

Richmond ponders town meeting revamp

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03/17/2008

RICHMOND — Town officials flirted with changing the annual town meeting scheduled for June 3 and 4 from a two-night fling to a one-day Saturday sweep at Thursday's selectmen's meeting, but shied from any changes at least for now.

Selectmen had mulled changing the format of the meeting after informal discussion that meetings last too long at three to four hours per night and fail to sustain voters' participation after the school budget passes.

In 2007, Richmond voters confronted 56 warrant articles, 16 of which addressed the school budget, which is usually tackled during the first night of the meeting.

By the second night, attendance dropped from around 185 to 75 while voters waded through the remaining town articles.

"We spend 90 percent of our time on probably 20 percent of our budget," Board of Selectmen Chairman Burt Batty said.

The board discussed moving the meeting to a Saturday, cutting the number of warrant articles and staging a question-and-answer session beforehand to help elevate discussion during the meeting.

But only one of those suggestions will be implemented this year. Selectmen will present the budget to residents at an informational meeting on April 17 and hold a question-and-answer session an hour before town meeting, but they decided eliminating warrant articles could diminish government transparency and switching the meeting to a Saturday in June might discourage participation.

"I'd be more inclined to advocate for a Saturday in March," Selectman Seth Goodall said. "I think June would be a tough time."

When selectmen proposed holding the meeting on May 31, School Board Chairwoman Jill Adams reminded the board that a town-

wide vote to validate this year's school budget must be held 10 days after the budget passes, per state mandate.

But moving the meeting to a date outside that 10-day window would require a special election instead of folding the budget validation question into the general election on June 10.

Given that consideration, selectmen opted to keep the meeting on June 3 and 4 as scheduled.

"We did try it on a Saturday. Saturday works until about lunchtime, especially on a sunny day," said Assistant Fire Chief and resident Paul Adams told selectmen. "What we're currently doing, unfortunately, is just what seems to work for us."

Other business

Selectmen also addressed the following business at the meeting:

- Discussed combining locations for the town holding area and universal waste station and received a proposal from Town Manager Thomas Fortier to change fees and operation hours for the town holding area. Proposed fees would increase dump stickers from \$1 to \$2 for residents and \$5 for non-residents. Tire fees would increase from \$2 to \$5 to \$3 to \$6.
- Received proposed up-dates to the town of Richmond Personnel Policy.
- Gave an update on a plan to consolidate school administrations with Dresden, Monmouth, Hallowell and Farmingdale, which is now up for approval by the School Board.