December 21, 2012

To the Board of Selectmen, Finance Committee, School Committee and other town boards and committees; and the Voters of the Town of Weston:

I am grateful to the Weston Town Meeting Advisory Committee for this report, which provides an assessment of Town Meeting and its role in Weston’s town governance, and gives thoughtful recommendations for action and consideration. Having already implemented several of their recommendations, I ask that future Town Moderators consider them as well. I also ask that the members of your committees and the citizens of Weston read the report and continue the discussion about how we can improve Town Meeting itself and how we can increase voter engagement in governance issues and process.

These past three years of my terms in office have been a transition period for the town. Under the steady direction of my predecessor, Robert Buchanan, we of Weston had taken much for granted as the world around us has changed. Citizens, increasingly preoccupied by work and life, but aided with improvements in information technology, have evolved in their expectations about how to engage in local government. Responding to these changes has been a keynote of this transition period. Our website provides more information, we have begun to communicate to our citizens directly through westonGrapevine, and Town Meeting has adopted procedures to encourage debate. But more should be done.

This report includes ideas that are outside the authority of the Moderator to implement and require changes to our bylaws. So I am gratified that the Board of Selectmen has voted to take the next step of forming a committee to review the by-laws, some of which deal directly with Town Meeting. I urge the committee, when formed, to consider the work already done by WTMAC, and to pursue at least some of the recommendations in this report. Foremost, it would be very useful to conduct a survey of citizens to understand their opinions and attitudes about local governance and their reasons for participating in or avoiding Town Meeting. With this information we can focus on
realistic steps to educate our citizens, improve their engagement in the governance process, and foster a more dynamic civic life.

Finally, I urge the other elected and appointed boards and committees of our town to consider the recommendations of the report and to engage in your own review processes in order to consider your part in addressing these questions. Further, I respectfully request that you inform the members of WTMAC by contacting the Chair, Tom Crane, when you plan to discuss the report, in the event that some of them are interested in and able to be present for your discussion.

I very much appreciate the service of our citizen leaders to the town of Weston, as well as our active voters, who are essential to the legislative process. I sincerely hope that you share my interest in this conversation and that the town will benefit from your participation in it.

Respectfully,

Wendy Spector,
Weston Town Moderator