



Survey on Town Meeting Member Communication

Appendix C: Replies to Open Text Questions

The following lists the replies to the survey open text questions. LWVN only edited to remove names (replacing last name with "X") and personal information (such as an email address).

<p>What other comments or recommendations do you have about the ability for your constituents to contact you?</p>
<p>*Contact information should be published on the Town Meeting web site. *Needham.gov (or some such) addresses for TMMs should be formulaic for ease of figuring them out.</p>
<p>A townwide discussion site that is not Facebook</p>
<p>As an elected representative, I feel it is extremely important for constituents to be able to easily contact all of their representatives at one time by providing one email address that will forward to all TMMs for that precinct. The easier the process is, the more likely people are to use it.</p>
<p>Depends on who we are talking about, that is, to which parts of my constituency, the question might apply. For instance, if Jim X, a resident of public housing has the Internet and a cable connection, reads the newspapers, follows current events, and the local scene, but has no computer... What then? In that instance, he, out walking, might meet up with me, out biking. Some of what Jim wants, I might have supplied to our community room library, such as a past planning document, prepared by a NHA consultant, to which I could refer him. The paper copies of Minutes, etc. are needed because not everyone wants the online connection. The further media solution would be for a Linden Street Design Studio to set up an internet channel for the Precinct "D" Neighborhood, to include High Rock School, public and private housing, etc. Another particular constituent, say, Rob X, might text message me, which may or may not get through the information maelstrom that social media has become. The real question is, what am I supposed to do with Rob's calls, as a TMM, when he needs better legal and medical help than he appears to be getting.</p>
<p>I am always happy to hear from constituents, although they do not always have very much information about the subject they are contacting me about. In many ways, it's an opportunity or an opening for me to educate them or offer them more information about a controversial issue</p>
<p>I cannot answer 2nd question...I do not know how easy (or not) it is for my constituents to contact me...</p>
<p>I completed a form last night at TM provided by Tedi Eaton. How does this survey relate to the information that Tedi is collecting?</p>
<p>I don't mind if my constituents want to email me, but I do not want my email to be used for solicitation purposes.</p>
<p>I don't think that constituents know who their representatives are. There should be a mailing or distribution once per year.</p>
<p>I feel that more contact with constituents would be very helpful. I don't know how to meet with the Diverse people who live in this Precinct.</p>
<p>I find that most people are not aware of what is going on. It's the same people that are involved. I feel a TMM vote is more about that person's opinion and not those they represent. That's why things don't change and zoning changes such as the muzi property get approved.</p>
<p>I have an email set up for this purpose and would love to hear from people, but I don't know a good way to reach out to the constituents in my precinct without posting something to the whole town.</p>
<p>I like getting phone calls</p>

What other comments or recommendations do you have about the ability for your constituents to contact you?

I love that you're collecting this feedback. When I ran for the first time last year this was something that was very important to me, letting constituents know who their TM members were and how they could get in touch with me. Our role is to represent our community yet we have no way to collect their feedback. Thank you!

I monitor the Needham page but miss a lot. A narrower Needham TM page would be handy.

I prefer not to give out my cell phone; I have a home phone that was in the Exchange Club's Needham Phone Book (last published in 2017); there used to be a "phone book" delivered to each land line subscriber that would list one's name, phone # and address, unless you wished to be unlisted. I would gladly list my home phone in a directory of Town Meeting members.

I think people know how to contact me (which is why I said easy) but truth is I don't know for sure. There have only been maybe 2 times anyone ever has in 7+ years.

I think phone contact ought to be encouraged rather than email. A conversation can then occur which is useful for both TMM and constituent.

I want to be contacted by constituents in my precinct about issues of concern, but on the other hand, I don't want to make it easy for people to "spam" all TM members.

I would be glad to share my email address with my Precinct, but I (and hopefully most others) do not plan on being a lifetime Town Meeting Member, so I believe it would be better for people to be able to reach us through Town Meeting specific emails that could be re-directed to current Town Meeting Members as they change over time.

I would like to be able to send out info to get feedback from constituents who sign up to receive

I would like to hear from constituents. Over the last many years I have been contacted probably less than 15 times. Hearing their opinions, especially when different from my own, make me re-examine the issue and rethink my opinion.

I'm open to other suggestions besides email.

