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A black and white portrait of Albert A. Barbieri, a middle-aged man with glasses, wearing a suit and tie, standing in front of a bookshelf.

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**#1 SELLING
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What Harvard residents had on their minds at Town Meeting

by Julia Dufresne
and Luke Macannuco

A total of 392 Harvard residents convened at the Bromfield School April 6 despite the cold and drizzly weather to debate and vote on 26 articles at the 2024 Annual Town Meeting.

Important issues like a choice of two overrides to pay for some or all of the \$33.9 million budget and financing the renovation of Department of Public Works buildings attracted a variety of Harvard residents, new and old. Piali De, a Harvard resident of more than 30 years and former School Committee member, called the meeting “such a privilege.” She added: “It’s given me a lot of pleasure to help shape this town. We’re proud of this town. It’s a unique, incredible, and beautiful town, but it’s because we all work at it together.”

Beth Conlon-Smith expressed the importance of getting involved in local political discourse. “I always try to come because it’s important for everyone to make their voice known in town politics,” Conlon-Smith continued by describing how the discussions at Town Meeting sometimes sway opinions and introduce topics that hadn’t at first appeared important. She has lived in Harvard for about 20 years and previously lived in Salem, New Hampshire. “Harvard is such a small town that if you really want to speak you have the opportunity,” Conlon-Smith said.

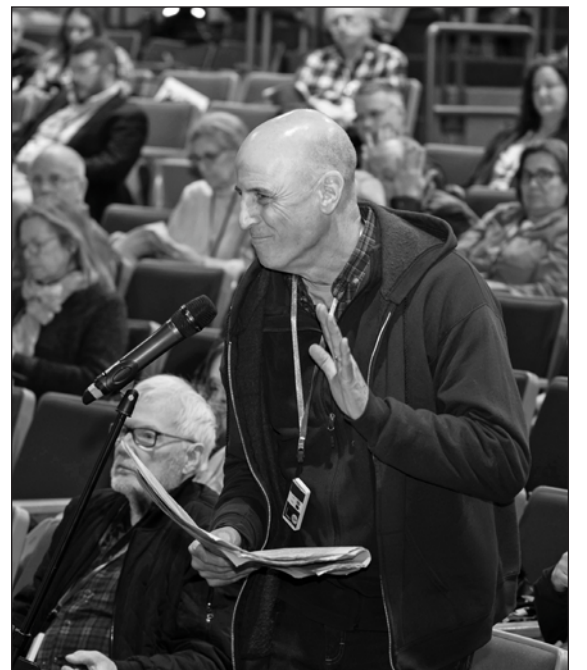
Harvard resident Robert Brown comes to Town Meeting “pretty much every year,” he said. Brown praised the concept of the open town meeting, which has been practiced in New England since the 17th century, when colonies were first established in America. “It’s a tried and true tradition,” Brown said, “and you have to be there to make it count ... that’s the way I look at it.”

Concern for Bromfield House and the schools

In addition to fulfilling a civic duty, some Harvard residents attended Town Meeting over their concerns regarding specific issues, like the budget override or extending the lease on Bromfield House.

Rosemary Ouellet, a member of the Fourth of July Committee, came to Town Meeting with an interest in how the votes would affect taxation in Harvard. "This is going to impact my taxes. If I don't know what to vote on, at least I know what's going on," Ouellet said. In regard to the Bromfield House, Ouellet hadn't formed an opinion yet aside from, "Yes, people should be housed. Maybe we could find somewhere else to do it so it would be easier for them." Ouellet added, "If we could find somewhere that might be more comfortable, that might be nice."

Marc Sevigny has always come to Town Meeting to vote on articles regardless of their significance. "I'm interested in the budget and the various allocations by the Community Preservation Committee," Sevigny explained. Sevigny has been in Harvard for 30 years, has served on various town committees, and is currently a trustee for the Harvard Conservation Trust. On the topic of the Bromfield House, Sevigny said, "I'm sympathetic to the needs of the families that are there; I feel like they've been there for a while and the community should come togeth-



Marc Sevigny takes part in Town Meeting discussion.
(Photo by Lisa Aciukewicz)

er and find an appropriate place for them.” Having attended many Town Meetings, Sevigny said he viewed the clickers for recording votes favorably. “I think that they would be a great addition and a real benefit. We’ve had a lot of close votes and spent sometimes 15 to 20 minutes just getting counts and recounts because we’re off by one.”

Liza Toll, a Harvard resident and student at Middlebury College, showed up to support the budget. "I know some people working at the school who are worried about losing their jobs if [the override] doesn't pass," she said. Toll typically would not have the opportunity to attend Town Meeting due to her schedule as a full-time college student, but because she was in town for the weekend, she was motivated to go. "Why not take the chance?" she said.

Harvard resident Rachel Kopay came to show her support of school funding and the Bromfield House at Town Meeting in between two youth hockey games she was coaching. Kopay spoke to the difficulties parents face when trying to balance busy schedules and attending important events like Town Meeting. "It's really great that the Girl Scouts are doing the babysitting in the [Bromfield School] cafeteria," she said, "We need that support so more families can come who are managing multiple activities on Saturday mornings."

The auditorium provided a guest section for those who were ineligible to vote. One person who wasn't voting but still attended, Sylvia Baedorf Kassis, moved into Harvard with their family in 2022. "I'm just getting to know the town," Baedorf Kassis stated, expressing concern about the families living at the Bromfield House. "I was really motivated to make sure that I could see what was happening around our Afghan families [who] hopefully will be able to stay in town." Baedorf Kassis is Canadian and unable to vote at Town Meeting. "Even though I can't vote here," she said, "I'm really concerned about being active on the local level."





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