

Call to Order

Committee Chair Mr. Stumpf called the meeting to order at 4:01 p.m. TGSC members all participated remotely via WebEx, able to see and hear each other and share documents for all to see. A feed from the WebEx was broadcast live on Andover TV, by which members of the public could observe the meeting.

Participants

The following were online on WebEx for the meeting: Town Clerk & Chief Strategy Officer Austin Simko (ex-officio); Sheila Doherty (ex-officio); TGSC Committee members Paula Colby-Clements, David Floreen, Richard Fox, Andrew McBrien, Dara Obbard, Gail Ralston, Sandy Stapczynski and Jon Stumpf; and Bernie Lynch and John Petrin of Community Paradigm Associates. Paul Cavicchi sent apologies for his absence in advance.

1. Approval of Minutes of Meetings of May 20th 2020

Mr. Floreen moved that these minutes be accepted as written, Mr. Simko seconded. The committee voted by roll call with 8 in favor of approval, none opposed, with 2 abstentions, comprising Ms. Colby-Clements and Ms. Stapczynski who were unable to attend the May 20th meeting. However, both Ms. Colby-Clements and Ms. Stapczynski stated that they had reviewed the full recording of the meeting and were satisfied that the minutes were an accurate record.

2. Discuss Members' Initial Views and Findings re Form of Government

Mr. Stumpf invited each member of the committee to express their current opinion of which form(s) of government should be recommended by the TGSC, which are candidates for recommendation pending further discussion, or which are candidates for further study to help determine the committee's recommendation. Mr. Stumpf made clear that the intention was to capture the members' initial views, from which deliberation can begin in earnest. Members were asked to restrict their comments to approximately five minutes or less, and spoke in alphabetical order of last name. Other members' audio was muted while each spoke to prevent interruptions.

Members' comments are summarized below, collated by themes for easier comprehension. Readers are referred to the posted video recording for the details of each member's statements. Hereafter, Open Town meeting shall be referred to as "OTM", Representative Town Meeting as "RTM", and any combination of Council/Manager/Mayor as "City form"

- **Overall summary:** In summary, all TGSC members spoke in favor of retaining OTM, some strongly and others stating that OTM is their preference on balance. However, there is a need to reform OTM in discrete areas. While all of these reforms are believed to be feasible, the TGSC should study these areas before delivering a final recommendation.
- **Accessibility:** OTM is very accessible, in that any registered voter can speak on the floor, vote, and even sponsor legislation. RTM is less accessible. City form is least accessible. Herein is OTM's greatest asset to our political culture. Concern was expressed that non-

confidential voting is affecting outcomes of votes and even deterring some voters from attending Town Meeting. The TGSC should research the magnitude of this and recommend a change to confidential voting if prudent. It was also noted that other reforms might make OTM more accessible to specific individuals, for example, by providing a means for people to contribute even though they find daunting the prospect of speaking in front of a large meeting. However, such reforms should be viewed as opportunities to further enhance OTM, not as statements that OTM is defective.

