

Town of Natick Hybrid Town Meeting Committee
Approved Meeting Minutes
February 5, 2026, 7:00 PM
on Zoom

Members present: Frank Foss, Josh Ostroff (8:30), Brinley Vickers, Patricia DeMeo, Saul Beaumont, Larry Drolet, Grace Keeney, Jaymin Patel

Also present: Jeff Alderson, Town Moderator: Steven Triffletti, Plymouth Town Moderator and Kelly McElreath, Plymouth Town Clerk

Call to order – roll call

The Chair called the meeting to order at 7:05 PM followed by a roll call of members.

Meeting Minutes

Approval of minutes for January 22 were approved on a motion by Saul, seconded by Patricia and unanimously voted; approval of minutes for January 28 were approved on a motion by Josh, seconded by Saul and unanimously voted.

Interview with Arlington Town Moderator Greg Christiana and Clerk Juli Brazile

Questions for Plymouth Town Moderator & Town Clerk

Background, Authority & Decision-Making

1. **What motivated Plymouth to pursue a hybrid Representative Town Meeting? (Both)**
 - a. Experience had during Covid was very positive in Plymouth; many wanted to continue; after our last remote, Steve wanted one more as Moderator as several elder members were nervous about coming back in person for health reasons; Select Board declined and compromised with Hybrid.
2. **What are the key differences, if any, between Massachusetts General Laws and Plymouth's Home Rule Petition that allow the use of a hybrid Town Meeting? (Clerk)**
 - a. How did Plymouth get approved? Team did it early, quickly and had support from legislative delegation (diverse/bipartisan support)
3. **Did Plymouth need to change any bylaws or adopt new legal authority to establish hybrid Town Meeting? (Clerk)**
 - a. *No, not really. We had to do a change - resolution to weigh in on the Palestinian war; Steve does not allow resolutions however allowed a table outside the room; then we had to put in rules around who can have a committee vs not*
 - b. *Yes, we had changes but not related to Hybrid specifically*
4. **Were any outside agencies, companies, academics, or pro bono partners involved in helping Plymouth design or implement the hybrid model? (Both)**
 - a. *Absolutely - we could never have done this alone with just TMM and the Moderator; need to rely on OTI (Options Technology/VVoter platform); right now when I call a vote, those in the room vote on their clickers, those at home use their device (program) and the vote reports merged as one - so does not feel any different*
 - b. *They work closely with Local Cable company and the school department who does their audio visual to work closely*

Town of Natick Hybrid Town Meeting Committee
Approved Meeting Minutes
February 5, 2026, 7:00 PM
on Zoom

- c. *Also need town staff, the Clerk, administrative representatives from Finance, School, etc.*
- d. *Steve has a regular assistant moderator that was added as part of Charter changes - **highly recommend** this as it is a challenge to monitor both in the room and multiple monitors as one person*
 - 1. *Plymouth's assistant moderator is great at technology which is key; while the Moderator knows the process/procedures*
 - 2. *Overall highly successful and people are really happy*

Pre-Implementation Research & Surveys

- 5. **Did Plymouth conduct surveys prior to implementing hybrid Town Meeting—and if so, who was surveyed (TM members, residents, staff, leadership)? (Clerk)**
 - a. *Yes, during remote TM - how many wanted remote? Do you want to continue?*
 - b. *The assistant moderator conducted a lot of these with TMM - we did not poll residents and staff*
 - c. *Plymouth has 162 Town Meeting Members - started with what they wanted first, then went to Select Board for approval*
- 6. **If you did, what did you learn from those surveys that influenced policy, security, bylaws, or meeting design? (Both)**
 - a. *Diverse group of TMM, heavily weighted with Seniors;*
 - b. *Benefit of Hybrid was we were able to bring in some young TMM because they could attend remotely (i.e. traveling, in college, etc.)*
- 7. **If you did, would you be willing to share the survey questions that were asked? (Clerk)**
 - a. *Steve can ask the assistant moderator for a copy*
- 8. **Have you conducted surveys since implementing hybrid Town Meeting, and what feedback have you received? (Clerk)**
 - a. *Haven't needed to, as everyone is really happy with it; Attendance is way up (90th percentile for participation)*
 - b. *We see more people in person and less remotely but overall have seen attendance increase*
 - c. *We encourage people to come in person because we cannot guarantee internet bandwidth, technology, etc.*
 - d. *You have to let the Clerk know a week ahead so that we can give them a log in. We had someone with trouble who had requested remotely, but showed up in person and then we sent them home to be remote*

