

Island Opinion

• EDITORIAL •

One meeting we can do without

What if there were a Financial Town Meeting and no one came?

Only 70 people out of the 4,580 registered Jamestown voters — about 1.5 percent — attended the Financial Town Meeting held Monday evening at the Lawn Avenue School. There was little discussion and the annual budget was approved in about 30 minutes.

That leads one to wonder if the Financial Town Meeting is necessary for Jamestown or if it has become a quaint New England anachronism.

We already have plenty of opportunity for public input. The Town Council this year conducted three exhaustive public workshops on the proposed budget. If someone had something to say, they had a chance to say it.

Tax-payer safeguards are in place, too. By law the town is limited to no more than a 5.25 property tax increase without asking for approval from the state legislature. No chance of a hefty property tax hike slipping by unnoticed.

Voters also have the upper hand. The entire Town Council stands for election every two years. In reality the council is only responsible for two budget cycles.

Finally, permission for town indebtedness, such as a bond issue to build a new highway garage, requires voter approval at a town election.

We are probably not ready to abolish the Financial Town Meeting though. The meeting heralds those early days when the colonists gathered to make collective decisions about the welfare of their communities.

Many of us remember when more than 700 people attended the Financial Town Meeting in the early 1990s and it took two nights to complete the business. People had lots to say about the town budget back then.

We could do away with the Financial Town meeting. But as independent Yankees, we like to believe we can meet once a year to voice our opinions on property taxes if needed.

— Jeff McDonough



“First in war, last in peace”

By Bruce Sundlun

When I left the governorship in 1995, I did not know Rhode Island history, but I now have been studying, lecturing and teaching it at URI for twelve years. It is by far the best history of the original thirteen colonies, especially in the beginning years.

Rhode Island was founded in 1636 by Roger Williams and four others, including Anne Hutchinson who founded Pocasset (Portsmouth) in 1638, the only woman in early American history; William Coddington founded Newport in 1639, William Ar-

nold founded Pawtuxet in 1640, and William Gorton founded Warwick in 1646. They were all “banished” from Massachusetts. Rhode Island’s charter from England in 1663, provided “political power shall rest in the people, and a form of government as the people may choose,” plus “freedom of religion”—two worldwide firsts.

Militarily, Rhode Island was “First in War, and Last in Peace,” for all the right reasons. Everyone knows about Paul Revere and

Lexington and Concord, in Massachusetts, but that was in 1775. Before that date, Rhode Island in 1749 had sunk the British ship Liberty, with its stamps for the Stamp Act, and in 1772 captured the Gaspee and burned it at the water’s edge. Esek Hopkins had attacked Fort Mason in Nassau in 1773 and stolen its gunpowder, muskets, and cannon, thereby arming Rhode Island well, and General Prescott, the British Commander in Newport, had been captured in his mistress’ house, and

paraded through downtown Providence in his underwear.

Every colony signed the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776, Rhode Island included, but we “terminated our allegiance” from England 60 days earlier, on May 4. That date is still Rhode Island Independence Day.

The Yankee farmers in Kingston and mariners in Newport each refused to fight the British, who had invaded Newport, and planned to burn Providence (thereby cutting-off and iso-

See “History” on next page.

• VIEWPOINT •

The news of 10 and 15 years ago is from the Jamestown Press. The news of 100 years ago from the Newport Daily News came from the collection of the Newport Historical Society.

100 years ago

From the Newport Daily News, June 5, 1907

The stiff south-easter which set in this morning, accompanied by rain, has added another set-back to all outside work. The fleet of small boats which are usually rigged and moored off the shore by the first of June, have not yet, in many instances, been launched, while those already in the water are not rigged, the weather failing to remain clear enough to allow the work to be done. The rain also keeps the summer visitors — several families are already here — indoors, and retards the coming of others of the summer colony.

From the Newport Daily News, June 8, 1907

The Conanicut Broom Works have received from Pittsburg, Pa., a 2,000-pound hand-stitch sewing machine to be used in their factory. It is of the latest pattern and will enable them to more than treble their output.

