

Wayland Town Meeting Procedures Committee
Final Report
July 26, 2010

The Wayland Town Meeting Procedures Committee (the Committee) hereby submits this final report of its activities, and its recommendations, to the Board of Selectmen (the Board).¹

This report should be read in conjunction with the Interim Report of the Town Meeting Procedures Committee (the Interim Report) submitted to the Selectmen on April 26, 2010, and attached hereto as Attachment 1. Material or topics discussed in the Interim Report will be repeated here only to provide context.

1. Establishment

The Committee was established by Resolution of the Board and with the collaboration of the Moderator on January 11, 2010. The initial charge to the Board is set out in the Interim Report. In order to assist the Committee in its initial work, a significant amount of material was compiled and made available prior to the first meeting. That material is included herewith as Attachment 2.

The Committee met weekly beginning February 25th, until the commencement of Town Meeting (Town Meeting, or the Meeting) on May 13th, then suspended activity for the duration of the Town Meeting. At the conclusion of the Meeting the Committee resumed its weekly meetings in open session beginning May 27th (see Attachment 3). Prior to resuming its meeting schedule, a public hearing was duly noticed, including newspaper and Town Meeting announcement, for June 2nd at which several members of the public attended and made comments (see Attachment 3 Section 12).

2. Focus of the Committee

The focus of the Committee's activities can be generally broken into two sections: first, a focus on three articles submitted for Town Meeting; second, a focus on general improvements to the town meeting experience.

- a) Pre-Town Meeting: The Committee's initial focus was on three articles submitted for consideration at the Spring 2010 Town Meeting, which commenced on May 13, 2010. A full discussion of the Committee's actions and determinations regarding those articles is set out in the Interim Report. All three articles were considered and acted on at a session of the Town Meeting held on Wednesday May 19th. The results were as follows:

¹ Much of this report will consist of reference to three attachments and numbered sections supporting two of those attachments. The attachments are: the Interim Report of the Committee; the material compiled for the Committee's use prior to its first meeting; and, the minutes of meetings along with related material received and considered by the Committee. The latter two attachments each have separately numbered sections that will be referenced throughout this Report.

(i) Article 21 - Official Ballot: This article was defeated by a vote of 90 in favor to 167 opposed.

(ii) Article 22 - Electronic Voting: This article was passed for a one year pilot test after the principal sponsor was able to secure a free pilot program from Options Technology for the spring 2011 Town Meeting, and revised the Article accordingly. The Article passed on a voice vote.

(iii) Article 23 - Town Web Site. This article was modified by the principal sponsor to be a web site not under the control of the town, but having the support of the town. It was nevertheless defeated by a voice vote.

b) Post - Town Meeting: After the conclusion of the Town Meeting, the Committee met several times to consider various ideas to enhance the Town Meeting experience and make the meeting function more efficiently. The ideas that the committee considered came from a variety of sources including:

- (i) Suggestions generated by the Town Meeting Study Committee formed in 2005, and the response to those suggestions by the moderator – see Attachment 2, Section 6
- (ii) Suggestions received in a suggestion box that was set up at the Town Meeting – see Attachment 3 Section 10
- (iii) Practices from other town meetings researched by a member of the Committee – see Attachment 3 Section 10
- (iv) Suggestions made by individuals at the June 2nd public hearing held after the Town Meeting – see Attachment 3, Section 11.
- (v) Suggestions developed by committee members as a result of research, study, or deliberations – see Attachment 3, Section 12.

3. Activities and Recommendations:

Pre-Town Meeting Activities

The Committee's principal pre-Town Meeting activities as it focused on the three articles have been fully discussed in the Interim Report.

While focusing on the three Articles the Committee did from time to time discuss issues of more general application to improve the efficiency and experience of town meeting. While several ideas were discussed, the Committee took no action. By general agreement, ideas for the improvement of town meeting were postponed until after the Town Meeting. Nevertheless, prior

to Town Meeting and in response to a recommendation of the Committee, the Chairman, acting in his capacity as Moderator, established a 7-person committee originally to be known as the Town Meeting Auxiliary Committee “to consider proposals to make Town Meeting more comfortable and pleasant.” See Attachment 3 Section 9.

