Town Meeting Review Committee

Report to the Board of Selectmen and Town Moderator

September 2017

TMRC members
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Executive Summary

The ad hoc Town Meeting Review Committee (TMRC) has completed their assignment for the 2017 fiscal year and is submitting this report on their work process, findings and recommendations.

The initial goal for establishing the committee was to explore what (if any) recommendations could be implemented to increase resident participation in the town governing process. The particular focus was how to increase attendance at Annual Town Meeting (ATM).

At a high level, the committee set the following goals to fulfill their charge.

>   *#1 – Recommend improvements to the Town Meeting process*

>   *#2 – Collect resident feedback*

>   *#3 – Educate on town government process*

The work breakdown to handle the project was assigned in 3 parts:

> *Data research - In order to recommend improvements, a study of similar New England towns was undertaken to determine if other towns had a better success rate at town meeting attendance. This work was done by TMRC member Tim Martel and presented to the group.*

> *Survey - It was agreed that a survey of residents was necessary to determine areas of potential improvement at the local level. The survey was created jointly by Julie Connelly and Sue Grinblatas and studied by the committee.*

> *On-going education – What is needed to get more people involved? What do residents need to know? What training needs to be provided? Recommendations and suggested training materials was done by Claire Reynolds.*

A significant component of the work involved studying 2 sets of data:

- *Comparable New England towns*
- *Resident surveys*

It was thought that data analysis would yield support for recommendations for changing meeting scheduling, timeframes and/or process. The committee's significant recommendations are based on comments included with the voter surveys. Comments should be reviewed by all officials participating in town meeting and practiced accordingly. Some changes may require a town meeting vote while others may be up to the discretion of the Selectmen and/or Town Moderator.

SUMMARY/CONCLUSION

The Town Meeting Review Committee members recommend that this study is not a 'one time' review. They considered their ad hoc assignment to be the '1ˢᵗ phase' in addressing citizen participation in town government. Research indicates that the Moderator and Selectmen should consider forming a new ad hoc committee for the purpose of the on-going process to educate residents particularly as new people relocate to Southborough. It was interesting to note that the largest percentage of respondents were in the age range of 31-50 years. This may indicate that

there is an interest to improve and partake in the process by the age group who are the town's current and future leaders.

Conclusion

1) *Data analysis of attendance at town meeting in comparable New England towns, did not indicate that changing the current meeting schedule (timeframe / weekday) made any significant difference in attendance numbers.*
2) *Survey responses indicated status quo for ATM schedule and quorum. Survey comments contained a significant 'night of meeting' changes with procedures and processes.*
   - *Presentations are too long*
   - *Residents need education on how Town Meeting works*
   - *Clarifications are needed when amendments are made to motions*
   - *While remote participation was supported, there is no provision under State law for Remote Participation at Town Meetings*
3) *Need for continuing education (type of government, how town government functions, citizen participation, etc.) which may increase resident participation. Southborough's town democracy takes time and is not just a 'show up and vote' at town meeting process.*

Final Thought:

A review of Town Meeting attendance:
April 2016 ATM (500+ attendees – Burnett House)
October 18th, 2016 STM (675 attendees – Main Street Reconstruction Project)
March 8th, 2017 STM (600+ attendees – St Mark's Golf Course purchase)
April 2017 ATM
      1st night 4/25 – 256 voters
      2nd night 4/26 – 215 voters
      3rd night 4/27 - 160

Attendance shows that the following quote is definitely 'on point'.

"Issues drive attendance"

quote by John Wilson – former Town Moderator (1985 -2008)

The TMRC would like to thank all the residents who took part in the survey and especially to those who took the time to provide their comments. This information was extremely important for the committee to have input for recommendations.

A special thanks to the Town Clerk, Jim Hegarty for his help and direction in providing sources for much needed data and answering all of our questions.

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Introduction

Following the 2016 Annual Town Meeting (April 11th) and based on feedback from the community, the Board of Selectmen sensed the need for residents to have more information regarding warrant articles and the town government process. It was also felt that an informed and knowledgeable resident base could potentially increase participation at the annual town meeting.

At the May 17th, 2016 Selectmen's meeting, Dr. Stephen Morreale (newly elected Town Moderator) spoke about his plans for outreach as he prepared for his new role. His intention was to encourage resident voters to become more actively engaged in various aspects of town governance. Specifically, he asked the Selectmen to create a joint ad hoc committee to evaluate how the town conducts town meeting and suggest ways to increase participation. His proposed committee would be comprised of five members, three appointed by the Moderator and two from the Board of Selectmen. The Town Administrator would also be appointed as an ex officio member.

Appointments to the Ad Hoc Town Meeting Review Committee were made at the June 7th, (2016) Selectmen's meeting. As six qualified candidates applied, the Board agreed to increase membership to include all applicants.

Mission

The TMRC was charged with exploring best practices in other New England communities, voting procedures, warrant review and improved public education of town meeting voters. TMRC unanimously voted on the following mission statement:

> The Southborough Town Meeting Review Committee (TMRC) was established at the beginning of FY 2017 to review the Town Meeting process, participation, workflow, and day/time held. This committee is comprised of 6 members, three appointed by the Town Moderator and three appointed by the Board of Selectmen. The Ex Officio member will be the Town Administrator.
>
> The charge of the TMRC will include, but not be limited to, exploring Best Practices in other New England communities. The committee will explore voting procedures, warrant review, improved public education of Town Meeting voters using multiple modes of media and improving interest, efficiency and attendance.
>
> The TMRC will be expected to present a report to the Town Moderator and BOS at a joint meeting by February 2017, before preparations for the 2017 Annual Town Meeting. The BOS and Moderator will work with the TMRC to craft potential warrant articles for consideration at the Annual Town Meeting.
>
> The report should include recommendations to enhance and improve the delivery information to voters, reports and briefings by Boards, Committees and interested parties for warrant articles, identify best practices in other localities, including day and time of meeting and voting procedures (considering electronic voting methods) during Town Meeting.
>
> Feedback and input from citizens will be vital to collect. It is suggested that members reach out to other Towns, current and past Town Moderators, Massachusetts Moderators Association, the Massachusetts Municipal Association, and other related groups. (source: Town website)

Goals/Objectives

Based on the assigned mission statement, the TMRC developed 3 main goals as well as specific objectives to achieve each goal. The Committee felt that the goals were realistic and sufficiently comprehensive to achieve their mission as an ad hoc committee.

