

Minutes of Moderator's Committee on Virtual Town Meeting
March 25, 2020, 7:30pm
Meeting held over Zoom

Members Attending: Dennis Doughty, Ben Franco, Karim Martin, Tracy Schroeder, Mike Sandman

Members of the Public: Meredith Mooney, David Pollak, Janice Kahn, Paula Friedman, David-Marc Goldstein, Robert Lepson, Claire Stampfer, Kim Smith, Jennifer Dopazo Gilbert, Harry Friedman, Carlos Ridruejo, Jennie, Jules Milner-Brage, Scott Ananian, Mark Levy, Virginia Bullock, Ann Theis, Alison Steinfield, Joe Viola, William Reyelt, Scott Ananian, Mark Levy, Fred Levitan, Shana Giora-Gorfajn, Nathan Spritz, Dave Gacloch Alison Steinfield, and others who signed in anonymously or cryptically.

Note: After numerous issues with the virtual meeting platform (ironic, no?) the meeting was shifted to a different online location than originally posted. This notice was sent out contemporaneously to the TMMA mailing list and approximately 40 people attended. Moving the meeting in real-time was preferred to canceling outright.

Charter and Nominations

Moderator Gadsby introduced the committee and outlined its responsibilities, which are to plan and execute a strategy for selecting a platform and processes for conducting the upcoming Town Meeting "virtually".

By a unanimous vote Mike Sandman was elected Chair of the committee.

By a unanimous vote Dennis Doughty was elected Secretary of the committee.

Discussion

Prior to the meeting Moderator Gadsby distributed a set of questions to the committee; the meeting involved discussing these points in order.

Participant Technology Issues

Moderator Gadsby stated that there are 248 town meeting members who are all "presumably qualified to participate in a virtual TM. It's clear that not all of them are computer literate or have appropriate access (home internet or platform). What is the process to help people? I.e., how can we help them download the platform and educate them on its use?"

The committee discussed a range of options. Ms. Schroeder stated that "as long as the person has a reasonably current device that can run a current browser. Outliers could be assisted by the Town's IT department or perhaps we could send a small number of people a loaner device." Mr. Doughty observed that the platforms under consideration support dialing in on a voice line so the possibility exists that some participants could be distributed materials in advance and participate entirely by phone. In addition, the committee discussed whether video from the meeting could be distributed over BIG's cable feed, which is something the Select Board is attempting to do with its meetings.

The committee agreed to produce a "needs assessment" and for members to evaluate individual platforms with respect to the assessment. The committee also recommends doing precinct-by-

precinct meetings as a “dry run” so that Town Meeting members in each precinct become comfortable with the selected tools.

How to handle the “hopelessly uneducable”

Moderator Gadsby stated that no matter what, there will be some people who will essentially be “illiterate” with respect to the technology, through lack of access or other limitations. At each Town Meeting there are people for whom we make physical accommodations. Thus, the question arises how to accommodate those people for this virtual Town Meeting. Mr. Gadsby raised the possibility of using the Town Meeting auditorium for a limited number of people who are not online.

The committee raised a number of issues which would arise. How would the auditorium be staffed; how would social distancing be preserved; how would the attendees be checked in; and, most importantly, how would voting be achieved with a combination of online and offline voting. Mr. Gadsby suggested that in the worst case scenario, in which he would read the roll for each vote, the people in person would simply speak up. In this scenario, the Moderator would hold Town Meeting as usual in the auditorium but most people would participate remotely.

Platform Selection

The committee debated the pros and cons of the two primary platforms. WebEx is the preferred videoconferencing platform used by the Town. Members of the committee who have used both platforms tend to prefer Zoom. (Mr. Sandman pointed out this was especially true for the Advisory Committee, which conducted a side-by-side evaluation a few weeks ago in which Zoom was the clear winner.)

The committee agreed to run a set of controlled experiments, using WebEx in the way the IT department suggests, in order to assess their appropriateness. The committee created a set of criteria, listed below, to use in this assessment.

Process Issues

Moderator Gadsby proposed that a virtual Town Meeting would be full of compromises. Few questions “from the floor,” for example. He stated that he would likely eliminate the ability of Town Meeting members to ask non-financial questions of department heads. He also indicated that he was considering restricting comment to those who have signed up in advance.

