

# 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY GOVERNMENT

Leveraging technology to improve committee work and public engagement in the Town of Homes

## WHO WE ARE

- Four person working group within the larger IT Advisory Committee
  - Phil Lawrence, Chair
  - Paul Roberts, Vice Chair
  - David Goldberg, Secretary
  - Jim Berets, Member

## OUR CHARGE

- Research innovative ideas and programs for facilitating interaction between government bodies and the public
- Assess current practices among Belmont committees and boards
- Identify areas for improvement in public engagement, efficiency, transparency, etc.

# THE SURVEYS

- Committee Survey administered to 39 officers of Belmont committees and boards
  - Questions about remote participation, scheduling, sharing information, public engagement
- Resident Survey administered to 181 (175 unique) residents
  - Questions about interaction with Belmont government bodies, remote participation, access to committee information, etc.
- Peer Community Survey
  - Surveyed two peer communities (Wellesley & Arlington) about remote participation, scheduling, sharing information with public, etc.

# SUMMARY

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Issue	Recommendation
Remote participation	BOS set up working group with goal to green light remote participation
Boards and committees	Town Administrator, IT director, etc. develop plans to improve efficiency of processes like scheduling, document and information sharing, etc.
Public engagement	Town Administrator, IT director etc. evaluate technologies to modernize public notifications
	Town Administrator evaluate Communications Liaison to facilitate public engagement via Town web site, social media, etc.

# REMOTE PARTICIPATION

## REMOTE PARTICIPATION

Strong support by both committee officers and the public for remote participation by the public –

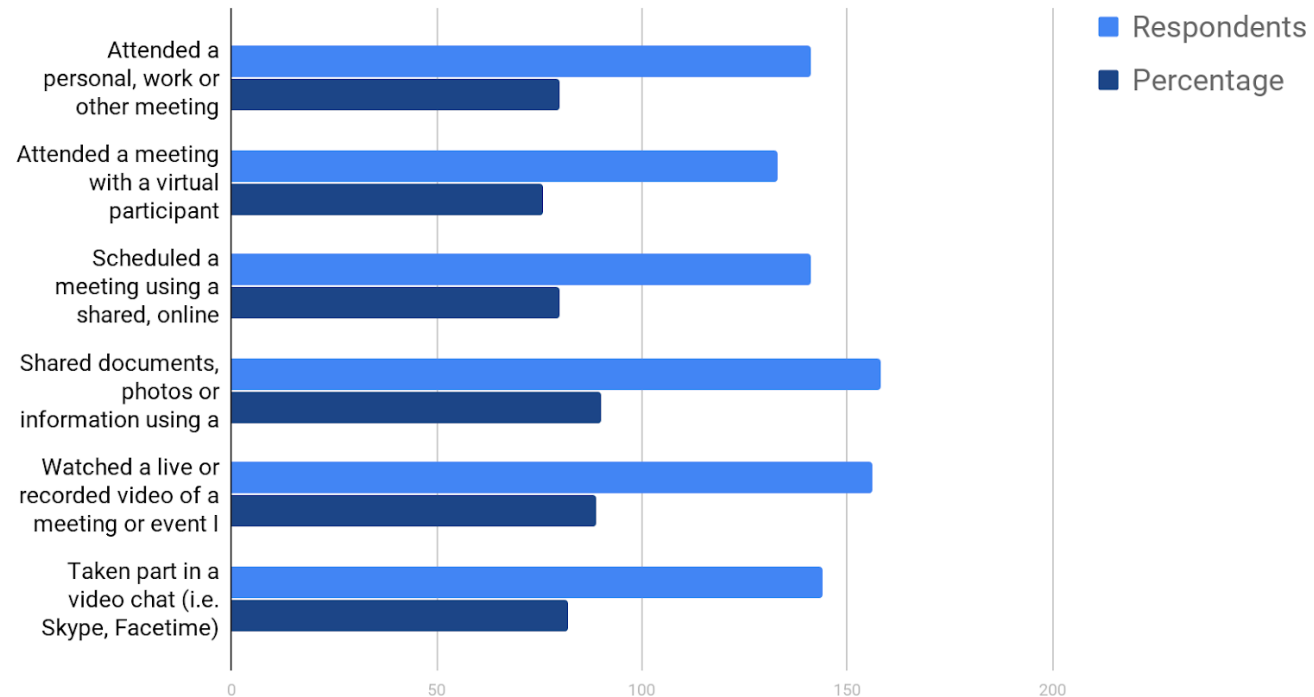
- 64% of committee officers support or “strongly support”
- 78% of residents support or “strongly support”

Also strong support for committee members being able to remotely deliberate –

- 76% of committee officers support or “strongly support”
- 71% of residents support or “strongly support”

# FAMILIARITY WITH ONLINE PLATFORMS

At some point in the past I have done the following...



