

OPINION

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Town Meeting process is hardly 'outdated'

TO THE EDITOR:

There are people in Wayland who believe our town meetings are outdated. What they don't understand is that we enjoy and profit from the precious legacy of pure democracy left to us by our ancestors, a legacy long since abandoned by larger towns like Natick, cities like Boston, and counties like Middlesex. The officials in those governmental entities need only answer to the people who finance their activities, when they decide to run for election or re-election.

In Wayland, our elected (and appointed) officials must still stand before the voters in town meeting assembled, as they did in colonial times, to answer questions and explain what they have done and propose to do with the money appropriated by us at town meeting, our legislative assembly. One might compare our system to that of the federal government, where administration officials must answer questions posed to them by congressional committees. Our congressional committee, the Finance Committee, has always been appointed by the Board of Selectmen, an executive branch of our town government, rather than by the moderator.

Some people are impatient with this process, because they believe

it takes too much time at town meeting and should be done at hearings scheduled by the Finance Committee and the Board of Selectmen before town meeting. I agree that many questions could be answered at such meetings, but town officials often do not have the information requested on those occasions. And those who seek the information believe the answers they get from town officials should be shared by everyone at town meeting when decisions are made on the budget, articles and other matters that affect our pocketbooks and lives.

What is even more surprising is that some of those who profess a genuine interest in the "issues" (support for our excellent school system, for example) have recently maligned and dishonored other voters who have exercised their right to question our town officials at town meetings within the time limits established by the moderator's rules. I am particularly distressed by this development, because I have instituted rules that now give every voter equal time and opportunities at town meetings to express their position in a civilized manner that respects the good faith of those with whom they disagree.

When we compare the way we govern ourselves with the way that our neighboring communities have governed us or themselves, it is clear we have done exceptionally well. The Legislature recently abolished the government of Middlesex County

because of persistent corruption; we all know about the quality of Boston's school system, which is supervised by its mayor; and then there is the Big Dig, which then Gov. Michael Dukakis told the Legislature would cost \$3.5 billion dollars. It will probably end up costing more than \$15 billion.

During the 48 years I have lived in Wayland, I know of no corruption that has infected our government, which has been largely run by a remarkable group of talented men and women, who devote their time and energy to making Wayland a better place and community, all without benefit of salary.

Our children have profited from an excellent school system, we live in remarkable safety, and enjoy large tracts of conservation land and water. We maintain a fine library within a larger network of libraries, a town pool and beach and provide services for senior citizens, young people and each other.

All of this we do, and have done for 371 years, through our open town meeting form of government that some have called "outdated." Outdated, indeed!

C. Peter R. Gossels
TOWN MODERATOR