As the “chat” function of the Zoom platform was heavily used during this committee meeting, the committee was open to the idea of how to incorporate it into Town Meeting. The suggestion which received the most attention was to appoint one or two people, most likely from the Advisory Committee, to monitor the chat in real time, summarize the feedback, extract important comments, and funnel them to the Moderator, who could choose to recognize individual members. The committee also recommended having one or two people to provide real-time IT support for the platform.

The committee intends to produce guidelines for participation, which would include rules such as “you must not use aliases while logged into the meeting.”

Voting issues

The majority of the committee was in favor of using electronic voting, provided by the videoconferencing platforms, as the platform for voting at Town Meeting. The important criteria are that whatever underlying platform is chosen, the participants need to trust it. This means being able to post the votes quickly so they can be audited. (No later than the next day.) Ideally members would be able to see the votes in real time; however, this was not considered a make-or-break requirement.

The fallback is clearly that the Moderator reads through the names for a recorded voice vote. The committee believes this would be unwieldy at best and would prefer to find acceptable alternatives.

Legal and Timing Issues

The Moderator informed the committee of some of the legal considerations around holding and scheduling the meeting. Whatever we do in a “remote” Town Meeting is not something that is currently authorized, so it will need ratification by the legislature, which may not happen swiftly. In addition, the Select Board will likely need to call a special meeting within the annual meeting to authorize the appropriate home rule legislation.

Ideally the Town Meeting will happen before the end of the Fiscal Year so the budget can be approved. The Moderator is likely to postpone the Town Meeting to mid-to-late June.

Next Steps

The committee produced a list of requirements for a virtual Town Meeting and a set of acceptance criteria for a videoconferencing platform.

Town Meeting / Process

- The public must be able to view the meeting
- New Town Meeting members must be sworn in somehow
- Any electronic voting must be able to exclude the public.
- Chat must be monitored in real-time for relevant comments, points of order, etc.
- The technology infrastructure must have adequate monitoring and support

Platform Selection

- Ability to mute everyone except the speaker
- Recorded voting option that inspires confidence, can be posted and managed effectively
- Scalable well beyond the 248 town meeting members and handle a wide diversity of bandwidth (and work on any handheld platform)
- Partition the audience somehow
- Deal with zoombombing / what registration features are available

The chair agreed to drive a process to evaluate the two primary platforms under consideration, WebEx and Zoom, with respect to the above criteria, and to hold the next meeting as a WebEx meeting by way of comparison.

The meeting adjourned at 9:30 pm.

The chat transcript from the Zoom meeting is attached.

Chat Transcript

19:56:12 From Jules Milner-Brage : From Dennis Doughty to Everyone:
(07:46 PM): Oh maybe that could be
The committee is Mike [Sandman], me [Dennis Doughty], Tracy Schroeder, Karim
Matin, Ben Franco (+ Sandy [Gadsby])

20:08:00 From Jules Milner-Brage : A personal observation about the BIG
YouTube-style of interaction, with 'community 'input via the 'chat 'feature:
It requires stringent discipline on the part of the meeting MC to make sure
that chat input is actually heard.

20:08:33 From Jules Milner-Brage : (That is, heard *and considered* in a
manner that is timely with respect to the meeting proceedings.)

20:08:48 From C. Scott Ananian : zoom actually has a web client. it is
usually configured to push people to the app.

20:09:27 From C. Scott Ananian : there's a setting in the zoom host
configuration to show the web link before pushing you to the app.

20:12:01 From C. Scott Ananian : [https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-
us/articles/115005666383-Show-a-Join-from-your-browser-Link](https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/115005666383-Show-a-Join-from-your-browser-Link)

20:18:11 From Shanna Giora-Gorfajn : Might I suggest precinct-by-precinct
Zoom breakout rooms for roll-call votes?

20:20:01 From claire : I think that you can click on participants to
arrange a vote

20:20:28 From Jules Milner-Brage : [https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-
us/articles/213756303-Polling-for-Meetings](https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/213756303-Polling-for-Meetings)

20:23:33 From Nathan : How would we swear in 1/3 of Town Meeting Members?

20:25:19 From Jules Milner-Brage : One issue with WebEx seems to be that
the quality of the client experience is poor and/or non-uniform across
platforms.