Governance, Rules & Participation

- 9. **Did Plymouth prepare and document formal guidelines or rules specific to hybrid Town Meeting? (Clerk)**

a. Need to use the clicker; can't trade clickers - two people, same last name and clickers got mixed up; we issue and collect

10. Does Plymouth allow residents, taxpayers, or other interested parties to participate in deliberation without voting, and how can they participate (remote/in person)? (Moderator)

a. Yes, but for the most part high participation in person

b. Hybrid is for those who can't be there for whatever reason

c. Our charter says 'taxpayers, residents can speak' with approval from TMM

d. Another rule we have is to call on TMM before others; as such, don't always have time for taxpayers/participants, but allowed

11. Have you encountered procedural challenges unique to the hybrid format, and how were they addressed? (Moderator)

a. Assistant moderator, multiple moderators, pay attention to the queue on monitor combined with people in person

b. Communication - Steve talks nonstop so people on tv and in room so everyone knows - people in the queue, etc. Steve does not stop so he constantly tries to communicate to those in the room, those remote, and public on cable

Training & Member Readiness

12. Does Plymouth provide training for Town Meeting Members for hybrid meetings? (Clerk)

a. Absolutely; initially we did Zoom training

b. The assistant moderator (AM) also created a training video for new TMM to watch

c. Beyond that, we had troubleshooters/helpers that were available to help TMM; now the AM will monitor the chat for issues (most times, operator error when there are issues)

13. Did your technology vendor assist with training materials such as videos or manuals? (Clerk)

14. What lessons have you learned about training members, and how has training evolved over time? (Both)

Attendance, Quorum & Participation Mechanics

15. Historically, prior to hybrid Town Meeting, what percentage of members typically attended in person? (Clerk)

a. We have not had any problem reaching quorum since COVID

16. What percentage of TM members now attend hybrid meetings in person versus remotely? (Clerk)

17. How is quorum measured and verified in a hybrid setting? (Clerk)

a. Quorum is presumed but measured by sign ins; nearly always - meetings begin at 8 am and there is almost always quorum by 8 am (in person when pick up clicker or they are admitted on Zoom)

1. *First saturday in april, first in october. We usually finish everything in one day as we work hard to prepare people before TMM*
2. *18 precincts have chairs and caucuses before TMM and there is a preview before TMM*
 1. *Unlike 35 years ago where most people open up their book/package at the first meeting*
 - b. *Those remote have to go between 2 different platforms - Zoom to be speaking and then VVoter platform for voting*

18. For actions that traditionally require standing (such as placing a hold on a consent agenda), how are those handled remotely? (Moderator)

- a. *We have not standing votes for years; ever since we went to electronic voting, everything is electronically*

19. Do TM members need to commit in advance (and if so, how far) to attending in person or remotely? Do they need to select an option for the entirety of the session or can they alternate each night? (Clerk)

Technology, Security & Reliability

20. What does the remote check-in process look like? (Clerk)

- a. *Clerk cooperates with OTI and Cable company*
- b. *Clerk and assistance deal with the remote primarily as its a small group*

21. How do you verify remote participants and ensure voting integrity throughout the meeting? (Clerk)

- a. *We tell them that it must be only you and not a family member voting; it is an expectation; just like when remote, you need your TV/other devices turned off*

22. What specific measures ensure speakers and voters are who they claim to be? (Both)

- a. *We know them, the clerk checks, AM checks, and I check; visually we check*

23. What physical setup is required in the meeting room (cameras, microphones, screens, staging)? (Clerk)

- a. *Cameras, microphones, screen behind Steve for presentations and to show the vote; on the side wall, for the hearing impaired, we have transcription of what everyone is saying when they speak*