#1 - Recommend improvements to Town Meeting process

- Outline Southborough's current process
- Research data from other towns
- Identify differences

#2 - Collect resident feedback

- Solicit resident preferences/comments
- Compile results

#3 - Educate on town government format and process

- Educate on town government structure options
- Educate on Southborough's format
- Educate on the warrant & town meeting process

At the time that the goals were created, the availability (or unavailability) of information was not known. If it was found that there were effective processes used in other towns, there would be further study.

The final report will document benchmark research, town survey results and committee recommendations.

It should be noted that the term, "Town Meeting process" often refers to the complete cycle of activities (start of the warrant, on-going meetings, warrant publication and actual night of Town Meeting.)
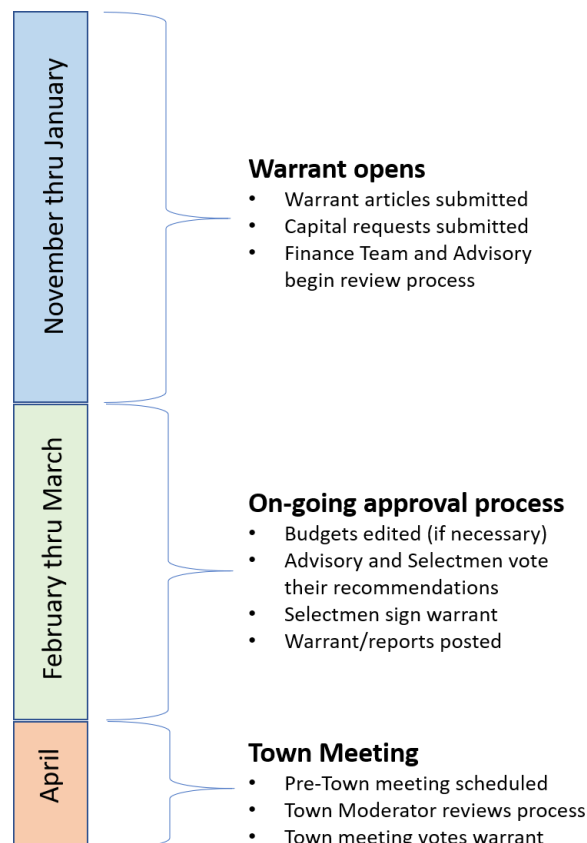
Goal #1 – Recommend improvements to the Town Meeting process

In order to achieve this goal, it was necessary to have a full understanding of the 'behind the scenes' work both for the committee and future readers of this report. Additionally, a study of any success rates of comparable New England towns needed to be examined.

Objective #1 – Outline the current process

The preparation for town meeting is extensive and begins approximately 6 months prior to the meeting date. The initial groundwork starts with a planning meeting (Board of Selectmen, Town Administrator, Treasurer) at which time the April Town Meeting date is planned and the budget directive is discussed.

The timeline shows a high-level view of activities during the 6 months prior to town meeting.

November thru January

Warrant opens
- Warrant articles submitted
- Capital requests submitted
- Finance Team and Advisory begin review process

February thru March

On-going approval process
- Budgets edited (if necessary)
- Advisory and Selectmen vote their recommendations
- Selectmen sign warrant
- Warrant/reports posted

April

Town Meeting
- Pre-Town meeting scheduled
- Town Moderator reviews process
- Town meeting votes warrant

It is important to note that in conjunction with the timeline above, updates on the proposed/requested budgets are provided by the Finance Director to the Board of Selectmen. These updates are provided at the monthly Selectmen's meetings.

Objective #2 – Research data

The committee was charged with exploring 'best practices' used in comparable New England towns. It was important to look at statistics from similar New England towns to determine if we could learn from successes in other locations.

For the committee members to make substantive recommendations, it was necessary to research available data from Massachusetts Town Clerks' offices. A detailed study was undertaken by TMRC member Tim Martel who studied a tremendous amount of data. The following process was used in defining towns that would be used for comparison:

1. Reviewed demographic data from 293 towns.

2. Narrowed the study of Town Meeting attendance data to 90 towns.
   - All have Open Town Meeting and similar municipal government.
   - Includes 43 similarly sized towns (with populations in the range of 5,000 - 15,000) – Southborough's population is in the middle at just under 10,000.
   - Used average attendance values from years 2013, 2014 & 2015
   - Study focused on:
     - Attendance rates
     - Month/Day
     - Quorum requirements

Study analysis – (Attendance rate data)
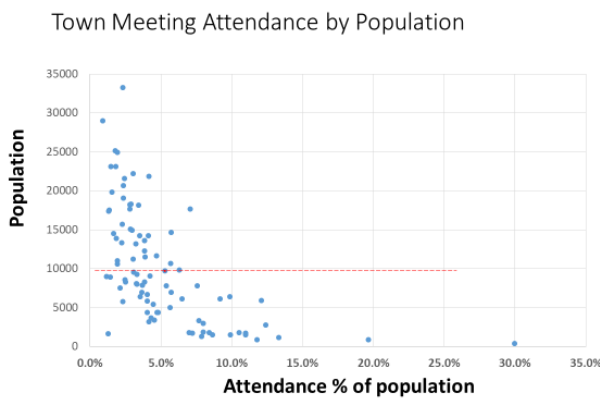
Analysis:
Each blue dot represents data for one of the 90 towns that submitted attendance population. Red line is Southborough's population of just under 10,000.