20:25:27 From Fred Levitan : zoom is more user friendly and has a better
quality than WebEx

20:25:35 From Jules Milner-Brage : (I.e., missing features in some
clients.)

20:33:11 From C. Scott Ananian : I do worry about scaling to 200+
participants. It will be hard to test this w/o getting 200 people together
to try it.

20:34:27 From Tracy Schroeder : Some features are reduced over 200,
particularly breakout groups, at least in Zoom

20:37:01 From Jules Milner-Brage : It seems like there should still be
some kind of back-channel means for communication. These textual chat
comments could be it. But it needs to be attended to contemporaneously with
the meeting proceedings.

20:38:49 From Jules Milner-Brage : Hand-raising doe not appear to be
uniformly supported across platforms via WebEx!

20:38:53 From Jules Milner-Brage : (does not)

20:44:09 From marklevy : MARK LEVYP7

20:44:39 From Nathan : That creates a problem for the last vote of the
meeting. We usually dissolve immediately thereafter and votes cannot be
changed after TM is adjourned.

20:44:42 From Dennis Doughty : :)

20:46:03 From marklevy : IS THERE A WAY OF RECORDING THE VOTING SO THERE
IS AN AUDIT TRAIL TO ENSURE ACCURACY OF THE ROLL CALL VOTE?

20:47:00 From Jules Milner-Brage : Mark Levy: In Zoom, e.g., see:
<https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/213756303-Polling-for-Meetings>

20:48:20 From Jules Milner-Brage : (See, esp., the material under the
heading, "Downloading a Report of Poll Results.")

20:57:19 From claire : can each TMM sign in with a unique I.d. that
allows them to vote?

20:59:11 From Tracy Schroeder : they could

21:00:56 From Carlos Ridruejo : in Zoom: enabling a cohost: The co-host feature allows you to share hosting privileges with another user in a meeting or webinar. This can be useful to allow another user to manage the administrative side of the meeting, such as muting participants or starting/stopping the recording.

21:01:17 From Shanna Giora-Gorfajn : Hand-raising feature?

21:01:47 From Dennis Doughty : Certainly zoom has that.

21:01:57 From Tracy Schroeder : yes it does

21:04:05 From marklevy : And platform has to support a wide variety of users, skilled, not skilled and merely baffled. User friendly counts big time, training all members in basics counts. Poorly handled participation by TMMs would kill any public confidence in the Town Meeting's outcomes.

21:05:57 From marklevy : I can't find the handwaving control on this version of Zoom - Mac os. Can anyone clue me in?

21:06:23 From Dennis Doughty : View participants and click "raise hand"

21:06:39 From Shanna Giora-Gorfajn : Over the past couple of weeks, my son's school (Maimonides) trained up faculty (with a wide range of ages and tech-comfort) on Zoom in just a couple of days, and then the kids seemed to adapt to it very quickly as well.

21:07:14 From NanPR : From Ernie Frey: On Swearing in, could the swearing in be accomplished by mail, or by a form that might be able to be signed at Town Hall?

21:10:05 From Ben Birnbaum : How do we accommodate the slide and visual presentations that are certain to accompany the Newbury discussion?

21:10:21 From Tracy Schroeder : they can be presented via screensharing

21:10:36 From Fred Levitan : we can share a screen in zoom

21:10:52 From Jennifer Dopazo Gilbert : Ben is correct

21:11:09 From Carlos Ridruejo : correct. 2 options.

21:11:39 From Jennifer Dopazo Gilbert : If the 125 Holland zoning fails then there would be a cash payment to the Housing Trust

21:12:54 From Alison Steinfeld : We will work to consolidate Warrant Articles, but can't be combined under one vote. Planning and Town Counsel will get back to Sandy

21:13:38 From Tracy Schroeder : requirement is perhaps instead ability to limit who can screenshare

21:13:52 From Dave Gacioch : Does Zoom not have a setting that prevents those on mute from sharing their screens?

21:14:18 From Tracy Schroeder : probably does, I just haven't personally looked at that

21:14:35 From Ben Franco : yes, it does.

21:15:34 From Ben Franco : It also has the ability to place people in waiting rooms and only admit "credentialed" meeting participants.

21:18:45 From marklevy : Need 2 sets of requirements. Must have and would like to have if possible. Would be good if requirement list was circulated to full committee before fleshing out is finished.