

TOWN OF ARLINGTON
TOWN MEETING ELECTRONIC VOTING STUDY COMMITTEE
TOWN MEETING PROCEDURES COMMITTEE

January 16, 2013

Call to Order

The special joint meeting of the Town Meeting Electronic Voting Study Committee and the Town Meeting Procedures Committee was called to order by Town Moderator John Leone in the Second Floor Meeting Room of the Town Hall Annex on Wednesday, January 16, 2013, at 7:35 PM.

A copy of the notice for this meeting is attached to these minutes.

Quorum

The following committee members were present.

From the Town Meeting Electronic Voting Study Committee: Raymond Charbonneau III, Steve Storch, Wes Beal, Adam Auster, and Eric Helmuth.

From the Town Meeting Procedures Committee: Hugh McCrory, James O'Connor, and John Warden III.

From both: John Leone.

Alan Jones was also present. Elizabeth Patton arrived shortly after the start of the meeting.

New Business

Introductions

Mr. Leone said that he had asked for the joint meeting to bring the Town Meeting Procedures Committee up to date on the work of the Town Meeting Electronic Voting Study Committee.

He then turned the chair over to Town Meeting Electronic Voting Study Committee Chair Eric Helmuth, who asked the members to introduce themselves.

Work to Date

Mr. Helmuth said the Town Meeting Electronic Voting Study Committee has met seven times and has six more meetings scheduled.

He said the committee has studied the practices of other town meetings, investigated the technology, explored what electronic voting would mean for Arlington, and started to think about specific recommendations to the 2013 Annual Town Meeting.

Site Visits

He said that committee members had visited town meetings in Framingham and Brookline and observed electronic voting in practice there.

Current Practice

He said that at present five Massachusetts towns use electronic voting in some form: Billerica, Brookline, Chelmsford, Framingham, and Wayland. Of these, he said, Wayland is an open town meeting, and the others are representative town meetings.

Mr. Helmuth reported that committee members felt that the technology worked smoothly and well in Brookline and Framingham during site visits.

He said that committee members heard only positive reviews of the technology from individuals in Brookline or Framingham.

He noted that Lexington's town meeting is also studying this question.

Of the town meetings using electronic voting, he said, all but Billerica use a system provided by Option Technologies Interactive. Billerica is using a system from Qwizdom.

Mr. Leone said that the moderator of Billerica's town meeting told him that he wishes Billerica were using the system from Option Technologies Interactive.

Technology and RFI

Mr. Helmuth said that the Town Meeting Electronic Voting Study Committee spent several of its meetings discussing technical specifications for a voting system, led by members with expertise in information technology.

He said this work has culminated in a formal Request for Information that was issued by the Town this week.

Cost

He said that the cost to Arlington of an electronic voting system would probably be in the range of \$10,000–\$12,000 per year to lease or \$25,000 to purchase outright.

Some lease agreements include the provision of a system operator by the vendor, he said.

Mr. Leone said that Brookline has purchased its system, while Framingham leases.

*Electronic Voting
in Arlington*

Mr. Helmuth said the Town Meeting Electronic Voting Study Committee had been in touch with the Town Clerk and the Town’s Information Technology Department to explore administrative burdens associated with electronic voting.

*Committee
Recommendations*

He said that the committee had voted to file warrant articles this year so as to give Town Meeting the option, if it chose to move forward, of using electronic voting at the 2014 Annual Town Meeting.

He said the committee has concluded that some comparable communities that are using electronic voting are satisfied.

The committee has further concluded, he said, that the principal benefit of electronic voting is increased accountability through faster and more frequent roll-call votes, providing both a report of the votes of individual members to the public and a record of attendance at the time of the vote.

He said that electronic voting might also save a small amount of time at meetings. However, he said that this result was unclear and that the committee did not see time savings as a major benefit.

The committee also identified minimizing unauthorized voting as a further benefit of electronic voting, he said.

He reported that the committee agreed that electronic voting was more accurate than voice voting and might be more accurate than a standing vote.

Mr. Helmuth said that the committee felt that any new system must safeguard the integrity and credibility of votes taken at Town Meeting.

He said that some training would be required, that someone would have to staff the distribution and collection of voting devices at Town Meeting, and that there would be financial costs.

He added that the committee identified a possible new source of voting fraud through electronic voting, namely illegal proxy voting facilitated by physical transfer of voting devices.

DISCUSSION:
Electronic Voting

The joint committee discussed the nature of changes that electronic voting might bring to Town Meeting, and how Town Meeting could consider those in its deliberations.

