

Open Town Meeting: Time to switch?

2000-2002 ANA LWV Town Government Study Group

Reason for discontent with Open Town Meeting (OTM)	How to measure	Things to try before abandoning OTM	Is this a reason to abandon OTM?	Does Rep. Town Meeting solve?	Does Town Council solve?
Moderator's expertise	Meetings out of control. Contentious, bitter Town Mtgs. Angry letters-to-the-editor complaining about OTM.	1) See "Suggestions for a better OTM." 2) Obtain training for the moderator. 3) Elect a new moderator.	Yes	No	Yes
Low attendance	Fewer than 250 attendees on first night. (Our 2001 survey of 12 towns with RTM found the mean size of RTM was 243, range: 180-291).	1) Encourage newcomers to town to join the political process. 2) Publicize OTM, e.g. warrant forum. 3) See "Suggestions for a better OTM." 4) Structure order of articles in warrant to maintain interest.	Yes	Maybe (Rep TMs often have attendance problems)	Yes
Response time to financial or other crises	Convening special town meetings and still not addressing the issue in a timely manner.	Solution is to switch to Town Council.	Yes	No	Yes
High attendance	Not enough parking. Not enough seats.	1) See "Suggestions for a better OTM." 2) Shuttle buses to alleviate parking problem. 3) Hold Town Mtg at Merrimack College.	No	Yes	Yes
Special interest groups dominate meetings	Special Town Mtgs called for a specific article. Mass exodus following votes on specific articles.	1) Publicize Town Mtg – encourage attendance by all citizens 2) Discourage numerous special Town Mtg	No	No	Maybe
Personality issues, power struggles	Tenor of debate. Civility or lack thereof at Town Mtg or in letters-to-the-editor.	1) See "Suggestions for better OTM". 2) Obtain training for the moderator. 3) Elect a new moderator.	No	No	No
Economic climate	Overrides passing or failing.	This might be a state, national and global issue beyond the town's control.	No	No	No
Accountability of Town Manager	Methuen and Weymouth changed to Town Council due to this (wanted more accountability than obtained with an appointed Town Manager).	The Select Board can appoint a new Town Manager or provide more direction.	No	No	Yes (if choose elected mayor form of Town Council).