

MEMO

DT: September 17, 2020
TO: Selectboard
FR: Dan Silverman, Town Moderator
RE: Post-Town Meeting comments
CC: Maria Broadbent, Town Administrator
Mike Trovato, Assistant Town Administrator
Courtney Butler, Executive Assistant
Jennifer Congel, Town Clerk

Last Saturday's historic outdoor session of our Annual Town Meeting was a success. A truly cooperative effort among town staff who comprised the planning task force made sure that the meeting was as safe and comfortable as could be, given the challenges. And a team of volunteers helped manage the meeting so that all voters could participate fully in debate.

As per past practice, here are my thoughts following the meeting.

Warrant:

1. The organization of the warrant by general subject matter is good and should continue.
2. The statements of the tax effect of financial proposals are helpful information for voters. This information was not included for all proposals, but should be, including the omnibus, capital budgets and enterprise budgets
3. The use of a consent agenda continues to be an effective way to deal with non-controversial articles. Using them for the (usually) non-controversial Community Preservation Committee's appropriations was tried for the first time at this meeting and seemed to meet with no objections. I recommend that we continue to use consent agendas where possible.
4. The confusion engendered by scheduling the override/debt exclusion election before the meeting should have been avoided. Because we were in such an unusual situation, it's understandable that no one was paying attention to the state statute that sets deadlines for elections on contingent questions. The Town could have avoided the scheduling problem by calling a special town meeting **within** the annual meeting just to deal with the contingent questions. This would have given us 90 days from the date of the meeting to have the election. (Town counsel indicated after the fact that their opinion was that a case could be made that the meeting could be considered a special town meeting, but I'm not convinced that either the Attorney General or bond counsel would necessarily agree.) Should a similar situation ever arise again, we should think a bit more creatively about a solution.
5. I repeat my recommendation from last year that the Board send the warrant articles to the relevant Boards and Committees as early as possible and require that the required recommendations be made in time to be printed with the Warrant. Boards or Committees that have an interest in an article should have a chance to see that the article is what they expect. There should not be any surprises to the interested parties when the final Warrant comes out. The use of amendments to achieve an end result that could have been included in the Warrant can raise questions of scope and adds procedural complexity that should be avoided whenever possible.

6. The same recommendation applies to sending the warrant to Town Counsel, who should be involved early in drafting the warrant articles.
7. As Moderator, I appreciate being able to review the Warrant in draft form before it goes to press and having the opportunity to make suggestions that might avoid procedural conflicts. The same early review regarding the motions has been useful and should continue.

Motions:

1. The motions booklet has been a major improvement in the Meeting's procedures. With the actual motions made available to every voter, we've eliminated the need for a verbatim reading of the motions. By making the motions with reference to the wording "as printed in the motions booklet", we've removed most of the tedious recitation while still satisfying the requirements of statutes (and bond counsel, with regard to borrowing authorizations). This practice should continue.
2. Having the Selectboard chair and vice-chair respectively make and second most of the main motions is also a welcome new procedure. I recommend that this become standard practice for future meetings.

Meeting practicalities:

1. It's quite possible that next spring's ATM will still need to be held outdoors, if the pandemic hasn't run its course. To that end, the planning task force met last Thursday for a post-meeting review. We've identified lessons learned and will be better prepared if we have to plan another similar meeting in the future.
2. I recommend that the Board give serious consideration to moving Town Meeting to a Saturday, regardless of where the meeting is held. It seems that voters were less fatigued by the end of the meeting, and it makes it more likely that only one session would be needed to complete the meeting. And, when we move back to the elementary school gym, the school would be happy not to lose the use of the gym for a few days.
3. After the 2019 ATM, we discussed offering childcare during Town Meetings to encourage participation by younger voters and had some preliminary discussions with Ms. Rodman, elementary school principal, about using school facilities for this. While the limitations imposed by the pandemic made it impossible this year, we should continue to plan on providing childcare in the future when we can so more younger parents would be able and encouraged to participate in the meetings.

Input from the Board:

1. If Selectboard members have suggestions for the planning task force, please let us know so we can incorporate them into future planning.