

Report of Committee on Electronic Voting at Town Meeting

Background: The Committee on Electronic Voting at Town Meeting was formed by a vote of the Annual Town Meeting on April 23, 2012. The committee's charge was to make recommendations concerning electronic voting to the Town Meeting no later than the 2013 Annual Town Meeting.

Article 17 **Substitute Motion**

MOTION: That Article 17 be referred to a committee to be called the "Committee on Electronic Voting at Town Meeting" and to consist of the Moderator, the Town Clerk, the Chair of the Board of Selectmen or such other member of said Board as the Chair may designate, the Chair of the Capital Budget Committee, the Director of Information Technology or his designee, and one Town Meeting Member to be appointed by the Town Moderator; said Committee to study the benefits, implementation procedures and issues, and potential problems associated with the use of electronic voting systems at Town Meeting, and to make recommendations concerning electronic voting to the Town Meeting no later than the Annual Town Meeting of 2013, which recommendations may include such proposed amendments to the Town Bylaws as the Committee deems appropriate.

Majority vote required for passage

ARTICLE 17 was adopted at the Belmont Annual Town Meeting held April 23, 2012 at the Belmont High School Auditorium.

Committee: The committee is made up of the following members:

Ellen O'Brien Cushman, Town Clerk
George Hall, Town Counsel
Anne Marie Mahoney, Chair, Capital Budget Committee
Mark Paolillo, Chair, Board of Selectmen
David Petto, Director of Information Technology
Maryann Scali, Town Meeting Member
Michael Widmer, Moderator

At its first meeting, Michael Widmer, Town Moderator, was elected chair, and Ellen O'Brien Cushman, Town Clerk, was elected clerk.

Summary Recommendation: The committee unanimously recommends that Belmont adopt the use of electronic voting at Town Meeting in specific instances, consistent with our General By-Laws..

Committee Process: The committee met five times between January and May and independently investigated the experience of other communities using with electronic voting as well as the current available technology for electronic voting. At one of its meetings, the committee heard from Sandy Gadsby, Moderator of the Town of Brookline which recently introduced electronic voting.

Rationale: The committee feels there are several advantages to electronic voting – accuracy of votes, efficiency of Town Meeting, and accountability of Town Meeting Members.

Accuracy – Electronic voting ensures that the vote is accurate. There is some margin of error with standing votes. Several recent Town Meeting votes have been very close, and despite the good efforts of the tellers, there is no certainty that the vote count has been accurate.

Efficiency – Electronic votes can be completed in one or two minutes compared to 10 minutes or more for standing votes. This would increase the efficiency of Town Meeting and also encourage more frequent votes for the record without taking the time of Town Meeting.

Accountability – Electronic voting has the potential to create greater public accountability for the votes of Town Meeting Members. Electronic votes are easier to capture and record than a voice vote or standing vote.

It will be the job of the Moderator and Town Meeting Members to keep the small-town culture of Town Meeting alive, by using the electronic voting mechanism as a tool merely to record, not to replace, the vigorous debate that Belmont has come to expect. The committee feels that electronic voting process which follows will support this goal..

Electronic Voting Process: The committee recommends that electronic voting be required in three instances, per the General Bylaws of the Town and Mass. General Laws:

- 1) If the Moderator doubts the voice vote;
- 2) If the voice vote is challenged by at least seven Town Meeting Members;
- 3) If at least 35 Town Meeting Members request a roll call vote.

In addition, the committee recommends that the Moderator, at his discretion, call for an electronic vote in those instances where a two-thirds majority is required and the voice vote is not unanimous.

Using their handheld devices, Town Meeting Members would press 1 for yes, 2 for no, and 3 to abstain.

It is anticipated that the voting will take about 40 seconds with the votes of individual Town Meeting Members displayed on a scrolling screen. If a Member believes his/her vote is incorrectly recorded, the Member would call this to the attention of the Moderator so the

Member could correct the vote. Only in the case of a roll call vote (per the General By-Laws) requested by at least 35 Town Meeting Members) would the votes of the individual members be saved and available to the public. In all other instances only the aggregate totals would be recorded and saved.

Distribution of Devices: The Town Clerk will pre-assign the handheld devices in numeric order to Town Meeting Members, alphabetically by precinct. Town Meeting Members signing in for the session will, by signature, accept responsibility for the pre-assigned device; when leaving Members will simply place the devices in a bin; Town Clerk staff will contact Members whose devices are not received.

Display: The screen displayed during Town Meeting will have a clock to show the time remaining for voting. The screen will also display a continuously advancing list of the individual Town Meeting Member votes (shown by precinct, two precincts at a time) as Town Meeting Members are actively voting, scrolling through at least twice during the voting time. No vote totals will be displayed on the screen during the voting period; totals will be shown after the close of the voting and declared by the Moderator. The vote total display will show: # Yes, # No, # Abstain.

Technical Specifications:

Handheld Devices

- a. Data transmission from handhelds in synchronized Frequency Hopping Spread Spectrum (FHSS) form to eliminate data transmission tampering.
- b. Transmission range minimum of 300 feet.
- c. Utilize single USB data receiver.
- d. Battery system for handhelds rechargeable NiCad, NiMH, NiZn or Li-ion.

Display Screen

- a. Projector minimum lumens 7000, minimum resolution 1280 X 800.
- b. Customizable templates for on-screen display and data reports.
- c. Ability to display Members present/non-present based on distribution/registration of handhelds.
- d. Presentation must be seamless, utilizing MS PowerPoint 2013.
- e. Presentation component must be compatible with Microsoft Office 2013 (Excel, Word, and PowerPoint).

Cost: Based on the experience of other communities, the committee believes that there would be a one-time cost of approximately \$20,000 to purchase the equipment and software. In addition, routine software upgrades would be required periodically. The equipment and software could also be used by other town departments.

Timetable: June 2013 – Town Meeting vote
Summer 2013 – Distribution of specifications
Fall 2013 – Purchase of equipment and software
Spring 2014 – Introduction of electronic voting (including training session)

Bylaw Change: The move to electronic voting would require a small change in the Town's bylaws as follows:

Article 20: To see if the Town will vote to amend the General Bylaws of the Town of Belmont by inserting after Section 2.7.6.1 the following new Section 2.7.6.2:

2.7.6.2 Electronic Voting. Notwithstanding the provisions of the foregoing sections 2.7.6 and 2.7.6.1, subject to the availability of a system to enable electronic voting by Town Meeting Members using wireless handheld mobile devices, the Moderator may count the vote, or conduct a roll call vote, on any matter before the Town Meeting by the use of such an electronic vote counting system.

or take any other action relative thereto.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael Widmer, Chair
Ellen O'Brien Cushman, Clerk
George Hall
Anne Marie Mahoney
Mark Paolillo
David Petto
Maryann Scali