

2023 Vermont Town Meeting Day Preview

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2023 VERMONT TOWN MEETING DAY PREVIEW

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Vermont League of Cities and Towns



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by VLCT Executive Director Ted Brady

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SUMMARY

A few weeks ago, VLCT convened nearly 100 Town Meeting moderators to help them tune up their moderating skills ahead of Town Meeting Day 2023. Many found themselves “unemployed” for a couple of years while Vermonters voted by Australian ballot to ensure the continuity of Vermont’s democracy through the state of emergency. As they get back to work, VLCT once again invited our cities and towns to share what they were voting on this Town Meeting Day.

We combed through 225 warnings and thousands of articles to get the pulse of Vermont’s Town Meeting Day 2023. The largest takeaway is that Town Meeting is back. In 2019, pre-pandemic, we counted 185 cities and towns that had at least a partial in-person floor meeting on or near Town Meeting Day. This year, we count 182. That’s a major jump from the count of in-person meetings we tallied last year – 63. And while some towns are holding delayed or modified Town Meetings this year using temporary flexibility granted by the Legislature, 18 others are proposing to permanently change their voting methods going forward.

Vermonters will vote on nearly three quarters of a billion dollars in municipal expenditures this year. They’ll vote on almost \$200 million of infrastructure upgrades (mostly sewer and water), and they’ll consider whether this is the year for new fire trucks, graders, dump trucks, and ambulances. One of the largest responsibilities voters have at Town Meeting – and one of the ones that makes Vermont’s democracy somewhat unique – is that they have the say on how they raise the money their town needs to conduct business, who should pay, and who shouldn’t. They’ll also vote on their school budgets. Across the country, and even in some larger cities like Burlington, most Americans don’t get such a direct say on their municipal budgets. Their elected representatives do that for them. This direct democracy gives Vermonters a chance to not only say yes or no, but even an opportunity to amend budgets in a floor meeting.

This year’s Town Meeting Preview includes a summary of the bounce back from Australian balloting to floor meetings, a look at what towns are asking voters to spend money on, an observation that towns are increasingly converting elected officers to appointed officers, a

look at efforts to legalize retail cannabis, and a quick summary of some novel ballot items facing Vermonters.

Open [the full report](#) or the [By The Numbers infographic](#).