

Town of Natick Hybrid Town Meeting Committee  
Approved Meeting Minutes  
January 7, 2026, 7:30 PM  
on Zoom

Members present: Frank Foss, Grace Keeney, Patricia DeMeo, Saul Beaumont, Brinley Vickers  
Also present: Jeff Alderson, Town Moderator  
Absent: Larry Drolet, Josh Ostroff, Jaymin Patel, Randy Brewer

**1. Call to order – roll call**

The Chair called the meeting to order at 7:32 PM followed by a roll call of members.

**2. Citizen's Concerns**

- No members of the public were present and seeking to be recognized.

**3. Meeting Minutes – December 17, 2025**

On a motion by Grace, seconded by Brinley the minutes for December 17 were approved by a vote of 6-0.

**4. Follow-up & Discussion of new information regarding Committee charter and scope of work**

- a. Compilation of questions submitted through 1/5/26*
- b. Questions submitted by J. Alderson*
- c. Questions submitted by S. Beaumont*

Frank reviewed the submitted documents leveraged above. The first document is a list of questions submitted to interview Frank and Jeff. The questions submitted by Jeff were also shared. The final section submitted by Saul were not questions but artifacts shared.

Brinley wanted to note that some people have been using an incorrect email address when emailing her. She asked that if you reply all to an email, leverage [brinleyvickerstmm@gmail.com](mailto:brinleyvickerstmm@gmail.com) as her email and not the comcast version of her email. Frank asked that all double check their mail server to ensure she receives emails

**5. Guest Speakers – Frank Foss, former Moderator & Jeff Alderson, Moderator**

Prior to the meeting, the team prepared a list of questions to ask Frank and Jeff. Jeff offered that Frank answer most of the questions given that Jeff does not have experience facilitating a Remote/Hybrid Town Meeting. Frank began by reading the questions and answered the first question.

During the first question, Brinley asked if we should ask additional questions throughout the responses, or write them down to save at the end. Frank responded that whatever the committee preferred.

[The following is a copy of the questions asked and responses provided by primarily Frank, however if others spoke, their names were credited]

**Interview Questions for Current/Past Town Moderators**

**1. Overall Viability & Lessons Learned**

- During Covid, the town had a 100% remote Town Meeting, what key lessons emerged?

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- First Lesson
  - Frank (Former Natick TM) shared the key lesson was can we comply with the laws and how we run Town Meeting today (can our rules fit as to what the legislature said we can do)?
  - We found out we did not need to change our Charter or our Bylaws
  - We found out that the manner we participated worked okay in our virtual world
  - After our first virtual town meeting on a Saturday, we realized we still needed rules as it complied to what the State said in their new legislation
  - Major lesson learned that Town Meeting understands the way the rules, laws, and practices come together for Town Meeting to work
  - Our very first evening virtual Town Meeting, I read through normal rules, in addition to the new statute so all were informed
  - Frank mentioned we may still have a copy of the rules read during that time
    - Jeff provided a link to the following: Copy of the SATM 2020 agenda which includes modified Rules. [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1oE\\_w-pyP6hNg6ilSriib5dkVBUXA7qSvBBZfkcSSy0/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1oE_w-pyP6hNg6ilSriib5dkVBUXA7qSvBBZfkcSSy0/edit?usp=sharing)
- Second Lesson
  - Never assume people know how to work software and between multiple software's (zoom plus VVoter). That was a large issue for us - some people got it, some sort of got it and some never got it and could not maneuver between both platforms; Some also had a hard time following along the electronic files and flipping between electronic copies and paper copies
  - Highly recommend training sessions to standardize the user's familiarity with the technology
  - Ensure when working with your technology vendor, when sending out passwords, and what they initially produce were correct
- Third Lesson
  - Prepare, prepare, prepare -
  - Key partners
    - Pegasus partners was key; ensuring signals maintained similarity as to what we were used to
    - Town Counsel - work closely
    - Select Board Chair (believe Jonathan Freedman at the time)
    - Town Administration
    - Dennis Roche, Director of IT for the Town of Natick
    - Option Technology
    - Assistant Moderators were incredibly important
    - When Natick Public Schools was on the agenda, Anna Nolin (Superintendent at the time)
    - Similar when Zoning was on the agenda, ensured those needed were part of preparations
  - More time spent preparing for meetings than during meetings
- Follow up question from Jeff: What was Frank's personal level of comfort with Zoom/technology and what did you have to use?

