

To the West Tisbury select board:

I would appreciate your reading this letter into the record at this Wednesday's (1/31) meeting, when the quorum issue is discussed.

I am writing to express my dismay regarding the proposal to reduce town meeting quorums from the current 5% of registered voters. It certainly is sometimes difficult to get a quorum to Town Meeting, which I agree should be addressed. But reducing the quorum concentrates power in a fewer number of people, which undermines the democratic process. Certainly, encouraging participation is a far better approach than reducing required attendance, which is simply fixing the symptom rather than the problem.

As two of you may remember, several years ago I wrote to encourage you to work on improving outbound town communications to voters and residents, followed by some discussion with you in-person, in a Select Board meeting. Yet, even now some people seem surprised when I ask if they'll attend town meeting. Too many are almost completely unaware of when it will be. The town needs to do a better job of communicating with everyone; we can't rely on the press.

To that end, I once again ask that the town proactively work to reach every resident as Town Meeting time nears. That would include directed emails to everyone for whom the town has an address, including those signed up for alerts of any kind. At least annually, we should invest in a postcard campaign to ask people to provide their email addresses - it could be included in every tax bill. Social media could be used as well, and sandwich board signs could be used along the main roads as reminders a week or so ahead of time. Key issues to be decided might be listed.

I do not think that how other towns determine a quorum should weigh heavily. West Tisbury has been a leader on a variety of initiatives over the years; it should be one on this.

If the lesson of the past eight years has taught us anything, it is that citizens need more direct involvement in town decision-making, not less. In the region that invented participatory democracy, we need to encourage it robustly.

Please reject the idea of a reduced quorum.

Thanks,  
Doug