

[The Smithsonian is coming to town: Town of Hawley partners with Mohawk Trail Regional School to host traveling exhibit on democracy](#)

By MADISON SCHOFIELD, Staff Writer

Published: 01-10-2025 9:33 PM

The Smithsonian is coming to the Mohawk Trail Regional School. The school has been selected to host the traveling “Voices and Votes: Democracy in America” exhibit in spring 2025.

“Voices and Votes” explores democracy in America, not through politics, but through the origins and means of democracy. It will feature historical and contemporary photos; educational and archival video; engaging multimedia interactive short games; and historical objects like campaign souvenirs, voter memorabilia, and protest material.

The exhibit is part of the Smithsonian’s Museum on Main Street outreach program, which partners with regional cultural organizations like Mass Humanities to organize traveling exhibits that “brings revitalized attention to underserved rural communities.” Shelburne Falls is one of six towns selected to host the exhibit and to receive a \$10,000 grant from Mass Humanities to develop public events during the exhibition, with guidance from Smithsonian Staff.

While details for events and programs have not been finalized yet, they will cover a range of topics connecting to the theme of democracy, and will partner with a number of community organizations such as the various libraries, historical commissions, local legislators and more.

“We have all these ideas,” said Tinky Weisblat, the Hawley administrative assistant (Weisblat also contributes a weekly food column to the Recorder, along with regular book reviews). “We’re trying to keep all the balls in the air and see what will land.”

Weisblat said she received an email from Mass Humanities inviting towns to apply to host the exhibit, and thought it was an exciting idea, but not something Hawley could host on its own. She mentioned it to a few teachers at the Mohawk Trail Regional School, who were intrigued and thought the exhibit would tie into their curriculum and educational goals for their students.

“Being a history teacher, I was immediately excited about the idea for several reasons: this is a topic that myself and my fellow history teachers are passionate about and try hard to get students to understand within our classes, and living where we do means that not all students have the ability or opportunity to experience a Smithsonian exhibit so this is a wonderful opportunity,” said Julia White, the AP U.S. history and sociology teacher at MTRS.

They decided to partner up and submit an application, and were accepted to host the exhibit from April 19 through May 31. Weisblat, the teachers, and other volunteers are now working to find local artifacts to include in the exhibit, like ballot boxes, campaign posters and buttons, and planning interactive events.

Weisblat said the goal is to have one event a week while the exhibit is in town, including a grand opening gala and closing celebration, a concert with Weisblat and the Mohawk Regional School band and chorus performing historic protest songs, a food tasting event with recipes from election bake sales throughout history, a panel with new citizens on their experiences voting, and maybe even a documentary highlighting some of the region's senior citizens and their memories of elections over the years.

Within the school, White said the social studies department teachers and their students are planning a number of activities for students, including an "I voted" sticker contest. In addition, the 8th and 10th grade civic classes will be hosting a legislative panel and showcasing their civic action projects, and students are working to curate local election themed artifacts, and working on a documentary project.

"There's so much exciting stuff that will be happening," Weisblat said.

White said she was excited to see to see the work of all the community volunteers come to fruition.

"We have a terrific group of community partners who are all approaching the exhibit themes in unique and interesting ways," White said. "Our exhibit programming is deliberately designed to bring all age groups together to think, discuss, and share their ideas and experiences. We have myriad ways for people to interact and deliberate on the themes of the exhibit while hopefully also having fun and learning from each other."

After the exhibit leaves Shelburne Falls it will travel to Lee, Ashby, Douglas, Holbrook, and Sandwich.

"We're the smallest host getting it ... even putting all the district towns together we're the smallest host," Weisblat said. "But we're mighty in enthusiasm."

School staff and community volunteers are still planning the various events connected to the exhibit and hope to have a schedule finalized in February. The exhibit will open in the Mohawk Regional School Library on April 29.

Reach Madison Schofield at 413-930-4579 or [mschofield@recorder.com](mailto:mschofield@recorder.com).

*Source: <https://www.recorder.com/SmithsonianExhibitComingToMTRS-56912768>*