

Adopt SB2 (Official Ballot Referenda) for Brookline

By Eric Pauer

New Hampshire's SB2 system—formally called the Official Ballot Referenda form of town meeting—changes how voters act on warrant articles. Instead of making decisions at a single in-person meeting, SB2 allows voters to cast their votes all day on election day, just like they do for local officials. This approach offers several advantages for residents who want a more accessible and inclusive way to participate in town government. SB2 is widely used, and we already use SB2 successfully in our Brookline School District.

1. Far Greater Voter Participation

Brookline traditional town meetings often draw about 5% of voters. Under SB2, we've seen 4 to 5 times higher turnout, because:

- Voting is open all day
- Voters do not need to attend a long meeting
- Participation is possible even with work, family, or health constraints

More participation means decisions better reflect the will of the entire community—not just those who can attend a meeting.

2. All-Day and Absentee Voting

Under SB2, every warrant article is decided by secret ballot on election day. This allows:

- Voting before or after work
- Voting during lunch breaks
- Voting while managing childcare
- Absentee voting for those who are traveling, deployed, ill, or away for the winter

This makes the process more equitable and accessible for all residents.

3. More Time to Review Information

In a traditional town meeting, voters must listen, process, debate, and vote in the same session. SB2 separates these steps:

- The Deliberative Session allows discussion and amendment of articles
- Voters then have weeks to read, research, and consider the final warrant before voting

This leads to more informed decision-making.

4. A Secret Ballot for Every Article

Every warrant article—budget items, zoning changes, bonds, and more—is decided by private ballot, not a public show of hands. This protects voters from:

- Social pressure
- Peer influence
- Public disagreement with neighbors or officials

Voters can make decisions privately and confidently.

5. Predictable, Efficient Voting

Election day is a familiar, well-organized process. SB2 uses the same structure:

- Polls open for set hours
- Accessible voting machines
- Trained election workers
- Clear procedures for absentee ballots

This consistency makes participation easier for everyone.

6. No Long or Multi-Day Meetings

Traditional town meetings can last many hours or even multiple days. SB2 eliminates the need for:

- Sitting through lengthy debates
- Waiting for specific articles to come up
- Rearranging work or family schedules
- Staying late into the night

Voters can participate without sacrificing time or comfort.

7. Still Allows Public Discussion

SB2 does not eliminate public input. The Deliberative Session remains a forum for:

- Asking questions
- Proposing amendments
- Hearing explanations from officials
- Discussing the merits of each article

SB2 simply moves the *final vote* to election day.

In Summary

SB2 expands access to local democracy by allowing all-day, secret-ballot, and absentee voting on every warrant article. It increases participation, supports informed decision-making, and ensures that every voter—regardless of schedule, health, or personal circumstances—has a fair opportunity to be heard.