



Election Modernization Committee

Date: **September 19, 2019**

Time: **7:30-9:00pm**

Location: **Lyons Meeting Room, Town Hall 2nd Floor**

Minutes

Attendance: Adam Badik, Greg Dennis, Walter Horn, William Logan, James O'Connor, Maxwell Palmer, Juhan Sonin, Lesley Waxman

1. New Committee Member Introductions

We did a round of introductions to Max, as it was his first meeting.

2. Review and Vote on Acceptance of Minutes from August 29, 2019

We reviewed the minutes from the prior August 29th meeting. Lesley moved to approve the minutes, Walter seconded. The minutes were approved unanimously.

3. Review and acceptance of draft report for submission to Select Board

We began reviewing the report that Greg had drafted.

Lesley drew our attention to a sentence in the "Online voting" section, which said that "Massachusetts and several other states" allow military and overseas voters to email their ballots. While true, she said that overseas email voting is a requirement of the federal UOCAVA law (Uniform and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act). We discussed a possible rewording to reflect that distinction.

Greg moved to change "Massachusetts and several other states make an exception" to "Federal law provides for an exception." Lesley seconded. The change was approved unanimously.

Following that edit, Adam questioned whether the UOCAVA law actually required states to allow the email receipt of overseas ballots. He read that it required states to provide an electronic transmission of the ballot *to* the overseas voter but not necessarily the electronic receipt of the completed ballot *from* the voter. Lesley said she could seek clarification on that.

Greg expressed concern that “polling locations” was the last item in order of priority listed in the report. Given that the location of polling places is a common source of discussion and complaints, it might suggest a disconnect between how we and the general public prioritize it. Lesley said she thinks it was prioritized last in part because it’s an area where we have few ideas and limited authority to make change. Jim noted that it’s the Select Board’s job to set polling locations and that the schools are already taken, so there seems limited opportunity to meaningfully change them.

Visitor Juli Brazile introduced herself as a member of the Envision Arlington Standing Committee. She said that Envision Arlington was preparing their annual survey of Arlington residents and suggested we add a question to the survey related to polling locations. There was agreement among the committee that those questions would be a good idea.

Greg mentioned that he knew of a few citizens in particular who are vocal about polling locations. He said that he would try to collect their thoughts and pass them onto the committee.

Walter asked about our level of authority to change the polling locations. Jim said it’s the Select Board alone who chooses them. Greg noted that we could still put forward recommendations to the Select Board. Adam suggested that we could possibly put forward a set of criteria for choosing good polling locations.

Jim noted that some people are finding it hard to find a place to park at their polling location. Adam said that some cities and towns turn parking spots near polling locations into “15-minute limit” spots for the day. Jim said we could possibly make a recommendation that the police department waive the meters near spots on Election Day.

There was agreement that the polling locations item could stay as-is. No motions were put forward to amend it.

Max noted that the second item in the report contained both Ranked Choice Voting and the idea of consolidating Town Meeting races in each precinct, perhaps incorrectly implying that they are a “package deal.” He suggested the item be split in two with an additional sentence to explain the motivation for Town Meeting piece. There was general agreement that this would be a good idea. The group discussed revised wording, ultimately arriving at the following text:

3. Structure of Town Meeting races

When there are vacancies in Town Meeting seats, there can be confusion due to the simultaneous election of members with different term lengths. Some towns address this by consolidating the race for all open Town Meeting seats in a precinct, regardless of term length, into a single consolidated race, where the longest terms are won by the highest vote-getters. We will study the possibility of doing the same in Arlington.

Greg motioned for the report to be accepted with the addition of that text. Max seconded. The motion was approved unanimously.

4. Further Develop committee goals and timeline

Jim brought up the topic of ex-officio members not having a vote. He said their lack of voting rights could explain their absences from the meetings. He had spoken with Moderator Leone, and although we can't decide to give them a vote, we could possibly take a straw poll of all committee members, both voting and non-voting, before a motion. Voting members could use the result of that straw poll to inform their own vote. A deliberate attempt to seek their yes/no opinion might be an incentive for more ex-officio members to show. Bill said he would let his opinion be known with or without a straw poll.

Jim and Greg noted that the absence of the Select Board administrator and any designee of the Clerk's office was of particular concern, because we have several questions we want to ask of them. Bill mentioned the possibility of inviting someone he knew that used to work in the Clerk's office to a meeting.

We discussed how the election responsibilities are divided between the Select Board and the Clerk's office. Lesley asked "who hires the election workers?" Jim answered: the Select Board. Lesley asked "Who does the training?" Jim said that the Clerk's office prepares all the forms but the wardens tend to train their own staff. Greg asked whether it's the norm for towns to divide the electoral functions in this way. Lesley said that she believed it was the norm.

Juhan asked about the implications of the open meeting law for our committee. In particular, he was interested in whether we could host an open, publicly-accessible repository of documents and information we could access. Jim said that open meeting law would permit emailing documents to the group so long as they are not discussed. He added that, according to the Moderator, we are actually exempt from Open Meeting Law, because Town Meeting and all of its committees are exempt. There was general agreement that we should try to adhere to the spirit of the open meeting requirements even if we are technically exempt.

5. Set future meeting schedule

We reviewed our calendars and set the next meeting date for October 22nd at 7:30pm.

Lesley suggested we decide on a topic for the next meeting in advance. The committee agreed to discuss early voting and to develop questions for the Envision Arlington survey at the next meeting. Walter added that we could also discuss consolidating mixed-term Town Meeting races, since everyone seems to be on board with that and the committee agreed. Max asked which other towns consolidate their mixed-term races, so we could look for example charter language to mimic. Greg said that he knows Wrentham does, and that Arlington also consolidates their races when precinct lines are redrawn.

Max suggested setting a date for the November meeting, too. We reviewed our calendars and set a date of November 19th at 7:30pm.

6. Adjourn

Jim made a motion to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Juhan and others. The motion was approved unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 8:57pm.