I'm pretty easy to reach, and a fair number of people do contact me immediately before town meetings.

If I could design the ideal means of communication, it would be facilitated by a website where constituents would enter a message and their address, and based on the address, the message would be sent to TMMs in their precinct. That would prevent constituents from sending messages to TMMs that aren't in their precinct. Also, it would be great if constituents could opt-in to receive communication from their tmms, so tmms could solicit feedback from their constituents. In this scenario, tmms would be provided with a town email address, which would serve as the address from which messages are sent, so follow-up communication could be possible. But I realized we are light years from this solution. A simple distribution list would be a fantastic first step.

If someone is online, like on Facebook, they could find me but my name is initials so they might have a hard time.

It is unsurprising that Needham's local elections turn out so few voters - they have had so little personal contact with their reps that it hardly feels like representation at all. It will take a good deal of education to break a long formed habit of not participating.

It should be as easy as possible for constituents to contact TMMs. The town should facilitate this in any way that it can.

It would also be helpful to have some expectations and guidance on How/if we should reach out to our constituents to inform them of what's on the warrant to solicit their feedback.

Just need to make it easy for them to speak their minds

leaving a voice message on my home phone is the best way

List email on town clerk list of TMM by precinct

Mail is good too since it often includes materials and a letter.

What other comments or recommendations do you have about the ability for your constituents to contact you?

My biggest question is what mechanism is in place for me to convey my constituents' comments, requests and questions. Town meeting can not be the only way to share my constituents' feedback. I think TMMs need training in order to be able to properly field constituents' feedback, request etc. I also think there needs to be a way to funnel this info back to the town manager and the Select Board, as someone other than the TMM should be aware of feedback from residents. There needs to be a way to begin to collate and summarize these requests that are shared with the Select Board, taking the feedback shared by all 200 plus TMMs. Otherwise this communication mechanism might cause a lot of frustration for residents if their comments are not properly addressed. I also think there needs to be some education to the public about what types of communications should be directed to town employees and what types of communications should be directed to the TMM. There needs to be clarity here.

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Need to implement an email method ASAP! Snail mail slow, unreliable, & many folks do not own a printer!

Not sure of best option but feel citizens should be able to easily contact town meeting members.

Perhaps get togethers a few times a year?

Perhaps there could be a Town Meeting Member discussion board that anyone can submit questions/concerns to, not just the current TMM Facebook page that is for Town Meeting Members only. A discussion board would allow all to see the questions/comments/discussions without flooding an email inbox.

Periodic precinct based meetings

Physical mail or phone

Pleased if residents are engaged enough to reach out with their interests/concerns

Precinct distribution lists (eg. PrecinctGTMMs@needham.ma) are fairly easy to set up, and easy to direct/point to a group of email address. It's also easy to then swap out an email address when someone new is elected, and constituents don't have to change where they are emailing. This is the easiest for constituents and the most secure/private for TMMs.

Publish the names addresses, phone number and email of TMMs. It is a public role.

Regular mail only

See me when on a walk

Setting up neighborhood meetings before town meeting to review constituent positions on warrant articles

Since we are a representative town meeting, it is critical that we know our constituents views, in order to best represent those at town meeting. The best option is the precinct distribution list, as this is by far the easiest for constituents to use. All they would need to do is click once and compose one email.

Some sort of email address of TMMs should be available to town residents, just as TMMs' postage address was considered essential in the past.

The ability/ease for constituents to contact me is paramount in our representative town meeting model — I am their voice in local government and I should be accessible through different platforms to receive their comments/input as I represent them. Phone and postal mail contact is established. Currently, as many-if-not-most folks use email as a primary contact method, there needs to be an option to connect via email.

they could email me and set up an in person meeting

We need to make it as easy as possible for citizens to find out what precinct they are in and to email their town meeting members. It shouldn't be multiple steps. None of them know what precinct they are in, so it should allow them to enter an address to find out precinct.

Younger members would probably prefer text.

Other methods you have found helpful for learning about the warrant articles?

What I like about the pre-recorded presentations is that I can watch at my leisure and can rewatch if I have questions or hear discussion and want to go back and review.

We used to have a weekly newspaper - gone now, sadly.

We have had a few precinct-by-precinct TMM calls

Watching meetings and reading committee documents as posted on Needham.gov or YouTube

Watching and/or reading Committee/Board meetings (Finance Committee)

Viewing SB, Finance and PB meetings where they debate articles.

