

Dear TMCC members,

In the Select Board's post-Town Meeting wrap-up discussion on Monday evening, we talked about a number of ideas and issues we want to pass along to you.

The Select Board believes that efforts to make Town Meeting shorter and more efficient without compromising its due process are important for attracting and retaining members from all walks of life, and for making the legislative work of the Town as accessible as possible to interested members of the community. Additionally, we believe that due process is best served with transparency, fairness and great respect for Town Meeting -- its members and its role in Town government. In that spirit and in support of those beliefs, we offer the following:

- We encourage use of the Consent Calendar. While this is at the Moderator's discretion, it would be helpful for TMCC to support and encourage its use among Town Meeting members.

[We discussed this with Harrison and he seemed willing to try this.](#)

- Any article that a member feels is not adequately explained in the Finance Committee Report should rightfully receive additional discussion and explanation, but for that handful of recurring articles whose written and verbal explanations match and for which no member has questions, the Consent Calendar would provide some degree of efficiency and time-savings.

[Hopefully, use of the Consent Calendar will work.](#)

- We encourage further consideration of starting Town Meeting at 7:00 pm. rather than 7:30 pm. While the scheduling of the meeting is at the Select Board's discretion, we would appreciate TMCC giving thought to the pros and cons of such a change, to help us determine if it would be a net benefit.

[The Fall 2011 TMCC survey on starting time received 91 replies, 45 in favor of 7:00, 45 7:30 and 1 with no preference. The most frequent concern was that working parents would have a hard time coming at 7:00. In TMCC discussion there was concern about the earlier time as TM membership of parents seems to have increased since then.](#)

- We encourage discussion with the Moderator regarding a few points of mutual expectations regarding questions and answers, namely:
 - Regarding Rule #6 of the Rules of Order for Town Meeting: Does and should the 3-minute rule for "subsequent speakers" apply to someone answering a question? Our concerns: that one can't predict how long it will take to adequately answer a question, thus can't know to ask for additional time first; that those speaking from the front table can't see the timer; and that speakers often ask two or three questions, creating further time challenges for the person answering (i.e., if the questions were asked by different people, or if the person had to be recognized separately to ask each question, the person answering would get three minutes to answer each; that they are allowed to be "bundled" together by the questioner unfairly burdens the answerer.)

[Harrison agreed that when asked for more time for presentations, he could allow "without objection". A TM member could object. There were mixed feelings about the 3 minutes for questions. There was also discussion about alternating calling on members with green and red cards evenly, but it was](#)

pointed out that this is not easy since the numbers of each may be very different.,

Regarding Rule #6 of the Rules of Order for Town Meeting: In the interest of making sure the body feels all rules are being equally and neutrally applied, how do "follow-up questions" work and how is it determined whether or not to allow them?

We had a discussion with Harrison about this .

- We encourage TMCC to expand its helpful recommendations about Town Meeting preparation (of visuals, for example) to include seeking assistance with amendments that are planned ahead of time. Town staff, the Moderator or others can often help to determine if an amendment is viable, and if not, how to make it so. This would not be about seeking a position on the amendment, but would help ensure that the amendment is clear and legitimate, rather than trying to work out such questions on the floor of Town Meeting. Encouraging that this be done when practical and possible would benefit the person seeking the amendment, and the rest of the body.

We have added a suggestion to have a helper arranged to project visuals. We are still deciding how to approach the amendment question, wanting to be sure that TM members feel able to make amendments during debate.

- We appreciate TMCC's continuing efforts to improve the various sound and visibility issues in the auditorium. Some improvements there were noted, as were ongoing challenges. Management of PowerPoint and other slide presentations seemed more problematic this time.

Our Audio Subcommittee is now working with town staff to improve audio conditions in the ARMS auditorium and hopefully be able to include this in the next town budget. Kris Pacunas has installed a set of mobile microphones which provide amplification in the Town Room when Amherst Media is not covering meetings.

We will keep trying to provide helpful suggestions for visual presentations on our web page.

- We noted issues with the check-in procedures that we want to bring to TMCC's attention, namely:
 - Because people had all their tally cards at the beginning, they were able to vote without checking in, which presents vulnerabilities for the accuracy of attendance and voting. (i.e., Does the vote of a person who is not officially "present" count? Did they fail to check in, or could someone else have their tally cards? If the votes shouldn't count, how would that be determined on the floor? Could the results of a close vote change after the fact, if the votes of those not checked in were nullified? What are the implications of that?)

We were assured that the tally people count the cards and the number of people sitting in each row very carefully so that extra cards would be noticed.

- Spectators often arrive later in the meeting to see the article of interest to them, and haven't heard the Moderator's announcements about the appropriate places to sit. This results in some non-Town Meeting members sitting in the front section, where they may or may not be participating in voting

(even with the most innocent intentions -- not everyone understands how TM and its rules work.) It was noted that tally cards for all votes (or electronic voting) could be a way of addressing this problem.

[We can discuss this with Harrison.](#)

- Regarding Rules #10 and #13 of the Rules of Order for Town Meeting, we want to let TMCC know that the Select Board has agreed that in order to let Town Meeting exercise its power of determining when each session ends, the Select Board Chair will make a motion to consider the next article every night, and will only make the motion to adjourn after that motion has failed. This is not expected to result in a significant change -- the motion to continue after 10:00 will likely almost always fail -- but it appropriately allows Town Meeting, rather than the Select Board Chair, to make the decision.

[No objection.](#)

Thank you for your consideration of these issues. The Select Board would welcome TMCC's thoughts and feedback on these points after you have had an opportunity to fully consider them.

Many thanks for all the good work you do for Town Meeting.

Sincerely,

Stephanie O'Keeffe
Select Board Chair

[Starting on time has been a concern and TMCC appreciates that the Select Board has been much better at arriving at the front table promptly.](#)