

## “Sticky Note” Brainstorming Notes from Town Meeting Meeting #1 1-21-26

Present:

Committee members: Michelle Downing, Rebecca Ellis, Kathy Grace, Evan Hoffman, Amy Marshall Carney, Valerie Rogers, Liz Schlegel, Susan Titterton

Public: Susan Clark, Roger Clapp, Karen Petrovic, Lisa Scagliotti

These notes are from Susan Clark's presentation and our “sticky note” exercise afterwards, provided to refresh the committee's memory.

Goal of this process: To help us create a roadmap, to identify our values

Local democracy has an incredible opportunity to bring forth what's in each community

Americans are really concerned about polarization

Conventional participation is harmful

Kathryn Schulz - [TED Talk](#) & Book called [Being Wrong](#)

Intelligent people of goodwill often disagree - the only way to solve it is to talk it out

Polarities - crucial contradictory problems that coexist

“Wicked problems” don't have one right answer

Ways to solve - expertise, activism

Wicked problems don't respond to that, they respond to trusting face-to-face communication

Freedom & Unity - ultimate motto of the paradox

Natural inclination is to create good vs evil narrative

Aim for patience, bigheartedness & grace

Do the hard work of finding a both/and solution (the third way)

In this grid -

*Quality* is in-person discussion and deciding

*Quantity* is ballot voting

Each type has benefits and issues caused by overuse

Comments in blue below represent additions from our discussion.

Also see attached write-up.

<b>Democratic Quality BENEFITS</b>	<b>Democratic Quantity BENEFITS</b>
<b>Democratic Quality OVER-USE</b>	<b>Democratic Quantity OVER-USE</b>

### **Democratic quality - benefits**

More citizen power (can deliberate & amend)

See past stereotypes

Increased understanding of issues

Two way communication between leaders & community - improves trust & solutions

Allows local wisdom to emerge

Improve democratic skills

Satisfaction of being heard

More fun, snacks

Humility/ I don't know everything

People can better understand what they are debating/voting on

Lots of different angles on every issue

Face to face deliberation - - see "others" as people, not "others".

### **Democratic quality - overuse**

Fewer people are involved if you just have a voice vote

No absentee voting for voice votes, restricts access for a lot of people

Risk of groupthink, false consensus

Takes more time & effort

Public speaking can be scary (feared by 75% of people)

May reinforce feelings of ingroup & outgroup, winners & losers, intimidation, exclusion

One person can dominate or intrapersonal conflict can derail  
Unintentional bias  
Can exhaust people/ ask for too much time  
Usual suspects  
Power differential can make people not want to talk (real or perceived)  
Some people won't / can't commit the time/ run out of time/ exhaust people  
Accessibility!  
Newcomers have to learn a whole THING (how to town meeting)

### **Democratic quantity - benefits**

More people participate  
Quick & easy  
Privacy  
Less intimidating/exclusion  
Less public speaking  
More accessibility

Can be more representative (but is it?)  
Benefits - if it's an overwhelming YES or No you know for sure how people feel  
Faster (short attention spans)

### **Democratic quantity - overuse**

Eliminates citizen participation, right to deliberate or to be held accountable  
Increases likelihood of re-votes  
Increases likelihood of uninformed decisions  
Neighbors can become invisible  
Ballots can be less inclusive  
Reduces public trust

Do people participate less bc they don't believe their vote counts  
Assumes people are informed  
No nuance to results - win/lose  
Increased frequency of voting times could decrease participation  
- (there are so many times when ballot voting is needed (EFUD, Town Meeting, school budgets, etc), that sometimes people either thought they already voted on the current issue, or are just "worn out" from so many times they need to vote)

\*\*\* Power is the most important factor in quality attendance - when you take away the power in a meeting and it becomes just informational, people do not come

\*\*\* Town meeting is known as the school for democracy

Kathy worried about impact of literacy (SEE ATTACHMENT)

Do people have shorter attention spans now?

Merits of Have Your Say Day - gives people the opportunity to weigh in, SB can adjust budget before the meeting

At the meeting it is often an Up/down vote

Reminders from Susan:

It is hard work staying in that third way

Craftsbury proposed some structural changes and created a standing committee and they doubled Town Meeting participation

Lincoln - Town Clerk said the working group got extremely stuck - with a 50/50 - and then kept working

Polarities are not WIN/LOSE they are to be navigated

Don't put people you disagree with into the "bottom boxes"

*Proverb: If you want to go fast go alone, if you want to go far go together*

We will have to bend on some things to get the things we have valued the most - there is no perfect answer.