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- Comcast used similar product to Zoom so had enough experience with remote calls with several locations
- Took a bit of time to understand VVoter platform and how to get used to it
  - Option Tech vendors joined 2 trainings and Frank had his own VVoter access
- Question from Brinley: In regards to training, a lot of other towns have online modules (a video that Town Meeting members can watch) and am curious what you think about utilizing similar methods to broadcast information? Not meant to replace conversation but as a precursor
  - Response from Frank that both types of training are valuable as not everyone could make training sessions; for those who could not make the session, they could watch the video; Similarly some individuals learn better from oral instruction vs visual instruction
  - Brinley suggested when we meet with Technology companies, asking the vendors what support they would offer us to help train our Town Meeting Members (i.e. would they attend training, provide videos)
    - Frank added that at the time of Covid, they didn't have material prepared at that time to fit our needs; now that it has been several years since
- What worked particularly well, and what clearly did not?
  - **What did not work:** Transitioning from motioning to speak and using VVoter software; of note, the VVoter platform has changed since 2020;
    - There were also some issues with conveying motions; question further on how to transfer motions - do you use email? How to submit? Frank shared that he had to put his foot down as it was impossible to keep up with motions on the immediate floor. Frank had a 48 hour notice requirement so internal team did not need to scramble.
    - Question by Brinley: What happens when a motion comes up on the floor if something is not anticipated? Would that be postponed or have a new mechanism?
      - Frank shared that a future moderator may want to bring in someone specifically that could on the fly make corrections and changes, and be proofed by him and the Clerk during Town Meeting, so that it is done right
      - Only concern is that if Legal needs to weigh in, that may need to take a bit more time so postponement may be applicable but would be a call for the moderator
    - Randy added in that sometimes people bypassed the Help Desk (Town Clerk was getting direct outreaches, Deputy Moderators, etc.) so opportunity in the future to narrow down the outreaches to specific people and reinforce the appropriate chain of command. Voting need to be brought to moderator attention but video related that is Help Desk
    - Consider that it may take more time however if you had the right tools it would be helpful (i.e. handwriting used to be horrible from some) so needing enough time to record, understand and submit
  - **What did work:** What Pegasus put up was better than what other Town Meetings were doing; Frank referenced 'Hollywood squares' so that Frank could

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see multiple reactions and 'read the room' based on those on video; if there were issues with VVoter queue to speak, we could visually see people

- We were only zoom bombed once and it was squashed quickly
- Having a Help Desk
- Having key players in the room with the moderator in case we needed immediate one on one conversation while members were debating
- In retrospect, what were the challenges and what would you do differently when transitioning to a hybrid Town Meeting? (Staffing, technical, security, etc.)

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## 2. Legal Authority & Risk