24. What backup plans or redundancy systems are in place if the primary platform fails? (Clerk)

- a. *We could go to in person only if remote failed as all on remote are on notice 'you are only doing this because you can't be in person'*
- b. *Only time we had a problem - severe storm during COVID; wasn't TM but a presentation night so we postponed, which we would take if it were TM (postpone to another date)*

25. What have been the biggest technology or security concerns, and how have they been managed? (Both)

Staffing, Coordination & Operations

26. How many staff and non-staff are required during a hybrid Town Meeting? (Clerk)

- a. Not a whole lot more than who would be there anyway*
- b. No one is 'hired' for this*

27. Did Plymouth need to hire new staff or expand existing roles? (Clerk)

- a. Not really*
- b. We are using existing staff*

28. What coordination was required between the Moderator, Clerk, staff, and technology vendor, and what challenges arose? (Both)

- a. Lots of coordination, hence this planning meeting later this month*
- b. Everyone talks to each other*
- c. Day before TM, Cable meeting, OTI and team sets up a day in advance; requires coordination with school to plan and ensure nothing is scheduled the day before TM*

29. How long does it take to prepare and set up for a hybrid Town Meeting compared to in-person only? (Clerk)

Costs & Budgeting

30. What were the initial startup costs for hybrid Town Meeting? (Clerk)

- a. Would need to defer to Clerk (contract with OTI, etc.)*

31. What are the ongoing annual costs, and how are they budgeted? (Clerk)

32. What changes occurred in the cost of Town Meetings after moving to a hybrid format? (Clerk)

Equity, Participation & Outcomes

33. Prior to hybrid meetings, did Town Meeting membership reflect the diversity of Plymouth's population? (Both)

- a. No, TM is white in Plymouth and heavily weighted towards Seniors*

34. Have you seen changes in diversity, representation, or equitable access since implementing hybrid Town Meeting? (Both)

- a. Yes, a few younger people but not a lot*

35. Has hybrid Town Meeting affected participation levels, quality of debate, voting patterns, or meeting length? (Moderator)

- a. Yes, higher percentage*

36. Do you expect continued changes in participation or representation over time? (Both)

- a. *No, in Plymouth there is a Charter and Review committee once every 5 years; group right now deciding to explore ballot initiative (lots of Charter reviews) and expect changes in the future*

Procurement & Vendor Selection

37. **What did you include in your technology vendor RFP/RFQ/RFS, and would you be willing to share it? (Clerk)**
 - a. *Ask Town Clerk and Assistant Town Manager*
38. **From a Clerk and Moderator perspective, what *must* be included in an RFP? (Both)**
39. **Based on lessons learned, what would you add, remove, or change if issuing an RFP today? (Both)**

Lessons Learned & Advice

40. **What do you wish you had known before starting hybrid Town Meetings? (Both)**
41. **What were your biggest concerns—security, equity, or technology—and how did you address them? (Both)**
42. **What's the most important advice you have for other towns considering a hybrid Town Meeting format? (Both)**
 - a. *Covid prepared us for this*
 - b. *Technology - important to have experts*
 - c. *Hallmark for good hybrid is planning, preparation and good communication with everyone*
 1. *Have to involve everyone - school, town, fin com, legislative delegation*
 2. *I also communicate to the community in multiple ways as not everyone follows the same news*
 1. *We have an online newspaper, local radio station, cable TV, social media*
 1. *I do all of it - interviews on the radio, tv*
 1. *Day before TM, day after TM, preview before TM*
 2. *I invite people to come as guests and we talk about what's on the warrant*

Additional Questions asked by Brinley:

1. **Could you share how the voting merge works?**
 - a. *Not Steve's area of expertise but once debate has been closed, and time to vote, a lightbulb goes on and I say 'voting will begin now'; we allow 20 seconds; those in person hit the clicker; those remote use the Vvoter platform and it all merges together*

Town of Natick Hybrid Town Meeting Committee
Approved Meeting Minutes
February 5, 2026, 7:00 PM
on Zoom

