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**Wild town meeting got down to business**
Templeton made sure voters counted

Templeton disposed of two landfill articles

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**TEMPLETON-** It was like no town meeting in memory.

With voters at Thursday's special town meeting seated in three different rooms in Narragansett Middle School and a temporary town moderator running a meeting attended by a record 876 people who were mostly there to oppose opening a landfill, town officials struggled to keep order and keep all voters in the loop.

The town had never had to use three rooms for a town meeting, and the logistics were daunting.

Town Clerk Carol Harris opened the meeting but then turned it over to veteran town official David Bergeron, who was elected by the town meeting voters to run the meeting. He was filling in for Moderator Robert L. Hubbard, who was out of the country on vacation.

Mr. Bergeron is a veteran town assessor who served previously as moderator after serving the town for many years as town accountant. The large crowd surprised even him.

"This is the first time in over 30 years that this number of people has shown up for a town meeting," he said, adding that he hoped they would return when town budgets are decided in the spring.

During the meeting, Mr. Bergeron communicated with assistants in the other rooms using walkie-talkies, while voters seated in the gym and cafeteria watched a broadcast of the session and were able to communicate their questions and comments through a sound system.

With debate over the landfill rumbling for months in Templeton, many seemed to have already made up their minds on the issue. The majority of the audience appeared to be against the proposed landfill and eager to vote quickly.

The meeting got off to a slow start, with numerous motions.

Voters defeated an effort to move up two articles that were not related to the landfill, and by the time the first landfill article came up it was about 7:45 p.m.

A motion to vote by secret ballot on the article to abolish the landfill enterprise fund was handily knocked down, and a motion to bring the landfill articles to a ballot vote was rejected by Mr. Bergeron.

Paul Laine, who was in the gym, said he thought the matter should be a ballot referendum. Mr. Laine added that in the gym people had no clue what was going on. The audience there apparently was having difficulty hearing what was happening.

After a recess to resolve that issue, discussion got started again about 8:15 p.m. and, after just two speakers addressed Article 1, John Henshaw, a sewer commissioner and a member of the antidump faction, made a motion to move the question. The motion would have pushed the article to a vote.

Mr. Bergeron said he would not allow the motion at that point, saying the article had not received full justice of discussion.

Raymond Voutila, a former member of the town Finance Committee, stood up to say the town should not have the landfill money in an enterprise fund controlled by a three-member board.

Dan Keeney, chairman of the town Finance Committee, said his committee voted initially to oppose eliminating the enterprise fund, but he learned in a meeting before town meeting that there are restrictions in the manner in which money can come out of the fund. He said there were greater restrictions than the committee wants. Based on the new information, he said the committee changed its vote and was recommending eliminating the fund.

Randy J. Lawrence, chairman of the Board of Health, said the town could divert the money that is needed for landfill expenses to the enterprise fund and send the rest right to town coffers.

An effort to put up a slide presentation by the health board on the landfill was voted down.

At that point Mr. Laine spoke again, suggesting the meeting be adjourned because of difficulties in the gym, where people were just hearing "babble," he said.

"Should've gotten here earlier," said one person sitting in the auditorium, where the discussion could be clearly heard.

The meeting was temporarily halted to try to resolve some of the problems voters in the gym and cafeteria were having.

When the meeting resumed, Mr. Lawrence questioned whether an enterprise fund could be rescinded within three years of its adoption.

Mr. Bergeron said an advisory opinion by the state Department of Revenue states that once adopted, a community must operate a fund for a minimum of three years before it can be rescinded. He stressed to the voters that the opinion was only advisory.

Three motions then came in to move the question and vote, and the crowd resoundingly supported this effort.

When the motion to abolish the enterprise fund was acted on, it was approved 702-84 at 8:59 p.m.

A second article, to prevent out-of-town garbage from being dumped in Templeton, raised legal concerns.

Resident Mike Dickson said it seemed to be extremely important to know whether the contract is legal.

"That could really cost the town a lot of money if we're not very clear on that tonight," Mr. Dickson said.

Mark A. Goldstein, town counsel, said in his opinion it is a legal, binding contract. There are one or two clauses in the contract that probably need to be clarified. He said the parties could change the language so it is enforceable.

At 9:52 p.m., the vote on the second article finally was completed, with the audience resoundingly voting not to allow commercial haulers to bring in garbage from outside Templeton to the town landfill on Route 202.

Although the dump-related articles were what most people attended the meeting for, most remained in their seats for two more articles.

Voters approved a substitute motion using $11,600 from the sale of fire stations in East Templeton and Otter River as matching funds for the town to receive about $104,000 from a federal assistance to firefighters grant and placing the rest in a stabilization account.

Fire Chief Richard Kirby had requested that up to $260,000 of the balance be used to buy a new firetruck, but the Finance Committee made the substitute motion.

Voters also approved transferring $16,700 into the Highway Department maintenance account.

George Barnes of the Telegram & Gazette staff contributed to this report.