- What changes were required to bylaws, rules, regulations, or charters to allow hybrid Town Meetings?
  - For Natick's remote Town Meeting, we only had to change the rules as to what was different from bylaw vs what was in the emergency law
  - There was a concern as to what if we do something wrong, either rights not fulfilled if they can't speak, or we do what we did several years ago where something was not posted, and re-vote/re-affirm all votes because we did not do something correctly.
  - If we don't follow the law, someone could stand up and say this is not as the law says, and this is void.
  - That said, there is always a way to fix something and we can redo it
- Were these changes broadly supported, and what objections were raised?
  - I did not look for Town Meeting's support as this was a requirement. We had to do it that way and changed based on what the statute said.
  - We did change the 10 min rule to 5 min rule when speaking and received very little pushback on that.
- Question from Brinley: When there is a situation where someone needs extra minutes (technical aspects, etc.) - do we need to put in that it is in our rules?
  - Jeff shared that our current rules allow members to request extra time, without objection from members; we can go as far as to vote to allow someone extra time to speak but we have never had to; we typically say 'without any objection we will get them extra time'; this should work for in person Town Meeting and remote Town Meeting (apply to any meeting); this is at the Moderator's discretion
- What legal gray areas still concern you about hybrid Town Meetings?
  - Rephrased the question by Jeff: Did any member of the public challenge how Town Meeting was being run?
    - Yes, 1 former Selectman/Town Meeting member because they thought I was not calling on them due to the intricacies of the VVoter queue; that one member raised real issue and to some degree the member was correct.<sup>8</sup>
  - Question from Brinley: In working with Legal, how are they aligned to what we decide?
    - Frank shared that our Legal Council was seated with us
    - Jeff shared that regular practices are still held as all the key players (Town Moderator, Town Council, etc.) will all still be in the room.
    - Brinley clarified: Is there any additional preparation work we need to prepare Legal?
      - Frank shared that is the moderator's role

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- Jeff agreed that there is a kick off meeting for every Town Meeting and if hybrid were on the table, here are the things we need to be prepared of, and Council would be a part of that conversation/prep
- Were any procedural decisions made primarily to reduce legal risk rather than improve deliberation?
  - Frank shared he can't think of any from a Legal standpoint; advice had been follow the statue and don't do anything different than what you were doing before

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### 3. Voting Integrity & Confidence

- How was voter eligibility verified for remote participants?
  - Frank shared that there were points in time where people turned off their screen, would lose signal and jump on and the Moderator Assistants would have to check everyone back in and didn't have 100% confidence that member was there and voting correctly.
  - Verifying voters has to be rock solid going into a hybrid meeting to ensure voting integrity
  - Jeff added that as a reminder, there were 2 platforms - zoom and VVoter so someone could have logged out of voter but stayed in zoom, or opposite
  - Technology providers of late have shared enhancements around how to 'verify attendance'
  - As a reminder that the ability to vote was not the same as the ability to be in zoom
  - Grace asked if we had members complete an attestation verifying that 'I Grace Keeney attest that I am the only one going to vote' or something of the sort during remote Town Meeting, which we did not, but would be something to consider in Hybrid
  - Jeff asked about passwords
    - Frank shared we wanted to change a password for every session however he was doing the mail merge and proofing as Option Tech did not do it at the time. They provided Member name, ID and password. I felt that was not something to pass on to another individual so Frank personally emailed these to each member.
    - Frank shared that we did not release the information to Help Desk or Assistant Moderators until the night of Town Meeting as we didn't want to expose that data to someone who shouldn't have it or who may vote for someone
    - Frank shared they talked about multi factor authentication for example, you have your user name and password, but then after you type that in, you have to input a code from your email/phone. Multi factor authentication system would prevent most of the concerns of someone voting on behalf of someone else
    - At the time, Option Technology did not have that available so we did not offer
- How confident were you in the accuracy and integrity of votes taken in a remote format?
  - Pretty confident because I could see the people and most faces