Town Meeting could choose to retain and release roll-call-vote data for every electronic vote, including non-roll-call tallies of total yeas and nays.

Alternatively, Town Meeting could limit roll-call data only to those votes taken as formal roll calls with opportunities for members to check the accuracy of the votes.

In the former case, only the formal roll call would become part of the official record of the meeting, but the other vote data would be publicly available without an opportunity for members to correct errors.

Mr. Beal said that over time, as Town Meeting grew more confident in such a system, formal roll calls with time-consuming member review might become less common.

Mr. Charbonneau said that releasing roll-call data for every vote, including the many routine procedural matters, could make it harder for citizens to find the substantive votes they are looking for.

Mr. Leone said that a roll-call record of the motions to adjourn would show who was present at the end of the night, which might encourage attendance.

The joint committee considered that electronic voting would make it possible to use data from a single vote for both a tally and a roll call, in contrast to the current system in which separate votes are taken at each stage.

Some members said that using a single vote would deprive Town Meeting members of the ability to change their votes in response to knowledge of how others were voting in a rising count.

Others noted that the ability to correct a vote in the review of a roll call would provide an opportunity for members to change their vote, for instance to the prevailing side to be able to move for reconsideration.

DISCUSSION:
*Demonstration to
Town Meeting*

The joint committee reviewed issues related to scheduling a demonstration of electronic voting before Town Meeting votes on the question.

These issues include the ethics of showing the product of only one of several possible vendors, logistical considerations, and the possibility of poor turnout for a high-effort event.

Mr. Helmuth said the Town Meeting Electronic Voting Study Committee has discussed preparing an audiovisual presentation based on videos of other Town Meetings using electronic voting.

DISCUSSION:
*Warrant and
Bylaws*

Mr. Leone, who chairs the Bylaws Subcommittee of the Town Meeting Electronic Voting Study Committee, said that voting at Town Meeting is regulated by Title I, Article 1, Section 10, Subsection C of the Bylaws.

Mr. Leone distributed a copy of Subsection C, along with two drafts of new bylaws proposed by himself and by Mr. Beal, respectively. A copy of this document is attached to these minutes.

Mr. Helmuth distributed copies of two warrant articles for Town Meeting previously approved by the Town Meeting Electronic Voting Study Committee to enable bylaws to be changed and to appropriate funds for an electronic voting system.

The document, which is attached to these minutes, included a possible revision to the article for bylaws.

He said the committee had deliberately written the bylaws article with a broad scope to allow for all possible changes that might be needed to facilitate some version of electronic voting.

He noted such an approach might open the door to unrelated proposals from the floor of Town Meeting, but that a narrower scope might restrict Town Meeting from something that the committee might want to recommend.

Mr. Worden said a narrower scope that specifically named electronic voting, as in the revised article, would give voters a truer idea of what Town Meeting might do.

Mr. Auster said that one approach under discussion was to remove voting rules from the bylaws altogether and instead describe voting procedures in rules adopted at the start of each town meeting.

To do so, he said, the broader scope might be required.

Mr. Leone said that he preferred to keep the rules in the bylaws.

MOTION:
Adjournment

Mr. Leone moved that the meeting adjourn.

The motion passed.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 8:55 PM.

Adam Auster, *Secretary*
Town Meeting Electronic Voting Study Committee

APPROVED
February 6, 2013

Adam Auster, *Secretary*,
Town Meeting Electronic Voting Study Committee

Documents attached to these minutes:

1. Notice of meeting
2. Existing and proposed bylaws
3. Warrant articles

Title I- General Government

ARTICLE 1: TOWN MEETINGS,

Section 10. Procedural Rules

C. Votes:

(ART. 13, ATM – 04/29/92), (ART. 22, ATM – 05/11/11)

All votes, unless otherwise provided by law, shall be taken in the first instance by a "yes" and "no" voice vote. If the Moderator is in doubt as to the vote he may call for a show of hands or for a standing vote, or if five voters immediately question the vote, the Moderator shall call for a standing vote. On all questions submitted for the consideration of the Town Meeting, there shall be a roll call vote when requested by thirty or more Town Meeting Members present at the meeting. All roll call votes shall be recorded so as to indicate the individual vote of each Town Meeting Member who shall have voted. Said roll call votes shall be available as recorded at the Town Clerk's Office. Whenever a vote of two-thirds of the Town Meeting Members present and voting is required on any matter, the Moderator may declare a motion passed by a voice vote of at least two-thirds in favor and a standing vote need not be taken unless required by law or these Bylaws. The Town Clerk shall record the Moderator's declaration that the motion passed by a two-thirds vote in favor.

