

**Your  
question  
answered**

**Will towns hold a  
traditional town  
meeting in March?**



MESSENGER FILE PHOTO

Bakersfield residents discuss the town's proposed budget during Town Meeting Day 2020. Most towns will not conduct floor votes in 2021 due to COVID-19.

**By BRIDGET HIGDON**  
Staff Writer

Since the late 1700s, Vermont towns have held town meetings to vote on issues like local officials and municipal budgets. These meetings can be loud and crowded, as residents pack into rows of folding chairs and stand shoulder to shoulder along the wall.

This year, the COVID-19 pandemic is expected to be a factor come Town Meeting Day on March 2, and these meetings in public spaces are likely to be risky.

In the years since the first Town Meeting Day, many Vermont towns have transitioned to voting via Australian ballot, or a system of voting in which voters mark their choices

on ballots at a polling place.

But in Franklin County, the towns Highgate, Franklin, Montgomery, Sheldon, Enosburgh, the village of Enosburg Falls, Fairfield, Bakersfield and Fletcher all still hold traditional town meetings, where items are voted on by a voice vote or hand count.

In October 2020, the Vermont Legislature passed Act 162, which allows communities to vote to use Australian ballot for Town Meeting come March 2021.

Highgate, Franklin, Montgomery, Sheldon and Fletcher all voted to use Australian ballot, but according to Vermont state law, an informational hearing prior to the March election is required.

**HOW WILL THE INFORMATIONAL HEARING BE CONDUCTED?**

According to Act 92, which the Vermont Legislature passed in March 2020, informational hearings, where the items to be voted upon are explained and debated,

»See QUESTION, page 3

**What to know  
this week**

**By MIKE NOSEK**  
Staff Writer

Here's a rundown of things to know and keep in mind for this week, including state and local news, COVID-19 testing information, and weather.

**Vermont legislators to act on a bill pertaining to town meeting changes**

The Vermont House is expected to debate and vote on bill H.48 on Tuesday, a piece of legislation that would allow for procedural changes of municipalities' town meetings because of the pandemic.

H.48 would authorize municipalities to move the date of their 2021 annual town meeting, authorize municipalities to mail Australian ballots for use in 2021 annual town meetings, specify that terms of elected board members will continue until a successor is chosen, and permit the Secretary of State to issue supplemental elections procedures to protect the health and safety of voters, election workers, and candidates.

Watch the session by visiting [legislature.vermont.gov/house/streaming/](http://legislature.vermont.gov/house/streaming/).

**St. Albans City Council to discuss a year-round pool and a proposed water tower**

The St. Albans City Council has a healthy agenda lined up for Monday night's regular meeting. Among other topics to be discussed are the possibility of a year-round pool being built at the Hard'ack Recreation

»See KNOW, page 4



ST. ALBANS CITY/ARNOLD & SCANGAS ARCHITECTS