Towns with smaller voter populations have a higher attendance rate. This could have an influence as the town's population grows.
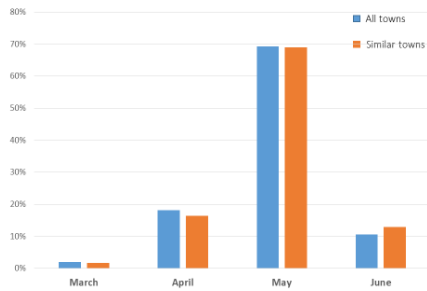

Analysis:
Orange line shows the percentage of registered voters. While the percentage fluctuates, the trend has declined in the past 10 years.

Study analysis – Month/day data
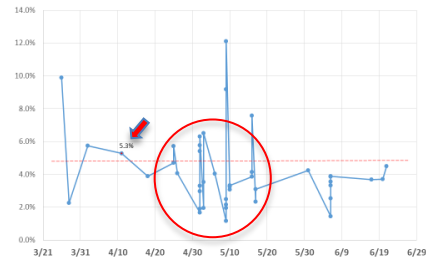
TM schedule by Month: Benchmarking Snapshot

- Includes data from 293 MA towns, including 116 similarly sized towns.

Analysis:
The chart shows that the majority of towns hold their meetings in May.
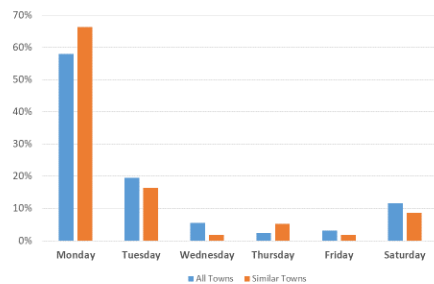
Attendance by week/month: Benchmarking Results

- Includes data for 43 similarly sized towns.

Analysis:
Each blue dot represents data from a town. While most towns hold their meeting during the mid-April thru mid-May timeframe, the circle shows attendance is below the average of 5% (red line). Therefore, no reason to change the meeting date.

The red arrow represents Southborough's data.

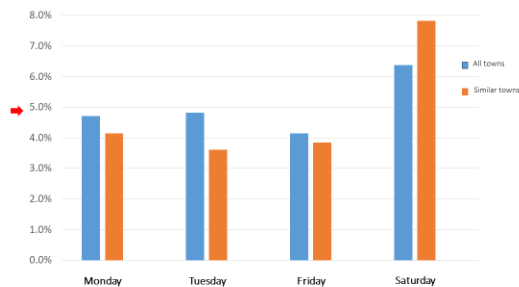Meeting occurrences by Day: Benchmarking Snapshot

Analysis:
The highest percentage of meetings are held on Monday – followed by Tuesday and Saturday.

Includes data from 293 MA towns, including 116 similarly sized towns.

Attendance by day: Benchmarking Results

Analysis:
Data shows that attendance is noticeably higher on Saturday when most voters typically don't work.

The red arrow indicates that the average attendance for all towns is just below 5%.

The available attendance data for the 90 towns studied did not show significant attendance for Wed, Thurs, or Sun.

Quorum

Quorum by population: Benchmarking Snapshot
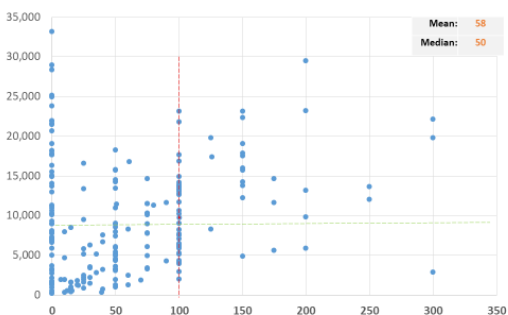
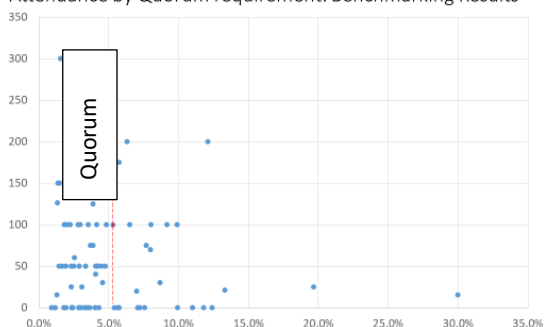- Includes data from 216 MA towns where quorum data was available.

Analysis:
As represented by the blue dots, most towns in the study (216 MA towns) have a quorum between 0-100. Smaller size towns tend to have a quorum between 0-50.

There are few towns with a quorum >100 as indicated by the red line.

Quorum mean = 58
Quorum median = 50

Attendance by Quorum requirement: Benchmarking Results

- Includes data from 86 towns where quorum & attendance data was available.

Research note: Towns are inclined to review their quorums. It has been found through anecdotal evidence that more people show up when there is no quorum. This suggests that people get concerned that only a few people will be making decisions for the whole town.

Objective #3 – Identify differences

After studying data from comparable New England towns, there was nothing significant learned that would support recommendations for bylaw changes.

Observations

- Attendance data is based on a representative sample of 90 towns.
  Average attendance is slightly below 5%.
  Southborough's attendance is slightly higher than 5%.
- Southborough's situation is that we rarely get closer to a 10% rate.
  When we do, it is usually tied to a hot button issue.
  (Example of Special Town Meetings in October 2016 and March 2017)
- Trend observation shows as towns get bigger, the percentage of voter participation decreases
  This may be a future trend for Southborough with population growths resulting from Madison Place and Park Central.
- Most towns (more than 50%) have town meeting on Mondays as does Southborough (Town bylaw).
- Studying data from other towns, attendance is markedly higher on when TM is held on Saturday.
  However, that may not necessarily be an indicator of day preference as the resident survey indicates.
  It may be that data shows higher attendance at Saturday meetings because voters tend to be home, therefore more convenient to attend.