The videos are so helpful. Seeing questions asked by other TMMS (and answers) is also helpful

talking to others

Speaking directly with proponents.

Note: I am a new TMM, so have no experience with league of women voters warrant meetings or TM before covid.

no other methods

Newspaper. Word of mouth

Newspaper. And on line department meeting agendas

Mailings from proponents

mailings and emails from organizations and citizens with an interest in the article

Local newspaper sometimes

Live presentations that members may "Question" at meetings and where members may comment on and discuss pro and con; discussions at LWV forums.

In pre Covid times we met at the Senior Center. Each precinct was assigned a different room. The interested TMMs attended a discussion of the Warrant articles along with some Town officials, who answered our questions. This was very informative.

If public forums were made available online that would help. FAQs, as the Schools provide, are also helpful. Presentations at TM are helpful but having them in advance makes it easier for me to think about, question, etc.

I think Zoom is the way to go for all meetings, to provide this option. I also think that minutes of the meetings made very public, perhaps in the newsletter that the communications person is now sending out, is also advisable. I think the communications director can/should provide a very brief synopsis in the newsletter what has been discussed at meetings with a link to the minutes. I would prefer that the newsletter be the main line of communication to me and constituents about what is happening in the town. I think there can also be links in the newsletter of the videos of in person meetings/zoom link meetings for those who were not able to attend either in person or via zoom can listen. But, there are only a small percentage of residents who have time or desire to listen to select board and zoning board meetings. This does not make them 'bad' residents and we need to find alternative ways to let them easily know what is being discussed and what has been decided. Without a town paper coming to people's doors, communication from the town is more critical than ever.

I tend to read whatever background information is offered by the advocates and the dissenters. If a reference is obscure, and not easy to find because there is no link to a source, I have to lean on the email working groups, etc

I love all of these options, but I haven't heard about many of them - the league discussions and issue specific public forums.

I just strongly suggest that people not get their info from FB - too much misinformation.

Other methods you have found helpful for learning about the warrant articles?

I do find that the town leadership is generally accessible and responsive to questions from Town Meeting Members. I've submitted questions via email and at various meetings.

Gathering and reading all the supplemental and background information which is on the Town's website

Doing my own research, talking with proponents of Articles

Discussion with residents I come in contact with in a variety of settings

Despite its limited reach I do appreciate the discussion on the TMM FB page. Warrant meetings provide an excellent chance to ask questions or clarify arguments. I also really appreciate the discussion that typically happens on the floor of town meeting (though less with covid)

Communication from the sponsoring party, either written or as part of their normal processes, eg. school committee meetings.

calling people and asking questions

Board public meetings and hearings

Being able to submit (online) and get response to my direct and specific questions about any warrant articles. In the absence of the warrant meetings we did pre-covid, I appreciate this option.

Attending committee (select bd., finance, planning, etc.) meetings or, more often, watching the recorded meetings on the Needham web site.

Attending BOS, PB and Finn comm meetings

Would you like to share any thoughts on communication with other Town Meeting Members?

Yes, TMMs should consider taking a lead role in supporting local media, in using existing news outlets, and in starting up a Town Meeting news paper (since the Needham Times has reduced its presence) or doing some other form of citizen's information clearinghouse, with accessible references, citations, etc. having to do with Town business - that which is public.

Yes from time to time

Yes

We often can find people via other members or by their precinct constituents, but an online directory would be more helpful.

Views on issues that may have a geographic impact such as Zoning articles

This would be great - and I hope that TMMs would participate. Also there should be a mechanism for TMMs, as a group, to communicate periodically throughout the year with the various committees so that TMMs can be apprised of what is going on in town and what issues are likely to come up.

The videos of article presentations need to be completed sooner to give TMMs time to review. They are still uploading articles the day before. There needs to be a cutoff.

The LWV warrant meetings were helpful and I was always surprised by the relatively low attendance.

The Facebook group for TMM is good, but it only covers about 1/4 of all members, and most are not very active there. I understand that many don't use Facebook, so it would be good to have a forum that included all TMMs. I don't have great ideas for how that would be done.

Sometimes

Published email addresses is good

not on FaceBook, so would not want that to be a primary technique

Not necessarily

Not at this time.

