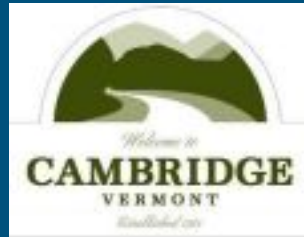


# Annual Town Meeting Modernization Advisory Committee Recommendations



# Table of Contents

Advisory Committee Charter

Executive Summary

Committee Work To Date

Recommendations – No Statue Change

Recommendations – Statute Change

Estimated Timelines

Appendixes

# Advisory Committee Charter

The Advisory Committee (AC) started meeting monthly on May 2, 2024.

The Four Select Board Directives:

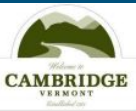
- Research options to increase participation in Town Meeting that comply with State statutes.
- Consider potential different models of participation where registered voters provide feedback, and which may or may not include changing the current form of floor vote of Town Meeting.
- Research impact to other towns in the State with similar size and population as the Town of Cambridge. (Work to Do)
- Develop cost estimates as to the impact of the Town budget for modernization. (Work to Do)

# Executive Summary

The Town Meeting Modernization Advisory Committee sets forth herein immediate and long-term recommendations to achieve the goals of the Selectboard and to benefit the taxpayers and residents of Cambridge.

- 1) To improve access, participation and outcomes, the Selectboard should seek to create a plan to improve the use of technology use and ADA compliance in 2025.
- 2) In 2025 the Selectboard should consider changing the time of the meeting and the order of the agenda thereof.
- 3) Because there is great value in the institutional knowledge of what is our annual citizen legislature that assembles at Town Meeting, we should retain the power of this body by working with our local delegation in Montpelier so that we can adopt remote attendance and voting opportunities not yet allowed under town charter or state statute.
- 4) Additionally, a legislative fix is needed to achieve this committee's ultimate recommendation: This is not black and white: Town Meeting versus Australian Ballot. Both is better. Both have their strengths and weaknesses.

We can retain our citizen's power at Town Meeting to amend and change the budget, nominate candidates for town office and consider all articles. However, we propose that this good work should then be codified by Australian Ballot on a date certain after Town Meeting. This too will require a legislative or town charter change.



# Advisory Committee Internal \*SWOT Analysis

\*Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats

Rank Order	Strengths	Rank Order	Weaknesses
1	Power to change articles	1	Lack of understanding of the floor vote and what can be done prior to voting
2	Hear Opinions	2	Voter Participation
3	Checks and Balance of Select Board	2	Inclusion i.e.: Hearing impaired or for those who may have health issues and are at risk of large public gatherings

Full SWOT Analysis – Appendix A

# Internal SWOT Analysis - Continued

\*Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats

Rank Order	Opportunities	Rank Order	Threats
1	Increase Use of Technology - Hybrid Meetings - Remote Voting	1	Voter Apathy
2	Civics Lesson - to educate community on what they can do at Town Meeting	2	Value of culture not being emphasized or passed on
2	Reorder articles to vote on municipal budget first	2	Resistance to change Town Meeting as we know it

Full SWOT Analysis – Appendix A

# Review of Voter Turnout Results for Cambridge

- Voter Turnout Results for Cambridge VT
  - High Level Voter Participation Trends
    - Town Floor voting remains largely consistent (6%-8% of voting population)
    - Australian Ballot (School Budget Votes)
      - Turnout tends to vary greatly year to year
      - No strong or consistent trends in participation
      - Metrics did not assess the volatility of budget, or other school articles
  - COVID years are not analogous to typical years (pre-covid or post-covid)
  - Election years tend to have larger turnout for voting in general
  - Details can be found in Appendix B

# Community Survey Results

- 190 Cambridge Respondents
  - Survey conducted at:
    - In Person - 4<sup>th</sup> of July Cambridge Town Fair
    - In Person - August 5<sup>th</sup> Primary
    - Virtual – July – September - Survey Links sent via Front Porch Forum and Town Face Book Page