Goal #2 – Collect voter/resident feedback

Ideas were discussed as to how to gather a representative sample of residents' feelings and opinions on town meeting. The committee agreed that a resident survey would be the best (but not only) method to collect data and comments. In addition, the process for marketing the survey was of utmost importance so as to collect a cross section sampling of age groups.

The initial availability of the survey was planned for a 6 week period. The timeframe was later extended to receive input from ATM which was rescheduled to late April 2017. Distribution was thru social media (MySouthborough, neighborhood blogs), Library, Town House, Senior Center and 2 town meetings (March & April 2017). The survey was available from March 2017 – June 2017.

Objective #1 – Solicit resident preferences/comments

The online tool Survey Monkey was used which is a popular, easy to use survey and has good summary reports for data compilation. Once the benchmarking data points were available, the resident survey was developed to include questions relevant to the data research as well as Southborough specific questions. TMRC members Julie Connelly and Sue Grinblatas created the survey which was approved by the committee. The survey was available on-line and a hard copy format. It was designed to include questions relevant to Southborough's town meeting.

A copy of the survey can be found in the **Appendix** – pages **Survey 1-2**.

In addition to similar questions found in the benchmarking data, survey questions ranged from general meeting remarks, streamline town meeting, quorum, scheduling and remote participation.

- Month/day
- Quorum
- Changes to the actual town meeting procedure (during the meeting)
  - Streamlining options
  - Voting methods
  - Miscellaneous changes
- Respondents age
- Communication (how residents get town related news/updates/notices)
- Frequencies of attend TM
- Comments section (comments elaborated on the categories listed)

Objective #2 – Compile results

The committee was extremely pleased with the participation in the survey. There were 248 responses of which 92 included comments. The most beneficial part of the survey was the comments which respondents included.

The TMRC would like to thank all who responded to the survey and particularly to those who took the extra time to provide their feedback. This direct voter information is most telling of how residents feel about the current town meeting process. The comments provide recommendations for improvement, follow-up for a future TMRC and the need for town government training.

All comments are listed in the **Appendix** – pages **Survey Comments 1-7**.
It is interesting to note that the age of respondents was a very representative view of the town's populations.

Resident survey responses

Question #1 - Which of the following would you support to streamline Town Meeting? Check all that apply.
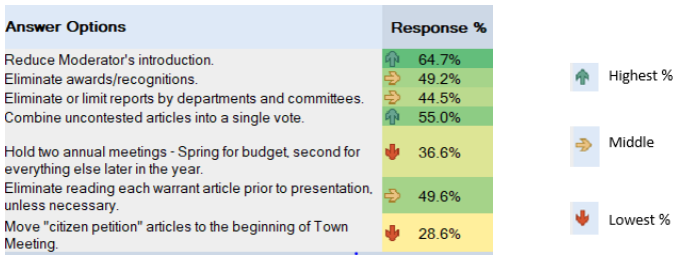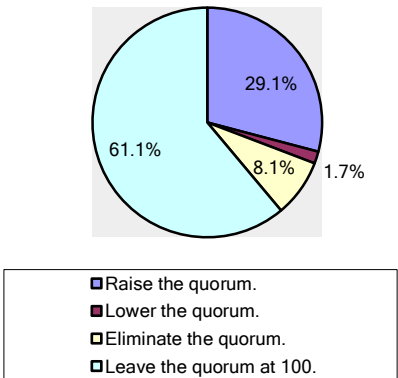

Question responses:

Major support for reducing Moderator introduction u and combining uncontested articles. Almost 50% of responders favored eliminating reading of each warrant article unless it was

Question #2 - The current quorum required for Town Meeting is 100 voters. Would you support raising or lowering quorum?

Raise the quorum.
Lower the quorum.
Eliminate the quorum.
Leave the quorum at 100.

While 61% of the responses supported leaving the quorum at 100, 24 responses listed a specific number.

Quorum #	# of supporting comments
50	1
150-300	17
300-400	2
500-1000	4

Question #2 (con't) - If you elected to change the quorum, what should it be?

Responses:

1. 2.5% of registered voters - about 225 today - it should change with our population
2. 5% of registered voters
3. A specified percentage of eligible voters.
4. 2% of registered voters
5. Should be a percentage of registered voters 10%
6. 200 as it more representative of the Town's population.
   Perhaps its time to get rid of Town Meeting government.
7. much higher to get more people involved and not leave when their item of interest is over.
8. A fixed percentage of population. 5%? Not realistic in today's environment, but in a town our size it is scary the small number of people making all the decisions.
9. Residents could vote remotely using technology.
10. No less than 5% of the last census
11. Have web-based vote. This will make this question mute.
12. A % of the voting population, 10-20%
13. 1000
14. 20% of town voters
15. No strong opinion
16. Make this higher to force participation.
17. 10,000 people in town, quorum should be 500
18. This is to question 3. The quorum stands at the beginning, stands throughout but is an issue only if questioned.
19. Not sure, but 200 is not a representative sample

Question #3 - Should quorum only be required at the opening of Town Meeting?

■	Yes, quorum should only be considered upon opening.
■	No, quorum must be maintained throughout Town Meeting.
□	There should be no quorum requirement.
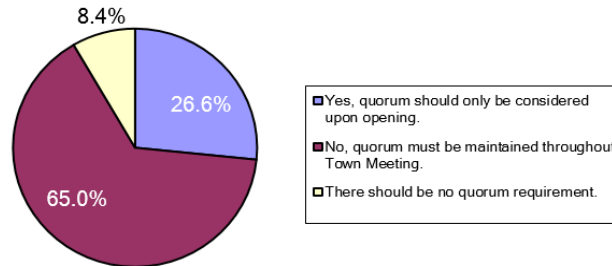
65% of responders favor maintaining quorum during the meeting.

