



Remote Participation Study Committee

Date: **Feb 3, 2022**

Time: **7:30 – 9:30 pm**

Location: Virtual, via Zoom.

Minutes

Attendance: Alex Bagnall, Jim Feeney, Eric Helmuth, Bill Hayner, Jennifer Susse, Mustafa Varoglu, Rachel Zsembery.

Members of the Public:

None

AGENDA

1. Review and accept meeting minutes from Jan 4,2022 meeting
2. Public Comment – 15 minutes
3. Review Feb 7,2022 Presentation to Select Board – 45 minutes
4. Plan for 2022 Town Meeting report – 45 minutes
5. Future business – 10 minutes

Decisions Reached and Action Items:

- Minutes were approved.
- Slide deck for presentation finalized.

Summary of Discussions:

Approval of the Minutes:

Minutes were approved. Will be submitted to the website

Public Comment:

No public persons were present for public comment.

Review Feb 7,2022 Presentation to Select Board:

The committee reviewed the draft slides for the Select Board presentation on Monday Feb 7,2022 and collaborated on final edits. Slides included at end of these Minutes. The Report to the Select Board, the Report on the Survey of the Board, Commissions and Committees and the Report of the Public regarding Hybrid Meetings were submitted to the Select Board since our last meeting.

The RPSC identified two points the Select Board has a direct ability to support in the presentation.

On the Policy Slide (Slide 5), obtain acknowledgement the SB needs to continue to authorize the ability for remote access to an in-person meeting when the current emergency legislation for all remote meetings expires (currently set to April 1, 2022, with possible extension to July)

- The Select Board and School Committee should authorize, encourage, and support hybrid participation for committees and commissions under their purview

the Implementation slide (Slide 6) recommendation:

- Invest in locations and technology to enable the piloting of hybrid meetings in 2022 for: Select Board, School Committee, Redevelopment Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, Community Preservation Act Committee, Diversity Task Group, and Disability Commission

These two items are directly under the power of the Select Board.

For the Select Board meeting agreed to have Mustafa Varoglu present the slides and to have Jennifer Susse and Alex Bagnall attend as RPSC members to help answer questions.

Plan for 2022 Town Meeting report

The committee discussed future tasks to address for the 2022 Town Meeting and tasks through the 2023 Town Meeting when the RPSC commission ends.

Some people were proposed for activities in absentia and the RPSC members can confirm their availability at future meetings:

Activities to focus on before 2022 Town Meeting (April 2022)

1. Reach out to additional committees to see if they would be interested in being part of the pilot – (Jennifer)
2. Subgroup - Technology models (Charges C & E)
 - Alex, Eric, Jim,
 - Input to be gathered on traditional meeting locations for boards, commission and committees
 - What are we suggesting that the Town support right away?
 - Which 3 rooms should be specifically nominated to host small, medium (e.g., ARB/ZBA), large (e.g., other's beyond Select Board or School Committee) meetings?
 - What types of technology suits these rooms?
 - Subgroup to bring proposals back to RPSC meetings.
3. Subgroup - Process models for hybrid meetings (Charges B, C, D & F)
 1. (Rachel, Jennifer, Stacy (to confirm), Janice (to confirm))
 - What are the parameters for the pilot program – members, duration, feedback loop, solicit feedback in person or survey or directly observe.

- What does success and failure look like in a pilot program of hybrid meetings
- Suggest some models for hybrid participation and ground rules that committees can adopt either wholesale or adapt as needed

Activities to address after 2022 Town Meeting through to 2023 Town Meeting

1. Assessing ways that public bodies provide information to the public about their work (Charge G)
 - People to be determined
2. Gather information from the pilot to assess what worked and what needs to be tweaked.
 - People to be determined
3. Advocate for state legislature change to all-remote option
 - (Stacy to be confirmed as a member of this group)
 - will require reaching out to elected officials, SB, and SC

Future Business

Confirmed future meetings from poll results

- Monday Feb 14
- Tues Mar 8
- Weds March 30
- Tues April 12 (2-week interval as we approach Town Meeting)
- Weds April 27 (2-week interval as we approach Town Meeting)

Meeting adjourned at 9:00 pm.

Remote Participation Study Committee

February 7, 2022

Committee Charged With:

- 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
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Information Gathering: What We Did

The study committee created and analyzed two surveys:

- **Sitting members of Town boards**, committees, and commissions (144 responses from 60 of the 64 bodies)
- **General public** on their opinions of hybrid public meetings (354 responses)

The committee also spoke to researcher Max Palmer about his work with Katie Einstein showing that remote meetings do not inherently increase the diversity of participants.

Survey Results (Highlights)

Benefits of Hybrid Meetings:

- Public can tune in for topics of interest during long meetings
- Allows for participation by more people
- Provide flexibility for childcare needs, inclement weather, travel, physical accessibility and other constraints

Concerns about Hybrid Meetings:

- Technical complexity; potential for audio/visual problems
 - Ensuring parity of experience for remote and inperson members/participants
 - Requires a new staff/volunteer role to manage hybrid meetings
 - Loss of social connection when not in room together
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Ranked Recommendations: Policy Suggestions

- **The Select Board and School Committee** should authorize, encourage, and support hybrid participation for committees and commissions under their purview
 - **The RPSC will develop suggested Town guidelines** for different hybrid participation models that prioritize parity of access and provide contingencies in case of technical failure
 - **The Town should commit to active outreach** to raise awareness of scheduled meetings and work to increase the diversity and number of participants
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Ranked Recommendations: Implementation

- **Invest in locations and technology** to enable the piloting of hybrid meetings in 2022 for:
Select Board, School Committee, Redevelopment Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, Community Preservation Act Committee, Diversity Task Group, and Disability Commission
 - **Update technology in the Select Board chambers** to allow remote participation without a dedicated operator from ACMi, and develop a plan to allow other boards, committees, and commissions to use this space when available
 - **Contemplate training and support** for members of boards, committees and commissions to run hybrid meetings
 - **Equip one or two additional meeting spaces** for remote participation
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Future Tasks

- Finalize technology, operational and location recommendations for hybrid meetings
 - Identify additional boards, commissions, and committees to pilot hybrid meetings
 - Gather information from pilot hybrid meetings to identify what worked well and where there's room for improvement
 - Assess ways that public bodies can provide information to the public
 - Consider advocating for legislation to permit the option of all remote meetings after Legislative authorization expires
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