



Waterboro Town Meeting future on June ballot

Nomination papers available for municipal elections

WATERBORO — Due to low voter turnout at the annual Town Meeting, Waterboro residents will vote in June on whether on not to continue to hold such meetings.

Last fall, the town's selectmen collected signatures for a referendum to ask voters if they wished to continue the annual Waterboro Town Meeting or switch to referendum-style voting on budget articles.

They collected 1,038 signatures of registered voters to put the matter to a referendum vote June 13 — far more than the 807 signatures required.

At their meeting Thursday, the selectmen's board took a formal vote to accept the petition and began to make plans for the lead-up to the vote.

“It's up to us to market this,” said selectmen's board Chair Dennis Abbott.

Selectman Jon Gale said he didn't have strong feelings “one way or the other,” about the vote itself, but wanted to ensure the public was informed about the issue.

Selectment agreed to hold several public hearings, and talked about making some public service announcements with Saco River Community Television as well as involving the local print media.

Low turnouts at the annual Town Meeting over the last several years prompted selectmen to discuss what to do about the matter. So after voters made their choices for U.S. president and state legislators at the polls Nov. 8, they were greeted by petitioners, asking them if they wished to hold a vote to change to referendum voting instead of the traditional Town Meeting.

Over the past few years, the average attendance at the annual June Town Meeting has been 40 to 50 people, in a town where there are 5,377 registered voters. Last year's annual Town Meeting June 18 saw 51 people cast votes.

That is a far cry from the days when Waterboro's population was around 1,200, and 100 people turned out for Town Meeting, which would, in those days, be so lengthy it would break for lunch. In years where there were particularly contentious issues, they'd break for supper as well, and resume voting afterward, selectmen said.

Voters will decide the question on Election Day, June 13. If Town meeting is abolished in favor of referendum-style balloting, it would take effect in 2018, which means there would still be a Town Meeting on June 17 — which would be the community's last.

The late Willis Lord's 'History of Waterboro' doesn't say exactly when the first Town Meeting was held, but Lord notes that the town was incorporated on March 6, 1787.

Over the years, town meeting dates have changed, in part so information on the school budget, legislative agenda and county tax could be more apparent, and also to encourage higher turnout — but that hasn't happened. Waterboro's annual Town Meeting used to be held in March, moved briefly to April and then finally, to June.

NOMINATION PAPERS FOR JUNE 13 MUNICIPAL ELECTION

Nomination papers for two selectmen's board seats — currently held by Dwayne Woodsome and John Gale, are available now. Each seat is for a three-year term.

Papers are also available for a one-year term and a three-year term for Regional School Unit 57; the seats are currently held by Jennifer Mayo and Lindsay Clancy.

Nomination papers must be returned to the Waterboro Town Clerk's Office by 5 p.m. May 1.

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