75 years ago

From the Newport Daily News, June 3, 1932

Jamestown shut out the Red Sox in a Municipal League contest Thursday night in one of the best staged games played at the Basin this season.

From the Newport Daily News, June 3, 1932

In order to make a report to the Unemployment Relief Board, the director of public aid appeared before the (town) council and asked for an estimate of the amount of money that will be borrowed from that fund, to take care of the unemployed during the current year. The council estimates covered the full allotment allowed the town the past year.

From the Newport Daily News, June 7, 1932

The Beavertail Golf and Country Club is now open for the season, with a good registration of former members, guests from nearby cities and summer residents. ... The professional shop is in charge of William O’Hanley, the well known golf instructor for many years connected with the Jamestown Country Club. The 18-hole course,



in the charge of Allen Chase, superintendent, is in excellent condition, due to remodeling and improvements during the winter and spring.

50 years ago

From the Newport Daily News, June 3, 1957

Seventy attended the buffet supper and dance which opened the Jamestown Golf and Country Club Saturday. Music was by Samuel Rosen and his orchestra of Providence.

From the Newport Daily News, June 4, 1957

The Commerce Oil Refining Corp. has added to its holdings in Jamestown. Three deeds conveying about 196 acres with a total indicated price of \$207,000 were filed in the town clerk’s office yesterday.

From the Newport Daily News, June 6, 1957

Governor Roberts today was asked to direct Thomas A. Monahan, executive director of the R. I. Development Council, to follow the recommendation of the council’s advisory committee and find a Rhode Island site, other than Jamestown, for Commerce Oil’s proposed refinery.

Nearly 2,000 boys of all ages, 1,937 to be exact, took part in Jamestown Boys Club activities during May, according to Donald Gillis, director.

From the Newport Daily News, June 7, 1957

The small craft landing ramp near the ferry landing, was officially opened last night before a gathering of more than 150 townspeople. ... It was built through the cooperation of the state Department of Public Works under the supervision of John L. Smith, state highway supervisor for Jamestown. Miss Rosamond A. Tefft, town clerk, cut the ribbon, which were of the colors of the Jamestown tercentenary and the Jamestown volunteer fire department launched its rescue

boat. The second boat launched belonged to the children of Cmdr. Smith.

25 years ago

From the Newport Daily News, June 1, 1982

Marchers in the annual Memorial Day parade stepped off to the tunes of Rogers High School Band under the direction of Theodore Durgin on Monday morning. Led by retired Army Col. Peter Drury, marshal, the parade stopped at the Four Corners Town Cemetery for ceremonies in memory of veterans of all wars. ... The line of marchers continued down Narragansett Avenue to the waterfront at East Ferry. ... The parade disbanded at Shoreby Hill entrance minutes before rainfall.

From the Newport Daily News, June 9, 1982

The Jamestown Ambulance Association received a shock this week when it was learned that the town’s ambulance, served by 40 volunteers, would be required to pay a toll on the Newport Bridge, the same as other vehicles.

15 years ago

From the Jamestown Press, June 4, 1992

Town Council members will seek assurances on a number of cross-island highway issues when they meet with state Department of Transportation (DOT) officials tomorrow at 8:45 a.m. in Providence. DOT Director Daniel P. Fanning has asked the council to endorse the state’s road plan. But before committing itself, the council wants guarantees that the conditions enumerated in its road resolution of last October will be met as closely as possible.

Town officials will continue to explore a proposed land swap to resolve a parking problem at East Ferry marina despite objections voiced by a few residents.

10 years ago

From the Jamestown Press, June 5, 1997

Jamestown’s 25-year-old checkerboard water tower is up for a renewal and a repaint after an inspection last July revealed the structure is shy of meeting health and safety standards. Changes recommended by the Pittsburgh Tank and Tower Company include applying new interior and exterior coats of paint, installing an interior ladder, and updating roof vents and hatches.