

Clerks Corner, August 2017  
Living in a small town

What does it mean to live in a small New England town? The most common answers are more fresh air and green space, safer environment, less pollution and traffic and a stronger sense of community. These are all very true and wonderful reasons to live in a smaller community rather than a large hustling and bustling city but two of the best incentives are rarely mentioned. Living in a small town in New England allows you to easily connect with your community as well as experience American democratic government in the most direct way.

Town Meeting is a form of government that allows every registered voter to take an active role in the governing of their Town. Those in attendance at Town Meeting vote on all things related to the day to day operations of the Town including expenditures and bylaws. Any registered voter has his or her say in the vote. It is an invigorating feeling to be able to exercise such power on issues that impact the daily life and the lives of you and your family members.

In recent years, the attendance at Town Meetings has decreased. According to data from the Annual Town Meetings in Wenham over the past 8 years, the average age of participants at Town Meeting is 65 even though younger people are moving into town. Why are these younger residents not attending Town Meeting? Primarily it is because of the hectic and busy lives we all lead but perhaps another reason may be a misunderstanding of Town Meeting. Town Meeting is one of the best and yet hidden advantages to living in a small New England Town. It is there that you have the opportunity to express your opinions on any number of issues, hear others express theirs and then, find consensus in a vote. Town Meeting is a “must attend to vote” occasion and it does require a time commitment. But those few “lost” hours can barely compare with the feeling of power and involvement you attain by being a critical cog at Town Meeting.

The other advantage to living in a small town which is often forgotten is the ease of getting involved within the community. “It takes a village to raise a child” is a proverb that means that it takes an entire community to raise a child. It can also describe life in a small Town. It takes an entire community to govern itself fairly. Without everyone’s involvement, the Town often does not function properly. In a small town, getting involved in any number of organizations including town government is easy. Attending Town Meeting aids in this as you get to see what organizations, committees and boards interest you. There are always ways to help, and each and every way you contribute is welcomed and much appreciated.

When our founding fathers committed themselves to writing the Constitution of the United States, they hoped to see a government run for the people by the people. This is what you find in small towns in New England that are run by Town Meeting and is a great reason for living here.

*Dianne Kaplan Bucco was elected the Wenham Town Clerk April 11, 2014 and re-elected on April 6, 2017. Dianne also achieved the designation of certified clerk through both the IIMC and the MTCA. For more information on the clerk’s office, please go to [www.wenhamma.gov](http://www.wenhamma.gov) or follow the Wenham Town Clerk on Facebook.*