

FINANCIAL TOWN MEETINGS IN RHODE ISLAND

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By

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Hailed by some as the “last bastion of pure democracy” while assailed by others as “an exercise in irresponsibility”, the financial town meeting in Rhode Island is slowly being replaced as a forum for democratic participation in Rhode Island local government. In the more than 55 years since the adoption of the Home Rule Amendment to the Rhode Island Constitution in 1951, nearly 50% of the State’s 31 towns have abandoned the Financial Town Meeting as the final step in the community’s budget-adoption process. A total of 17 (or 55%) of Rhode Island’s 31 towns have retained the Financial Town Meeting: As the table below indicates, attendance in recent years has been low; with less than 5% attending in most towns in 2008.

Town	Registered Voters who attended the 2008 Financial Town Mtg.	Number of Registered Voters	% of Registered Voters who Attended in 2008
1. Barrington	168	15,114	1 %
2. Coventry	245	22,891	1 %
3. East Greenwich	89	9,117	1 %
4. Exeter	129	4,237	3 %
5. Foster	143	3,294	4 %
6. Glocester	58	6,964	1 %
7. Jamestown	115	4,431	3 %
8. Lincoln	365	16,691	2 %
9. Little Compton	206	2,849	7 %
10. New Shoreham	86	1,461	6 %
11. Richmond	154	6,000	3 %
12. Scituate	292	7,747	4 %
13. Smithfield	175	15,000	1 %
14. Tiverton	816	11,744	7 %
15. Warren	48	1,721	3 %
16. West Greenwich	168	4,160	4 %
17. West Warwick	173	15,729	1 %

The remaining 14 towns have abolished the Financial Town Meeting:

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| 1. Bristol (1970) * | 8. Narragansett (1966) * |
| 2. Burrillville (1988) * | 9. North Kingstown (1985) |
| 3. Charlestown (2002) | 10. North Providence (1950) |
| 4. Cumberland (1978) * | 11. North Smithfield (1989) |
| 5. Hopkinton (2006) | 12. Portsmouth (1983) |
| 6. Johnston (1962) * | 13. South Kingstown (2006) |
| 7. Middletown (1968) * | 14. Westerly (1968) * |

*** These towns abolished the Financial Town Meeting at the time their original Home Rule Charters were adopted.**