Would you like to share any thoughts on communication with other Town Meeting Members?

No

Need to implement!

My precinct had a zoom once and to be honest, the same people took over the discussion and said what they had said at the planning board meeting. There was never a discussion about gathering feedback from "our constituents"

More TMMs should attend LWV Warrant meetings maybe have two warrant meetings

It's really just as difficult to contact other TMMs - I don't necessary know them, even the ones from my precinct, so to contact them I have to go through the same process as a constituent. If a distribution list existed we could at least email...

It is easy to communicate with Town Meeting members within your precinct, but more difficult to communicate with others

Isn't the point of town meeting to offer our independent judgement on warrant articles?

I'd like communication with other TMMs to be possible but suggest it be topic related (for example, logistics like mtg time and availability of videos, specific warrant articles, reminders of select board or finance meetings and summaries, etc.

I love the idea of being able to meet and get to know TMM in my precinct as well as town-wide

I hesitate to engage in more activities because I'm so busy, sometimes overwhelmed with responsibilities, but I do want to be a responsible and responsive Town Meeting member.

I do not believe communication with other TMM is that important. TMM should be able to research and form their own opinions without influence from others. Communication should be used for purposes of coordination/logistics or dissemination of information.

Do you mean do I want to share my comments on this survey with other TMMs? Or do I want to participate in a meeting with other TMM who are interested in improving communications? Yes, I would be interested in both of these.

Always interesting to know what others are thinking - offers greater perspective

Feel free to add any additional thoughts or comments you have about Town Meeting communication.

We could use a local newspaper. The Needham Times no longer covers town government.

TM is the end of a long process of negotiation and consensus, and a very late time for people to take notice of issues.

There is a notion that communication with TMM, of lack thereof, is a problem in Needham. It is not clear to me that this is true. Rather, the issue which the League of Women's Voters is seeking to address is actually poor civic engagement by the average citizen - email distribution lists will not solve this or improve the situation.

Thank you for moving forward with this study!

Thank you for doing this! Addressing this issue is long overdue

Thank you for doing this survey! I look forward to more communication with my constituents and fellow Town Meeting Members!

So glad this is happening. It is long overdue!

Our Moderator Michael Fee does a good job of training new Town Meeting members and responding to questions from all members.

Online virtual reality is becoming, or has become, unmoored from real reality. If I did not have a printed paper copy of NHA meetings, and my own notes, it would be hard to recover or reconstruct the real record, from the current summary Minutes by the Chair, which are often simply not accurate.

<p>Feel free to add any additional thoughts or comments you have about Town Meeting communication.</p>
<p>Not about TMMcommunications but I think town meeting votes should be recorded electronically to provide speed and transparency I want my constituents to know how I voted and I want to know how other TMMs voted</p>
<p>Material available from U-Tube or Town Website is very helpful to prepare prior to the meetings</p>
<p>It would be good to know if you have any queer TMM. I am a lesbian and I think I may be the only one on town meeting , though I am not sure.</p>
<p>Info sent from town very helpful</p>
<p>I think the communication from the town to TMMs also needs to be improved. I would recommend something like what we receive from Secretary Galvin's office about issues facing the Commonwealth's voters. The pros and cons for the issues has always been very helpful to me when deciding how to vote. I wish there were communications similar to this, not just the Select Board presenting their opinion. I know it is different, but I never feel that I hear both sides of things, unless it is a highly controversial topic. Everything else, including the school department's budget which represents such a significant majority of the town's budget, is passed with little to no comments or questions. Something is not right here and I think the information shared might have something to do with this.</p>
<p>I do not think the electronic sign boards (e.g. at dump...I am old enough to still call it that ;) are effective or attractive.</p>
<p>I do not know about Google groups, but could learn. It's hard to talk to constituents when you don't see them , and you don't know who they are.</p>
<p>Hooray for the LWVN for undertaking this study, Thank you!</p>
<p>As a Fincom member I am very well informed about all Town meeting issues so I don't feel the personal need for new or additional forms of communication for my benefit. Happy to make myself more available for others if interested.</p>
<p>Almost any communications improvements and innovations will be very welcome. However, I am not interested in participating in any Facebook-reliant solution. I see no reason for the Town to support private businesses that are willing to subvert Democracy in the name of profit.</p>