

Town of Natick Hybrid Town Meeting Committee
Approved Meeting Minutes
February 11, 2026, 7:00 PM
on Zoom

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

Also present: Jeff Alderson, Town Moderator: Greg Christiana, Arlington Town Moderator and Juli Brazile, Arlington 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

Tabled until the next meeting

Interview with Arlington Town Moderator Greg Christiana and Clerk Juli Brazile

1. Background

Moderator

1. Can you help our team understand the current format of Arlington Town Meeting? (The report mentioned 252 members but do you meet all in one day, over multiple days, nights?)
 - a. Lengthy - 4th Monday in April each year (annual in the Spring and sometimes a Fall Special Town Meeting but not Spring/Fall (two times/year)), will meet every Mon and Wed typically 8 pm - 11 pm until finished (shortest number: 5-6, longest: 13); average 8-9 nights; 60-80 articles on warrant; this year 90 articles with 24 citizen petitions; lots of debate; allow up to 7 minutes per speaker; attempted to reduce to 5 minutes and was not voted favorably
2. Clerk's perspective
 - a. Post election, excel spreadsheet - name, precinct, location goes to the vendor to program clickers
 - b. Arrange time for IT and cable and vendor to do set up (large chunk of first day);
 - c. Volunteers greet members to hand out handsets
 - d. Article titles and what votes are needed (majority vs $\frac{2}{3}$) are prepopulated for the screen
 - i. Are public allowed to attend?
 1. Yes, they can attend; and they can speak but have to be introduced by a TMM already on the speaker list (i.e. needs to be prearranged)

Both

3. Since delivering the report last year, what has happened? Has Arlington voted to move forward with hybrid?
 - a. Nothing yet implemented or formal decisions on proceeding; Town Meeting procedures committee has met/discussed

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- b. How did the study committee decide what to include in the report?
 - i. Some was described in its charge
 - ii. Made report 2 years ago, published last year
 - iii. Co Chairs have continued to participate in town meeting procedures committee
 - 1. Greg's understanding is the Moderator has discretion to decide to move forward
- 4. Is Arlington still operating in an in-person only setting at this time? Yes
- 5. Since completing the report, have any assumptions or recommendations changed based on new information or experience?
- 6. Have there been any pilot tests, mock hybrid meetings, or smaller hybrid implementations since the report?
 - a. We talked about a small pilot like 5 people but because the infrastructure would be the same cost, it would not be cheaper/simpler - while the risk of a smaller group would be smaller, it would still be just as a cost/staffing impact
- 7. How was the report written?
 - a. The team started with surveys - **current** Town Meeting Members, those who have **left** after a poor virtual experience, and **general public** (they were looking for barriers that hybrid would solve, i.e. increasing participation)
 - i. Survey was based on desire/usage/participation and less so cost as we did not have costs available to present/discuss/vote on
 - b. Also surveyed other Town Clerks via email (i.e. solicited feedback via email with standard set of questions)
 - b. Met with Town Counsel to understand Legal landscape; Representative from the Disability Commission who assisted in expanding their thinking about access
 - b. Visited virtual meetings
 - b. Separated the sections and co-chairs took each part/sections that members wrote and smoothed it all out together
 - b. It was drafted and published by the committee; Warrant article formed the study committee; Article was drafted by TM Procedure Committee; Charge was to study various aspects of how to conduct TM in a hybrid format (how would we update infrastructure, AV requirements, impact of experience, etc.)
 - i. How many hours to write it? Not sure/did not have professional writers

2. Staffing, Roles, and Workload

Moderator

- 8. Do you currently, or envision, an assistant moderator or deputy moderator to assist in a hybrid format?
 - a. Been discussed in TM Procedures meetings; we do have an assistant moderator who is elected from the TMM at the start of each TM; this person steps in if conflict of interest
 - b. In the satellite room, I nominate a deputy town moderator in case something breaks to come into the main room/share

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9. Do you envision needing someone dedicated specifically to managing remote participants or the remote speaker queue?
 - a. Need someone to monitor
10. Would the Moderator need a separate technical liaison during meetings?
 - a. Would envision IT folks
11. Do you anticipate needing additional procedural support (e.g., parliamentarian, timekeeper, queue manager)?

Clerk

12. Would hybrid require additional Clerk office staff before or after meetings (attendance tracking, vote verification, recordkeeping)?
 - a. We always need a back up system for voting (i.e. if voting and something goes wrong, what happens? During remote, people called); we need to vet carefully
 - i. Belmont needed 8 staff to manage voting
13. Do you anticipate needing dedicated staff to monitor remote attendance and quorum throughout the meeting?
 - a. We already pay 2 IT staff, we also have election workers (\$15/hour) and high school volunteers; rarely have staff overtime but likely for hybrid we would need them; with zoom, you need someone dedicated to just running the zoom
14. Would training Town Meeting Members fall under Clerk responsibilities or another department?
15. Have you identified any roles that might shift from volunteers to paid staff in a hybrid format?