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- After almost every vote we showed/scrolls the vote, which gave the moderator more confidence as voters could confirm their vote was correct; this would be up to the voters preference
  - Brinley asked about this as when we scroll the vote, it slows us down. She was curious if there is a way to confirm their votes (i.e. this was the vote you submitted/acknowledge the vote to assist those who are concerned their vote was incorrect)
    - Frank shared this would be a good question for Option Technology and the tech vendors
  - Randy shared that one issue was people would not refresh their screen so the system would time out on them. It was not logging their vote and we learned that, however Frank added that by now Option Tech has fixed that
  - Frank suggested we have Dennis Roche join a future team meeting as he can explain the common user issues
  - Jeff added another good question for the vendor would be what to do if someone loses internet and their vote fails; for awareness, we currently use the cheapest clickers in the market. Jeff added that adopting a Hybrid meeting would be a great catalyst for us to adopt new technology for all of Town Meeting (i.e. those in person too). There are updated clickers out there that has a better confirmation of your vote. Or will provide a record of 'you voted this way tonight'.
- Were any votes challenged because of the remote structure?
  - In the moment yes, but not after we dissolved; no Appeals of the way the votes went
- What safeguards must be in place before remote voting can be trusted long-term?
  - Frank shared this is future dated /may be better suited for Jeff
  - Jeff commented this is around audit and proof; members need to see how they voted and he believes this will be more common place
    - Members want to know was my vote recorded and correct
    - To create trust in voting we need to audit; currently we get a document of the votes and it goes in a file, but there is nothing on our website today (no searchable data) to tell me how I voted over the past 5 years; or what was the historical vote count on budget issues
    - Is the record there and is it equally valid for in person and remote participants?
    - Jeff continued that if we do vote records and audits, we need it to be clear in the audit that they were remote in the audit (Jeff wants to know what our hybrid participation is, public deserves to know, and to know the types of involvement)
    - Randy added that transparency came up a few times and when we went through the Consent agenda, at the time, the Moderator could only see the vote vs calling out Holds
    - Brinley asked for clarification
    - Jeff clarified when we do a Consent agenda, Jeff runs through every article and if more than 7 people rise to be counted, then that article is removed from the consent agenda

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- The issue that Randy brings up is that it is not a vote, but we need transparency to count the 7
- Suggestion that in the future to solve this via hybrid is to have those 'vote in' (i.e. Click the A button) vs watching people physically stand in the room and also be on zoom.
  - Jeff added that consent agenda removal is not technically a vote however we could in theory have it be a vote

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#### 4. Moderator Authority & Control

- Did the remote format change your authority as Moderator in practice?
  - Frank said not a bit as the law says you have ultimate authority
  - In terms of control, it was harder to control than in person (more cumbersome) however authority was the same
- Who had final authority during technical failures or disputes—Moderator, Clerk, IT staff, or vendor?
  - Moderator has all final control (no different than today)
- What authority should moderators explicitly have in a hybrid meeting that they may not have today?
  - Jeff shared the ability to mute someone. In hybrid, you can cut someone off. No different authority but different ability.
  - Jeff has drafted supplemental rules that is the same authority he has but a different implementation
  - There is no net new authority given to the moderator however its more on implementation details. In person, I would do this but remotely I would do it this way.

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#### 5. Technology Reliability & Contingency Planning

- What were the most common technology failures during remote meetings?
  - Most were not technology but user errors
  - At one point Frank's team considered handing out ipads but the School was on different versions
  - Jeff added that if he had a wish list, this is where he would push. He believes some of the new technology the vendors have is that instead of a clicker, you get an ipad mini so that those in the room and those at home all have the same 'clicker'. Jeff thinks the most common issue will be variability in network bandwidth and connectivity. We need a requirement that if you want to use hybrid, you have a minimum network connection so that their bandwidth is tested and if not above a certain number, they need to attend in person. Jeff shared he wants device standardization (those in person should have the same device as those at home). Town Meeting would need to vote that budget allocation but its how we could support the same experience.
  - Another suggestion if they were hybrid, that if they don't have the right bandwidth you be given a hotspot for internet and the ipad/clicker device.
  - Patricia mentioned that hybrid is a solution for those who may be traveling for say work and unable to attend in person so how would that work?
    - Jeff clarified that remote does not mean at home but that wherever you be, there may be a test routine - try out the internet in advance. The

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participant would have to check their environment and be clear with the expectation for them to have a good connection. Advised we should also have best practices for confidentiality/privacy/'how' to attend remotely.

