Andy Rouse

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Open Town Meeting Reform

I am in favor of keeping open town meeting. I hope that the committee would look at how open town meeting is conducted in many places in Vermont, such as Hartford, VT. They seem to have adopted a form of town legislation which I believe your committee is characterizing as "bifurcation".

Their legislative procedures consist of multiple parts. First, a pre-town meeting is held where presentations are given about upcoming articles, and candidates for town offices can give presentations, but no votes are taken. Second, on town election day the ballot for town elections also contains the articles for town meeting, which are voted on. Third, about a month after town election day, town meeting is held and budget articles not passed on election day can be presented again (presumably modified) and voted on at the town meeting.

I don't know if something similar to the VT bifurcation model would be legal in MA, but I hope the committee would discuss the possibility. For example, a three part process similar to the following has some attractive features.

Part one. Three or four weeks before town elections there is a town meeting, but articles involving budget, zoning or bylaw changes are discussed and may be amended, but no vote is taken at the meeting. Small budget items could be voted on at this meeting.

Part two: The warrant articles not voted on at town meeting are placed on the ballot along with town office candidates. Therefore absentee voting will also be allowed for warrant articles on the ballot.

Part three: A second town meeting is held where spending articles on the ballot that were rejected may be reconsidered. These articles could be modified from the rejected versions. I don't know what the default process is if a rejected town budget is rejected again, because I have never been to town meeting where the town budget has not passed.

I hope you can explore these possibilities, because I think open town meeting needs to be preserved but reforms are definitely needed.