



Natick Town Meeting Electronic Voting Study Committee

Report and Recommendations to
Spring Town Meeting
April 2015

Committee Members

- Richard Sidney, Chair
- P.J. McNealy, Vice-Chair
- Harriet Merkowitz, Secretary
- Paul McKinley
- Patrick Hayes
- Joseph Sinko
- Ex-officio, non-voting members
 - Frank Foss, Moderator
 - Diane Packer, Town Clerk

Committee's Charge

Pursuant to vote of the the 2014 Spring Town Meeting of favorable action on Article 41:

“To study the subject of electronic voting by Town Meeting members and to submit a report with recommendations to Town Meeting no later than the 2015 Natick Spring Annual Town Meeting.”

Committee's Objectives

What Are We Trying to Solve

- Some feel that Town Meeting takes too long
- No record of actual vote counts (unless a teller vote is required)

What Will TM Get

- More efficient voting
- Clear, accurate recording of votes
- Increased accountability

What are Measures of Success

- Votes are accurately recorded
- Votes are reported on the Town web site
- Shortening of Town Meeting Sessions

Focus of Committee Efforts To Date

- Committee formed on July 15, 2014
- Has met 10 times

- Has gathered information about:
 - Vendors
 - Approximate Costs
 - Processes used by other towns
 - Possible benefits

- Seen a vendor demo of a system
- Arranged for a vendor demo for Town Meeting

- Prepared recommendations, a report and actions for Town Meeting

Recommendations

1 Adopt Electronic Voting for all votes of Town Meeting

- including procedural votes

- Start with the Fall 2015 Annual TM
- Report voting results on the Town's web site
- Create Handbook and Procedure Guide for Town Meeting, the Town Clerk and the Town Moderator

2 Lease the equipment, with operational personnel provided through a Service Contract

Full report handed out as you entered

Cost Comparison

Lease (Recommended)

- Approx \$12,000/year for up to 16 sessions
- Additional sessions approx \$300/session
- No cost for maintenance, upgrades, training, etc.
- Vendor ensures that equipment works
- Lease is all-in cost, including personnel

Purchase (Not Recommended)

- Between \$13,000 and \$26,000
- Staff training required, approximately \$1,500
- Annual maintenance approximately \$2,500
- Possible staff overtime to run equipment
- Possible miscellaneous costs for monitors, switches, cables, batteries, etc.
- Additional skills to diagnose equipment and/or communications issues

Pros and Cons

- **Improve voting methods**
- **Improve accuracy in the records of the Town Meeting**
- **Increase accountability to the Citizens**
- **Improve effectiveness of Town Meeting process**

- **Introduce concerns about:**
 - ease of use
 - Security
 - Illegal voting by proxy
- **Incur financial costs and operating burdens**

Article 24: Amend By-law Article 3

- Currently, Article 3 requires a 2/3 vote to use technology
 - If funds are appropriated and spent, requiring 2/3 vote could mean spent money is wasted
- Enabling legislation only.
 - Amendment does not require that Town Meeting spend money
- Amendment requires that electronic voting be used, *when available*
 - Available means funded, acquired and operating correctly
- When not available, current rules for voting apply

Article 25: Appropriate Funds

- Request \$15,000
 - Committee recommends lease plus operational services
 - Lease may include services to operate equipment
 - Technology to be available for Fall 2015 Annual Town Meeting
 - Vendor and financing determined by Procurement Officer & Committee (see Article 26)
- Appropriation will appear as a separate line item in Town Clerk's budget, restricted to this purpose
 - Any unused funds will fall to Free Cash
- Future appropriation requests will appear in the Town Clerk's budget within the Omnibus Budget Article
 - Separate warrant article submitted this year to allow for Town Meeting debate.

Article 26: Extend Committee's Term

- Through Spring 2016 Annual Town Meeting
- Aid the Procurement Officer in:
 - Preparing RFP & evaluating responses including final determination of purchase or lease
 - Evaluate Service Contract for support or to train in-house personnel
 - Select an appropriate vendor
- Document appropriate processes for managing the technology
 - to distribute and collect devices
 - to publish votes
 - for voting challenges
 - for equipment failures, etc.
- Create a Handbook for Town Meeting Members
- At Spring 2016 Annual Town Meeting, report about TM experience

Questions or Comments?

- Please email Rich Sidney at richsidneynatick@gmail.com or call me at 508-655-5639