Post Town Meeting Activities

Having obtained the above referenced input from others and undertaken its own discussion and consideration, the Committee members each identified 5 improvements which each member felt could be implemented in the short term and 5 improvements that could be implemented in the longer term. It was recognized that there would be overlap in the individual recommendations as neither time frame was given precise definition.

All ideas submitted by the members were initially summarized and plotted on a table and then a further summary was made ranking those proposals that appeared most often among the various lists, see Attachment 3 Section 13.

Recommendations

As a result of discussion of the most frequently suggested improvements, the Committee reached consensus on the following recommended improvements to town meeting:

- Count Votes More Efficiently – it was agreed that if/when electronic voting is implemented, this issue becomes moot because there will be no need for tellers on standing counted votes. However, if the town does not approve electronic voting, improvements need to be made to the role and activities of the Tellers who count the votes. Such improvements would include:
 - (i) Tellers should be identified and trained before the meeting.
 - (ii) A sufficient number of Tellers should be available, so that there will be trained Tellers for every counted vote.
 - (iii) Seating sections should be clearly marked and the experience of the tellers should be considered when assigning sections to count.
 - (iv) Key votes should be anticipated and tellers ready as soon as the decision is made to have a standing counted vote.

- Institution of a Consent Calendar – The Committee recommends that a Consent Calendar be instituted. A Consent Calendar would allow one or more articles which are determined by the Selectmen in consultation with the Moderator to be non-controversial or less controversial, to be handled in one motion. This is not a unique idea, and several factors were considered including:
 - (i) Initially only a small number of non-controversial articles should be included.

- (ii) Articles in the Consent Calendar should be comprehensively discussed in the Warrant.
- (iii) Removal of articles from the Consent Calendar shall require an objection by 10 voters.
- (iv) A change to the Bylaws will be necessary.

- Article Advocates – Many articles brought before the Meeting could be better prepared and presented, especially insofar as responding to questions that may come up regarding the article. The idea of a designated article advocate was discussed. The Committee feels that every Board and every petitioner bringing an article before the Meeting should appoint a designated advocate who will be responsible for not only presenting, but also answering questions on that article at Town Meeting.

The Finance Committee and the Selectmen should encourage the identification of one or more principal advocate(s) when preparing comments on an article and when making the decision to include an article in the warrant.

- Appointment of an Assistant to the Moderator - The Moderator should have the authority, but not the duty, to appoint an Assistant to the Moderator who shall serve at the will and pleasure of and have no separate authority from the Moderator. Among the activities that could be undertaken by the Assistant to the Moderator:

- (i) Select candidates who may serve as tellers to help the Moderator count the votes, and train and organize the tellers appointed by the Moderator to count the votes;
- (ii) Act as a resource and ombudsman for citizens who may want to ask questions or seek guidance on procedure; and,
- (iii) Generally function to take some of the burden off of the Moderator.

- Appointment of a Standing Town Meeting Committee – The Chair of the Committee in his capacity as Moderator, established the previously referenced Town Meeting Advisory Committee consisting of seven members, the Chair and one member of each of the following subcommittees along with a member of the Board of Selectmen:

1. The Electronic Voting Implementation subcommittee shall consider how best to implement the electronic voting system at the 2011 Town Meeting approved by the voters at the 2010 Town Meeting, to evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of that system, to assess the cost effectiveness of such systems, and to recommend specifications and procedures for use of such a system, in the event that the Town shall vote to finance electronic voting in the future.

2. The Town Meeting Facilities subcommittee shall consider how to make Wayland's town meeting venues more effective, convenient and comfortable for those who attend, whether we use the Field House, the auditorium at the Middle School or otherwise. The subcommittee shall make every effort to persuade those with the funds needed to improve the facilities at town meeting to invest in better seating, lighting, audio and video equipment to help the voters understand the issues presented at town meeting and to follow the proceedings as they develop in order to improve the quality of our legislative process. The subcommittee shall also find ways to arrange and finance the provision of babysitting services, food and beverages as well other amenities to encourage voters to attend town meetings by making those meetings more comfortable, pleasant and user friendly.

3. The Town Meeting Procedures Subcommittee shall monitor how our town meetings are doing, study and consider the issues identified in the Final Report of the 2010 Town Meeting Procedures Review Committee, which are recommended for further study, as well as other issues that may be brought to the attention of the subcommittee from time to time.

The Town Meeting Advisory Committee, its subcommittees and members shall serve at the pleasure of the Moderator.

