

Lexington Virtual Town Meeting

2020

Decisions, Decisions, Decisions...

We started discussing holding a remote Town Meeting in early March...

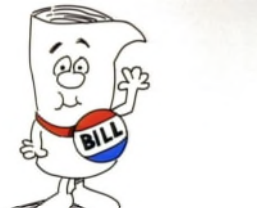
... in mid-March we received an opinion from our Town Counsel that he believed we were already entitled to hold Town Meeting remotely

... but other concerns raised by bond counsel, caused us to rethink and consider legislative avenues...

... the Select Board, Town Moderator, Town management staff and Appropriation Committee all supported and committed to the idea of moving forward with a remote Town Meeting.

We just needed to figure out how...

I'm just a bill...



We worked with Town Counsel and Bond Counsel to pursue legislation that would confirm the legality of our remote Town Meeting

5/4/2020	Senate	Text of S2673, printed as amended
5/4/2020	Senate	Passed to be engrossed
5/7/2020	House	Read; and referred to the committee on House Ways and Means
5/26/2020	House	Committee recommended ought to pass with an amendment, striking out all after the enacting clause and inserting in place thereof the text contained in House document numbered 4752
5/26/2020	House	Referred to the committee on House Steering, Policy and Scheduling
5/26/2020	House	Committee reported that the matter be placed in the Orders of the Day for the next sitting for a second reading, with the amendment pending
5/26/2020	House	Rules suspended
5/26/2020	House	Read second, amended (as recommended by the committee on House Ways and Means) and ordered to a third reading
5/26/2020	House	Rules suspended
5/26/2020	House	Read third and passed to be engrossed
6/1/2020	Senate	Rules suspended
6/1/2020	Senate	Senate concurred in the House amendment with a further amendment striking out all after the enacting clause and inserting in place thereof the text of S2733
6/2/2020	House	Referred to the committee on Bills in the Third Reading

Nice Clear Language...

The latest version included retroactive language (we believe...)

SECTION 17. If this act does not take effect at least 15 days prior to the date of a scheduled representative town meeting to be held during the governor's March 10, 2020 declaration of a state of emergency, the actions of a town moderator, select board or board of selectmen, and town meeting that are substantially consistent with the requirements of section 8 shall be ratified, validated and confirmed in all respects as if this act had been in place prior thereto.

Just in case, we have a Special Town Meeting article to authorize the Select Board to petition the legislature for a Special Act confirming the legality of our remote Town Meeting.

If all else fails, we've also filed a Motion for Injunctive Relief in Middlesex Superior Court seeking to have the courts confirm the legality of our remote Town Meeting (the second hearing is this afternoon).

Not a Clear Path!

Technical Stuff

- For the video platform we decided on Zoom Webinar with the 500 attendee option.
- For the voting platform we are using the same system as our electronic voting by Vvoter from Option Technology
- For the debate platform, one of talented Select Board members developed an online web portal to provide secure login for all 198 members of our Town Meeting.

Ramping UP!

- The Select Board, Moderator, Town Meeting Member Assn President and Town staff worked together to get information out to TM members.
- We developed a dedicated Remote Town Meeting website, all presentations were pre-recorded videos posted on this site weeks in advance.
- Held training sessions by Precinct starting May 12 (all 9 precincts) every Tues, Wed & Thurs, plus one make-up session. One separate training for Select Board and the one for Appropriation Committee.
- Held a mock Town Meeting on May 27.
- All pomp and circumstance was eliminated...
- It took a team of approximately 20 town staffers to man help lines, manage presentations, read questions from the public, etc. to make it all happen.

Results...June 1st night jitters

- We had 190 of 198 Town Meeting members present, nobody recalls that high of a voter turn out in recent history.
- June 1 we held our first (first ever in MA?) online Town Meeting and completed 27 articles that were included in a LARGE consent agenda, including the budget (General, Water, Sewer, Recreation), capital plan, two home rule petitions, CPA projects and a land swap amongst others including a major zoning change.
- People have been patient (no one more than our Town Moderator), curious, had fun and were ready and eager to participate to ensure the Town's business was carried out.