

Minutes
June 11, 2019 Meeting
Town Government Study Committee
Milton, MA

The meeting was called to order by the Chair, Richard Neely, at 7:11 PM in the Baker Conference Room in the basement of Town Hall.

Present were Richard Neely, Marvin Gordon, Kathleen Fagan, Kerry White, John Cronin and Peter Mullin.

The Committee decided to defer consideration of minutes of its prior meetings.

Chair Neely reported that he had been contacted by Cindy Christianson, who suggested that the Committee should investigate sponsoring a recall petition bylaw. Neely reported that the 1997 Town Meeting warrant had a recall petition article which was not adopted. After some initial discussion there was no interest among Committee members in pursuing this topic, particularly in light of the Committee's scheduled November 2019 termination.

The Committee met with Frank Schroft, the Chair of a Committee appointed by the Town Moderator, Bob Hiss, to study whether Milton should adopt electronic voting at Town Meeting. Schroft said that his committee was reaching out to the approximately 30 towns which currently use this technology, including Belmont, Arlington, Natick, Easton, Lexington and Brookline. Schroft said his Committee had identified three principle benefits to the technology: Accuracy, Efficiency and Accountability. He said that a hand-held device would be issued to each Town Meeting Member prior to the start of the meeting each evening. The device operates on a secure network and would be keyed to the particular member. When it came time to vote the Moderator would declare a 30 second period during which members would enter either a Yes or No vote. Some towns also have a Present or Abstain vote button. Most towns have a display screen that shows the result of the vote. Some towns only show the percentage of the vote for each option. Other towns have a screen which shows how each individual Town Meeting Member voted. Schroft said that among the benefits identified by his Committee was greater accuracy and the elimination of the need for standing and roll call votes and the expeditious resolution of quorum questions. Schroft said that the devices can be either purchased or leased. Belmont purchased its system for \$35,000, while Arlington leases for \$5,000 or \$6,000 per evening. When the devices are leased the vendor usually provides an employee who is present at the meeting to handle any questions which may arise. Schroft said that among the problems the Committee had identified were people turning off their device and then needing 4-5 minutes for it to warm up before they could vote again, pocket voting, and people taking the device home, rather than turning it in each evening. Among the issues the Committee had identified were whether to use the devices for all votes or only certain votes, whether the Moderator should have discretion as to whether the devices should be used on a particular vote, and whether how each individual TMM voted should be published as to each vote. Schroft said that the use of the devices would require a change in the existing Town Bylaw regarding voting at Town Meeting and that his Committee would be consulting with the Town Administrator and Town Counsel regarding a proposed Bylaw change.

Chair Neely reported that he had sent an opinion from John Flynn, Town Counsel, to Cheryl Tougias, the Chair of the Planning Board, regarding an Associate member of the Planning Board. In the opinion Flynn says that, under state law, the Associate member can only be involved in matters before the Planning Board when it is acting as a Special Permit Granting Authority (SPGA). Committee members commented that they could not recall an instance in recent memory when the Planning Board had been unable to act on a SPGA matter because too many members were recused or had missed a meeting. The Committee noted that if an article were to be proposed for Town Meeting, we would have to decide whether the Associate member should be appointed or elected and, if appointed, by whom.

John Cronin distributed a copy of the Scituate Design Review Bylaw. The Committee has not yet reviewed whether to propose such a Committee for the Town. The Committee hopes to get the views of the Planning Board before pursuing this topic.

The Committee discussed the recent Town Annual Election and the fact that the Committee sponsored question to switch from an elected to an appointed Treasurer had failed with the voters. It was noted that only 13 % of Town voters had participated in the election. There was discussion about whether to resubmit the question to the voters and how that could be accomplished. Chair Neely will reach out to Mike Zullas, the Chair of the Select Board, to see what their view is on this question.

Chair Neely reported that the Town Administrator had told him there is currently a stalemate with the Union regarding the Park Department Supervisor position. The prior Supervisor was a Level 9 position. Administrator Dennehy wants to make the new position a Level 7 position. Dennehy is consulting with the Town's labor lawyer regarding available options. There was also some discussion of the questionnaire that Park Commissioner Scott McKay had prepared to send to other towns regarding their Park and Recreation activities. Chair Neely said that he would consult with Select Board Chair Zullas regarding consolidation of the Park Department workforce with another Town Department, and report back to the Committee.

The Committee agreed on July 16, 2019 for its next meeting.

The Committee voted to adjourn at 8:35pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Peter Mullin
July 16, 2019