Both

16. Are you expecting additional floor staff during meetings to support members experiencing technical issues?
 - a. Yes, need Tech Support as you have varying levels of proficiency for tech
17. Would IT staff need to be present for the entire meeting or only on call?
18. Are there new coordination roles between IT, ACMi/public access, and the Clerk/Moderator teams?
19. Staffing implications
 - a. Because of the timing, have to pay overtime, hours are not ideal, steep staffing requirements
 - b. Belmont may be pausing on hybrid because of staffing requirements to ensure a smooth experience

3. Costs

Both

20. What expenses are currently being expected to support hybrid?
21. Are the largest costs expected to be upfront capital investments or ongoing operational expenses?
22. Have you identified recurring annual costs that did not exist for in-person meetings?
23. Do you anticipate increased staffing overtime or stipends on meeting nights?
 - a. Yes
24. Are there costs associated with member training, device support, or loaner equipment?
25. Have you developed a rough cost-per-meeting or cost-per-member estimate?

4. Meeting Length, Pace, and Moderator Cognitive Load

Moderator

26. Have you discussed how hybrid may affect the Moderator's ability to read the room or manage debate flow?
 - a. Starting out, would like some type of equitability between experiences (i.e. all should be able to raise a point of order, all have the same experience regardless where you are); makes it more challenging for procedural details (i.e. if problem with a vote, how to get it resolved)
27. Do you anticipate slower motion handling (points of order, amendments, procedural questions) in a hybrid setting?
28. How has the team envisioned handling cameras?
 - a. Did not have for all for remote meeting given bandwidth for 250+ members
 - b. Broader question of equity for in person vs remote; don't want the remote to have a second class experience

Clerk

29. Do you anticipate additional time at the start of each session for roll call, attendance verification, or technology checks?

Both

30. Are you envisioning hybrid meetings being longer, shorter or the same amount of time as compared to fully in-person?
 - a. Arlington's experience was that remote slowed them down but could have been the inefficiencies in their town culture/format/process/set up (i.e. we had 60-70 articles, with speakers for every one); if you have a smaller warrant and less debate, it would go faster and could be what drove Arlington's experience
 - i. The culture in Arlington is very involved and that can slow the process down

5. Implementation Status & Timeline

Both

31. What steps has Arlington already taken toward implementation since the report?
32. What are the biggest remaining unknowns before a hybrid launch?
33. If funding were approved tomorrow, what would realistically be the timeline to implement hybrid?
34. Are there specific dependencies (procurement, voting system replacement, Town Hall upgrades) that could delay implementation?

6. Technology, Vendors & RFP

Moderator

35. From a Moderator perspective, what technology functions are most critical for running the meeting effectively?

Clerk

36. Has Arlington issued or drafted an RFP for hybrid Town Meeting technology or electronic voting systems?
 - a. Juli could share with us; it's not specifically for a hybrid set up but is focused on electronic voting system is now referred to as 'electronic participation system' as it is inclusive of raising your hand/request to speak and voting
 - b. One page of the RFP has a rubric for how Arlington would assess the selected vendor
 - c. One item in the rubric is hybrid compatibility (can vendor provide a solution that works seamlessly for in person and remote?);
37. If so, what requirements proved most difficult to define or evaluate?
38. Did you learn anything about authentication, attendance tracking, or vote verification that surprised you?

Both

39. Has Arlington formally begun a procurement or RFP process for hybrid meeting or voting technology?
 40. What lessons have you learned so far from vendors or the procurement process?
 41. Did pricing vary significantly based on features, staffing models, or support expectations?
 42. What technical requirements turned out to be more complex than anticipated?
 43. What advice would you give another town before starting an RFP process?
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Plymouth meeting invite

Frank reminded members to let him know if they would be attending the February 26 meeting.

Survey Discussion

Josh described the overview proposal for surveys of current/former TM members, staff, and the public; Brinley elaborated on the FlashVote option and why we needed to make a quick decision.

Jeff advocated against using FlashVote. There was discussion about what the content of a public survey would be.

Patricia was also not supportive of FlashVote given the small sample. Randy was also concerned that it only went to a small slice of the population. In discussion, we would also not get raw data, but just the summary, so we would not be able to do crosstabs, for example. There would also be an intermediary. It might not be representative (which is not to say there is an alternative sample that is) and may be residents who are more technologically literate.

In discussion about getting a broad sample, Brinley noted that we would have access to the Town's resources including email, social media, etc.

Josh spoke to the timeframe for a survey and that we could bring a concrete proposal with questions, samples, outreach strategy, and survey window to the next meeting.

Frank wanted to get into the topics we needed to learn about, and we can do that offline and at the next meeting. People can get their input to Brinley and Josh.

Patricia wanted to discuss the timeframe and make sure we were doing this the right way, not the fast way. Speaking to the report coming to Spring TM, Frank wanted to do that but maybe it would not be the final report. There was discussion about how soon we would get this done and a sense that we could resolve this in the next month+.

Scheduling

Frank noted that there are no changes to what we have scheduled. Hoping to hear from Burlington and Belmont. Patricia will reach out to Echo 360 Technology. There was discussion about staffing needs and how different communities saw this differently.

Future meetings

- a. Speakers – topic specialists, administration, elected officials, etc. TBD:
 1. February 18th - Option Technology
 2. February 25th - TBD Meridian (Technology)
 3. March 4th - Legal Counsel (Karis North)

 4. March 11th – TBD

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5. March 18th - TBD

Adjournment

On a motion by Grace, seconded by Patricia, the meeting was adjourned at 9:23 PM by a unanimous vote.

Respectfully submitted,

Josh Ostroff, Clerk and Grace Keeney, Vice Chair