

Town Meeting Procedure Committee Minutes

February 27, 2019

1. **Attendance:** Cheryl Barker, Rebecca Greene, Mark Wolinski
2. **Called to order:** A meeting of the Town Meeting Procedure Committee was held in the First Floor Conference Room at Swampscott Town Hall. Meeting was opened at 7:30p.m.
3. **Discussion:** The Chair, Mr. Wolinski called the meeting to order at 7:30pm.
 - Minutes from the December 19, 2018 meeting were unanimously approved.
 - Further recap of topics from 12-19-18 including the timeline for sharing findings in May at TM.
 - For the Love of Swampscott in conjunction with the Residence at Vinnin Square and Town Moderator to host a pre-town meeting, new TM member/elected official gathering.
 - Draft proposed by Whisky Wolinski to share with Town Meeting (edited from initial form):

Through TMPC discussion, we narrowed down the topics to approximately 10 key areas. Our strongest recommendations may be subject to legal review, approval of the selectmen, and / or a vote by the full Town Meeting.

RECOMMEND:

1. Waive reading of each warrant article.

This chair's question about this to the moderator in May 2018 was the genesis of this committee. We have the article printed in the warrant. The motion is projected on the screen. I asked the moderator why the then moderator read the motion in its entirety when it came up for consideration, and then the sponsor of the article repeated it verbatim. We quickly gravitated to Reading's town meeting as an example. At the beginning of the meeting, there is a procedural vote to waive the verbal reading(s) described above UNLESS THE MOTION HAS CHANGED since the printing of the warrant.

2. Consent Agenda.

The following is a description from lucidmeetings.com:
"A consent agenda is a meeting practice which packages routine committee reports, Board meeting minutes, and other non-controversial items not requiring discussion or independent action as one agenda item. This can save precious meeting time by allowing the Board to approve this 'package' of items together in one motion."

Swampscott's School Committee uses this procedure.

In advance of the meeting, the moderator decides which articles are routine and unlikely to be controversial.

As the moderator suggests the articles to fall within the consent agenda, members may request that particular articles be removed from the consent agenda for consideration and debate on their own. The number required varies from town to town; this committee recommends a vote of SEVEN members to separate an article from the agenda.

We believe this could save 20 - 30 minutes of time at the meeting.

3) "Hand Raisers"

Citizens attending one of our meetings expressed concern about lack of visibility for members wishing to be recognized who are further back in the auditorium. This committee thought that one very easy and quick solution would be to provide some sort of little sign on a stick (think bidding at an auction). There could be a few dozen available to anyone requesting one. Where do we get these things? Seems like it would be a great little arts and crafts project in the schools.

Topics considered for which this board is NEUTRAL:

4) "Article 2" implementation.

Article 2 is this town's place for reports from town committees, commissions, boards and other civic groups with information to share with the body. At present, the moderator has discretion for time limits, and to lay the motion on the table to spread out the reports throughout the meeting.

This committee has no further action to recommend at this time.

5) Pre Town Meeting seminars.

We saw many examples of towns who devoted entire 90+ minute seminars in the weeks prior to town meeting to present and explain many of the warrant articles (without debate) to anyone interested to attend. Obviously, the goal of these is to educate the members before town meeting, and thus make the meeting more efficient as member's arrive with many questions and concerns already answered, thus saving time at the meeting. We did see some irony in this, though, in that while it saved time in the meeting, overall the time spent was just shifted to another night. And members can still ask questions and debate the article in the meeting, so maybe it does not save a lot of time.

Topics considered that this board does NOT RECOMMEND AT THIS TIME:

6) OPEN vs ELECTED (representative) Town Meeting

Obviously a big topic that would require major bylaw change, we discussed this briefly and came up with a few points against a switch.

- Many towns struggle to assemble a quorum
- There may be a one time, huge turnout for single, controversial articles, but these citizen's involvement does not extend beyond the single topic.
- Elected members are likely to take the responsibility more seriously.

Using this chair as an example; It was a single topic that motivated me to run to be a town meeting member. But because there is a three year commitment once elected, I made an effort to become educated in other areas of town issues beyond my initial motivating topic.

7) Electronic Voting – Many Towns currently use.

This committee's research came up with figures between \$15,000 to \$75,000 to implement this. Some towns own the equipment, some rent it. The only advantage we saw was quicker decisions on controversial topics which may require a

standing vote or even go so far as requiring a roll call vote. If programmed as such, we could essentially have a roll call vote as part of every vote. Some towns even publish the full voting results on their website, just as our elected public officials. Whether we want that for Swampscott may merit future debate.

But for non controversial votes, electronic voting may take even MORE time. A traditional voice or hand vote may take 5 or ten seconds. An electronic vote may be open for 30 seconds to a minute.

So, considering the cost, and perhaps NOT saving time, this committee does not recommend this at this time.

8) Lottery for Warrant articles

We saw a few examples where the warrant order - or some portion of it - was determined by lottery.

Additional topics:

9) Town Meeting materials on Town's website

This committee agreed that many towns have more informative websites. We decided it was beyond our scope at this time to come up with specific recommendations.

10) ADA compliance

This committee is aware that there are plenty of ADA compliance issues surrounding Town Meeting (and any public meeting).

Our recommendation above for 'Hand Raisers' arose from this discussion as one non controversial, low / no cost item that can be put into place quickly item that can be.

4. **Adjournment:** There being no other business matters to discuss; the meeting was adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Cheryl Barker



Secretary
Town Meeting Procedure Committee