Question #4 - Which of the following changes to Town Meeting would you support? Check all that apply.

Answer Options		Response %
Put time limits on presentations.	⬆	84.9%
Put time limits on individual comments.	⬆	75.7%
Limit number of microphones on the stage.	⬇	9.6%
Require that each committee and board have a representative available to answer questions on behalf of such committee or board.	⬆	61.5%
Require a hard stop at 11:00 p.m. with no option for extension.	⬇	29.7%
Assign time limits to discussion of individual articles.	➡	38.9%
Limit ability to "move the question" until all those who wish to comment have had an opportunity to do so.	⬇	28.9%
Change format from open town meeting to representative town meeting.	⬇	7.9%

The majority supports time limits on presentations and individual comments.

61% of responders favor a board/committee representative to be at the meeting for questions.

Question #5 - What is your preferred month for Town Meeting? Please rank.

75.5% of responses indicated that the late March to early April timeframe was the preferred time to hold Town meeting.

Month	Votes
Late March	87
Early April	61
Late April	31
Early May	12
Late May	0
Early June	5

Question #6 - What is your preferred day of the week for Town Meeting? Please rank.

Day	Votes
Sunday	19
Monday	44
Tuesday	58
Wednesday	17
Thursday	5
Friday	5
Saturday	48

Question #7 - What is your preferred start time for Town Meeting? Please rank.

The results below indicate preference for TM time if held on different days of the week:

Day/time	% of supporting responses
Sunday (afternoon)	56%
Monday – Thursday (evening)	95%
Friday (evening)	92%
Saturday (morning)	46%
Saturday (afternoon)	36%

Question #8 - Which of the following changes to voting at Town Meeting would you support? Check all that apply.
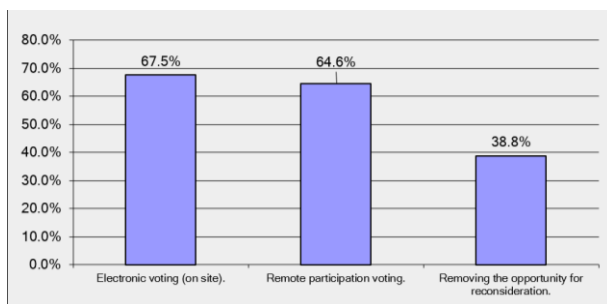

Question #9 - What other changes to Town Meeting would you support? Check all that apply.
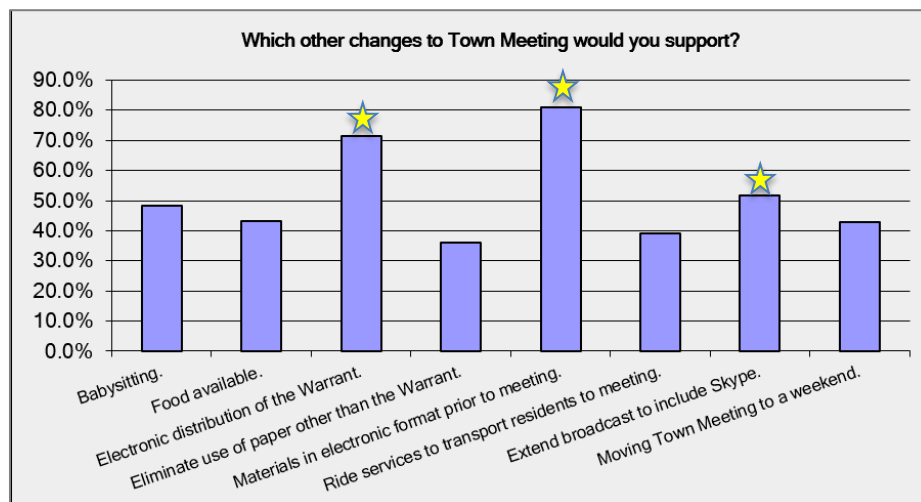
Three suggested ATM changes received over 50% support from respondents (indicated by yellow stars):

1. Materials in electronic format prior to the meeting.
2. Electronic distribution of the Warrant.
3. Extending the live broadcast to include Skype.

Question #10 - What are your primary sources of Town related news? Check all that apply.
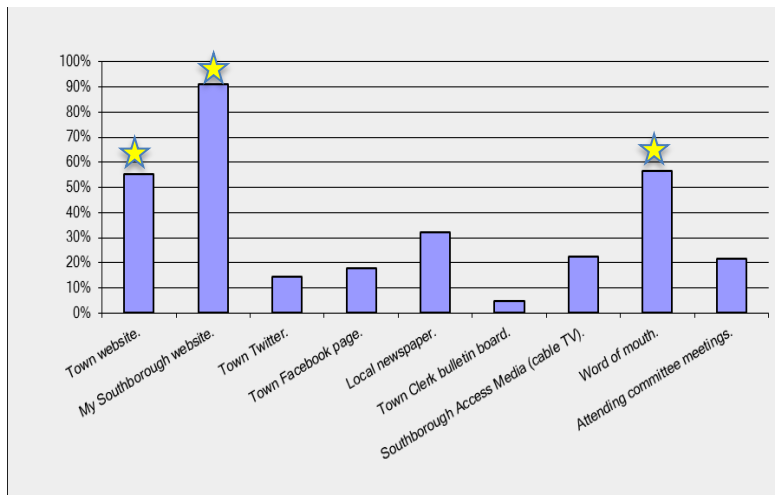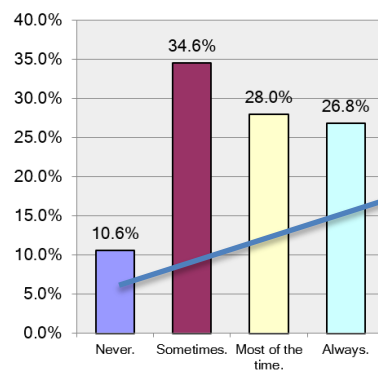

Top 3 sources (yellow stars):

1. My Southborough
2. Town website
3. Word of mouth

Question #11 - Age of respondent.

