



Time	7:30 PM
Place	Acton Town Hall, 472 Main Street, Room 9
Members Present	Jodi Bromberg; Ann Chang; Pat Clifford; Ann Corcoran; Mark Hald; Xuan Kong; Steve Noone; Elizabeth Osche; Amy Reimann; Alma Sandman
Members Absent	Ray Yacouby

Committee Chair Steve Noone opened the meeting at 7:31 PM

1. Public Participation

Bonnie Lobel, speaking as an individual and not a Council on Aging member, is concerned that Town Meeting is scheduled when pavement can be slippery and many seniors do not drive at night. It has been suggested that Town Meetings take place on weekends. In 1972, the Acton Area League of Women Voters (LWV) questionnaire received 242 responses. 70% said they would attend a Town Meeting if held on Saturday and 59% said they would attend if held on a Sunday. There is support for weekend Town Meetings. Please consider the hardship for seniors to attend at night and in winter.

Terra Friedrichs has made inquiries of former Town Moderators whether there was anything preventing a town from passing a bylaw requiring Town Meetings end at 10:30 PM. She indicated their responses were that there was nothing preventing that.

2. Transportation: Town Manager to Discuss Transportation and Thoughts on Improving Town Meeting

Town Manager John Mangiaratti introduced himself and discussed his experience with Town Meetings in his previous communities. Attending Town Meeting with children is challenging. As a resident of Westford which holds an all-day Saturday Annual Town Meeting, he has found he might only be able to attend for an hour. In his experience, he has found that if people are passionate about an issue, they will find a way to attend.

Acton has an organized transportation program facing challenges, and we look forward to the Committee's feedback, particularly with scheduling and providing more realistic expectations.

We have been using social media and other channels to reach people, such as Facebook, Twitter and a Municipal Monthly newsletter. We have about 1,000 subscribers on the web, just under a thousand on Facebook.



Questions and Answers

Q: Was there enough capacity on the busses used at our Town Meetings?

A: Not aware of any issues; we can operate four to five busses.

Q: People wish to watch Town Meeting from home in order to time their arrival to vote on a subject of interest. By that time, parking can be an issue. Would we consider operating a shuttle bus from the Haartz or St. Elizabeth's church parking lots?

A: We successfully tested this as an option at the December 2018 Special Town Meeting. It is possible we could promote it for upcoming Town Meetings.

Q: Did Westford attempt to close down other local events in favor of increasing Town Meeting attendance?

A: Not aware of such efforts, however, the date of Westford's Town Meeting has shifted.

General Committee Comments

- Have the Town engage a marketing firm, including search engine optimization.
- There can be barriers to attending Town Meeting, such as night driving, child care or financial concerns. A soccer game is optional; the risk of driving in adverse conditions is not optional.
- In past years, Annual Town Meetings continued for four nights. Could a multi-day Town Meeting be consolidated to one all-day meeting?
- The committee has discussed recommending increasing the number of articles placed on a Consent calendar.
- We could recommend dividing the Annual Warrant into two town meetings, one taking place in the fall.
- Presentations could be provided in some format ahead of Town Meeting. The LWV discusses the articles ahead of Town Meeting. The Town Manager has hosted videos on ActonTV.
- The Warrant itself is in good shape with all recommendations, generally good summaries including contact information for questions.

General Public Comments

- Would like to see more advertising of Town Meetings in general, as opposed to promoting particular articles.

3. Babysitting: Former School Committee Chair Kristina Rychlik to discuss Babysitting Arrangements and Thoughts on Improving Town Meeting

Kristina Rychlik introduced herself and described the genesis of the program, intended to make it easier for those with challenges to attend Town Meetings, get a sense of the process and vote on the budgets. At the request of then-School Superintendent Steve Mills, it began in 2014, which was the first Regional School budget vote to take place after the full regionalization of Acton and



Boxborough kindergarten through grade 12 schools and the first year it was agreed that the town and school budgets would be at the beginning of the first night of Town Meeting. A broad voter education plan was formulated; the babysitting was one part of that and the PTOs agreed to run the program; however, the program incurred negative feedback from a local citizens' group as trying to bribe people for their votes. Over the years the program operated, it has averaged between 20 and 30 children taking part and was sponsored by the LWV, the PTOs, the town and the ABEA. Last year, there were no sign-ups for the second night of Town Meeting, so it was cancelled. It was found that the service was occasionally used by parents who then went out to dinner, or even sat across the hall, not checking into Town Meeting. Last year the LWV took over running the program after the former PTO leader in charge could not find someone to take over, and the same groups sponsored it.

