TOWN OF ARLINGTON
TOWN MEETING PROCEDURES COMMITTEE

June 21, 2023

Call to Order

The meeting of the Town Meeting Procedures Committee was called to order by Town Moderator Greg Christiana on Wednesday, March 2, 2023, at 7:08 p.m. in the conference room of the second floor of the Town Hall Annex in Arlington, Massachusetts

Quorum

A quorum was present: Adam Auster, Greg Christiana, Rebecca Gruber, Christopher Moore, and John Worden.

Hybrid Meeting

Mr. Christiana said that remote participation in the meeting was authorized by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Public Comment

No Comments

There were no other persons present or remotely present.

Disposition of Minutes

Mr. Worden moved to approve the draft minutes of the June 14, 2023, meeting with the following correction.

MOTION:
Corrected Minutes

On the first page, change the fourth bulleted item under "Town Meeting Debrief" to read "Discussion of low vote count and/or absences at 2023 Town Meeting."

Mr. Moore seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously.

Unfinished Business

Town Meeting Debrief

Mr. Christiana noted that the Committee had not completed its discussion of issues that he had identified based on correspondence with Town Meeting members and his own experience.

He shared a list of issues with the Committee. A copy of this list, entitled "Ideas for Town Meeting Policies, Guidelines, and Preparations" is appended to these minutes.

Mr. Christiana said this list was the "procedures" section from a longer list of issues.

Points of Order After Debate Ends	Before resuming the discussion based on that list, however, he introduced the problems that can arise when points of order are made after the question is called, originally suggested in correspondence from Mr. Moore.
When Allowed	Mr. Christiana suggested that there were no points of order that could be in order after debate is ended by a two-thirds vote that would not also be in order at other times.
Problems Related to Point of Order	Discussion included questions of whether Town Meeting is terminating debate too soon, that some points at the 2023 Town Meeting were not in order, that some were legitimate but unanswerable.
	Committee members also discussed the requirement imposed by the vote to end debate, even if Town Meeting lacks all the information it might need, and whether and how to share opinions from Town Counsel.
Reconsideration	Mr. Worden noted that in the event of a significant problem that emerges after the question is called, Town Meeting could reconsider the motion. That would reopen it for debate and further action, he said.
Purpose of Points of Order	Mr. Christiana agreed that points of order are not for clarification.
Recommended Motions	Discussion resumed on the question of what is before Town Meeting as a result of the vote, generally considered under Article 3 at the opening of Town Meeting, to place recommended actions of boards and committees before Town Meetings without further motions, and how to handle subsequent changes to those recommendations.
	Several members expressed support for the idea that the vote of Town Meeting to consider the recommended actions was a vote to do so for those

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recommendations as provided to Town Meeting at the time of the Article 3 vote.

If so, changes to those recommendations would need to be made in the form of amendments, and late recommendations would have to be introduced in the usual way.

2023 Town Meeting

In a discussion of this year's Annual Town Meeting generally, different members praised the quality of debate generally, and said that meeting in person conferred many benefits for the functioning of Town Meeting.

Committee members also suggested that the pace of decision making may have been too rapid for some members.

Other issues related to the structure of debate and the inability, under the so-called 48-hour rule, to propose amendments to motions made at the last minute, unless Town Meeting postponed consideration to allow for such amendments.

Deadlines under the 48-Hour Rule

Mr. Christiana told the Committee that the Town Clerk had proposed to him a schedule of deadlines for amendments of 6 p.m. on Thursday for consideration the following Monday, and 3 p.m on Monday for consideration the following Wednesday,

He said the Town staff needed to be able to process and disseminate proposed amendments via email and the annotated warrant, and that Town Hall was open late on Thursday nights but closed midday on Friday.

Discussion included the need for members to receive proposed amendments in advance and the role that the Moderator has played in reviewing amendments, sometimes through several iterations when time allows.