# Community Survey Results

- Key takeaways from survey respondents
  - Almost 50% of respondents indicated desire for a hybrid/remote access solution
  - 76% indicated that meeting date and times are a barrier to participation
  - 25% indicated shorter meeting would increase likelihood to participate
  - 25% indicated more information on topics would likely increase desire to participate with 15% saying a barrier to participation was the lack of information
- 18% felt that their voice didn't matter with about 3% of respondents requesting more privacy in votes
- Details can be found in Appendix C

# What other towns are doing

- Duxbury Town Meeting (Three Step Model)
  1. Pre-Budget “Have your Say” meeting
    - Includes a moderator / does NOT follow Robert’s Rules
    - Allows for discussion, budget & article adjustment proposals
    - Satisfies desire to gather, provide input and affect change
    - Could be appropriate 1<sup>st</sup> step towards hybrid / virtual in the future
  2. Budget is finalized – with the expectation that input from “Have your Say” is incorporated
  3. Australian Ballot – voting on above

# What other towns are doing

- Field Research – Duxbury Town Meeting (Three Step Model) cont'd
  - Australian Ballot – Drive-thru
    - Convenient
    - Addresses many disability concerns & childcare concerns
    - Addresses location concerns
    - Simplifies effort for staff (setup / takedown)
  - Participation
    - “Australian Ballot Voter Turnout in 2024 was 2x the average prior voter turnout”
    - Town Clerk - Duxbury

# What other towns are doing

## Jericho Town Meeting Reimagined - Executive Summary

Here we provide a three-step process that expands on the traditional Town Meeting to involve citizens in framing a vision for the town and provide them with a well-publicized venue in which to have direct input on the draft town budget and other matters of concern to the citizens:

1. An early-fall kick-off meeting focused on vision,
2. A winter meeting in which to discuss and have impact on the draft budget,
3. The Australian-ballot vote on the 1st Tuesday in March.

## Jericho Proposed Meeting and Voting Schedule – Appendix E

Click on this link for:

[Jericho Reimagined Town Meeting – Full Report](#)

# What other towns are doing

- Lessons Learned from Fletcher Adopting Australian Ballot
  - Fletcher holds special meeting on 10/24 to vote on adopting Australian Ballot
    - Adam Howard & Jack Nee attend for info purposes only
    - Six articles presented for vote on whether or not to determine all current Town Meeting business by AB (budgets, town officers & public questions)
      - Relatively little pro/con discussion held prior to any article
      - All 6 articles passed for AB (narrow margin)
      - SB chair resigns on the spot after meeting
    - Town now left to figure out how to go about making this happen
    - Thoughtlessly executed resulting in hurt feelings on both sides
    - Many residents wish they'd been better educated on the matter or gone through a process like Cambridge, which defeated Australian ballot and Jericho, which adopted more nuanced articles setting the table for a deliberative process.

# Meanwhile, in Massachusetts...

- State of Massachusetts Town Meeting Variations
  - More than 70 towns with Open Town Meeting utilize 'clickers' for voting
  - Wayland - Authorized remote participation in town meetings by Act H.2053
  - Lexington - Authorized remote participation in town meetings by Acts H.668 and H.4876
  - Lexington held its first remote/virtual town meeting for its representative model (about 200 attendees) in June 2020
- Massachusetts currently has bill H.3025/S.2011 going through legislation to allow remote participation/hybrid models for the state
- Town Meetings in MA may stretch over days, and in general have a time limit to each day, and are conducted until resolved.

# Recommendations with No Statute Change

## Changing Date and/or Time of Meeting

~76% of surveys sited Timing of Meetings as a barrier

31% mentioned conflict with work as a barrier

32% that more convenient meeting times would be an incentive with an additional 15% writing in that meeting times were a factor

24% indicated that shorter meetings would be an incentive

## Structure Meeting Agenda for Efficiency

Put estimated start time for each article

Conduct voter outreach to determine high priority articles

# Recommendations with No Statute Change

- Accessibility – In Person Town Meeting

In 03/2023 VT Coalition for Disability Rights made a public call for Towns to make Town Meeting more accessible -- *Cambridge is one of the 175 (of 237) Towns that is called out specifically*

VT Disability-support organizations indicate that Australian Ballot is the most inclusive method of voting currently available in VT.

