on an

issue prepared by the selectboard or in many cases by a small group of private citizens with a special interest.

In short, it leaves the town with neither a legislature nor a town meeting. In doing so, it compromises the actions of the selectboard or school board, which must anticipate how the community will react to an issue and then submit this best guess to a winner-take-all decision.

By removing the option of amendment, flexibility is forfeited. The right to deliberate, compromise and amend is lost. School boards watch as entire budgets go down because a simple compromise on one issue is impossible.

Selectboards see important community projects scuttled because they have misread the mood of the community—projects defeated that could have been saved at a town meeting with a simple nip or tuck from the floor.

Using the Australian ballot instead of a town meeting is like creating an ice sculpture by taking one great swing at a block of ice with a sledgehammer instead of carefully applying a chisel with care over time.

Advocates of Australian ballot argue that an "informational meeting" the night before fills the void, but in practice these meetings are no substitute

PEACHAM SAVES ITS TOWN MEETING

On a cold night in mid-December, the voters of Peacham debated whether to adopt the Australian ballot for their town and school meeting. In the discussion, Robert Macchini offered these words:

"We've been hearing the argument that even if the number of people who can't attend town meeting is small, those few people still are denied their right to vote, and that is unacceptable in a democracy. This argument is wrong because it fundamentally misunderstands what a town meeting is. If town meeting really denied people the right to vote, it would have been outlawed a long time ago, but instead it is widely admired as the last bastion of true democracy in the face of bloated big government.

"There's a legitimate reason why town meeting requires us to be present to vote, and it's this: Town meeting is not a ballot box or a voting booth, and it's not a state or federal election; town meeting is a body of citizen lawmakers, a local legislature, and every one of us is a legislator. Like any other legislature, its members must be present to participate and vote, and like any other legislature, it can, should and must meet even if some of its members are absent."

By a vote of 146 to 53, Peacham rejected the Australian ballot.

for town meeting decision making. Informational meetings are almost always poorly attended. Vermonters don't simply want to be heard; they want to act. Research shows that Vermonters are much more likely to make time for meetings when actual decisions will be made there.

Does traditional town meeting exclude citizens who would otherwise participate? And if so, does Australian ballot solve this problem?

These are important considerations, and they must be met head on. To do this we offer the following:

- With the Australian ballot, many more people will participate, it is argued. But how many more? This "quicker, easier, simpler" way of participating is not all it's cracked up to be. In Vermont towns, Australian ballot turnout seldom exceeds 40 percent and most often is under 30 percent. Most of these are citizens who go to town meeting anyway. This is evidence that town meeting does not deny participation to large numbers of people *who would otherwise participate*.
- Across the country, voter turnout in local elections (using printed ballots) is rarely higher than 25 percent, and is usually much lower.

While Vermont towns that trade town meeting for Australian balloting may increase voter turnout in the short run (if only by a little bit), we have to wonder: What about the long run? States with no town meeting culture – as Vermont is threatening to become – lack the advantages of our face-to-face deliberation and yet often get lower turnout in local elections than we currently see with our traditional town meetings.

- In general, town meetings held at night, when most people are not at work, produce attendance no higher than town meetings held right in the middle of the workday. Likewise, no evidence exists that attendance is generally higher at a Saturday town meeting than it is on Tuesday. These are telling facts, because they demonstrate that it is not work and the economic considerations that go with work that keep people from participation, but rather our priorities in allocating our spare time.
- Still, some people can't go to town meeting – perhaps they can't take time off from work or are away in the military or are homebound. Should we give up on town meeting because of them? If this were a significant and constant number, we would say yes. But it is a tiny number. Again we stress: Town meeting is not a polling booth. It is a legislature. And in a Vermont town, citizens, as legislators, need to be present to take part.
- Finally, there are other things we should do to reduce the number who "can't attend" town meeting to almost nothing. Most importantly, we must make sure everyone who wants to get time off for town meeting can do so. (See "A Day for Democracy," p. 70.)

Town meeting attendance (except in the smaller towns) will almost always be somewhat lower than voting booth attendance. However, as long as there is no important systematic bias against certain groups of people, changing to a ballot system and ending town meeting would be a tragedy. As long as participation remains a viable choice for citizens, a small deficit in the *quantity* of participation should not be used as a reason to destroy the magnificent surplus in the *quality* of participation town meeting offers:

- Face-to-face participation teaches forbearance and tolerance. It teaches respect for others' views. It teaches citizenship.
- Town meeting allows citizens to hear "both sides of the story." It builds an appreciation for the complications often involved in the simplest policies.
- By allowing citizens actually to fashion the law themselves, it creates a sense of "ownership" of the town's business not present when decisions are made by others.
- Town meeting is more efficient. Allowing citizens the right to change town budgets from the floor often satisfies objections and avoids the

WHEN SOME CANNOT ATTEND

Those Vermonters in the military who are stationed overseas at town meeting time will not be able to vote in their town meetings. Some might say this is an argument to switch to Australian ballot (so that absentee ballots can be issued). Major General Martha Rainville doesn't agree. She supports maintaining the face-to-face town meeting tradition.