- b. The technology does the merge together
- c. OTI will be able to explain to you as they are the ones that take the clicker data with the website/Vvoter data
- 2. Yes please share the survey notes
 - a. Steve said yes, we can share
- 3. Kudos on the 8 am staff and curious how Town supports?
 - a. Steve shared we have always done a Saturday in Plymouth
 - b. The changes he made - we used to start at 10 am, then moved at 9 am and then 8 am. We start promptly at 8 am, not 8:01 am
 - c. Some issues where the meetings were running late (4/4:30 pm)

Additional questions asked by Patricia:

- 1. On the stage, do you have screen with hybrid attending?
 - a. Steve said no - the screen behind me will show the in person assembly, the person that is remote and is recognized to speak;
 - b. Some may ask how many people are in the queue; but that is irrelevant
 - c. We have a rule where someone motions to close the debate; Steve can say 'please stand if you want to be heard' - those people are standing and 4 people in the queue
 - 1. If you choose to be remote you can't really read the room and you don't always know how many want to speak or not
- 2. On average, how many remote participants do you get per session?
 - a. About 20 out of 162 (small number) but it is because we reinforce that you have the right to do it, but there are challenges and we can't promise if you have operator error

Additional Questions from Saul:

- 1. The 90% attendance - astounding! Is it because its Saturday or because its Plymouth?
 - a. We are representatives so attendance has been good in the past but went way up with remote
 - b. Those who don't come to TM because they are sick, death in family but are traveling for funeral, all types of reasons where people could be abroad; unforeseen illness is large because they don't want to be with others
 - c. Can't say enough about how remote increased attendance
- 2. Is that why you do it all in one day? Because a Saturday?
 - a. Steve attributes more to the preparation from TM and staff
 - b. There are options to observe other hearings but each Precinct has their own caucus where they meet with TMM; the Precinct Chairs meet; there is a preview with presentations and goes over every article - this is the staff

Town of Natick Hybrid Town Meeting Committee
Approved Meeting Minutes
February 5, 2026, 7:00 PM
on Zoom

1. Members have enough opportunity as possible to ask questions in advance
3. Is it possible for Natick to see the RFP that Plymouth used?
 - a. Steve can't answer that but someone in Natick knows Kelly who can call them
 1. Frank noted that he will follow up with Kelly on several items and can include this; Frank will also include Assistant Moderator for RFP ask
4. In the training materials - is that public that we could get access to?
 - a. Absolutely - Steve will ask AM for training and survey data

Additional Questions from Brinley:

1. Do you have anything in place for accountability? Are there consequences if people don't show up?
 - a. We have had people move out of precinct where you have to resign
 - b. For attendance, mostly ballot box and 3 year term
 1. 18 precincts and 9 members per precinct
 1. There are also alternates that are elected if there is a resignation
 2. Precinct Chairs rally attendance
 - c. Plymouth's caucus system is precinct with Chairs, Vice Chairs and Clerks - many of them meet every month throughout the year

Questions from Grace

1. Is the Precinct chair elected?
 - a. They are elected by the members of that precinct (i.e. 9 members of the precinct come together to vote who will be Chair, Vice Chair and Clerk)
 - b. These Chairs have the role of filling precinct seats, ensuring participation, attendance, etc.
2. Remote - do you require that they be on camera?
 - a. No, they are sworn in, and when sworn in, they need to follow the rules
 - b. Although TM is not subject to OML the Precinct Chairs are, and they have to sign statements

Follow up question from Brinley:

1. Have you always had the Chair, Vice Chair, Clerk
 - a. Long time now, Charter says you have to vote within 30 days for Chair, Vice Chair, Clerk
 - b. There are not minority precincts
- c. Are there precincts with renters vs homeowners?

