

On March 22 the reps contradicted the March 4 vote of the people for the option tax resolution. In this case the reps were justified. It is still an unusual example of democracy in action.

In 2012 the selectboard campaigned for the tax and the Police-Fire Project together, but the reps rejected the tax. In order to fund the project the selectboard directed public pressure onto the reps by putting a tax resolution to a vote of the people. As written by the board this sweetened campaign version of the tax would "defray the costs of the Police-Fire Project." The board knows that tax money goes into a general fund and cannot be designated for any particular project. Actually, to include such campaign language within binding legislation would be illegal, and it was not included in the version the reps voted on. Since the resolution was misleading, the reps were justified to disregard the peoples' close vote.

The Police-Fire Project was widely discussed as a budget problem on March 22. The selectboard -- meaning mostly Mr. Gartenstein and advisors who sit together at the meeting -- the selectboard listed two supporting votes in defense of the project. The board did not mention the reps' overwhelming vote in 2013 to cut the cost of the project. It was revealed that the board had directed the Police-Fire Oversight committee to make only limited changes in the plan, and now the projected cost is still \$14M. Some reps proposed cutting project bond interest from the budget, and some wanted to reject the budget altogether, to discourage the board from excessive spending. The board argued that public services would be cut instead. The board claimed \$5M was committed to the project, although Robert W. Giroux, Executive Director of the Vermont Municipal Bond Bank, said the money can be put to other purposes after a vote of the people. (!!)

Many reps have withdrawn their support for the project, and many spoke of strong public opposition. In sum the climate at the meeting was good for cutting or delaying the project, but we were not organized enough to bring any proposal to a vote. Since then fifty-six reps have signed for a referendum, forcing the board to let the people vote on the budget. Vote NO.

The reps have behaved according to town charter, which describes their office as ". . . a guiding body for the town and a source of ideas . . ." Town charter gives the selectboard on the other hand a list of duties "not committed by law to the care of any particular officer . . .". "Guidance" and "ideas" are not on their list. But the board is going overboard with new ideas to guide us into this expensive project; ideas like cutting services instead of the project, a sham cost-cutting committee, a misleading resolution to manipulate the tax vote, and votes and revotes on the project and on the option tax. If all these votes are the democratic process, when will they put the Police-Fire Project to a vote of the people? What are they afraid of?

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