

Frequently Asked Questions – Electronic Voting at Town Meeting (Articles 13 & 14)

Articles 13 & 14 at this year's Annual Town Meeting would enable future Town Meetings to vote by electronic devices. Article 13 amends the Town bylaws, and Article 14 appropriates funds to rent electronic voting devices.

What are the Benefits of Electronic Voting?

This secure method of voting, which is used by the United States Congress and dozens of other Massachusetts Town Meetings, provides three principal benefits:

- First, votes can be cast confidentially, like a vote cast at the ballot box. This is important so that Town Meeting voters feel they can vote their conscience.
- Second, the integrity of votes will be enhanced given that human standing counts will no longer be necessary. No matter how careful human counts are, there is always the chance of human error. That risk does not exist when voting is conducted electronically.
- And third, votes can be taken more quickly, providing for a more efficient Town Meeting. Under the current rules, about five votes are conducted by time-consuming standing counts where rows and sections are counted one by one by section counters. These standing votes take about an hour that could be saved with electronic voting.

Why is a Bylaw Vote Required?

Article 13 would amend the Town bylaws to allow Town Meeting the option of voting by handheld electronic device. Currently, voting at Town Meeting is conducted either by a show of hands or through a standing count. This amendment would provide for a method of conducting a vote electronically.

Why Do we Need to Appropriate Money for Electronic Voting?

Article 14 authorizes appropriation of \$40,000 to rent electronic handheld devices for an Annual Town Meeting and multiple Special Town Meetings in the next fiscal year. This is a conservative cost estimate to ensure that necessary funds are available. This amounts to about \$1.50 per registered voter.

Are We Buying the Devices or Renting Them?

The article contemplates renting the devices, rather than buying them, so that the Town can choose different vendors or different technologies as we become more familiar with electronic voting. And renting each year allows us to use the most current technologies each year. Ultimately, as Andover first adopts this new technology, we should have the maximum flexibility to find the vendor and the systems that works best for us. Appropriating funds to rent devices for FY 2024 does not preclude the Town from purchasing devices in future years.

Are These Devices Secure?

Yes. Over 70 Massachusetts communities use this technology and, by all accounts, are pleased at the benefits these devices provide. These devices are secure and not hackable because they operate in a closed system – they are not conducted to the internet. And voters can see in real-time that their votes were counted accurately through a big-screen display that tells each voter, who knows only their own number, how their vote was registered for each article.

So much of our lives are safely conducted through electronic means, whether through banking or investing or the obtaining of medical care. We know of no community that has adopted electronic voting and then discarded use of these devices.