Virtual meetings can offer accessibility tools (e.g.: closed captioning) but can present access concerns if exclusively virtual

- Accessibility – Town Meeting Location

More parking provided on CES School Grounds

Provide off site parking with handicapped shuttle bus

# Recommendations with No Statute Change

- **ADA Accommodations**

Proactively ensure ADA compliance for all included disabilities,

\*Invite VT Center for Independent Living (access team) to assess facilities for compliance,

Invitations/Announcements include information on how to request special accommodations,

All communication and documentation to use simple/plain language,

*Note – of Survey respondents who don't (or don't always) attend Town meeting – approx. 13% indicated a reason related to some disability*

\* Facilities Assessment can be done – free of charge

# Recommendations with No Statute Change

- ADA Accommodations (continued)

- Provide Headsets

- Provide a Signer, if applicable per ADA requirements

- Provide a Visual Presentation of Agenda/Articles

- Designate Space For Those With Health Issues

- Set up Special Handicap Parking Spots Directly Across From The CES Entrance to Elevator

# Recommendations with No Statute Change

## Use of technology – Pre-Meeting

Podcasts or like methods to inform/engage wider range of voters

Ask voters to email questions ahead of time

Electronically Post High-Level Summaries of Money or High Interest Articles

## Use of Technology – Meeting

Text threads/RSS alerts to inform people when articles/agenda items are due to come for a vote

Hybrid meeting to allow people to view/comment remotely

47% surveyed indicated a remote participation option would be an incentive

Electronic voting-devices provided to allow voting in secrecy vs. voice floor vote (may require statute change)

7% asking for electronic voting methods in their write-in comments

3% asking for more privacy in voting

## Childcare

6% sited childcare as a barrier to participation

# Recommendations with No Statute Change

- Younger Generation Engagement:

Provide the opportunity for Young People to Serve on Town Boards and Committees

- Examples include:

State of Vermont Board of Education has a nonvoting student member

United Way of Lamoille County has a voting student board member

# Recommendations That Would Require Statute Change – Two Step Process

- Town Meeting with Remote Access and Voting Followed by Australian Ballot on Date Certain

## Citizen Legislators at traditional town meeting would:

Adopt Budget and Amend from floor

Adopt Special Articles and Amend from floor

Nominate Municipal Candidates

Special Article Discussion and Debate

65% of respondents indicated they were in favor of a hybrid meeting

## Date Certain Australian voting would then be used for:

Adopt Amended Budget,

Elect Candidates nominated from the floor at Town Meeting,

Vote on Special Articles

27% of respondents said Australian Ballot could be an incentive

# Recommendations That Would Require Statute Change

- Younger Generation Engagement:

If 17 yr. olds turns 18 after Town meeting, but during the Town fiscal year they could be allowed to vote on all local articles (budget, elected officials, special articles)

If 17 yr. olds turns 18 after Town meeting, but during the Town fiscal year they could be allowed to run for an elected position (SB, Moderator etc.)

# Estimated Timeline – No Statute Changes

November – December 2024 – Selectboard Reviews Recommendations and Determines Go Forward Plan

January – February – Selectboard-directed Community Outreach to Review Modernization Changes with Residents  
(With updated name of Reimagine Town Meeting)

March Meeting 2025 – Implement Changes

April 2025 – Assess Impact of Changes

May 2025 – Review Changes with Residents

June 2025 – Determine Next Phase of Changes

# Estimated Timeline – Statute Changes

November – December 2024 – Select Board works with delegation to Determine Required State Statute Changes

January – February 2025 – Community Outreach – Review Statute Changes with Residents

March 2025 – Local Town Charter Changes Voted Upon

January – April 2025 – Work at State Level to Develop Statute Changes

January – April 2026 – Legislature Acts on Statute Changes

March – 2027 – Statute Changes are Implemented



Thank you For Your Time.