Town of Natick Hybrid Town Meeting Committee
Approved Meeting Minutes
February 5, 2026, 7:00 PM
on Zoom

1. We have areas that are more affluent/high end communities which has brought well educated people into the community and the challenge is to make sure they don't take over
2. As moderator, I can only appoint 3 people per precinct for Fin Com as we don't want 1-2 precincts running the town

Question from Saul:

1. Population of Plymouth?
 - a. 70,000
 1. Steve added that the town is exploring a change in government (mayor) and are looking to put on the ballot in Spring of 2027
1. Clarification from Brinley: Is there a charter review committee?
 - a. Steve said it's been about 5 years, we don't have one currently

Question from Jaymin:

1. Would you say the cost have been worth the benefits/complications?
 - a. Absolutely
 - b. You can also offset costs by being well prepared, lots of planning, a crisp TM will save the town money
 1. We are down to one day (a long day - 15 min morning/afternoon break, 45 min lunch); we break every 2 hours
 - c. Efficiency comes from being well organized and well prepared

Question from Grace:

1. Did you explore other vendors? Or did you always go with one?
 - a. Steve said when we went to electronic voting, assume we looked at more than one vendor for clickers; once we went with OTI, we stayed with them for remote during covid and throughout during hybrid as hybrid is the same as during covid

Question from Patricia:

1. Do you lease or purchase clickers?
 - a. Steve said question for Clerk/outside of his scope

Prior to departing, Steve invited our team to join the planning meeting they have at the end of February to try to attend so you can see the coordination that occurs

Steve shared other rules he has for efficiency (speakers cannot speak more than 3 minutes; only get called once, regardless of article - so for example if you want to speak on article 1,2,3,4 and

Town of Natick Hybrid Town Meeting Committee
Approved Meeting Minutes
February 5, 2026, 7:00 PM
on Zoom

someone only wants to speak on article 4, you won't get called for 2,3,4 - those who only wanted to speak on 4 get preference).

Our TMM also move the question a lot - we heard a lot and are ready to vote, we are all prepared

If additional questions come up, happy to assist - thank you Steve!

[Steve departed at 7:57]

Citizen's Concerns

Frank called for any Citizen's Concerns; Brinley asked if we could add Surveys to the agenda; Frank said let's take it up under Agenda Item #4; no others sought the floor.

Meeting Minutes

Minutes tabled to the next meeting.

Surveys

Brinley said she drafted something to collect survey questions; she is thinking that there be 4 sets - 2 are related and overlapping; 2 sets to go to TMM for TMM during Covid so we can get insight about their remote experience; and then also, current TMM.

The third set would be for Town Staff - what data we would like to have about being remote (for example, would it alleviate stress if they had the opportunity to participate remotely, and would it be changed for rules)

The fourth set would be to the Town as a whole - residents, public; Brinley reached out about using FlashVote. We can go Google Forms to control the raw data and the town will help promote; if we go FlashVote, the time restraints are very quick - need to make decisions by the next meeting, otherwise we will be too late before TM; they only do a set number of surveys and the Town Communications Director is willing to put us in the queue for the 1st of March. If we did Flash Vote through the town, it is very limited as there are specific requirements - 5 questions max, 9 response max per question - we don't get raw data back; they analyze data for us and send it back to us; one of the 5 questions is the open ended they put out in a survey so really only 4 questions we could ask; Brinley recommends we do a Google Forms instead; Jay from the town is willing to send surveys to the town if we do a Google Form

Frank asked if we voted to do surveys yet and the team clarified no, not yet, Brinley asked she would like it to be part of the agenda so we can discuss as a team

Town of Natick Hybrid Town Meeting Committee
Approved Meeting Minutes
February 5, 2026, 7:00 PM
on Zoom

Frank shared that he does not feel qualified to draft questions for a survey; goal is to have data for feedback with the town.

Saul said that the HTMC is for TMM and never wondered if we should get opinions of residents; list Jay has is about 500 people; Saul does not believe we should send survey to Town and also does not think that Town Staff should opine; he does agree it should go to 180 or so TMM.

[Josh joined the meeting at about 8:30]

Brinley shared that it is problematic to have 180 members but only 120 show up; also felt like we are not representative of town and wants to increase participation; intent is to find out what is keeping you from being a TMM, if there was a remote option, would you be more inclined to run? That would help inform if it is worth it for us to spend the money and incorporate for our TMM.