- Brinley added that there may need to be some clarification that if you forgot to charge your ipad, that is not our fault
- What contingency plans were in place if remote access failed during deliberation or voting?
  - If it didn't work to our expectations, we didn't do it. At one point Zoom didn't work and we cut it off.
  - Anything part of the meeting should be available to everyone so Chat was not enabled in remote town meeting. If problem with technology, call Help Desk. Chat is the equivalent of people speaking out of order in Town Meeting.
    - Brinley raised that this came up in equity conversations that if you have someone with a speaking challenge/vocal difficulties, can you accommodate and make exceptions.
      - Jeff added that we have that accommodation availability today and therefore is no different than on line. The Town Meeting Member has to share with the Moderator and work through that.
      - Jeff added that he would like to explore closed captioning being accessible and leverage technology that supports all equally, however his role is still to accommodate
      - Frank shared some had sight issues and hard of hearing issues we accommodated
      - Jeff added that if you want the remote option and have a disability, bring it up so we can make remote available to you
      - Brinley added this is a question for the technology vendor
      - Randy added that there is a host of regulations coming that may even allow those in other languages to participate
      - Brinley asked for further context but Randy said its new and we may be able to raise it at a future meeting
- Did technology failures ever influence debate, participation, or outcomes?
  - Not really impacted debate
  - On participation, some may not have been comfortable at first
  - Outcomes, no influence
    - Frank noted that when he reviewed voting records there were some who logged into VVoter but never voted; He followed up with one individual who didn't want to learn the system - not necessarily a technology failure but user related
    - Jeff added that user confidence is important as if technology was intimidating that can impact users. We should be receptive to those who are new however the difference is this is hybrid so if you have concerns, come in person
- What minimum technology standards should be non-negotiable for a hybrid Town Meeting?
  - Frank said the minimum standard for Town Clerk is article, motion and vote that needs to be recorded so it is imperative those be recorded correctly
  - Frank added that someone from Karis's firm assisted with minutes as our Town Clerk was very busy and helpful to have an independent recorder.

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- With the Spring, the Town Clerk was also preparing for an election in addition to Town Meeting so important to think about what else is going on.
- What tech specific redundancies (WiFi, modes of communications/media, support staff) should we ensure to prevent technical issues from derailing entire town meeting nights? And what are the relevant financial implications of having such redundancies?
  - Randy shared it comes down to how much you want to pay for
  - Jeff added that Frank mentioned the Help Desk that was paid for and important
  - Randy shared that tonight if a USB gets unplugged, the whole meeting could go down. Want to ensure there is a spare laptop to plug in but then if you have a video switcher and that goes down, it is expensive. Redundancy is great but need to think practical vs financially viable
- Given an unexpected tech failure on the town side, how would/should the moderator keep virtual meeting members informed?
  - Frank shared that we had a situation where we needed to shut the whole feed down and had everyone log back in. Suggested there be a blast email
  - Jeff added that he now has the ability to blast all members today via Natick Alerts and he would recommend that be a contingency plan (if all else fails, check your email)
  - Randy added that if zoom fails, but voting tech is available, you could also send a message through the voting app
  - Randy shared that we should plan for a situation where power goes out in a part of town for remote participants, but those in person are fine, how would you support a widespread outage.
    - Frank added at that point the moderator would have to make a call.
- Given an unexpected tech failure on an individual member's part, how would the moderators handle the voting process? How to handle delay/voting should some member be unable to get back online for an extended period of time?
  - Frank said we had several people who couldn't get VVoter to work and so with every vote, Frank would ask how those individuals were voting. Some would even call people on their cell to get their votes so we could track how they wanted to vote.