## QUOTE

*“We lost several meetings this year due to snow. Then we had difficulty rescheduling due to the members' work conflicts and availability of dept. heads. Being able to participate remotely would have helped us meet our deadlines without the heartburn we experienced this year.”*

- Committee officer

## WHAT OTHER TOWNS ARE DOING

- Still early days...but Belmont won't be the first
  - Framingham Mayor is allowing remote participation
  - Other Bay State communities investigating
- Nationally: Boulder, CO and Austin Texas permit remote participation
- Smaller communities as well
  - East Tawas, Michigan
  - Miami Lakes, Florida
  - Etc. etc.

# RECOMMENDATION

- Establish working group to study how to implement remote participation answer questions about:
  - Conditions and caveats
  - Technology to use
  - Facilities/locations
  - Equipment handling
  - Training
- Based on working group plans and recommendations, approve remote participation plan

# BOARDS AND COMMITTEES

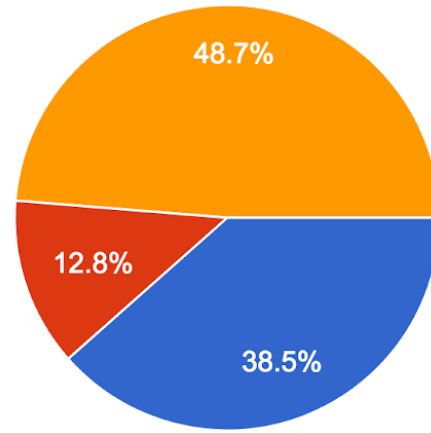
## PROCESS & ENGAGEMENT

- Not uniform process for making materials available before/after meetings
- Varied methods for scheduling meetings and notifying public of meetings
- Concern about low level of public engagement

## SHARING MATERIALS

We make digital copies of the following available to the public online after each meeting...

39 responses



- just an agenda and minutes
- agenda, minutes, and some documents
- agenda, minutes, and all documents we are permitted to make available to the public
- we only make hard copy documents available following the meeting

# RECOMMENDATIONS

- Develop consistent, uniform, efficient and user-friendly processes for:
  - Scheduling meetings and coordinating among members
  - Posting minutes and other documentation
  - Sharing information proactively with the public
- Belmont may already have tools needed to do this
  - Office 365, Civic Pro, etc.

# PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

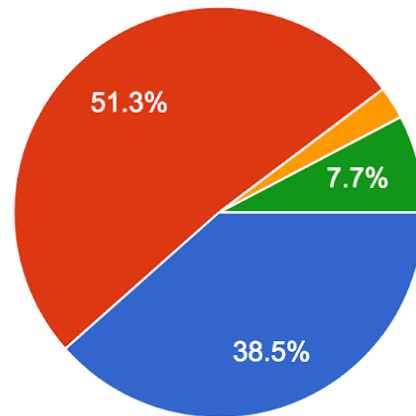
# PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

- Opportunities to improve Town government's engagement with the public
- “The Room Where It Happens” phenomenon
- Better access via town web site and modern platforms (Facebook, etc.) can make Belmont residents more aware of what is happening in town

# PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

At a typical committee meeting we have:

39 responses



- 0 members of the public
- 1 to 5 members of the public
- 6 to 10 members of the public
- more than 10 members of the public

# RECOMMENDATIONS

- Restore Town employee to manage web site
- Expand role to full time Communications Liaison with broader responsibilities that include:
  - Centralized social media management
  - Focus on improved, streamlined communications with public
  - Troubleshooting committee and board outreach efforts
- Consider adoption of electronic signage at key locations in town to replace paper based public notices

Thanks!  
Questions?