Age of respondent

Age 51-70   Age 31-50

18-30   31-50   51-70   over 70
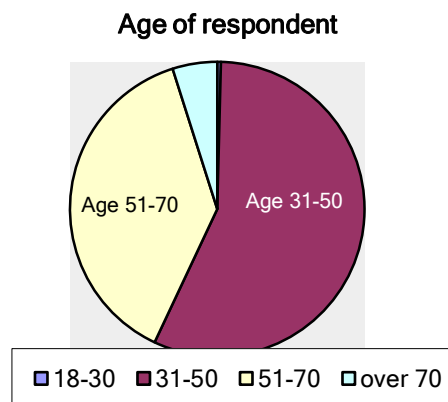
Question #12 - -How often do you attend Town Meeting?

It is interesting to note that over 10% of the respondents, never attended town meeting.

Question #13 - -Add any comments

92 comments were submitted with the surveys.

All comments are listed in the **Appendix** on pages **Survey comments 1-7**.

A high-level recap of key/common comments is summarized for reporting simplicity.

Each summarized issue has included reference numbers to the actual comment(s) found in the Appendix.

Town Meeting in general

It is difficult for voters with small children to attend. Either they have to pay high babysitting fees or only one family member can attend. While many respondents acknowledged that babysitting is provided, the late dismissal of the meeting is not practical for small children.

Reference Comment – #28, #33, #36, #38, #39, #40, #41, #43, #44, #45, #56, #57, #59, #60, #62.

Warrant availability prior to Town Meeting

Numerous comments were submitted with recommendations for the warrant to be available prior the meeting. Those who are familiar with the processes leading up to the meeting, know that the warrant is available and how to get a copy. It seems from the comments that there is a need for better knowledge of how to obtain the warrant.

Reference Comments – #13, #18, #20, #50, #86.

Night of Town Meeting - Streamlining

There is overwhelming consensus to streamline town meeting as much as possible.

    Waiting for quorum

    Many creative suggestions were provided as to how to efficiently use the time prior to the start of the meeting. Since the actual meeting cannot start until quorum is reached, there may be an opportunity to efficiently use the 'wait' time to either inform the audience or reduce the number of activities that take place once the meeting starts. Some of these include: standard announcements, award information, reports, 'rolling PowerPoint presentation', etc.

    Reference Comments - #19, #22, #23, #26, #49, #64, #70, #92

    During Town Meeting

    Suggestions for moderating the meeting and protocol were found in the following comments:

    Reference comments - #18, #19, #26, #42, #47, #51, #54, #57, #58, #63, #66, #70, #71, #72, #83, #86, #87, #92

    Suggestions for voting during the meeting were also given.

    Reference Comments - #10, #17, #18, #21, #22, #25, #27, #32, #37, #39, #44, #56, #62, #66, #68, #74, #77, #81, #90

General observations on Survey Results

- o Strong support (65%) for maintaining a quorum throughout the meeting
- o Strong support for reducing the introduction of the moderator.
- o Slight majority support for combining uncontested articles into a single vote.
- o Slight majority support for eliminating reading of each warrant article.
- o Awards and recognition – 47.8% in favor of elimination.
- o Strong support for remote participation. TMRC does not support. The State Law has no provision for Remote Participation at Town Meetings
- o Strong support for electronic voting, TMRC supports studying this option.
- o Low support for removing the opportunity for reconsideration.
- o Survey results show preference for a weekday (most want M-T-W).
  However, a separate question indicated that voters would be amenable to moving to Saturday. 43% said yes.

Goal #3 – Educate on town government process

It was interesting to note that many of the survey comments had constructive suggestions that indicated a need for education on town government. Education would be beneficial to increase awareness and potential greater participation. Each TMRC member had resident feedback regarding new residents not being aware (or fully informed) of Southborough's form of town government. This led to the discussion of how residents learn about this topic. If new residents don't know the role that they can have in the process, they certainly won't be participating.

In addition, anecdotal data indicates that as town populations grow, the number of voters at town meeting decreases. If that is a trend, Southborough needs to educate residents as to why town meeting is important. It is extremely important that residents are efficiently and effectively receiving information. An educated voter population most likely would improve town meeting attendance. This has been proven at meetings with 'hot' issues.

Improvements have been made to streamline the town meeting. Residents need to know this as their suggestions clearly indicate 'streamlining' is important to promote attendance.

> A prime streamlining example is the Town Clerk's Article 39 from the April 2017 ATM.

> In this particular case, the article presented an amendment to change the process for determining a two-thirds vote. (Some articles require a two-thirds vote.) In the past, a two-thirds vote had to be counted by a show of hands or by standing. Town Meeting approved the amendment to allow the Moderator to declare a two thirds majority when it is clearly obvious.

> This article will save at least one hour at Town Meeting.

Objective #1 – Educate on town government formats

There is a tremendous amount of existing material regarding town government and town meeting. The Town website should be the collection point for 'all things' Town Meeting with the webpage providing an organized source of material. While information is continuously being added and updated on the website, links need to be <u>easy</u> to find. (It would also be helpful if newly added/update information is highlighted.)

A suggested process for collecting town meeting/governing documents would be:

- o Review what exists (currently posted or in print)
- o Call for 'town meeting buffs' to provide additional information. These residents are an excellent source of information and documents.
- o Southborough Access Media videos (ex., Donna McDaniels' video)
- o Pinpointing material produced by the Massachusetts Moderators Association

The Senior Tax Write-off program could be used as a resource to help with the above. There is a wealth of 'town government savvy' seniors who can facilitate the process of pulling together material and working on the initial structure of the website page. Website designed could be augmented by a 'web savvy' volunteer.