Review of Proposed Amendments

Mr. Christiana said his review has considered both scope and how one amendment might make consideration of another amendment impossible depending on the wording and the order considered.

Trade-Offs	He said it is better for Town Meeting that he be able to work with proponents, but that doing so requires time.
	In discussion, members noted the trade-offs between time to perfect proposals, need to provide notice to members, and potential burden of lengthy time requirements on the ability of Town Meeting members to propose amendments.
Schedule for Submission and Review	Discussion tried to tease out ways to shorten the deadline for submitting amendments, taking into account the needs for review and notification of Town Meeting members.
	Members also noted the possibility of tabling, postponing, or committing the main motion in especially complex situations.
	Mr. Christiana said that a policy of processing and sharing motions in the order received might prove an incentive for Town Meeting members to submit amendments in advance of any deadlines.

Unfinished Business

Next Meeting: July 19, 2023	The Committee agreed that its next meeting will be on Wednesday, July 19, at 7 p.m., at a place to be confirmed later.
	Adopted by general consent.
MOTION: *Adjournment*	Mr. Auster moved that the meeting adjourn.
	Mr. Moore seconded the motion.
	The motion passed by general consent.

Adjournment   The meeting adjourned at 9:25 p.m.

Adam Auster
June 23, 2022

APPROVED
July 19, 2023

Adam Auster

Greg Christiana,
Town Moderator

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Documents attached to these minutes:

1. Notice of meeting

2. "Ideas for Town Meeting Policies, Guidelines, and Preparations"

Town Meeting Procedures Committee

Date: Wednesday, June 21, 2023
Time: 7:00 - 9:00 PM
In-person location: Town Hall Annex 2nd Floor Conference Room
Remote access: Zoom

Agenda

1. Public comment
2. Approval of past minutes
3. Town Meeting debrief (continued)
4. New Business

This will be a hybrid meeting with remote participation via Zoom. Registration information for Zoom will be posted.

Ideas for Town Meeting Policies, Guidelines, and Preparations

Greg Christiana
Arlington Town Moderator
published June 9, 2023; updated June 14, 2023

The following is a list of areas where documentation of existing and/or new policies, guidelines, or preparations may allow Town Meeting to run more smoothly or help participants better understand what to expect. It may not be feasible to address documentation for all areas due to prioritization or feasibility. In some cases, it may be necessary to create a written record of existing practices or to make them more explicit; in other cases, it may be necessary to create new practices altogether.

Additional ideas may be emailed to gchristiana@town.arlington.ma.us for consideration.

Preparations
- Criteria and/or process for determining whether to convene TM in person vs remotely
- Preparations for network outage
    - establish plan for network outages when meeting in person: mobile hotspots for presentation computer and Moderator's computer, local backups of content needed to run the meeting
- Line-up of National Anthem performances
    - call for performers in advance
    - assemble contact list for school choirs and other groups
- Preparation for bake sales during Town Meeting
    - assemble contact list for school groups who might be interested in participating
    - see Bake Sale FAQ from HHS
- Ensure vote language is up to date
    - Prevent repeat of Article 64 where vote language was updated at a board/committee meeting but not reflected in materials published to Town Meeting

Procedures
- Rules for Budget Amendments (mainly Town Budgets and Capital Budget)
    - clarify limitations on amendments, e.g. amendments allowed to top-line budget numbers, but not line items, sub-budgets, or individual staff positions
- Clarify 48-hour rule for amendments and substitute motions
    - initial submissions required 2 business days in advance
    - revisions allowed based on Moderator feedback
    - clarify whether the rule applies to other types of motions, e.g. motion to divide, referral to committee, etc
- Consent Agenda
    - Criteria for Articles to be included in (and held from) the Consent Agenda
        - threshold for holding an Article
        - whether Articles can be held in advance
        - for comparison, see Lexington's guidelines:

