

FINANCIAL TOWN MEETINGS IN RHODE ISLAND
(March - 2013)

By
Joseph E. Coduri, Supervisor
Local Government Assistance
Rhode Island Division of Municipal Finance

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 60 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 16 (or 52%) 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 2012.

Town	Registered Voters at the 2012 Financial Town Meeting	Number of Registered Voters	% of Registered Voters who Attended in 2012
1. Barrington	143	13,873	
2. Coventry	195	24,255	
3. East Greenwich	54	10,467	
4. Exeter	140	4,846	
5. Foster	80	3,782	
6. Glocester	33	7,894	
7. Jamestown	158	4,512	
8. Lincoln	209	15,667	
9. Little Compton	170	2,972	
10. New Shoreham	113	1,434	
11. Richmond	36	5,903	
12. Scituate	116	7,924	
13. Smithfield	118	14,674	
14. Warren	172	7,703	
15. West Greenwich	72	4,202	
16. West Warwick	na	23,818	
Statewide Totals	1,809	153,926	1.2%

The remaining 15 towns have abolished the Financial Town Meeting:

1. Bristol (1970) *
2. Burrillville (1988) *
3. Charlestown (2002)
4. Cumberland (1978) *
5. Hopkinton (2006)
6. Johnston (1962) *
7. Middletown (1968) *
8. Narragansett (1966) *
9. North Kingstown (1985)
10. North Providence (1950)
11. North Smithfield (1989)
12. Portsmouth (1983)
13. South Kingstown (2006)
14. Tiverton (2011)
15. Westerly (1968) *

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