



TOWN OF BELMONT

455 CONCORD AVENUE
BELMONT, MASSACHUSETTS
02478

MICHAEL J. WIDMER
TOWN MODERATOR

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March 1, 2021

By Hand

Roy Epstein, Chair Belmont Select Board
455 Concord Avenue
Belmont, MA 02478

Re: 2021 Annual Town Meeting – Request to Call Meeting to be Held by Remote Participation

Dear Mr. Epstein and Members of the Select Board:

I am hereby requesting, in my capacity as Town Moderator, that the Select Board call for the 2021 Annual Town Meeting to be held through remote participation because of the public health and safety risk presented by holding a physical meeting with 300 people. This letter is intended to conform to the requirements of Chapter 92 of the Acts of 2020.

Such a meeting would be conducted using a combination of technologies, described in more detail below, that will allow Town Meeting Members (TMMs) to see and hear the Moderator and all other participants, to be recognized and address the meeting, and to vote securely. This combination of technologies will allow non-TMMs to see and hear the proceedings and, when authorized in advance by the Moderator, to address the meeting in the same manner as is the practice in Belmont. It will allow TMMs to signal the Moderator when they wish to address the pending question and be put in line to speak, as is customary at live Town Meetings, to determine whether a quorum is present, to raise a point of order where appropriate, and to determine whether their votes have been properly recorded. The technologies will allow interested members of the public to watch the meeting remotely for purposes of witnessing the meeting and it allows for the meeting to be recorded so that the proceedings can be heard and viewed at a later time. Lastly, our court reporter would be creating the word-by-word transcript as required by Belmont General Bylaw §20-210.

The combination of technology methods I am proposing includes the following:

- TMMs will attend the meeting and vote using “TurningPoint,” a secure online application operated by Turning Technologies, the same company that provides

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the electronic voting system acquired by the Town and used at Town Meetings since 2014. Each TMM will be assigned unique login credentials to use the system. TMMs who are logged in through TurningPoint will be deemed present at the meeting and will be able to vote using its features. All votes will be recorded electronically and the vote of each TMM will be displayed on the screen so that each member can verify that his or her vote was correctly recorded, as a roll call vote.

- Active participation in the meeting will be conducted through “Zoom,” a proprietary video conferencing platform (<https://zoom.us/>). The Town currently has a license to conduct a Zoom meeting with up to 500 participants. This number is sufficient to accommodate the 288 TMMs from the Town’s 8 precincts, the at-large members, and town officials and staff, with more than sufficient additional capacity for additional speakers if necessary. All approved speakers and TMMs will be issued an invitation allowing them to log in to the meeting from a desktop or laptop computer, tablet or smartphone, or to call into the meeting with any telephone (audio only). For security and clarity of presentation, the screen and the audio will be controlled by Town staff acting under my direction, as is our custom. All speakers will be muted until recognized by the Moderator. TMMs may use the “raise hand” feature of the software to get in line to speak, and will be recognized in order, unless I choose to recognize a town official to answer a question or address a particular point. Any non –TMM who has made arrangements with me in advance of the meeting to speak can be recognized in a similar manner.
- Town officials and staff will participate by logging in to the Zoom meeting in the same manner.
- If a TMM has a point of order, it can be raised by using the “Q&A” feature, which will be monitored by one of my staff assistants so that any such point of order can be brought to my attention promptly. This same feature would allow a TMM who does not have a microphone to contribute to the meeting, as above, with a member of the staff reading the comments and questions submitted through the Q&A feature so that they may be entered into the record.
- The Zoom video and audio feed will be simultaneously broadcast by Belmont Media on local cable stations and by livestreaming on the internet. It will also be simultaneously recorded for future viewing. Any member of the public, whether or not a Belmont resident, will be able to view the proceeding live. TMMs may choose to listen to and view the proceedings in the same manner, but will not be considered present unless also logged in to TurningPoint.

With the assistance and cooperation of the Town Clerk’s office and the Town’s Information Technology Department, I have tested these platforms and am satisfied that they will allow the conduct of a Town Meeting that will function in substantially the same manner as a Town Meeting conducted in a physical location and in accordance with the operational and functional requirements set forth in Chapter 92. Furthermore, Belmont held a successful Annual Town Meeting on June 16, 2020 that was attended by more

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than 260 Town Meeting Members, using the combination of technologies described in this letter. Similarly, we held a successful Special Town Meeting through remote participation on September 21 and 23, 2020.

We will conduct further testing of these platforms in addition to training sessions and a warrant briefing which we propose to hold in the same manner prior to Town Meeting. Those training sessions and tests will allow us to ensure that all TMMs have the training and equipment necessary to participate fully, and to determine whether any adjustments are needed to the process to make sure it runs as smoothly as possible. I hereby confirm that I have conferred with the Chair of the Belmont Disabilities Access Commission about accessibility to the Town Meeting.

I appreciate your consideration of this request. Please contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

/s/ Michael J. Widmer

Michael J. Widmer
Town Moderator

cc: Patrice Garvin, Town Administrator (by email)
Ellen O'Brien Cushman, Town Clerk (by email)
George A. Hall, Jr., Town Counsel (by email)