- **Efficiency:** City form is highly efficient, RTM less so, and OTM is inefficient and can even be unwieldy.
- **Accountability:** Councilors and RTM members are accountable to the electorate and are subject to defeat at the ballot should they fail to represent the wishes of their constituency. City councilors are most accountable in that councilors could fail to win re-election due to their position on even a single issue. RTM members are somewhat accountable. Conversely, OTM voters are unaccountable to defeats at the ballot but are accountable to their peers and to rebuke by the Town Meeting itself.
- **Which Form of Government is Most Representative:** City form and RTM is formally representative in that Councilors/Members are elected by specific precincts. However, both forms are only representative geographically, as voters are assigned to their precinct solely on the basis of their address. OTM is not formally representative, but data for Andover show roughly equal turnout by precinct to Town Meeting, and do not show any evidence that voters turn out in disproportionate numbers for issues that impact their precinct.
- **Comparison with other communities:** Equal numbers of municipalities that are generally considered to be comparable to Andover (socio-economic status, financial robustness, etc.) employ OTM and RTM. Equally, comparison of Andover with communities of similar size is inconclusive. That is, comparison with other municipalities does not suggest either that Andover should retain or should replace Open Town Meeting; the data are neutral.
- **Fit with culture and history:** The best and most appropriate form of government for a community is what works best for the culture and demographics of that community. Andover has a culture of inclusiveness and intimacy in government that comes from structural mechanisms. Toying with those structural mechanism un-necessarily could have unintended superstructural and cultural consequences. Andover is a very successful community in the main, and thus it would appear that OTM has served us well. Andover should not change its form of government unless there is a clear imperative, and this imperative has not been expressed by the data or by residents. Two members stated that, in the abstract, they might recommend City form as the easiest to implement, but this is not a reason to change an established and mature system of government.
- **Wishes of Andover's Residents:** The UMass Lowell survey showed two thirds of Andover residents are in favor of retaining OTM, and that this was reflected in input received during Listening Sessions and via other channels. However, many voters have expressed a desire for improvements to the current OTM operations, suggesting that status quo can be advanced. Further, we should learn from changes brought about as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic to rethink how we can get people to engage instead of taking the ability to engage away from them. A minority of residents believe that Andover should adopt RTM; they should be thought of as a constituency, not as a groundswell.

Once all members had spoken, Mr. Stumpf invited members to speak either in support of, or in opposition to, any statements already made. No member offered any further comments. Mr. Stumpf therefore declared that the TGSC has expressed a clear preference to move forward under the assumption that we will recommend that OTM be retained, and that the TGSC should now identify and study specific reforms to OTM, and consider any further public input, prior to deciding a final recommendation.

3. Discuss Next Steps in Form of Government Study

The committee initially attempted to enumerate the topics for further study, but it became apparent that this would not be fruitful due to the potentially large number of topics to consider. Instead, the committee chartered the following sub-committees to which the studies would be delegated:

1. Engaging Voters to Increase Town Meeting Participation – This includes anything from providing pre-meeting forums to pushing the envelope on remote participation to improving dissemination of the Finance Committee Report. With this subcommittee in particular, we may need to look into the future and consider what may be, but is not currently, possible.
2. Electronic Voting – Powerful research was done on this matter in 2018-2019. This subcommittee should review and update this and prepare it for consideration by the TGSC.
3. Improving Efficiency – This includes anything from bundling similar financial articles to allowing that articles-to-be-withdrawn be withdrawn in one motion at the beginning of the meeting.
4. Meeting Time and Location
5. Other Miscellaneous Open Town Meeting Reforms – This includes any issue, whether identified back in January or not, that would improve the conduct of OTM.

Each sub-committee should meet as required and be prepared to report back to the full committee at its next meeting.

Members were asked to email Mr. Simko within a week to let him know on which sub-committees they would like to serve. Mr. McBrien will resend the list of topics that was created during the January meetings of the TGSC so sub-committees can pick out any topics that are germane to their charter.

It was agreed that the TGSC should provide an update to the Select Board at the next mutually convenient Select Board meeting. Out of respect for the Select Board (the body by whom the TGSC is chartered), public briefings will not take place until the Select Board has received an update.

4. Discuss Schedule and Upcoming Meeting Dates

To provide these sub-committees with sufficient time to complete their work, it was decided that the full next meeting of the TGSC should be deferred to mid to late August. Mr. Simko will poll all members of the TGSC to set a date for the next full meeting.

Sub-committees should meet as frequently as required until then. Mr. Simko will poll members of each sub-committee to identify dates for their first meetings.

Adjournment

Ms. Doherty moved that the meeting adjourn, Ms. Ralston seconded. The committee voted by roll call unanimously in favor and the meeting was adjourned at 6:06 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Andrew McBrien, Clerk