Material topics to include:

- o Town government formats
- o History of Southborough's form of town government
- o Role of resident volunteers and elected/appointed officials and committee members
- o Role of town employees

Objective #2 – Educate on the warrant / Town Meeting process

Since it was generally agreed that an education initiative would most likely increase citizen participation, it would be a worthwhile experiment to offer a formalized training program. As residents' schedules are busy, a concise workshop training could be offered. This could be done to judge interest, response and possible follow-up.

Town Meeting Preparation – Workshop content sample

> How to get up and running quickly for the next Town Meeting

> **Audience:** New residents (existing residents who want to learn more). Any interested party who wants to learn about the town meeting process.

> **When:** 2 weeks prior to Town Meeting
> (Saturday workshop and a weekday night)
> Southborough Access Media could videotape for an on-going resource

> **Duration:** 1.5 hours followed by Q&A session for interested parties

> **Facilitators:**
> Town Clerk and/or Moderator
> Former TMRC members
> Few resident voters

> **Content:**
> Town government
> Warrant
> Town meeting protocol
> Resources

There is no shortage of material available to educate voters on 'all things town government'. Thus, the preparation time for such a workshop would be minimal.

Town Meeting Quick Reference Guide (QRG)
Available a week prior to the meeting and at town meeting.
(Sample in the **Appendix**, Pages **Town Meeting QRG 1-2**)

Promotion
Electronic signs (Transfer Station, major intersections, etc.)
MySouthborough blog
Town & neighborhood social media sites

Further thoughts
- Offer the Town Meeting Preparation workshop on an annual basis – prior to Town Meeting.
- Research education (civic duty) training offered in schools. Is there a program that the town could augment? What training could be specifically designed for students turning 18?
- Research options for best distribution method(s) for the warrant? (The warrant used to be delivered to every house. In today's world, people want electronic copies.)

TMRC Recommendations/Votes

TMRC votes on recommendations - Summary Survey results and TMRC votes

Upon completing the benchmark data study and resident survey responses, the TMRC voted on the following 18 items. (Votes were taken at their May 31st 2017 meeting - all committee members present.)

Votes on Month/Day

1.) Move to recommend that the next Special TM be held on a Saturday at the Selectmen's discretion.
Motion made by T. Martel, 2nd C Reynolds,
Vote: 4-0

2.) Move to keep annual TM on Monday.
Motion made by T. Martel, 2nd C Reynolds
Vote 4-0

3.) Move to keep annual TM in early April.
Motion by S. Grinblatas, second by T. Martel,
Vote 4-0

Votes on Quorum

4.) Move not to change current quorum and to recommend that quorum only be taken at start of Town Meeting.
Motion made by T. Martel, second by C. Reynolds,
Discussion: The motion did not reflect resident feedback as the survey indicated strong support (65%) for maintaining a quorum throughout the meeting. The committee discussed that frequently at ATM, people leave after their 'special article' was voted. Therefore, it may be difficult to keep the meeting 'moving along' if there was a call for a quorum. The committee recommends that the Moderator should inform voters that although the item has been voted, it could be brought up for reconsideration later in the meeting which could change the vote.
Vote 4-0

Votes on Streamlining meeting
Seven survey questions dealt with streamlining ATM. The first 3 options were voted in one motion (#5).
The table summarizes survey results with greens checks showing TMRC agreement.

Options	Percent Agree	Recommendation	
Reduce the introduction from the Moderator.	65%	✔	4-0
Combine uncontested articles into a single vote.	55%	✔	4-0
Eliminate the reading of each warrant article prior to presentation, unless amendments have been made.	50%	✔	4-0
Eliminate awards and recognitions.	49%	✔	3-1
Eliminate or limit reports by departments and committees.	45%	✔	4-0
Hold two annual meetings - one in the spring for budget only and a second for other bylaws and articles at a different time of the year.	37%	✕	2-2
Move "citizen petition" articles to the beginning of Town Meeting.	29%	✕	2-2

5.) Move to:
- o Reduce the introduction from the Moderator
- o Combine uncontested articles into a single vote
- o Eliminate the reading of each warrant article prior to presentation, unless amendments

Motion made by T. Martel (2nd S Grinblatas)
Discussion: Strong support for reducing Moderator introduction. Slight majority support for combining uncontested articles and eliminating reading of each warrant article.
Vote: 4-0

6.) Move to eliminate awards/recognitions.
Motion made by C Reynolds (2nd S Grinblatas).
Vote: 3-1

7.) Move to eliminate or limit reports presented at the start of the meeting was made
Motion made by C Reynolds (2nd T Martel)
Vote: 4-0

8.) Move to hold 2 annual meetings (divide budget from bylaws and articles).
Motion made by C Reynolds (2nd T Martel)
Discussion – 2 meetings are costly, but the current one meeting goes multiple nights. Needs further examination regarding cost and popularity.
Vote: 2-2

9.) Motion to move citizens petition to the beginning of meeting made by C Reynold (2nd T Martel)
Discussion – Single issue voters possible would leave after their petition. Traditionally, all citizen petitions are voted at the end of the meeting.
Vote: 2-2

Voting

Three survey questions dealt with changes to voting at ATM. The table summarizes survey results with the green check showing TMRC agreement. Note the asterisk comment.