# Town Meeting – Modernization Advisory Committee

- Peter Ingvoldstad – Select Board Liaison
- Sam Lotto - Chair
- Adam Howard - Vice Chair
- Karen Smith
- Rick Fletcher
- David Loya
- Jack Nee – Member at Large

# Appendix A – A/C Internal SWOT Analysis

Rank Order	Strengths	Rank Order	Weaknesses
1	Power to change articles	1	Lack of understanding of the floor vote and what can be done prior to voting
2	Hear Opinions	2	Lack of Voter Participation
3	Checks and Balance of Select Board	2	Inclusion i.e.: Hearing impaired or for those who may have health issues and are at risk of large public gatherings
	Those who like it - like it a lot		Entire groups are missed - such as business owners or those who can not afford to take the day off
	Tradition		Super Majority participates
	Social Aspect		Public speaking can be intimidating
	Restorative		Time and Day
	Civility		Length of Meeting
	Relieves Cabin Fever		Meeting structure is not child friendly
	Accountability of Select Board and Voters		Lack of Child Care
	Real Time Voting		Some view floor/in person votes as a form of voter suppression
	Educators can attend		
	Participants are self appointed legislators		
	In person voting may provide the opportunity for well informed decision making		

# Appendix A – A/C Internal SWOT Analysis

Rank Order	Opportunities	Rank Order	Threats
1	Increase Use of Technology - Hybrid Meetings - Remote Voting	1	Voter Apathy
2	Civics Lesson - to educate community on what they can do at Town Meeting	2	Value of culture not being emphasized or passed on
2	Reorder articles to vote on municipal budget first	2	Resistance to change to Town Meeting as we know it
	Town Report - include an overview of Town Meeting and how it works, what votes have the power to do		Lack of diversity amongst participants
	Have school in session		Conflicting priorities amongst families
	Resident voting - such as what is done in Winooski		School not in session
	Australian Ballot - for officers - to shorten meeting length		Location - Schools are seen as a security risk by insurers
	Revisit the Community Engagement Team - 2017 Report		Not a State Holiday
	Provide Child Care		Voters who do not get paid time off
	Provide Transportation - Shuttle from remote parking sites such as at the Silos		Constraints of Vermont Statute and Town Meeting Law
	Socialize Employers as to what takes place at Town Meeting so they would consider granting paid time off		People are more selective of their use of time
	Provide stipend for attending to make up for lost wages or pay for childcare		Polarization - has been ongoing
	Have your say meeting January - when Budget development is underway i.e.: Duxbury Model		Changing demographics - mix of vocations
	Questions could be sent ahead of time in order to use discussion period more efficiently or take a way the fear factor of public speaking		Parking - physical constraints
	The Ad Hoc Committee work provides the opportunity to find out how residents prioritize their capacity to provide input as compared to the opportunity to cast their vote		

# Appendix B – Cambridge Voter Turnout per Cambridge Town Office and Secretary of State

	Statistics from Town Office				Statistics from Secretary of State Annual Meeting Statistics Reports								sos.vermont.gov	Approx Population
	Voter registration summary sheets				<a href="https://sos.vermont.gov/elections/election-info-resources/town-meeting-local-elections/">https://sos.vermont.gov/elections/election-info-resources/town-meeting-local-elections/</a>								See Add'l Links	
	# Registered	# Absentee Recorded	# In Person Recorded	# Total Votes	# Voters on TM checklist	# Voted	Floor meeting : # highest vote (est.)	Floor vote Turnout (%)	Australian ballot: # Voted (incl absent)	Australian ballot Turnout (%)	Australian ballot: # voted via absentee	Absentee Ballot Turnout (%)	# of votes for Presidential General	
2014	----- RECORD NOT FOUND -----				2899	308			308	10.56%	19	6.21%		~ 3859 (2010 Census Data)
2015	----- RECORD NOT FOUND -----				2896	451	175	6.04%	276	9.53%	12	4.35%		
2016 (elect year)		0	334	334	2908	330	330	11.35%	1095 (*)	37.65%	105	9.59%	1953	
2017		25	293	318	293 (*)	742	216	73.72%	526	179.52%	25	4.75%		
2017 (Est/Corrected)		25	293	318	3293	742	216	6.56%	526	15.97%	25	0.75%		
2018	3223	0	209	209	223 (*)	526	208	93.27%	318	142.60%	12	3.77%		
2018 (Est/Corrected)	3223	0	209	209	3223	526	208	6.45%	318	9.87%	12	0.38%		
2019	----- RECORD NOT FOUND -----				3253	653	290	8.91%	363	11.16%	23	6.34%		
2020 (elect year)	3349	114	194	308	----- RECORD NOT FOUND -----								2218	3839
2021		250	175	425	2996	425			425	14.19%	209	49.18%		
2022	3102	226	382	608	3089	610	0		610		190			
2023		0	254	254	3110	226			226	7.23%	0	0.00%		
2024	2838	0	226 (198) (**)	226	----- RECORD NOT FOUND -----									



