

Two Options for Hanover School District Voters

On Tuesday, March 1, Hanover (Ray) School District voters will decide whether to keep the traditional, town-meeting style of voting or to adopt a new system similar to that of Dresden.

The current system allows for all-day voting on only a few warrant articles and enables only those present at the District business meeting to amend and vote on the remaining articles. The proposed system would allow all-day and absentee voting on all warrant articles but would not enable voters to amend articles.

There are advantages and disadvantages to each system. The question is do we maximize one type of voter participation by maintaining the ability of citizens to discuss, amend and vote on most warrant articles at the District business meeting, or do we maximize another type of participation by allowing more people to cast ballots through all-day and absentee voting on all articles?

The warrant article proposing the new system will appear on the all-day Hanover District ballot that includes the election of officers. A 60% majority of participating voters will be required for adoption of the proposed system. If adopted, it would first go into effect March 2006. Thus, regardless of the results, this year's evening business meeting will be held on Wednesday, March 9 to vote on all remaining warrant articles including the budget.

Because the vote on whether to adopt this new form of governance occurs on March 1, community discussion on this matter is planned for February. Please watch this spot for dates and places of upcoming community fora. Or email us at sau.70@valley.net with your questions and thoughts.

The Current Option: Town-Meeting Style

Each year on the first Tuesday in March, Hanover citizens vote in all-day secret balloting on some warrant articles and to elect District officers and School Board Members. Then, an evening business meeting acts on the remaining warrant articles including the budget. Those in attendance ask questions, discuss, debate and amend the articles. Voting at the meeting takes place by voice, by show of hand, or by secret ballot. Since warrant articles discussed and approved at the business meeting can be amended, it is not possible to vote absentee on these articles.

In recent years attendance at the evening meeting has typically been between 50 and 85, though last year saw an "at capacity" crowd of over 250. Some people do not attend the evening meeting due to a lack of interest, but others find it difficult or even impossible to attend.

The Proposed Option: The Dresden Model

If this method of ballot voting were adopted, starting in 2006, Hanover district meetings would consist of two sessions: a discussion session one day and an all-day voting session on another day. The discussion session would consist of explanation of and debate on each warrant article, but amending of articles would not be allowed. To simplify matters, voting on all warrant articles would be on the same day as Dresden, and absentee ballots would be available. Hanover School bonds would require a 60% majority to pass.

In recent years Hanover voter participation in all-day Dresden voting has ranged from under 500 to over 2100. While this is considerably higher than the numbers who attend the Hanover School District evening business meetings, it is not uncommon for the turnout of registered Hanover voters to be less than 10%.

Want more information?

See these links:

[Chronology of Events](#)

[Key Differences Between the Current and Proposed Systems](#)

[The Warrant Article](#) as it will appear on the ballot

[The text of the enabling legislation](#), Senate Bill 418

[The Voting Options Committee Report](#)

For additional thoughts on all-day and town-meeting style voting please see the [Report of the Town Meeting Task Force](#) of the Hanover Select board prepared in the autumn of 2004.

Key Differences Between the Current and Proposed Systems

All-day voting

Current – limited by law to a few questions. Most articles are decided at the District business meeting.

Proposed – required by law on all questions.

Absentee ballot

Current – only possible for warrant articles which appear on the all-day ballot.

Proposed – possible on all warrant articles.

Ability to Amend

Current – only on those articles discussed at the District business meeting.

Proposed – not possible.

Bond Issue Passage

Current - 2/3 of voters at the District business meeting.

Proposed – 3/5 of voters participating in all-day voting.

Possibility of coordinating Hanover and Dresden voting dates

Current – difficult to coordinate due to differences in New Hampshire law and Dresden compact rules.

Proposed – yes.

Chronology

Winter 2003: Citizens submit a petitioned article for the 2003 Hanover School District warrant proposing adoption of an all-day voting system as set forth in Senate Bill 2 (SB 2). The article garners 58.5% of the vote but fails to receive the 60% required by law for passage.

June 2003: In response to this vote and the legitimate concerns of the petitioners, the Hanover School Board forms a “Voting Options Committee.” Their charge includes making recommendations to establish all-day voting and to align Hanover School District and Dresden elections so that all voting can occur on one day.

Summer and Fall 2003: The committee meets six times and holds a public forum with representatives from other school districts.

November 2003: The committee submits its report to the school board. In their recommendations, all committee members agree that seeking special legislation is the best method for establishing all-day and absentee voting on all articles and aligning Hanover School District and Dresden elections. They also recommend that bond votes require 60% to pass and that any new system preserves the citizen's ability to bring a petitioned warrant article to the voters.

December 2003: The Hanover School Board asks our local representatives to introduce state legislation enabling the Hanover District to adopt a voting system similar to Dresden with a deliberative session to discuss but not amend articles and a separate all-day voting session.

January 2004: The first hearing on this enabling legislation, Senate Bill 418 (SB 418), is held in Concord.

May 2004: SB 418 is signed into law. Since it is "enabling legislation", before the proposed system can come into effect, it must be approved by 60% of participating Hanover School District voters.

February 2005: Community fora are planned to give citizens an opportunity to ask questions and express opinions about whether to adopt this voting option.

March 1, 2005: The Hanover School District will include on its March 1 ballot an article asking voters if they would like to adopt the balloting procedures enumerated in SB 418. This question will appear on the portion of the Hanover ballot that includes the election of officers and is currently voted on by all-day and absentee balloting.

March 9, 2005: Regardless of the results of the March 1 vote, the traditional evening business meeting will be held on March 9 to vote on all remaining warrant articles including the budget.

March 2006: If the SB 418 warrant article obtains the necessary 60% majority on March 1, 2005, the proposed system goes into effect.