

## What is a Town Meeting?

On December 5<sup>th</sup>, we will hold a Special Town Meeting at Samuel Staples Elementary school at 7:00 PM. For many people who have recently moved to town, I am often asked what this is all about.

The Town Meeting is a uniquely New England traditional form of government. It dates back to colonial times where all the townspeople gathered together to make decisions for the town. In some towns like ours, it remains the legislative body of the town. To change ordinances (the town's laws), appropriate money above \$20,000, and sell town land for instance there must be approval by the town meeting.

There is one annual town meeting in April where we approve the town's annual budget and conduct other town business as needed. Then during the course of the year Special Town Meetings are called as needed for other questions.

An agenda is set by the Board of Selectmen and items are voted on by those who attend the meeting.

If this sounds like a rather quaint relic of an earlier time it is, but it remains Easton's form of government. In neighboring towns like Weston and Redding which share the town meeting form of government, these meetings are mostly simple formalities. In Easton, however, they are often passionate and raucous affairs. Typically, a group of people who feel strongly about an issue and can attend a 7:00 PM meeting on a weeknight, carry the vote, and make policy for the town. As you might imagine, those who can attend those meetings fiercely defend their legitimacy. When I initially ran for First Selectmen the conduct of Town Meetings was a major issue.

Recognizing that Town Meetings where the whole town gathered to legislate we're not necessarily realistic in modern times, the process has been modified by state statutes to allow the Selectmen to choose to bring important questions to a "Machine Vote" or a referendum. This brings the power to legislate back to the whole town as was originally intended. This is why we have referenda. Recently you have seen referenda on a number of questions. It is the feeling of this Board of Selectmen that all-important questions be brought to the full town. The Selectmen attempt to bring all of the relevant information which pertains to a particular ballot question to the town's citizens by posting it on town's website [eastonct.gov](http://eastonct.gov) under the town meeting button. There is usually coverage in the Easton Courier and several on line news sights.

I attend every referendum and am constantly asked, "What are we voting on?" While I appreciate that people participate in the legislative process by showing up to vote, we have important questions to decide and we need to understand as citizens what we are voting on. Without editorializing, like everywhere else in society there are lots of places to get "information " so please consider where you get your information from. The town is committed to bringing you actual documents and factual information to help you make up your own mind.

Most people who move to Easton come from towns where laws are made by legislative bodies like town counsels or if you moved from other Connecticut towns an elected representative town meeting. Either way, the work of making policy or laws is done by people you periodically elect, and that is where your responsibility ends. That is not the case here. You determine the future of your town. If you do not participate there will be others who will be happy to determine that future for you. While learning about issues and voting takes time and effort I hope I have made clear why it is so important that you participate. Your satisfaction with the town you chose to live in, how well the town functions and your property values truly hang in the balance.