

Town Governance Study Committee

Public Input Listening Session

Public Safety Center, Saturday November 20th 2019, 7.00 – 8.0 pm

During the Town Governance Study Committee (TGSC) Listening Session of November 20th 2019, the essence of each comment from the public was captured on a flip chart as a brief bullet. The flip chart was intended to provide a highly visible and easily digested resource by which the meeting participants could gauge whether their input was being heard correctly. Each sheet was removed from the flip chart as it became full, and remained on display for the remainder of the meeting. From time to time, the captured bullets were read back to check comprehension. The TGSC did not express opinions at this meeting, nor agree or disagree with any points made.

This following is a verbatim transcript of the flip chart sheets, with the exception that spelling and other typographical errors have been corrected, and minor additions have been incorporated (in italics) to aid comprehension.

Transcript

1. What precipitated TGSC? Lot of questions, private warrant articles
2. Community Preservation Act – tried twice, not supported. Not a structural topic so not for TGSC study. But what part of government looks at environment (etc.) could be a structural question
3. Has Andover grown to need representative government?
4. Representative government does not necessarily mean Representative Town Meeting
5. *[In data gathering]*, look beyond MA, beyond New England
6. What should be our Executive function? Select Board and Town Manager? Town Administrator? Other?
7. *[Input form on Web site]* should not ask if people are employees, registered voters, under 18.
8. Largest town in MA with Open Town Meeting but 1200 *[attendees]* at best
9. Logistics issues at Town Meeting are exclusionary, eg *[lack of]* parking, seating
10. Many people feel they don't get opportunity to serve. Appointment rests with Town Manager. Consider Appointments Committee.
11. Other towns have many more *[board]* positions as elected (eg Burlington)
12. Andover news did not include notification of Listening Sessions. *[Consider]* Communications Committee
13. *[Town needs]* consistent single source outlet for all town information
14. Water Commissioners – Select Board can only devote so much time to any issue, including water. Ditto Sewer Commission
15. Conservation Commission [members] pressured into certain decisions *[to ensure]* re-appointment
16. Generalize *[point 15]* – Who drives? Town or citizens? Comes back to Appointments Committee. Staff serve residents or vice versa
17. Planning Board accountability?

18. *[The]* difference between elected and appointed people feeling pressured into a decision is that whole town pressurizes via election
19. What percentage of people turn out for local elections? But what should be expectation?
20. *[If Town moved to Representative Town Meeting]* could there be insufficient people to fill all seats?
21. *[For efforts to increase turnout]* How do we know if we are succeeding without a *[measurable]* definition of success?
22. Is turnout *[for local elections]* greater if more people are running?
23. Turnout is declining for local elections (>50% in the 1950s). This is the biggest problem we face. Nothing to do with parking, People just don't/won't participate
24. Saturday Town Meetings? People working in Boston cannot get back by 7.00pm
25. Could elections be on Saturday (legally)?
26. How to get more voter registration? More registration = more turnout
27. Working well – strength from Town Manager function – properly trained, professional experience. Compare to elected mayors, who may win on personality, not experience/ability
28. Short ballot, focus on key positions
29. Retain Town Manager position, even if some rebalance of Select Board and Town Manager
30. Not working well – Town Meeting
31. Council/Manager form *[of government]* should not be equated with problems of cities
32. Cannot rely on Townsman to disseminate Town information any more. Beef up Town Web site. Town must take responsibility. Part of transparency.
33. Select Board deliberations need to be written up in much more detail
34. Articles for Town Meeting warrant so far in advance and also brief enough *[for warrant to be small enough]* to send to everyone. Very inefficient and prevents understanding
35. *[Participant recently]* lunched with people from towns with Mayor and Council, Representative Town Meeting and Open Town Meeting. *[In discussions around the table, people from]* all three *[said their government]* has strengths and weaknesses
36. In Burlington, all submittals, filings, etc for projects posted on Web site
37. Braintree - from Representative Town Meeting to Council. Framingham – Town Meeting shifting. *[What can we learn from these towns?]*
38. TGSC Web site – not just statements *[of public input]* but discussion forum