# Appendix B – Cambridge Voter Turnout Metrics (Cont.)

\*Number is directly from report. **Caution:** Potential numeric discrepancy

\*\* Number of logged in attendance vs (additional numbers regarding voting power)

Records not found may still be available, but were not obtained during the initial search

Sited/Additional Resources:

<https://electionresults.vermont.gov/#/voteturnout>

<https://electionarchive.vermont.gov/elections/view/82048/>

<https://electionarchive.vermont.gov/elections/view/144513/>

[https://data.census.gov/profile/Cambridge\\_town,\\_Lamoille\\_County,\\_Vermont?q=060XX00US5001511500#populations-and-people](https://data.census.gov/profile/Cambridge_town,_Lamoille_County,_Vermont?q=060XX00US5001511500#populations-and-people)

# Appendix C – Community Survey Results

Attendance					
Barrier Analysis			Participation Incentive		
Timing of meetings	75.86%	88	More convenient meeting times	32.54%	55
Location	9.48%	11	Remote participation options	47.34%	80
Lack of information	15.52%	18	Childcare provided during meetings	12.43%	21
Lack of interest	10.34%	12	Transportation to meetings	2.96%	5
Feeling my voice doesn't matter	18.10%	21	More information on topics discussed	25.44%	43
Other (please specify)	69.83%	81	Shorter meetings	24.26%	41
	Answered	116	Other (please specify)	28.40%	48
	Skipped	74		Answered	169
				Skipped	21
% of blank replies [1]	63.79%		% of blank replies [2]	12.43%	
% of write ins [3]	69.83%		% of write ins [4]	28.4%	

# Appendix D – State of Massachusetts Information

- <https://malegislature.gov/Bills/193/H3025>
- <https://www.lincolntown.org/DocumentCenter/View/86161/Acton-Area-League-of-Women-s-Voters---TM-Report---2024?bidId=>
- <https://concordma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/48246/Article-29---Use-of-Hand-Held-Electronic-Voting-Devices>
- [https://www.wayland.ma.us/sites/g/files/vyhlf9231/f/uploads/remote\\_participation\\_v4.8.pdf](https://www.wayland.ma.us/sites/g/files/vyhlf9231/f/uploads/remote_participation_v4.8.pdf)
- <https://malegislature.gov/Bills/193/H2053>
- <https://www.mapc.org/planning101/moving-our-democracy-forward-virtual-town-meetings/>
- <https://www.mma.org/lexington-holds-first-online-town-meeting-in-mass/>
- More information is available in the form of articles, town clerk replies, and association reports based on information from the town offices

# Appendix E – Proposed Jericho Meeting and Voting Schedule

Late August to mid-September, 2024	<i>Step 1</i> Budget and Business Kick-off Meeting
November 1, 2024	Reports and budget requests due to Town Administrator from outside groups such as the Rawson Library and Fired Dept.
January 21 to 26, 2025	<i>Step 2</i> Town Budget and Business Review and Action Meeting
January 30, 2025	The Selectboard, having completed revisions they find appropriate to the draft budget, approve the final budget in their meeting
January 31, 2025	Warning for the Australian-ballot vote on the final budget posted
January 31, 2025	Ballot preparation begins for mailing 20 days before the polls open.
February 12, 2025	Early/absentee ballots mailed
March 4, 2025	Polls open for in person-voting by <i>Australian Ballot</i>