**Town Meeting Subcommittee**

**Minutes of Meeting of July 27, 2022**

Members present:

Peg Arguimbau

Rob Carver

Matthew Keenan

Joanne Michalek

Ganesh Rangarajan

Also present:

Brian Luther, Metropolitan Area Planning Council

Member absent:

Keevin Geller

**Debates and votes on resolutions**

The subcommittee considered and voted on the following items. They will be forwarded to the full Governance Study Committee, which will decide whether to pass them on to the Select Board. The resolutions were:

* **Proposal to test on-site electronic voting at Town Meeting**. For more than a decade, Massachusetts communities have safely used hand-held electronic voting devices at Town Meetings – saving significant time, improving the experience of participants, and ensuring secure and accurate vote counts. We recommend the town conduct a three-year experiment, using voting devices at all annual and special Town Meetings, to determine the merits and cost-effectiveness of electronic voting. (Mr. Keenan)
  + **Discussion:** Mr. Carver said other towns had shown on-site electronic voting to be feasible and functional. Adopting electronic voting would help foster greater engagement in town government here, he said; Ms. Michalek concurred. Mr. Keenan spoke about the expense of buying or renting voting systems and securing technological support, which could raise the cost of Town Meeting considerably. Mr. Rangarajan said there is a price to be borne for true democracy.
  + **Approved, 5-0. (Ms. Arguimbau, Mr. Carver, Mr. Keenan, Ms. Michalek and Mr. Rangarajan in favor.**
* **Proposal to support efforts enabling remote participation in Town Meeting.** Current state law does not allow voters to take part in Town Meeting unless they are physically present. Officials in Wayland are seeking passage of enabling legislation allowing that town to test a remote-participation system at its Town Meeting; that system would permit off-site participants to speak, introduce amendments and cast votes. We recommend the Select Board vote to support Wayland’s efforts (including asking our legislative delegation to co-sponsor the bill), monitor the progress of the legislation and, if a successful test is conducted, determine if a similar experiment should take place in Sharon. (Mr. Keenan)
  + **Approved, 4-0. (Mr. Carver, Mr. Keenan, Ms. Michalek and Mr. Rangarajan in favor.)**
* **Proposal to allow noncitizen participation in government.** Current law prohibits noncitizens from voting in federal and state elections. Recently, several communities in Massachusetts have petitioned the legislature to allow noncitizens, many of whom have lived in their communities for decades, to vote in local elections. We recommend the Select Board seek legislation that permits non-U.S. citizens to participate more fully in community life in Sharon by voting in town elections and at Town Meeting, as well as serving in appointed and elected positions on town boards and committees. (Mr. Keenan)
  + **Discussion:** Mr. Rangarajan said many noncitizens living in Sharon are legal permanent residents. They own homes and pay property taxes without having a say in how the town’s money is spent. Many have to wait decades, upwards of 60 years in certain cases, to become a U.S. citizen, he said. Mr. Rangarajan said he would consider amending the proposal to restrict noncitizen voting to property owners; Mr. Carver and Mr. Keenan opposed the idea. Mr. Carver said he felt strongly about not connecting citizen rights to property rights. Mr. Carver also noted there may be pushback from some townspeople who believe voting should be restricted to legal U.S. citizens. He said allowing noncitizens to serve on town boards and committees would be a plus: “There’s a lot of talent out there.” Ms. Arguimbau and Ms. Michalek said they wished to have more time to consider the proposal. Mr. Keenan said the motion would be considered again by the full Governance Study Committee and the subcommittee members will have a chance to vote again then.
  + **Approved, 3-0-2. (Mr. Carver, Mr. Keenan and Mr. Rangarajan in favor; Ms. Arguimbau and Ms. Michalek abstaining).**
* **Proposal to prioritize town warrant on internet:** Currently, the town sends a full warrant booklet to all households, accounting for the majority of expenses related to Town Meeting. This proposal would recommend instead placing a clear, navigable version of the warrant on the town website. A postcard would be sent to all households alerting voters aware to the posting, allowing them to become familiar with the issues under consideration. Printed versions of the warrant will still be available at town buildings and at the meeting itself. (Mr. Keenan)
  + **Discussion:** Mr. Keenan said switching to a web-based warrant book from a printed version sent to each household in the town could partially offset the cost of other committee initiatives, including on-site electronic voting. Mr. Luther of the MAPC said state law lets communities decide how to distribute information about the articles to be discussed at their town meetings. Most nearby and comparable towns still send warrant books to their residents, though Milton, Wales, Dover and others have stopped the practice, he said.
  + **Approved, 5-0. (Ms. Arguimbau, Mr. Carver, Mr. Keenan, Ms. Michalek and Mr. Rangarajan in favor.)**
* Moved that the Select Board consider the following suggestions to be implemented prior to Town Meeting to increase voters’ understanding of the issues to be addressed at Town Meeting: Once the warrant has been closed (early January) , a series of town-wide communications should be issued (via mailing, cable TV notice and Facebook) to call attention to the warrant (“Your Warrant is Coming to the Internet!” or “Be on the Lookout - Your Warrant is on the Way!”) with a list of general topics to be taken up at Town Meeting. It will also include the board or committee to be contacted or watched for information regarding specific topics. (Ms. Arguimbau)
  + **Approved, 5-0. (Ms. Arguimbau, Mr. Carver, Mr. Keenan, Ms. Michalek and Mr. Rangarajan in favor.)**
* Moved that the Select Board incorporate changes to the format of the Town Meeting Warrant as recommended by the Governance Study Committee. Those changes may include, but not be limited to, placing in the warrant any and all slides, charts or maps next to the corresponding article to be utilized during Town Meeting discussion. (Ms. Arguimbau)
  + **Approved, 5-0. (Ms. Arguimbau, Mr. Carver, Mr. Keenan, Ms. Michalek and Mr. Rangarajan in favor.)**

**Minutes**

The subcommittee unanimously approved the minutes of the July 13, 2022, meeting.