Options	Percent Agree	Recommendation	
Electronic voting (on site).	68%	✔	4-0
Remote participation voting.	65%	✘	0-4
Removing the opportunity for reconsideration.	39%		**

** The committee recommends that the opportunity for reconsideration not be removed, but instead be limited to prevent abuse and to improve Town Meeting efficiency. Specifically, the committee suggests that reconsideration only be permitted if new information is submitted or a mistake in process or information is identified. (4-0)

10.) Motion to have electronic voting on site (to replace tellers) made by C Reynolds (2nd S Grinblatas)
Discussion: While this may be an enhancement to speed up voting, the cost may not justify changing to this method. The Town Clerk has researched use of electronic voting in other towns. The expense versus time savings need to be studied.
Vote 4-0

11.) Move to allow remote participation voting was made by S Grinblatas (2nd T Martel)
Discussion: While this may increase participation, due to Southborough's form of government, it may not be allowed.
Vote: Unanimous against 0-4

12.) Motion that reconsideration would only be permitted if new information is submitted or a mistake in process or information is identified made by J Connelly (2nd T Martel)
Discussion: This option should be studied further, in order to make recommendations which would prevent abuse. Currently the trend is that every vote of substance is followed by a vote to reconsider to close out the article. Recommended that it would only be used in light of new information or mistake/confusion. This will require TM vote.
Vote: 4-0

Procedural changes

Options	Percent Agree	Recommendation	
Put time limits on presentations.	85%	✔	4-0
Put time limits on individual comments.	76%	✔	4-0
Require that each committee and board have a representative available to answer questions on behalf of such committee or board.	62%	✔	4-0
Assign time limits to discussion of individual articles.	39%	✗	0-4
Require a hard stop at 11:00 p.m. with no option for extension.	30%	✗	0-4
⭐ Limit ability to "move the question" until all those who wish to comment have had an opportunity to do so.	29%	✗	0-4
Limit number of microphones on the stage.	10%	✗	0-4
Change format from open town meeting to representative town meeting.	8%	✗	0-4

⭐ Note – limited support for this option. TMRC feels that all comments should be heard but need to be limited to unique (not yet presented) comments.

13.) Motion to support time limits on presentations made by C Reynolds (2nd T Martel)
Vote: 4-0

14.) Motion to put time limits on individual comments made by C Reynolds (2nd T Martel)
Vote: 4-0

15.) Motion to require that each committee and board have a representative available to answer questions on behalf of a committee or board made by J Connelly (2nd T Martel).
Vote: 4-0

16.) Motion to assign time limits to the discussion of individual articles made by C Reynolds (2nd T Martel)
Vote: All opposed 0-4

17.) Motion to support the following was made by S Grinblatas (2nd C Reynolds)
  - Require a hard stop at 11pm with no option for extension
  - Limit ability to "move the question" until all those who wish to comment have had an opportunity to do so
  - Limit number of microphones on the stage
  - Change format from open town meeting to representative town meeting
Discussion: The committee felt that a hard stop not feasible particularly in the situations where adding another additional time would result in completing the meeting. In addition, "moving the question" should only be done after any new comments are heard.
Vote: All opposed 0-4

TMRC votes on survey summary – Miscellaneous changes

Options	Percent Agree	Recommendation	
All materials to be provided in electronic format on the Town website at least one week in advance of Town Meeting.	81%	✔	4-0
Electronic distribution of the Warrant.	71%	✔	4-0
Extend the live broadcast via cable TV to include an internet option such as Skype.	52%	✔	4-0
Babysitting.	48%	✔	4-0
Food available.	43%	✔	4-0
Moving Town Meeting to a weekend.	43%	✘	0-4
Ride services to transport residents to Town Meeting.	39%	✔	4-0
Eliminate use of paper other than the Warrant.	36%	✔	4-0

18.) Motion to support:
- o   Materials in electronic (1 week prior to Town Meeting)
- o   Electronic distribution of Warrant
- o   Extend TM broadcast to include Skype
- o   Babysitting
- o   Food
- o   Ride services
- o   Eliminate use of paper other than the warrant

And not to support moving TM to weekend.
Motion made by C. Reynolds, (2nd T Martel)
Vote: 4-0

Summary of recommendations

Month/Day - Bylaw requires that the ATM is to be held on the second Monday of April.

While the benchmark study results (90 similar size towns) show that there is an increase in attendance at a Saturday meeting, Southborough survey did not concur.
At this time, do <u>not</u> change the date or time of Annual Town Meeting (ATM).

For the next "big issue", if a Special Town Meeting is needed, hold it on a Saturday as an experiment.
- Select a late morning or early afternoon timeslot.
- 43% of survey responders support moving ATM to the weekend.
- No changes to the current bylaws would be required to do this for a special town meeting.
- Based on attendance at a Saturday meeting, a future move of ATM to a Saturday could be considered which would require a bylaw change.

Quorum

Survey results show that Voters want to leave or lower the quorum, and vast majority want quorum requirement to be maintained throughout the meeting, not just at the beginning.

At this time, do <u>not</u> change the quorum number of 100 registered voters.
Recommendation – no requirement to maintain quorum throughout the meeting would make for a more efficient meeting. As part of TMRC charge, recommendations were sought as to how to keep the meeting moving along.)
Since survey responses were not consistent with the TMRC recommendation, further review and follow-up may be appropriate.
Anecdotal evidence from other Towns suggests that any lowering or removal of quorum has a strong tendency to increase participation.

General
- Survey responses tend to exhibit a strong inclination towards 'status quo'. With that in mind, change could be difficult to achieve.
- Survey comments are consistent that the beginning of Town Meeting has too many announcements, introductions, comments and reports.
- The comments also had a lot to say about the procedures during the meeting and recommendations for moderating the meeting.
- While the benchmark data shows that the vast majority of towns are in May, attendance is not necessarily higher. No compelling reason to make a recommendation to move meeting to another month, particularly based on survey results. Strong preference for status quo that ATM is held in April.
- Reconsideration opportunities should be reviewed. While there is often a reason to reconsider a vote if there is new or clarified information, this option should not be abused.
- In the interest of streamlining the meeting, the Moderator could implement reasonable time limits (or number of appearances) on discussions at the mic. Survey comments were strongly in favor of some type of restriction to keep the meeting moving in a timely manner.
- Address comment #48 (found in the Appendix on page Survey Comments – 4). This was out of the scope of the TMRC.
- At the discretion of the Selectmen and/or Moderator, consideration should be given to:
  - Reconvening the TMRC for a report review to discuss next steps and/or
  - Forming another ad hoc committee for the purpose of implementation, education and keeping this initiative going.