

Municipal Technology Committee Proposal

Common questions - and answers

Q1: Why does Southborough need another committee?

A: Technology is playing an increasing role in our lives, and in the town government's operations. The town needs a strategic plan across all government entities and technologies, and needs to consistently execute that plan.

Q2: The Town just hired an Information Technology Manager. Isn't that his job?

A: The IT manager is a welcome addition to the town, and is making good progress on its IT issues. The MTC would be complementary to his role, and provide him with additional resources. The town's technology issues cover a much bigger space than IT; no one person can be expert in all technologies.

Q3: What exactly do you mean by "Technology"?

A: Technology keeps evolving, but at least:

- Information Technology / Data Processing equipment and Software
- Networks, Voice/FAX, Intelligent Buildings, SCADA, Radio, AV, Emergency communications, Cellular, Mobile, RFID, PNT, GIS, EV, AES ...

Q4: What, exactly, would the MTC do?

A: Several things:

- With the town's technology managers (including IT, schools, etc), produce and monitor execution of a strategic plan for ALL technologies across the town, enabling improved services
- Allow the town's technology managers to take advantage of the vast amount of resident expertise to complement their own. (About 600 engineers, CIO/CTOs, etc appear in the census.)
- Bring all the independent Boards and Committees to one forum to coordinate technology plans
- Report to the Town Meeting on the strategic plan and on significant warrant articles involving spending on technology and related services.
- Report to the town Administrator, Selectmen, School Committee, ... as needed

Q5: Would the MTC have budgetary or other authority over technology spending?

A: No. Authority & budgets remain with the Boards and Committees. MTC's role would be similar to the Advisory Committee, but with technology expertise and focus. Its role is to facilitate, not to slow down, adoption of useful technologies. It does not micro-manage, disempower, or evaluate staff. It is required to advise Town Meeting on articles that include significant spending for or changes in technology.

Q6: Why would the MTC have a budget?

A: To cover administrative expenses: printing, perhaps travel to work with or observe other communities. In rare circumstances, paid consultants.

Q7: What should we expect in the strategic plan?

A: The strategic plan is expected to be a 5-year rolling plan, which identifies:

- The current uses of technology in the town, and how they should evolve
- Opportunities for operational and spending efficiencies, as well as for better service to the citizens and employees
- Intersections of technology use with laws and regulations, especially security and privacy
- What's being done well; priorities for investments

Q8: Why create a standing committee/bylaw? Isn't there an existing committee with this name?

A: Technology isn't going away. The current ad-hoc MTC was formed by the Selectmen pursuant to a 2007 Town Meeting appropriation for IT technology in Town Hall. That money has been spent, ending the MTC's authorization. In any case, the current MTC isn't structured or staffed to meet the strategic challenges facing the town.

A standing committee will ensure that there is an on-going strategic plan for all Town government entities, and that Town Meeting has on-going guidance on spending.

The current MTC has voted to present this article to Town Meeting.

Q9: Who would be on the committee?

A: There would be three types of committee members:

- 5 voting members: residents with technology backgrounds and expertise appointed by the primary technology drivers: Selectmen, School Committee, and Library Board of Trustees
- regular ex-officio members from Selectmen, School Committee, Library, Board of Health. These are expected to be the technology managers - including the Selectman's IT manager
- ad-hoc ex-officio members - appointed by Boards/Committees with consent or by request of the MTC as needed.

The ex-officio members don't vote, but do participate fully in the committee's work.

Q10: Is that all? Would there be staff?

A: The MTC would have no staff, but is expected to solicit volunteer consultants from the pool of town residents to assist with its work. In rare circumstances, the MTC might need to pay for consultant expertise. The job is too big for a small committee.

Q11: Why now?

A: The current ad-hoc MTC's authorization expires with the last \$1 of the 2007 appropriation. The town is on the cusp of initiating major projects, including Main Street and the public safety building. The library is waiting for a grant cycle that would enable renovations. And the new IT Manager will be proposing programs to recover from the effects of not having any in-house IT services for Town Hall. In addition, ad-hoc and uncoordinated decisions are being made every day in other areas. The convergence of these opportunities represents a unique opportunity to put a strategic planning process in place with minimum disruption.

Q12: When should we expect results?

A: Some sooner than others. The bylaw puts in place a framework for a big job. Immediate opportunities include the work proposed by the IT Manager, and those created by the Main Street reconstruction and Public Safety building upgrades.

Creating a comprehensive strategic plan will take time, as will forming the necessary partnerships with the town employees. The committee should have a preliminary, if incomplete, strategic plan by the 2018 annual Town Meeting and would report at that time. Of course, anything that can be done sooner, will.

Q13: What about other towns? Are they doing anything similar?

A: There are a few other towns with technology advisory boards. Arlington, the inspiration for the proposed bylaw, reports that its TAB has been extremely effective.

Q14: The bylaw doesn't specify precise thresholds or timetables and uses "reasonable" a lot. Why?

A: The MTC is obliged to create "rules of procedure", which will address these and other operational procedures and behavioral norms. The bylaw determines the bounds of authority and is static; the rules of procedure provide stability, with the ability to adjust as the MTC evolves. Experience shows that rules of procedure will evolve with the MTC. "Reasonable" avoids volatile detail and is commonly used to mean "what an ordinary person, who wants the MTC to succeed, would do."