- https://lexingtonma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/5196/Consent-Agenda-with-Article-Descriptions-PDF
- excerpt: "if 10 Town Meeting members oppose the inclusion of any proposed consent agenda Article that Article/Motion will be removed from the list"
  - Construction of Consent Agenda to split Legislative Articles into their own part (implemented at 2023 ATM)
    - some TMMs need to recuse themselves from voting on Articles relating to legislation presented to the State Legislature
    - splitting the Legislative Articles into their own part of the Consent Agenda allows those TMMs to vote on the non-legislative Consent Agenda Articles

Speaking and Presenting

- Guidelines for speakers at TM
  - Introducing oneself as a speaker:
    - TMMs: name and precinct
    - Town committee members: name and committee membership
    - Town staff: name and office/title
    - Town residents: name and street address
    - non-residents: name and residency or affiliation
  - Invited speakers
    - guidelines / FAQ for speakers so they know what to expect
    - if minors intend to speak, policy for acquiring permission from parent/guardian(s) in advance
- Guidelines for presentations at TM
  - video allowed if relevant, e.g. drone aerial footage, but no spoken audio
  - 16x9 widescreen format
  - font guidelines for legibility
  - for comparison, see Lexington's guidelines: https://www.lexingtonma.gov/579/Creating-Presentations-for-Town-Meeting

Printed Materials

- Official materials
  - Deadlines for publishing major board/committee reports ahead of Town Meeting to allow time for inclusion in the printed and distributed Town Meeting packet
  - Town offices (e.g. Clerk or Select Board) print official materials such as all approved amendments and substitute motions, as well as official reports (for a subset of committees and boards)
- Unofficial materials
  - TMMs can print their own copies for distribution via a table at or near TMM check-in
  - no printed materials distributed on seats

TMM Feedback and Suggestions

- Holding articles from Consent Agenda
  - concerned that a single member holding several articles, and then not speaking on them, is an abuse of power and waste of the meeting's time
  - would like to place requirements of those holding articles:
    - their name announced and recorded
    - when debating the article, the holder should explain to the meeting why it was held
    - someone who holds a 'No Action' article should have to have a substitute motion ready right then
- Sequencing of multiple amendments
  - Town Meeting Time, on pg. 94:"Not more than one primary and one secondary amendment may be pending at one time."
  - considering amendments as specified in TMT would be more clear, but could extend debate significantly
- Technology for requesting to speak
  - using the same button to request to speak and to cancel the request is error prone, not to mention confusion about switching modes between speaking and voting
  - mobile app / wifi-based solutions like OTI would like to use in the future are problematic, e.g. based on experience with large classrooms using apps like iClicker (https://www.iclicker.com/), participants often have the following issues: "I can't download the app", "I can't log into the wifi", "I got kicked off the wifi", "I forgot my cell phone; how are you going to count my vote?", "I use an unsupported operating system"
- Speaker queue management (irrespective of technology)
  - once someone speaks to an article, they shouldn't get to speak again to **any article** until and unless no one who has not yet spoken at The Town Meeting is ahead of them on that speakers list
  - when someone "moves the question" that should count as having spoken
  - should keep track of who's spoken on an article
  - preserve speaker queue when debate is interrupted by adjournment and resumed another night
  - if a recap is warranted after debate is interrupted by adjournment, it would be best for Moderator to provide it, possibly with help from a pertinent committee chair
- Termination of Debate
  - concerned about overuse of the motion and that debate may be terminated prematurely given lots of speakers in the queue
  - wants Moderator to instruct TM on when the motion is appropriate
- TM start time
  - feels that 11pm is too late for adjourning TM each night
  - maybe start earlier, 7 or 7:30pm
  - in last TM survey, 61% of respondents preferred a start time earlier than 8pm
  - STM in the Fall or Winter provides an opportunity to change the start time:
    - will get darker earlier
    - unlike ATM opening start time, STM start time not specified in Town Bylaws