



Election Modernization Committee

Date: **January 14, 2020**

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

Location: **2nd Floor Conference Room, Town Hall Annex**

Minutes

Attendance: Adam Badik, Greg Dennis, Sean Harrington, Walter Horn, James O'Connor, Maxwell Palmer, Juhan Sonin, Jennifer Susse, Lesley Waxman

1. New member welcome

We welcomed Sean Harrington, chair of the Republican Town Committee, to his first meeting.

2. Review and Vote on Acceptance of Minutes for December 17, 2019

We read the draft minutes of the December meeting. We decided to strike one superfluous sentence about early voting and to add a short link to the Ranked Choice Voting presentation.

Sean made a motion to accept the minutes as amended. Jennifer seconded. The minutes were approved unanimously.

3. Review of Correspondence received since last meeting

Jim read an email we received from Arlington resident Tom Perkins. He expressed surprise that he only recently learned about the existence of the committee and an interest in what we had been discussing. Jim replied to his message with links to our past agenda, meeting minutes, and our calendar of future meetings on the town website.

4. Warrant Article to extend the life of the committee

Greg handed out language that he had drafted for potential warrant articles. We read his draft warrant article language to extend the life of the committee. Everyone was satisfied with that language as is, which read as follows:

ARTICLE: VOTE/ELECTION MODERNIZATION COMMITTEE

To see if the Town will vote to extend the life of the Election Modernization Committee, change its structure or membership, or take any action related thereto.

Walter made a motion that the committee submit this warrant article, subject to any suggested edits by Town Counsel Doug Heim. Sean seconded. The motion was approved unanimously.

Jim raised the question about whether we need ten signatures to put the article on the warrant, whether we needed it inserted by the Select Board, or whether we had the authority to add the article ourselves. Most believed that as a committee of Town Meeting, we could place the articles on the warrant independently. Jim said he would investigate the question further.

5. Additional Warrant Articles

We read Greg's draft language for the warrant article to consolidate Town Meeting Member elections. Greg noted that we haven't received clear instruction yet whether the article should take the form of a bylaw change or home rule petition, so his draft covered both possibilities.

Adam thought the proposed language included some superfluous language describing our existing Town Meeting elections as "currently divided into multiple elections on the ballot when there are vacant seats." Lesley agreed the full clause was unnecessary, but she wanted to retain the reference to "vacant seats," because those are the situations that our article would improve. Everyone agreed with that suggestion, so we edited the language accordingly. The revised warrant article read:

ARTICLE: CONSOLIDATION OF TOWN MEETING MEMBER ELECTIONS

To see if the Town will vote to amend the Town Bylaws or to authorize and request the Select Board to file Home Rule Legislation to consolidate the elections of Town Meeting Members when there are vacant seats into a single election per precinct, where the highest vote-getters win the longest available terms, or take any action related thereto.

Leslie made a motion to submit this warrant article, subject to any suggested edits by Town Counsel Doug Heim. Sean seconded. The motion was approved unanimously.

We discussed whether to submit a warrant article to lower the voting age for town elections. In a prior meeting, the committee expressed a desire to wait until the Envision Arlington survey data was available before making any firm decisions about trying to lower the voting age. However, we could theoretically submit a placeholder article now, to be filled in with either a firm motion or "no action" at a date close to the meeting.

Jennifer said we had some very preliminary survey data, which looked mixed. Greg noted that placeholder articles on potentially contentious topics can unnecessarily rile people up and cause confusion at Town Meeting. There was consensus that we will not submit a warrant article to lower the voting age for this annual meeting, but assuming the committee's life is extended, we may revisit the question before the 2021 Town Meeting.

Walter made a motion that we will not submit a warrant article to lower the voting age for this town election. Max seconded. The motion was approved unanimously.

6. Ranked Choice Voting

We read Greg's draft warrant article language to elect town offices by Ranked Choice Voting. Everyone was satisfied with the article language as is. It read:

ARTICLE: HOME RULE LEGISLATION/RANKED CHOICE VOTING

To see if the Town will vote to authorize and request the Select Board to file Home Rule Legislation to elect Town offices by Ranked Choice Voting, or take any action related thereto.

Jennifer said that convincing Town Meeting of this reform will take education and effort. She said we should be sure that now is the right time to pursue it, because if we are unsuccessful, we can't try again for two years. Adam said it feels like the right time, because of the state-wide education effort underway with the ballot question. Lesley said that her impression from Town Meeting that Ranked Choice Voting was a primary reason for the creation of the committee and that it made sense we pursue it now. Walter said he favors approval voting for single-winner races but that it is not well-suited for multi-winner races. Greg agreed that RCV seemed to be the original point of the committee and that the education would be effort but doable.

Walter made a motion to submit this warrant article, subject to any suggested edits by Town Counsel Doug Heim. Adam seconded. Sean abstained. Everyone else voted yes.

7. Guest Speaker

There was no guest speaker.

8. New Business / Public Comment

Patti Brennan Sawtelle spoke briefly about her candidacy for Town Clerk.

Tom Perkins, who had sent us correspondence that we reviewed earlier in the meeting, offered some thoughts and concerns on election matters. He expressed an interest in a "none of the above" option on the ballot and expressed concern about the limited information available about candidates for town office.

We scheduled our next meeting date for February 6, 2020.

9. Adjourn

Juhan made a motion to adjourn. Jennifer seconded. The motion was approved unanimously.