

**TOWN MEETING STUDY COMMITTEE - Final
MEETING MINUTES**

**Hybrid Format
Thursday, November 7, 2024, 7:00 pm**

Members Present: Jennfer Morris-Gundy; Kenny Mitchell; Ariane Liazos; Taylor Ortiz; Andrew Pang; Ben Shiller; Andy Wang; Sarah- Cannon-Holden, Moderator; Timothy Higgins, Town Administrator

Members Present via Zoom: Jim Hutchinson, Select Board representative

Temporary Chair Tim Higgins called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm as a Hybrid meeting pursuant to Gov. Healy's signing of order S.3007 suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law to March 31, 2025.

- **Welcome & Introductions**

Mr. Higgins welcomed the Committee, invited members to introduce themselves, and invited Sarah Cannon Holden, Town Moderator, and Jim Hutchinson, Select Board Representative to TMSC to offer any introductory comments.

Sarah Cannon Holden thanked the Committee and expressed her commitment to keeping an open mind about potential changes to our Town Meeting proceedings that residents might prefer. She urged a careful balancing of the desire for improved efficiency with the need to tolerate some of the inherent messiness of the democratic process. Jim Hutchinson echoed Sarah's sentiments and expressed the Board's commitment to keeping resident input at the center of the process. Jim shared his desire to find appropriate ways to experiment with clickers and to take resident input on how they should be employed during town meetings.

Tim Higgins shared his view that town leadership has a track record of modifying town meeting procedures in response to input from boards, committees, staff, and the public. Tim noted that the TMSC process will be a more structured exercise. Tim urged the Committee to take the time to become familiar with current practices and traditions as a starting point. He noted that Lincoln has done some pioneering work to better engage the public (e.g., State of the Town Meeting). He offered that there is certainly room for improvement but that a thorough understanding of existing conditions would help the Committee focus on a higher value opportunities.

- **Administrative/Procedural**

The committee first addressed some administrative issues including the following:

Committee Leadership – A chair and vice-chair will be elected at the next meeting. Folks were asked to consider volunteering. It was noted that the roles of chair and vice-chair are primarily organizational and administrative, including organizing meeting agendas, facilitating meetings, coordinating follow-up between meetings, etc. The vice chair's primary role is to stand in for the chair when that person is unavailable.

Meeting Schedule and Logistics – The Committee is leaning towards a monthly meeting schedule, with additional meetings as needed. Generally, the Committee prefers Thursday meetings, beginning at 7 pm. An attempt should be made to limit meetings to 90 minutes. Tim will send out a doodle scheduling poll to arrive at a date for our next meeting.

Meeting Format – The Committee indicated a preference for hybrid meetings (in-person and Zoom). Jim Hutchinson believes in-person meetings are most productive but acknowledges Zoom's convenience. Jim urged that the Committee keep an open mind about meeting format and not to be shy about moving to a format that works best for the Committee members.

Public Participation During Meetings – The committee decided to handle public comments organically during the meeting. The Committee emphasized the importance of hearing residents' perspectives with the aim of allowing active interactions while maintaining meeting efficiency. There will not be a separate public comment segment on the agenda.

Public Engagement – The committee discussed the need for a robust community engagement plan, including a citizen survey that will be developed with the support of professional consultant/s.

Webpage Content - The webpage contains committee charge, meeting minutes, schedule, and Zoom links. They are assembling a comprehensive reference library. Reference materials include:

- Town meeting bylaw
- Lincoln's comprehensive plan
- Mass Moderators Association best practices
- Reports from Andover, Weston, and Acton
- Select Board newsletters on town meeting issues

Webpage Management and Communication – The webpage is maintained by Town Administrator's office. It is open to community document submissions and will be continuously updated. There was some discussion related to creating a webpage with flexibility in design. A dedicated email address (tmsc@lincolntown.org) for public communication has been created by the Town IT department. Committee members will receive updates on incoming emails. Tim will explore possibility of setting up town e-mail for Committee members.

Open Meeting Law Guidelines:

- Agendas must be posted 48 hours in advance
- Detailed agendas are required, allowing last-minute urgent additions
- Strict rules about communication between committee members:
 - o Avoid discussing committee business on social media
 - o Prevent "serial communications" that might inadvertently violate open meeting laws
 - o Committee members can discuss administrative matters via email, but not deliberate on substantive issues
 - o Roll call votes are required when members participate remotely.

- Subcommittees will post agendas, take minutes, and report back to the main committee to ensure transparency.

Public Records Law– With few exceptions, it should be assumed that all materials generated by TMSC will be made available to the public, either in the ordinary course or by request.

Committee Resources - The committee will have access to town-wide budgets for consulting, legal support, and printing materials.

- **Committee Charge**

Purpose of the Committee – The TMSC is an advisory committee to the Select Board and Moderator. It has been tasked with reviewing current meeting procedures with the aim of developing strategies for improvement.

Committee Discussion – The Committee reviewed and discussed the Charge from the Moderator/Selects. Discussion included:

- Does the project scope include reviewing the process leading up to Town Meeting? Jim and Tim confirmed that yes, the pre-Town Meeting process is within the scope.
- Does the Charge instruct the Committee to use a consultant to help develop the survey? Jim and Time confirmed that yes, the Board and Moderator have instructed us to work with a consultant.
- Does the Charge instruct the Committee to submit recommendations or simply list and pros and cons? This will require further discussion. It was agreed that at a minimum the Report should include an analysis of pros and cons of various contemplated changes/improvements.

- **Next Steps**

Organizing by Topics – The Committee discussed the possible benefits of working in small teams recognizing that the teams would be subject to the Open Meeting Law. The Committee felt that it would be premature to discuss possible teams until there was a better understanding of the tasks and key groupings of topics. Tim offered to provide a first draft of key topics/“buckets” to help the Committee begin to think about how to organize and prioritize its work. This item will appear on the next agenda for ongoing discussion.

- **SOTT Preparations**

SOTT Presentation – The SOTT is scheduled for Saturday, December 7th. The main session will begin at 9:30 a.m. TMSC has not been asked to present during the main session but instead to organize and facilitate two breakout sessions (11:00 a.m. and repeated at 11:45 a.m.) to help the public understand what to expect from the process and to begin to identify key opportunities for input.

Next Steps – TMSC will make this its primary focus for its next meeting (now scheduled for November 21st).

- **Other Business**

Voter Participation Survey – A ten-year voter participation survey for Lincoln and neighboring communities has been posted to the TMSC page.

Homework:

- Consider volunteering to serve as Chair or Vice-chair and be prepared to vote during next meeting (all);
 - Begin to review background reports and materials posted to the TMSC page (all);
 - Provide draft list of key project topics/“buckets” to help organize our work (Tim); and
 - SOTT clicker exercise: Come to next meeting with ideas about possible questions to pose to participants.
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- **Adjournment:** Sarah Cannon-Holden made a motion to adjourn. Ben Shiller seconded. The motion was approved unanimously with a roll call vote: Shiller – aye; Wang – aye; Mitchell – aye; Gundy– aye; Pang – aye; Liazos – aye; Ortiz – aye; Hutchinson – aye; Cannon-Holden – aye; Higgins - aye. The meeting adjourned at approximately 8:34 pm.

Submitted by Peggy Elder

Approved by the Committee: 11/21/24