The original idea was to see as many town and school votes as possible take place by 9 PM, the then-recommendation of the LWV. The plan was designed in the best way it was determined possible to implement. The Schools donate the physical space, the teachers donate their time. Mrs. Rychlik and the LWV donated movies, games and gift cards for the volunteer teachers. It was not designed to meet every need of every family nor cover the full hours and time to vote on every article presented at Town Meeting.

Suggestions for Improvements to Town Meeting

- Hearing from the same people saying the same thing too often.
- Misinformation is difficult to correct. With regard to a presenter at Town Meeting, attempting to make a correction requires getting into a microphone line and hope they are recognized to make a comment. Social media is not always helpful; there can be considerable misinformation which is very difficult to correct. While not necessarily a Town Meeting matter, it can work against our efforts.

Questions and Answers

Q: Could electronic voting clickers provide for parents to sit in another room with kids?

A: Yes, with sufficient staff and equipment.

Q: Is there an example of another town providing babysitting?

A: Concord's recreation department provides babysitting staffed by nurses. It requires sign-up, and runs the entire Town Meeting period. They do not provide infant care.

4. Town Moderator to discuss Thoughts on Improving Town Meeting

Town Moderator Jo-Ann Berry introduced herself to the Committee. She believes in democracy and feels Town Meeting needs to be a fair and efficient use of people's time. She supports the use of time limits, and will continue their usage at Town Meeting. She would like the agenda of Town Meeting to be as precise as possible, however, it is within the Members' right to extend debate. We will use parliamentary procedure to limit debate to times certain unless voted to extend.



Suggestions for Improvements to Town Meeting

- Providing additional and more clear information ahead of the meeting with the intent of reaching as many as possible, however possible.
- Hopefully people will feel that if the Town Meeting was run fairly, they will return to future Town Meetings.

Questions and Answers

Q: Would you hold public hearings with someone promoting articles, someone that could answer questions as part of a dialog?

A: I am willing, but it will add to the stream of work for those involved. It is worth a try to see if it generates more interest. The LWV helps with that.

Public Comment

Ms. Friedrichs likes the idea of pre-polling, but by an entity without a stake in the outcome of the article. It's meant to just get a sense of what is controversial or not.

5. Town Meeting Attendance Data Analysis

The Town Clerk provided public record Town Meeting attendance data since 2016 to the Committee which was analyzed by Mr. Noone. He reviewed and provided the Committee his analysis. It was noted there is an attendance drop on the second evening of an Annual Town Meeting. Controversial topics at a Special Town Meeting draw much larger crowds. An Annual Town Meeting attracts less than 3% of voters while a Special Town Meeting rises to 7%. The analysis was reviewed with the question, "How many individuals came to all eight of the last sessions?" Just 38 people attended every one of these sessions.

It was asked if there is data that breaks down attendance by demographics, for example, by age and by race. Race data is not collected, however, age (by year) could potentially be cross-referenced with Census data.

Xuan does not feel race is a factor. He tries to engage Chinese community, but they don't have a passion for Town Meeting unless there is an issue near and dear to them. The Town has recently been providing language translations for some or all article summaries.

The Committee discussed the placement of articles in the Warrant, for example, zoning is often toward the end of Town Meeting, yet can have significant impact on people and property. Town meeting is an opportunity to participate in democracy, to see how laws are made. How can Town Meeting be made more interactive and interesting, and thus increase participation, and not seen as an onerous burden.



6. Next Steps

A. Poll Questions

Xuan Kong has extensive experience in polling, and will drive this task. He is looking for a couple other people to assist. We need to decide the questions we want to ask. Please think about this over the next weeks, and send your question ideas to Steve Noone, who in turn will send to Xuan. An online poll is preferred.

B. Public Outreach

Thoughts on public outreach channels were discussed. Ideas included:

- Beacon newspaper
- PTSO groups
- Neighborhood groups
- ActonTV
- Memorial & Citizens' Libraries
- Human Services & Senior Center
- Handout at upcoming Special Town Meeting
- Insert an advertisement in the Special Town Meeting Warrant

C. Public Hearing

There will be an invitation to the public to attend public forums held by the Committee, one on a weekend day and one in the evening. These will be posted Committee meetings. The consensus was the daytime meeting on Saturday, November 2 in Town Hall Room 204, and the evening meeting on Wednesday, December 4 which is also our regularly-scheduled meeting day & time. We will place an announcement in the Municipal Monthly newsletter and on ActonTV.

7. Committee Business

A. Approval of Minutes

It was moved, seconded and unanimously voted to approve the Minutes of the September 4, 2019 meeting.

It was moved, seconded and unanimously voted to adjourn the meeting at 9:19 PM.

Documents and Exhibits Used During this Meeting

1. Draft Minutes of the September 4, 2019 meeting
2. Analysis of Town Meeting attendance
3. Massachusetts Municipal Association article regarding Use of Technology

Respectfully Submitted,
Mark Hald, Clerk