- **Limitation on Debate** – Current rules allow up to 20 minutes of initial presentation, followed by 3 minutes per speaker for a total of 60 minutes, which includes amendments, questions and other procedural matters. The Committee felt that there should be some limitation on the time allotted for debate, but lacked quantitative information about the time spent on the different factors. The Committee therefore requests that the Town Meeting Advisory Committee look into this, quantify the various factors and make a recommendation. Such consideration should also include the timing and availability of the Motion to Terminate Debate.
- **Sunday Session** –The Committee recommends that one session of the Annual Town meeting be commenced on Sunday afternoon but limited to three hours, or until adjourned pursuant to section E 2 of the *Moderators Rules and Regulations Governing Wayland Town Meeting*.
- **Improved Audio-Visual Capability** – The Committee recommends that audio visual capability be improved in order to allow display of status of the matter under consideration, maps, plans, and graphics, as well as the language of some proposed amendments. However the Committee recognizes several constraints to implementation including the structure of the High School Field House (the normal site of the Meeting), the financial feasibility and the need to control additional time that this may engender. The Committee feels that this needs to be reviewed by the TMA Committee with particular attention to the financial questions including the acceptability of commercial advertising to defray any extra costs.
- **Clarify and Limit Reconsideration** – The availability of and procedures for reconsideration has perplexed many people and caused concern about the value of a vote once taken. The Committee recognizes that there is a need for a reconsideration procedure. The

current procedure calls for disclosure of “significant new information to the meeting,” delay until after all other articles are considered and a 2/3 vote in order to undertake the reconsideration. The Committee felt that the phrase “significant new information,” the existence of which is currently a determination of the Moderator, should be better defined.

- Set Town Meeting Dates a Year in Advance – After discussion the Committee could see no great advantage in this and noted a number of difficulties. While the date of Town Meeting should be publicized as soon as reasonably possible, that date is affected by several factors and a full year in advance is often impossible.
- Control of the Procedural Microphone – Abuse of the Procedural Microphone is perceived as a problem, but the Committee lacked factual or quantitative analysis to document such abuse or make recommendations. The TMA Committee needs to look at this and gather more facts about the use of the Procedural Microphone and ways that use could be limited or expedited to increase the efficiency of the meeting.
- The Pro and Con microphones should each contain a visible card that tells the speaker to address all comments to the Moderator, and to state their name and address before commencing their remarks.

Issues Identified Without Recommendation:

The Committee also identified a number of issues regarding town meeting that deserve attention, but for reasons of time did not pursue and therefore makes no recommendation. Those issues include:

1. To the extent possible introductory material should be trimmed in order to facilitate getting into the deliberation that is the purpose of Town Meeting;
2. Provide More comfortable chairs, wheelchair seating;
3. Provide Organized child care;
4. Provide a Snack bar;
5. Set a schedule of items for each night of town meeting;
6. Hold town meeting in the Auditorium instead of in the Field House;
7. Spread out the town meeting, e.g. consecutive Mondays;
8. Hold only one town meeting per year;
9. Include more information on budget items in the Warrant;
10. Enforce drop-dead date for article submission;
11. Provide more effective, but limited in frequency, warrant hearings & town board meetings where public can get questions answered regarding warrant articles
12. Disclose Conflict of Interest;
13. Regarding voting on the budget: identify “hold-out” items, vote on Budget excluding “hold-out” items, then take up each “hold-out” item; and,
14. Have Finance Committee give a brief explanation of the number of hearings/meetings they had on each article and the major reasons why they voted for/against an article

4. Conclusion

In concluding this study of Wayland's Town Meeting procedures the Committee believes that the open Town Meeting has served Wayland well for many years and should be preserved. As with all institutions, constant improvement is required, and as a political institution it must evolve to reflect the times and the changing needs of the citizens of Wayland. The suggestions that the Committee has made are intended to maintain the constant improvement to keep this institution vital.

The Committee expresses its thanks to a number of people and groups including the Board of Selectmen, the previous Committee(s) that studied Town Meeting, the Town Administrator and his staff who provided support particularly at the outset and the people of Wayland who participated in the work of the Committee by supplying comments and suggestions, and by attending the Committee's public hearings.

WAYLAND TOWN MEETING PROCEDURES COMMITTEE

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