TOWN MEETING DAY



Instant runoff rejected

Predictable punctuated by surprises

Free Press Staff Reports

7:20 p.m. Monday, Bolton

A modern-day microphone magnifies Moderator Joss Besse's voice as he calls town meeting to order and reminds the room of rules as old as the 200-year-old tradition itself:

If you aren't registered, don't vote. Direct all comments to the moderator. Give your name and speak up loud and clear. Old and new have been rubbing shoul-

ders since 50 of Bolton's 900-plus residents gathered for a potluck supper an hour ago in the windowless elementary school meeting room.

Theresa Stockwell, 79, put down her casserole dish of maple-sweetened baked beans beside an up-to-date bowl of couscous with cranberry vinaigrette. Talk at the dinner tables ranged over subjects ancient (the state of Notch Road) and modern (Mike Rainville's geothermal heating

Before the evening gets much older, Besse will ask voters to answer a peculiarly 21st-century question — whether to approve a lower school budget that will require higher taxes — in an 18th-century manner, by a voice vote of those gathered.

This is town meeting 2010: Sometimes as quaint as as a Norman Rockwell painting, sometimes as dull and practical as a corporate report. As Vermonters gathered in town halls and school gymnasiums this week to vote on budgets, elect town officers and exchange gossip, town meeting showed its two sides: Utterly predictable ritual interrupted occasionally by surprising decisions; businesslike voting leavened with humor or enlivened

See THE DAY, 4A



GLENN RUSSELL, Free Press Residents vote Tuesday on an amendment to the proposed town budget during

Voters kind to schools

town meeting at Fletcher Elementary School.

Almost all plans pass

thanks to tight budgeting

By Molly Walsh Free Press Staff Writer

School budgets fared well in

many Champlain Valley towns and beyond on Town Meeting Day, with few spending plans going down to defeat — even those carrying double-digit tax increases.

Voters in Burlington, Bolton, Huntington, Richmond, Milton, Shelburne, South Burlington, Williston and Westford passed school budgets, while residents of Char-

lotte and Colchester rejected spending plans. Further afield, proposals in the Champlain Islands fared well, even in Grand Isle, where the 2.6 percent budget increase will trigger an estimated 16 percent school taxrate increase and where last year voters rejected the budget four

Burlington Superintendent of Schools Jeanne Collins was among those celebrating Tuesday. She thanked city voters for saying yes by a wide margin (4,230 to 2,856) to a school budget that will rise 4 percent and increase the school tax rate

See SCHOOLS, 5A

New North End leads effort to kill method of voting

By John Briggs Free Press Staff Writer

Burlington voters narrowly repealed an instant runoff voting system for mayor Tuesday, confirming a pronounced geographic division within the city.

The vote in favor of Question No. 5 on the city ballot was 3,972 to 3,669, with heavy repeal votes in more conservative New North End Wards 4 and 7 that offset majorities to retain IRV in the city's five other

The result could have "a pretty significant impact nationwide," anti-IRV activist

TOWN

INSIDE

Coverage from

County and be-

ONLINE

Town Meeting

Day in photos at

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yond, **1B-7B**

Chittenden

John Ewing said; or it was a local question that left many voters indifferent the perspective of City Council President Bill Keogh, D-Ward 5, who said voters were far more interested in Burlington Telecom than in IRV as he campaigned for reelection.

That latter sentiment was heard even in Ward 7, which voted decisively for repeal, 1,006 to 437. Democrat Greg Jenkins, who lost in his challenge to incumbent

Republican Paul Decelles, said he wanted to keep IRV, but he said, "There are a lot more important problems we have than IRV."

The IRV system was adopted in 2005 for Burlington mayoral elections and was used in 2006 and 2009. It allows voters to indicate their ranked preferences for candidates. Candidates with the fewest votes are eliminated round by round until one candidate earns more than 50 percent of the vote.

Mayor Bob Kiss was elected twice through the system. In 2009, Kiss prevailed after three rounds of runoffs. He received just 29 percent of the initial vote in a fiveman race but defeated Republican Kurt Wright after three other candidates were eliminated through IRV.

"This was an anti-Bob Kiss issue" for the repealers, Keogh said, those unhappy "that somebody can win with 29 percent of the

The local impetus for the ballot item might have been "sour grapes," as Kiss put it, from opponents still rankled by Wright's narrow defeat last March.

Ewing, a longtime Democratic leader in the city, called the measure a principled effort to repeal an overly complicated system, "a system which, on paper, persuaded people to give it a try but in reality resulted in a very confusing and poor system.'

Whatever the motive, FairVote, a Takoma, Md., group which supports IRV, as

See IRV, 5A

Harry Curth, 62, of Ferrisburgh listens to comments from the crowd during town meeting on Tuesday.

TOWN MEETING DAY HIGHLIGHTS

Progressives take a hit in Burlington

Mayor's party loses two tight races, one City Council seat, 1B

Lowell votes big for wind project

About three-quarters of voters back plan for 18-24 turbines, 1B

Airport parking garage gets green light

Addition leads clean sweep of Burlington ballot items, Chart, 4B



GLENN RUSSELL. Free Press

Howrigan recites the Pledge of Allegiance at the start of town meeting Tuesday at Fletcher Elementary School.

Thomas G.





WEATHER Hi: 36 Low: 23

Slight chance of snow showers.

OBITUARIES: Find today's death notices on Page 10A

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