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On all questions submitted for the consideration of the Town Meeting, there shall be a roll call vote, either by voice, or if an electronic tally and display system is available, an electronic vote, when requested by thirty or more Town Meeting Members present at the meeting. If an electronic tally has already been taken on the question, then, in lieu of a second electronic vote, the vote of each Town Meeting Member who shall have voted electronically in the first instance shall then be displayed and recorded. All roll call votes, oral or electronic, shall be recorded so as to indicate the individual vote of each Town Meeting Member who shall have voted. Said roll call votes, oral or electronic, shall be available as recorded at the Town Clerk's Office.

Whenever a vote of two-thirds of the Town Meeting Members present and voting is required on any matter, the Moderator may declare a motion passed by a voice vote of at least two-thirds in favor and a standing vote, or electronic tally, need not be taken unless required by law or these Bylaws. The Town Clerk shall record the Moderator's declaration that the motion passed by a two-thirds vote in favor.

If an electronic tally and display system is available, all votes, unless otherwise provided by law, may at the discretion of the Moderator, or by rules adopted by Town Meeting, be taken by an electronic tally. Absent the use of an electronic tally and display system, and unless otherwise provided by law, all votes shall be taken in the first instance by a "yes" and "no" voice vote.
(Intention is to open up electronic voting to anytime the moderator desires, or by Town Meeting adopting rules at the beginning of Town Meeting.)

The results of any vote taken by electronic tally may be made available in a manner that will indicate the individual vote of each Town Meeting Member.
(Allows, but does not require, the town to make available the results of any electronic vote to the public).

If the Moderator is in doubt as to the vote he may call for a standing vote, or if an electronic tally and display system is available, an electronic tally. If five voters immediately question the vote, the Moderator shall call for a standing vote, or if an electronic tally and display system is available, an electronic tally.

If an electronic tally is taken then only the vote totals, "yes" "no" or "abstain", shall be displayed during that session of Town Meeting.
(Strikes the line saying what the Town Clerk will record. Maybe it could still be here, since recordings made by the Town Clerk are not the only data ever recorded, and possibly made available to the public later. "During that session" is meant to allow data to be shared with the public later. The intent is to restrict how much is displayed, on screen, during a session of Town Meeting.)

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If an electronic tally has already been taken on the question, then, in lieu of a second electronic vote, the vote of each Town Meeting Member who shall have voted electronically in the first instance shall then be displayed and recorded.

All roll call votes, oral or electronic, shall be recorded so as to indicate the individual vote of each Town Meeting Member who shall have voted.

Said roll call votes, oral or electronic, shall be available as recorded at the Town Clerk's Office.

Whenever a vote of two-thirds of the Town Meeting Members present and voting is required on any matter, the Moderator may declare a motion passed by a voice vote of at least two-thirds in favor and a standing vote, or electronic tally, need not be taken unless required by law or these Bylaws, or by rules adopted by Town Meeting.
(Added "rules" to keep consistency with earlier use of rules.)

The Town Clerk shall record the Moderator's declaration that the motion passed by a two-thirds vote in favor.

Electronic Voting Study Committee
Warrant Articles as currently voted (not submitted)
1/16/13

VOTE 1

Proposed Title/Subject Matter: APPROPRIATION/ELECTRONIC TOWN MEETING VOTING EQUIPMENT

Body: To see if the Town will vote to appropriate a sum of money for the purchase or lease of electronic voting equipment for use at Town Meeting, determine how said sum will be raised and expended, or take any action related thereto.

Requested by: The Town Meeting Electronic Voting Study Committee

VOTE 2

Proposed Title/Subject Matter: BYLAW AMENDMENT/TOWN MEETING VOTING

Body: To see if the Town will vote to amend the Town Bylaws to amend the method of voting at Town Meeting; or take any action related thereto.

Requested by: The Town Meeting Electronic Voting Study Committee

Potential Revision, VOTE 2

Proposed Title/Subject Matter: BYLAW AMENDMENT/TOWN MEETING VOTING

Body: To see if the Town will vote to amend the Town Bylaws to amend the method of voting at Town Meeting to provide for electronic voting; or take any action related thereto.

Requested by: The Town Meeting Electronic Voting Study Committee