She said, "Today's Green Mountain Boy must sometimes temporarily relinquish the ability to participate in town meeting due to the obligations of their freely accepted military duty. This is a small price of service.

"Town Meeting Day and the Green Mountain Boys are unique institutions in Vermont. The independent spirit of the 'Boys' leads us to try harder, perform to a higher standard, and to never accept the status quo. This spirit is also present at town meeting as we express our opinions and participate in the democratic process. The result of this spirit in both institutions is government by the people and for the people, just as our forefathers intended."

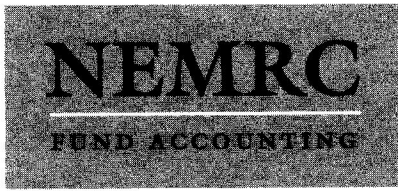
Major General Martha Rainville is the Adjutant General in command of the Vermont National Guard.

time-consuming process of re-voting a budget again and again, which often happens with the Australian ballot system.

- Town meetings build community by bringing people together. Yes, from time to time difficult personalities will hold the floor. Yes, conflict often occurs – and it should. But when successfully resolved in an open and honest manner, wounds heal more quickly and leave the body politic stronger than ever.
- Town meetings strengthen civil society in the larger political communities of which they are a part. There is a clear correlation between a state's use of traditional town meetings and stronger democracy at the state level.
- Unlike the polling booth, town meetings can be exciting, interesting and fun. They bring politics to life. Here laughter is often heard. Here we meet neighbors we haven't seen for ages. Here we learn that "Bill Stone over on the North Road is having trouble in mud season too." Here we discover that the town library is offering a new program for our kids. Here, most of all, we get to see ourselves in the full light of real democracy. Here, for one shining moment, we can be a Socrates.
- Like we said. It can be fun. Good fun.

<u>Appropriations/Dues/Fees/Taxes</u>	2019	Expenses YTD	Under/Over	2020
Abbott Fund	12.00	0.00	12.00	12.00
County Taxes	7,500.00	6,930.00	570.00	
Library				
Annual Stipend	500.00	500.00	0.00	
Fiber Optic	700.00	700.00	0.00	
Meeting House M & I			0.00	
Maintenance	6,000.00	6,000.00	0.00	
Meeting House Fire Insp	0.00	125.00	-125.00	
Heffernan Insurance	4,000.00	4,108.86	-108.86	
Transfer Station	15,393.00	14,852.12	540.88	
VT DEC Watershed Exp	900.00	900.00	0.00	
VT. League of Cities & Towns	1,523.00	1,523.00	0.00	
Windham Regional Commission	1,000.00	956.45	43.55	
Appropriations/Dues/Fees/Taxes Total	37,528.00	36,595.43	932.57	12.00

Selectboard	Proposed	YTD	Under/Over	2020	Notes
Education & Seminars	500.00	335.00	570.00		
Legal Services	1,500.00	2,447.65	-947.65		
Mileage	300.00	88.16	211.84		
Payroll					
Select Board	7,500.00	6,874.76	625.24	7,500.00	
Select Board Clerk	3,000.00	1,523.28	1,476.72	3,000.00	Based on 200 hours reg., road, special meetings
Employer Fica/Medicare	803.00	642.46	160.54	803.00	
Public Notices	500.00				
Selectboard Total	14,103.00	11,911.31	1,526.69	11,303.00	



New England Municipal Resource Center, Ltd

November 19, 2019

Town of Windham, VT

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Received

**TOWN OF WINDHAM
ATTN BUDGET ADJUSTMENT
5976 WINDHAM HILL RD
WINDHAM VT 05359**

Dear TOWN OF WINDHAM Officials:

It is with a heavy heart that I write this letter to inform you of a significant increase in your annual license/support agreement fee. I started NEMRC 33 years ago with the goals of helping keep Vermont local government "local" at an affordable price. And indeed, NEMRC has been able to provide Vermont specific municipal software and local, knowledgeable support at very competitive prices to our clients over that time.

In the last few years, due primarily to the global cybersecurity scare, government, insurance companies and the tech industry are demanding major changes in software development. These changes require NEMRC to add additional cyber security staff, undertake annual expensive cyber security audits and take other measures to ensure the safety of your electronic records. The changes are costly. In particular, knowledgeable cybersecurity personnel are in very short supply (especially in Vermont) which means they can and do command high salaries.

Unfortunately, we can no longer do business in this environment without a major shift in our fees to cover these new costs. We are announcing these increases now to give you a heads up while you are working on next year's budget. However, these increases will not take effect until the anniversary of your annual support agreement either based on the calendar year 2020 if you are on a calendar year basis or based upon your FY2021 fiscal year if your anniversary starts after July 1, 2020.

Your annual support/license will increase from \$1460.81 to \$5000.

These increases will also allow us to continue with our cloud development and conversion of all of our modules (see back of this page).

This increase still leaves our fees much lower than our national competitors. Consistent with our 33-year philosophy, we will continue to provide you with superior, locally based support. I am asking you to please understand the necessity for this increase and respectfully ask for your support during this transition.

If you have ANY questions or comments please call me on my cell 802-289-1026 or email me at esaunders@nemrc.com

Yours truly,

Ernie

Ernie Saunders
President/Owner