

Town Governance Study Committee

Public Input Listening Session

Memorial Hall Library, Wednesday December 11th 2019, 9.00 – 10.30 am

During the Town Governance Study Committee (TGSC) Listening Session of December 11th 2019, the essence of each of the public's comments 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. *[A member of another committee has seen]* many meetings quickly go to governance.
 - People do not understand how *[town]* government works. People can't hang out *[at enough meetings]* to find out
 - Complex issues need repeated conversations. Town Meeting is one-shot.
 - *[Example]* Historic Mill District too big for one-shot. RFP takes time
 - People are generally pleased with Town Government
 - Town needs to understand *[views of townspeople]* and dialog *[is needed]*
2. People have asked [the member of another committee] for help to “pack the room for Town Meeting”. *[Having enough of the right people in attendance is a]* big factor in pass/fail
3. References to city council *[form of government]* – allows series of meetings on a topic
4. W. Concord project analogous to Historical Mill District holds meetings every Wednesday
 - Daytime
 - Almost “office hours”
 - Local and comfortable
5. Town Officials and Community Volunteers *[work together in decision-making]*
 - People want to have community in the loop. Adds legitimacy
6. Why city council?
 - Discussion, not one-shot. (Amesbury – city council adopted because of vey similar issue to Historical Mill District)
 - Councilors *[have to stay]* very active to get re-elected
7. Social Media
8. Timeliness – Town Meeting is not timely
9. *[A speaker]* had no idea public could attend committee meetings until *[she]* had to present to one

- *[You can get involved]* But have to stick your foot in the door
 - But people do talk amongst themselves
 - Only engage *[with/in government]* if issue affects them directly
10. *[Thus]* Town Meeting does not represent town
 11. Representative Town Meeting means you have more direct contact with your representative
 - Someone who is local and could have office hours
 - Could improve dialog – closer and more personal
 12. Lot easier to speak to neighbor
 13. Engagement takes time – many people have no time
 14. Correct to place onus on individuals to get educated, but vicious circle
 15. School System has Communications Director, Town does not.
 - For Town, *[responsibility for communication is]* divided up by *[Department]* function
 - School system is one department (albeit big). Town has 8 major departments
 16. Need open discussion about finances
 17. Thinks communication is there
 - Lack of understanding *[by townspeople]* of what is available
 18. Big change in Andover is increasingly fewer people live and work here
 - Less ties to the Town
 - Different *[reduced]* abilities to engage
 19. I want services and financial stewardship. I want the ability not to engage and live in a well-run town.
 20. Hear lots of complaints about Town Meeting but don't hear any specific *[actionable]* complaints
 - Is this because people only have “gut feel” that something is wrong?
 - Is this because people don't feel qualified *[to comment]*?
 21. Simon Sinek – “Start With Why”
 22. Students have made a big difference *[wherever they have got involved]*
 - Get parents involved
 - Very long-term view
 - Fresh ideas
 23. Financial issues on unsustainable trajectory
 - Town Government/Management cannot address this without more citizen engagement and support
 24. 30/40s *[year old]* people disengaging from all politics
 25. Absences from town (eg business travel) prevent attendance at Town Meeting
 - Representative Town Meeting is not the solution
 - Technology?
 26. Citizens *[need to start]* backstopping Town Management
 27. Hope Town Meeting does survive in some form. Direct democracy
 - Separate voting from debate?
 - Voting via ballot
 - Retains directness and ensures ability to vote
 28. Setting ourselves up for failure if we don't think outside the box *[on Town Meeting]*
 - Eg Collins Center is a limit per se

29. *[Town Government/Management should]* Get out there outside structure of Town Meeting. Ad hoc events *[one-off meetings]* have changed direction of big projects
30. Lot of information on *[Town]* web site but not clear who you need to speak to on any specific issue
31. Town Meeting *[impediments]*
 - Young families
 - Travelling
 - April/May is busy time
32. Regularity of engagement promotes interaction
33. Issues coming to Town Meeting repeatedly voted down because of lack of understanding
34. Open doors – people don't trust government *[in general]*
35. Individuals in Town Government very helpful. But not clear where to go on big strategic issues
36. Erosion of civic responsibility
 - People don't feel they need to be involved
 - Communication not working partly because people don't feel need to listen
37. Are we looking at other towns?
 - Yes in Phase 1 to see issues they chose to address
 - Yes in Phase 2 to see how they addressed them
38. Starting next year, all 8th graders must do a civics project
39. Cautionary note on representative Town Meeting: Gerrymandering is happening nationwide *[driven by]* Right and Left
40. Article at 2019 Town Meeting was not recommended *[for approval]* by Select Board because Select Board wanted to refer it to the Town Governance Study Committee. Appointed vs elected Planning Board.
 - TGSC is looking at all governance-related private Articles *[from past Town Meetings]*

1. Next Steps

Mr. Simko presented a slide showing forthcoming TGSC meetings

2. Closing Remarks

Mr. Stumpf again thanked the members of the public for their participation and for the input they had provided

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 10.30 am.

Respectfully submitted,

Andrew McBrien, Clerk