

TOWN MEETING REVIEW COMMITTEE

Thursday, January 23, 2020 – Town Hall Auditorium, 7:00 PM

MINUTES

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FAIRHAVEN,  
MASS.

Members Present:

Mark Sylvia, Moderator (Chair)  
Brian Bowcock (Pct 1)  
Eleanor Chew (Pct 2)  
Sean Powers (Pct 3)  
Paul Foster (Pct 4)  
Dan DeNardis (Pct 6)

Others Present:

Erin Costa, Town/Schools Media and Communications Coordinator

The Committee took up the fourth review topic, engagement. Members of the committee and invited guests introduced themselves.

Engagement Topics

- a. Town Meeting Members
  - How do we increase attendance?
  - How do we communicate with Town Meeting Members outside of Town Meeting?
- b. The Public
  - How do we encourage more registered voters to run for Town Meeting?
  - How do we keep the public informed on the actions of Town Meeting?

TOWN MEETING MEMBERS/PUBLIC

The Committee discussed how best to communicate directly with Town Meeting members. Paul Foster suggested we consider ask Town Meeting members to provide an email address when their annual nomination letters go out. He also suggested that the Clerk could ask for email addresses when Town Meeting members check in at Town Meeting.

The Chair suggested the possibility of the Town issuing town email addresses to all Town Meeting members. The Chair will check with the Technology Team, Town Administrator, Town Clerk and others to see what the best approach is to collect email addresses. Dan DeNardis

raised the question of data security/hacking. The Chair will raise that when discussing this topic with Town officials.

The Chair introduced Erin Costa, Media and Communications Coordinator for the Town/Schools who talked about ways we can update/improve the website as a resource for Town Meeting members and the public.

### ***Website***

Erin indicated that she met with Town Clerk Carolyn Hurley to revamp the Town Clerk's webpage to make it more user friendly. A lot of information provided. Cleaning up the voting page is one of her priorities. Erin offered to work on developing a Town Meeting page separate from the Town Moderator page. She suggested that when you go to a new Town Meeting page, you could click on a link on the town website and provide useful/helpful information. Some examples could be posting vacancies, including important deadlines and include other helpful resources. The page could also function as an interface for town meeting members to engage with each other. Erin also suggested the possibility of developing a newsletter that can be shared with Town Meeting members. **The Committee was supportive of developing a Town Meeting member page and agreed to work with Erin to develop one.**

### ***Social Media***

Erin also discussed the use of social media to raise public awareness and increase communications between town meeting members.

She used as an example the Town's Facebook page – Erin managed an event on the Town's Facebook page related to the May 2019 Town Meeting. She also tweeted about it. For 2020 we can consider setting up a hashtag prior to the beginning of town meeting that can be used through out the day by officials and town meeting members. Facebook is also able to live stream Town Meeting.

Erin offered to do both – the consensus from the Committee was to utilize social media to the fullest extent possible as a tool to increase communication among Town Meeting members and raise awareness with the public.

### ***Fairhaven TV***

Erin also mentioned that Fairhaven TV is a great resource for sharing important dates, producing videos that inform the public and as a medium to cover all Town Meeting related activities.

**She suggested we may want to consider producing a creative video with BD TV/students and her office to generate interest in what town meeting is and how it works. She suggested that maybe a Q&A about what town meeting is would be a good approach – what is the point of Town Meeting and how does it work. It should be an engaging video that includes students.**

Erin also indicated that she is happy to post a Save the Date on Fairhaven TV.

***Other strategies to raise awareness/increase engagement***

Erin also offered that a way to do outreach and raise awareness about Town Meeting is to participate in an early voting registration day at Fairhaven High School.

Paul Foster talked about civics and how unfortunately today, the Massachusetts educational framework does not include US History and Civics. Committee members inquired as to whether or not we can work with the School Department about developing curriculum that raises awareness about local government. **The Chair indicated that he will reach out to the School Department to inquire about the opportunity to include local government in future curriculum.**

Dan DeNardis suggested that the Chair reach out to his colleagues in the Moderators Association to see what is done in other communities to raise awareness. **The Chair agreed to reach out to the Moderators Association to see what engagement strategies are recommended.**

**It was also suggested that a way to engage the public is to track the critical articles that were approved at Town Meeting and share that information online and via social media. An example of that is the status of Oxford and Rogers Schools.**

Erin indicated that she will gladly promote Town Meeting and precinct meetings via the communication tools available.

***Precinct Meetings***

Brian Bowcock suggested a way to engage Town Meeting members and the public is to change the tradition of precinct meetings – have one in your precinct. Have finance committee rep show up. Engagement by chairs.

The Committee also discussed a concept previously discussed - Precinct chairs meeting. That would be an effective forum to increase awareness and improve engagement. The Moderator could be a possible convener.

Dan DeNardis raised the issue of privacy regarding the use of social media. Erin Costa emphasized that the Town/Schools are very careful in what they include in social media. She indicated that there are established protocols that follow on the Town and School sides of government. Dan also asked about what user friendly meant – Erin explained that user friendly means that the generally public can easily learn about Town Meeting or conduct business. The Chair also indicated that the public can share their thoughts through a feedback loop and that the website must comply with ADA requirements.

**Erin offered to put together an outreach/engagement plan and share it with the Committee.**

Eleanor Chew indicated that we need to provide more information about elections and running for office. Could we utilize the Government channel to provide this information? She indicated that the Neighborhood News provides this information. **Erin indicated that she his happy to provide anything that exists on the website on Fairhaven TV.**

Eleanor indicated that it would be useful to provide election/vacancy/how to run information on Fairhaven TV and via posts/flyers via various departments (Senior Center etc..)

Erin indicated that the Town Clerk has indicated that they will update the list of vacancies prior to Town Meeting. If we can promote it prior to the Precinct meeting we may get more interested citizens to attend and express interest.

The next Committee meeting is scheduled for February 6, 2020 at Town Hall. The topic will be recommendations to Town Meeting.