Remote Participation Study Committee
Draft Meeting Minutes

Date: October 12, 2021
Time: 7:30
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
Rachel Zsembery

Members of the Public: Elizabeth Dray

Agenda:
1. Review and accept meeting minutes from Sept 29,2021 meeting
2. Town Boards and Commissions Survey status and next steps
3. Methods to gather feedback from the public about their experience with remote participation
4. Identify additional sub-topics important for Remote Participation Meetings. (Technology, legal and other resources in Town)
5. Any other business

Decisions Reached and Action Items:
- Minutes were approved
- Members of the public would be invited to the next committee meeting (on Oct 26) to share their perspectives on the
- Jennifer (with help from Janice and Mustafa) would seek to digest the input from committee members and share with the rest of the committee before the next meeting

- Stacie (with input from Eric and Rachel) would draft a survey for the public on experiences and needs for remote/hybrid meetings.
- Next agenda: minutes, intro to public, public participation (directed to the chair), limit to 3 minutes, commission data, public data, start to draft recommendations

Summary of Discussions:

The meeting began at 7:30 and Rachel Zsembery was introduced. The committee voted unanimously to approve the Sept 29 meeting minutes, and noted that they appreciated the format and quality. ☺

The Chair shared slides, beginning with an update on the survey of Town Boards and Commissions status. 67 responses were received, including responses from multiple members of some committee. The group lacked contact information for three committees (LIST THEM), plus the Housing Authority, since they are not under the Town's authority.

The group discussed whether the Housing Committee should be included, and decided that since they were not a town board or committee, they were out of scope and that it would be best to leave them out. They also discussed whether committees not subject to Open Meeting Law (OML) – such as committees of the School Superintendent or Town Manager - were within this committee's scope, and noted that the charge seemed to leave that question open. For time, they suggested focusing on OML committees. They discussed the three committees that had not yet been contacted, and identified strategies to contact them.

The group talked briefly about the format of outcomes, and noted that they might include recommendations about prioritization for investing in hybrid meetings, best practices for how to conduct hybrid meetings, and also an implementation framework to help the town allocate personnel and meeting rooms. They noted that for any proposed warrant articles, should have those in mind for the deadline. The language can be broad in January, but final language will be needed by March. If proposing appropriations, we will need to know. If legal issues are in play, we will need to bring in legal advice.

Town Boards and Commissions Survey status and next steps

The Chair shared a link to the survey responses from town boards and committees reporting on characteristics of their meetings relevant to considerations for hybrid meetings. (https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1cpqKqKKoDd5U4m2rHmSwkU7kwFn7etDcoVrWbbhc6mY/edit#gid=538400726) Many committees had multiple responses. The group began looked at the spreadsheet and discussed how to organize the data. Participants suggested using the data to prioritize the types of meetings that would be most critical for investments in hybrid meeting technology. They suggested looking at how frequently they met, how many members of the public participated, where the meetings took place, what kind of engagement took place, and what needs were reported for public participation.

The committee noted that they planned to close the survey after the end of the week, and work with whatever data they have.

Jennifer to take first cut at organizing the data, sorting by committee if multiple members answered and turning answers into bar graphs. After she takes a first pass, she will share with Janice and Mustafa and

come back in two weeks with some digestible version of the data. She agreed to try to share with the committee before we meet.

Methods to gather feedback from the public about their experience with remote participation.

The group discussed creating a survey to learn more about the perspectives of the public. Members suggested posting through facebook sites, Arlington patch, emails from the town (one person coordinates social media and town dispatches), and also through unofficial social media groups. They discussed ways to get a broader set of input, including other forms of engagement like at the Farmers market or door-to-door, but decided that there wasn't time right now.

The group discussed what kind of information they were looking for, including the needs, people's experiences with remote meetings, and which committees were seen as most important for hybrid access. They also thought it could be helpful to understand the barriers people have to participating remotely, which might be addressed in recommendations as part of the report.

They then brainstormed questions for the survey, including the following:
- What are the meetings you want to be able to participate in remotely?
- Under what circumstance do you want to participate remotely or in person
- Have you participated in online Board or Committee meetings in past?
- Do you find it easier to connect remotely than in person?
- Do you feel more connected to your community and to the group/ committee when in person or remotely?
- Recommendations or suggestions of ways you would like to engage as a participant or observer as meetings move to hybrid?
- What has worked for you in terms of receiving material and understanding the material presented at the meetings?
- Have you/ would you like to watch videos of meetings?
- How do you get information on committees or meetings that are important to you?
- Add a question or two on benefits accessibility based on availability, financial, childcare, ability to travel
- What are the impediments or obstacles you have for joining remotely or in person?
- What kind of guidelines should
- Options for reaching broader community
    - DIGS (Diversity, Inclusion…) groups, PTOs at all schools
    - Other groups that may have mailing lists, Council on Aging, Human Rights Commission, Housing authority members that are Arlington residents or appointees to send to renters
- Was digital engagement better/ worse than in person

Stacie agreed to take the first cut, and send to Eric for Rachel for review. Once done, she would send to all members of the committee to circulate through the Town and through community and neighborhood groups. They agreed it was important to make clear that the survey was just information gathering, not promises/commitments or raising expectations. The Chair suggested also inviting letters, unstructured feedback, and an offer to share comments at the committee's to next meeting.

Future meeting topics/information to gather:

- Offer public participation at beginning of the next meeting (include this with our emails for the survey, post it in the agenda)
- Other towns have started to do Hybrid meetings. For the Nov meeting, maybe reach out to folks with hybrid meeting experiences (governed by OML) from other places.
- Other towns or cities that have developed guidelines or rules, ahead of us? Eric agreed to ask the Town Manager
- Investigate technology systems that might be helpful
- For the early December meeting, develop questions for the town.
- Additional topic to consider: Best practices about meeting minutes – ex, committees put up draft minutes before approved? Can minutes be approved in a 5 min mtg? if on zoom. Recommendations for how minutes should look? (Participants asked if this was within this committee's scope, and one member felt only if it is tied to hybrid meetings.)
- For the report to the Select Board: Consider what the SB can implement without bylaw or TM appropriations.

The Chair volunteered to lay out future meeting dates and topics.

The committee then took a public comment from Elizabeth Dray, who said that she was pleased with the work, but very concerned about survey outreach being done only through the town email and committee members' personal networks or neighborhood email lists. This will be outreach to primarily white, home owners and economically secure residents who live in our precincts and who we socialize with. This will not cast a wide net and include many of the voices that historically are not included. We get the same voices, the same faces providing their input on decisions that affect everyone. I would love to see this committee avoid that. Can't keep maintaining the status quo on who we invite to the table to talk. She recommended reaching out to the Rainbow Alliance, Seniors, the Housing authority, specifically to TM members in neighborhoods with more seniors and renters, diversity groups at each of the schools, or even the PTO. The Chair suggested going to the TM mailing list and inviting them to send it out.

The meeting adjourned at 9:38.