Saul thanked Brinley but echoed we can't solve all problems in town; our mission is to stay focused on TMM for a survey.

Frank seconded that to ensure we stay within our charge; Survey should be specific and targeted for us to make a recommendation. If that enhances the participation, that would be great. But surveying residents is not a part of our charge.

Patricia agreed with Frank and Saul - felt that survey to residents is beyond the scope of our committee. She recalled that Jeff was particular wanting only TMM to be a part of the team.

Grace added remarks that liked surveying, and liked surveying TMM.

Josh added that Jeff Alderson, Town Moderator mentioned in our organizational meeting that surveying TMM is something we might want to do but would caution town wide as it could take a lot of time. Town Meeting is a binary vote – we either vote yes, no, or abstain; surveying TM members would allow them to provide more insight. Josh said if we went forward with a survey, he would be glad to work with Brinley to make sure it is concise.

Jaymin echoed support for survey and will help the community feel heard.

Saul clarified about the survey – is it for TMM or public? Jaymin shared he thought both. Sometimes the public likes the chance to weigh in and would be great for us to avoid.

Saul said that the disadvantage of a survey now is that the public won't get the information that we have already learned.

Town of Natick Hybrid Town Meeting Committee
Approved Meeting Minutes
February 5, 2026, 7:00 PM
on Zoom

Brinley shared our charge is to study and recommend a comprehensive framework. We need to be able to see if this is something we want to spend our money. The questions for general public - what is a barrier for being involved in TMM, if there was a remote option, would you be more inclined in getting involved in TM.

Frank said that some of those would be outside of the scope for our meeting. But that we get what you're proposing and we need to lay out carefully what we want to do and stay within our charge.

For next steps, Josh suggested we have a draft and then we can go from there; Josh offered to meet with Brinley to get a draft and then let the committee decide yes or no.

Saul moved, seconded by Brinley the proposal Frank shared for Brinley and Josh to develop a the survey proposal and draft the questions; approved by unanimous vote.

Plymouth invitation

Frank reminded all they are invited for the Plymouth hybrid planning meeting on February 26 at 11 AM.

Randy asked if we could go back to 4a – Plymouth did not have the same experience as Natick. Keep in mind that in Natick we break up and set down for every meeting multiple nights (at a higher cost) but Plymouth does it just once.

By doing it one day, they don't have to choose eg. "one night I want to be at home, one night I want to be here, one night I want to be home."

Draft Schedule and Speakers

- **January 7th** – Interview Jeff and Frank
 - **January 15th** – Draft for Town Meeting Warrant, follow up from discussion, bring up draft questions for interviews and review upcoming speakers/what we want to ask them
 - **January 21st** – Interview **Diane Packer/Andrew G - Clerks from Natick**
 - **January 28th** – Brookline
 - **February 5th** – Plymouth
 - **February 11th** – Placeholder for Lexington or team meeting
 - **February 18th** - Option Technology [Week of February break]
 - **February 24th** - Placeholder for Meridian
- [February 27 – Warrant Closes]
- **March 4th** – Karis North/Natick Town Counsel
 - **March 11th** - Placeholder for Arlington, Belmont, Burlington

Town of Natick Hybrid Town Meeting Committee
Approved Meeting Minutes
February 5, 2026, 7:00 PM
on Zoom

- **March 18th** - Placeholder for Arlington, Belmont, Burlington
- **March 25th** - Placeholder for Arlington, Belmont, Burlington
- **April 28** - Town Meeting Starts

Once ready:

- Draft Report and Public Meeting for input
- Select Board and Fin Com presentation of update?
- Final Report and Recommendation of additional needs (bylaw changes, policy document, or request for more time, etc.)

Adjournment

On a motion by Grace, seconded by Saul, the meeting was adjourned at 9:28 pm by a unanimous vote.

Respectfully submitted,

Josh Ostroff, Clerk and Grace Keeney, Vice Chair

Town of Natick Hybrid Town Meeting Committee
Approved Meeting Minutes
February 5, 2026, 7:00 PM
on Zoom

APPENDIX: BROOKLINE PRESENTATION WILL BE INSERTED HERE