[The team paused here at 9:25 pm on Jan. 7th and agreed to regroup on the remaining questions below on Jan. 13th]

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## 6. Decorum, Deliberation & Equity

- What are the biggest challenges to maintaining decorum in a remote Town Meeting?
- What are the biggest challenges to equitable deliberation between in-person and remote participants?
- Did remote participants have equal opportunity to be recognized and heard?
- Did the hybrid format advantage or disadvantage certain speakers or viewpoints?
- Are there specific requirements you are aware of in terms of a specific amount of quorum needing to be in person?
- How were motions submitted? As we consider Hybrid, would you recommend there be a digital submission method similar to an in person written method for submitting motions and amendments; should this method be distinct for online or uniform for online and in person submissions?

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### 7. Moderator Capacity & Sustainability

- How did the remote format affect your workload, focus, and fatigue as Moderator?
- Is moderating a remote Town Meeting sustainable over multiple sessions or years?
- What additional support would be necessary for moderators to succeed long-term?

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### 8. Public Trust & Transparency

- How did public confidence and trust compare between in-person and hybrid meetings?
- Did livestreaming or recording change participant behavior or debate quality?
- What actions most improved trust in the hybrid process?

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### 9. Natick-Specific Questions (Closing)

- If Natick could only get three things right when designing a Hybrid Town Meeting, what should they be?
- Based on your experience, is there anything else we should consider as we recommend how Natick may adopt a hybrid Town Meeting model?

At 9:25, Frank suggested we hold some of these questions until our next meeting and we can debrief our next meeting.

Patricia suggested we start at 7 pm next week and go until 9 pm instead of 7:30 pm. Saul agreed as did the rest of the team.

Frank shared we will pick questions back up next week on January 13<sup>th</sup>, and that if you have more questions to add, to send to Grace to include in our next meeting.

### 6. Leadership Report

- a. Timeline – Frank asked Grace to share the draft timeline we prepared, copied below:

#### Draft Schedule and Speakers

- **January 7<sup>th</sup>** – Interview Jeff and Frank
- **January 14<sup>th</sup>** – Review Draft Committee Report, follow up from interview/discussion, bring up draft questions for interviews and review upcoming speakers/what we want to ask them
- **January 21<sup>st</sup>** – Interview **Diane Packer/Andrew G from Natick**
- **January 28<sup>th</sup>** – *Placeholder for another Moderator/Clerk/Administrator/Tech interview, potentially:*
  - Town Moderators/Town Clerks/Tech Directors/Town Administrators from:
    - Plymouth Town Meeting Moderator
    - Brookline
    - Lexington – ask if both Moderator and Administrator/Clerk could join together
- **February 4<sup>th</sup>** – *Placeholder for another Moderator/Clerk/Administrator/Tech interview*
- **February 11<sup>th</sup>** – *Placeholder for another Moderator/Clerk/Administrator/Tech interview*

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- **Mid February** – Finish fact finding/interviews
- **Mid February to Mid March** – Draft Report
- **February 27** – Warrant Closes
- **Mid March** – Public Meeting for input
- **Early April** – Select Board and Fin Com presentation of update?
- **April 15** – Final Report and Recommendation of additional needs (bylaw changes, policy document, or request for more time, etc.)
- **April 28** - Town Meeting Starts

## 7. Scheduling

- a. Future meetings
  - Brinley asked that at next week's meeting we finalize which speakers are after the January 21<sup>st</sup> session.
  - Frank added that it would be valuable to have Karis join a future meeting from a legal landscape.
  - Frank also added that Diane and Andrew would have some individuals who would join.
- b. Speakers – topic specialists, administration, elected officials, etc.
  - January 21, 2026 - Diane Packer, former Town Clerk & Andrew Ghobrial Town Clerk
- c. RTM Representatives, Technical Representatives & Legal visitations
- d. [Town Report draft committee report](#)

Frank referenced Josh's draft committee report and asked the committee to review the draft report and that we spend time at next week's meeting also finalizing.

## 8. Adjournment

On a motion by Brinley, seconded by Patricia, the meeting was adjourned at 9:35 by a unanimous vote.

Respectfully submitted,  
Grace Keeney, Vice Chair, subbing in for Clerk