



Remote Participation Study Committee Draft Meeting Minutes

Date: September 29, 2021

Time: 7:30pm

Location: Conducted by remote participation

Minutes

Committee Participants:

Mustafa Varoglu, Chair
Jennifer Susse, Co-Chair
Stacie Nicole Smith, Secretary
Alexander Bagnall
Janice Cagan-Teuber
Jim Feeney
Eric Helmuth
William Hayner

Members of the Public: Elizabeth Dray

Agenda:

1. Introductions
2. Nominate chair
3. Nominate Vice chair
4. Set goals for Remote Participation Study Group
5. Set future meeting dates

Decisions Reached and Action Items:

- The Chair, Vice-Chair, and Alex will create and implement a survey for the chairs of existing town boards and committees to clarify and categorize their needs for hybrid meetings
- Members should consider questions that the committee needs to answer to accomplish their task and send to the Chair prior to the next meeting
- Members should get sworn in by the Town Clerk before the next meeting

- The next two meeting dates were set for October 12 and October 26 from 7:30 -9:30 pm on Zoom.

Summary of Discussions:

All participants introduced themselves. There was a motion, a second, and a unanimous vote to nominate officers, and after nominations, a unanimous vote to select Mustafa Varoglu as Chair, Jennifer Susse as Vice-Chair, and Stacie Smith as Secretary.

The Chair brought up slides with the committee's charge and goals for review. The charge is as follows:

Committee Charge

The Committee is charged with comprehensively examining options and requirements for providing remote participation through video-conferencing or other similar technology in public meetings under ordinary conditions where, among other things, the Open Meeting Law will require in-person attendance by public body members in a physical location. The Committee's study shall include, but not be limited to:

- A. Evaluating the benefits and challenges of providing hybrid forms of public meetings;
- B. Assessing which public bodies can and should provide remote participation;
- C. Examining what portions of meetings can and should be available for remote participation;
- D. Determining what, if any, local rules beyond legal requirements can and should be established for remote participation;
- E. Understanding the costs of different models of remote participation, especially hybrid remote participation;
- F. Evaluating the impact of remote participation on accessibility requirements and concerns.
- G. Assessing ways that public bodies provide information to the public about their work.

In discussing the charge, members spoke about the benefits of virtual and hybrid meetings for participants, while noting research that suggests that diversity is not necessarily increased. They noted the different configurations of hybrid meetings, including having some or none of the Committee members participating remotely (noting that State open meeting law, once the pandemic exception expires, requires that a quorum of committee members be present in person), and all, some, or none of the public joining remotely. These situations might require different approaches or technology needs. They also noted that different meetings had different levels of participation for the public, and that the goal should be to support opportunities for remote participation appropriate to the type of meeting.

The group reviewed the goals (scope) and timeline for the task, which requires recommendations by January 15 2022, and agreed that the short timeframe was a significant challenge. They noted that recommendations affecting the budget would be even tighter, since the budget process was beginning now, but that federal Cares Act and rescue plan funds might be available for this, as it is a purpose listed in the ARPA statute.

The chair pulled up a list of the many committees and boards in Arlington, and members began considering the range of conditions and technologies that might be needed to support hybrid meetings for these different committees and boards. They began brainstorming a set of questions that could help categorize the different types of meetings and needs, that could then form the basis of a matrix or grid, including:

- type of participation (public presentations/business, hearings, public comment, etc)
- location of meeting (and potential technology hardware in that location)
- frequency of meeting
- size of committee
- whether or not staff support exists
- whether/how to go into executive session
- need for display of documents (plans or charts)

They also named the following questions/ ideas:

- Use a google form to gather info?
- Can we standardize a hybrid meeting package in certain town owned rooms for smaller/ less frequently meeting / more specialized meetings to be held in?
- What are the different formats of meetings that are being held - panel at front (Select Board, School Commission), working meeting of individuals (ZBA)?
- What type of information do we want to share during the meeting - minimal (agenda, documents already posted), visual (plans diagrams in active discussion), presentations?

Going back to the list of committees and categories, members suggested finding a way to get representatives of committees to share the information that fills out the spreadsheet, and that this can help the group create some advice for prioritization and range of hybrid approaches.

The group also discussed their role regarding proposing by-laws or local rules, and suggested a few examples of types of things they might recommend, such as rules related to the storage and sharing of the zoom recordings of meetings, what types of meetings (or conditions) should require hybrid participation options and what shouldn't.

The group then brainstormed some initial criteria for evaluating success. These included:

- We provide remote participation to all Town Boards and Committees
- Identify first round or priority list of meetings to enable Remote Participation in hybrid setting
- Increase the number and diversity of people engaging with Town meeting
- Identify ways to minimize friction in hybrid meetings for the meeting members
- Not dramatically increasing burden on Town Staff

The Chair reminded members to be sworn in by the town clerk, and reviewed open meeting law requirements forbidding deliberations outside of meetings. The committee then made a motion and voted unanimously to allow the Chair, Vice-Chair and Alex to have the authority to put together a document for committee representatives to fill out and to send it out. There was a short discussion about dates for future meetings, and the committee agreed to second and fourth Tuesdays from 7:30 – 9:30 for the next two meetings, with other dates to be set later.

The Chair also encouraged members to brainstorm a list of questions that the committee would need to answer and send them to him before the next meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 9:30.