

*TOWN MEETING
STUDY
COMMITTEE
REPORT*

Town Meeting recommendations, February 2026

Town of Lincoln, Massachusetts |

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Executive Summary

In September 2024, the Select Board and Town Moderator established the Town Meeting Study Committee (TMSC) to take a fresh, community-wide look at how Lincoln's Town Meeting functions. Town Meeting is central to Lincoln's self-governance. As our legislative body, its effectiveness rests on residents' trust that the process is inclusive, well-organized, fair, and aligned with the Town's values.

The Committee was charged with examining current procedures and practices, identifying what is working well, and exploring opportunities to improve communication, clarity, efficiency, fairness, accessibility, voting methods, and resident participation. The charge (see Appendix A) also directs the TMSC to incorporate resident feedback, learn from peer communities, understand relevant legal requirements, and assess the potential benefits and drawbacks of possible changes to Town Meeting operations.

There is much to celebrate about Town Meeting. Over the last 10 years, Lincoln's participation rate was 55% higher than our peer Towns (see Appendix C). Town Meeting provides us with the opportunity to build community, see old friends, and meet new friends and neighbors. Improvements such as the implementation of the Consent Calendar (which groups non-controversial items into a package for a single vote) have saved significant time, allowing residents to focus on more complex, strategic issues that require in-depth discussion and deliberation. At the Annual Town Meeting, in one day, we set direction and make key decisions for a \$50m+ organization – the culmination of significant board/committee work and a testament to the competence of Town staff, elected officials and volunteers. In addition, holding the State of the Town meeting in the fall to educate residents on upcoming issues and gather input has become a practice adopted by neighboring towns.

Every voter can participate and have a say – it is the purest form of deliberative democracy. And yet, we face some challenges. While we have the highest participation rate among neighboring Towns, on average only 8.4% of our registered voters attend Town Meeting; this is governance by those who participate. In essence, each of those present at Town Meeting represent almost 12 of their neighbors who do not attend.

Overall, the TMSC concluded that the existing Town Meeting processes work well for typical Town Meetings. However, when a major issue is on the Warrant, such as a significant expenditure, zoning issue or building project, attendance more than doubles or triples and overwhelming feedback indicates that the existing system becomes quite strained. We need to do better, both at Town Meeting and in the process leading up to Town Meeting.

A key aspect of our committee's work was to gather resident input and feedback. It will come as no surprise that our residents were not shy about sharing their perspective – ranging from "I hope you don't change a thing" to "Town Meeting is broken - blow it up and start over" – giving some insight into the challenges the TMSC faced as we proceeded with our work.

Prior to the TMSC being appointed, an engagement process started with the September 2024 "Let's Talk About Town Meeting Kickoff Forum" where participant feedback was captured in an online "Padlet" app. This continued with the December 2024 State of the Town Meeting, the March 2025 Town Meeting, the Feast and Fair event, and a professionally administered survey. 566 Lincoln residents responded to the survey, and our consultant's report can be found in Appendix D. We reviewed results of the survey with attendees at the November 2025 State of The Town meeting and gathered input on key items the TMSC was considering.

The TMSC understands that those who are happy with the current approach may have been less likely to respond to the survey and participate than those who are unhappy. At the same time, with 566 residents responding, the survey participation rate exceeded the average Town Meeting attendance over the last 10 years by more than 25%. Also, the survey indicated broad support for change, spanning demographic groups (age, with/without children, length of residency, etc.).

Based on the feedback we received, there are positive aspects of Town Meeting that residents want to retain and enhance, including:

- Direct resident voting
- Use of electronic clicker voting
- Resident comment/question period
- Community building opportunities over breakfast and lunch
- Consent Calendar

There are also several areas of concern that they would like to see addressed:

- Length of Town Meeting
- Presentation of Motions on warrant articles in a balanced and fair manner
- Challenges to Town Meeting access and voting for some
- Confusion and intimidation regarding Town Meeting process and rules

Figure 1 below outlines our recommendations to the Select Board and Moderator in each of these areas. Additional details can be found in the report sections that follow.

The TMSC views these recommendations as tools available to Town leadership to implement when appropriate. We recommend piloting these changes, rather than mandating them in a bylaw. This will allow for quantifiable evaluation of their effectiveness and understanding of any unintended consequences of the changes.

For Town Meeting to continue to serve Lincoln, we must preserve that which is working well *and* be willing to let it evolve, taking advantage of technological advances and changes in the needs and desires of our community. Therefore, we recommend that the Select Board and Moderator periodically appoint a new TMSC to continue the always appropriate process of assessing of Town Meeting effectiveness.

We would like to thank all who made time to provide feedback; it was the key input to our work and recommendations. We would also like to thank the contributions of Town staff in supporting our efforts, along with Barbara Peskin and Tom DeNormandie, for their regular attendance and input during our committee meetings.

Respectively submitted,

Town Meeting Study Committee members:

Jennifer Morris Gundy
Tim Higgins – Town Administrator
Sarah Cannon Holden – Town Moderator
Jim Hutchinson – Select Board Representative
Ariane Liazos

Kenny Mitchell
Taylor Ortiz
Andrew Pang
Ben Schiller
Andy Wang

Lincoln Town Meeting Study Committee Recommendations

Reduce Length of Town Meeting

- ✓ Clickers for voting
- ✓ Citizen Comments: enforce 2-minute limit, visible timer
- Podium speakers:
 - Enforce time limit, visible timer
 - Encourage Warrant sponsor to limit number of speakers
 - Note other board/committee supporters on a slide

Present Motions In A Fair & Balanced Manner

- For high-interest issues, publicize & hold an open forum for 2-way discussion & feedback, prior to TM
- Allow differing views when conditions are met
 - Pro/Con summary printed in the Warrant
 - ✓ Presentation with slides from the podium
 - Separate Pro, Con, and Procedural microphones

Preserve and Enhance Existing Town Meeting Traditions

- ✓ Community Building Opportunities
- ✓ Consent Calendar
- ✓ Resident question/comment/deliberation session
- ✓ Clickers for Voting
- ✓ Town Meeting Primer
- ✓ Gather Meeting Metrics and Satisfaction Survey

Improve Town Meeting Access and Voting

- ✓ Continue A/V investment across spaces
- Shuttle service for high-interest meetings
- ✓ Schedule high interest items first
- Future Voting Options to Consider (by-law or State law change)
 - Scheduled voting time for high-interest issues
 - Remote Voting – Monitor Wayland Progress

Reduce Town Meeting Confusion & Discomfort

- ✓ Use clickers to support voter anonymity
- Educational outreach work recommendations
 - ✓ Use real-time education within Town Meeting
 - Deliver materials in multiple modalities
 - Directed outreach to new residents & voters
 - Revise materials for clarity and effectiveness

✓ Item is in progress, piloted or implemented

03/04/2026

Figure 1: TMSC Recommendations

Preserving and Enhancing Town Meeting Traditions

New England Town Meetings have provided a form of local, democratic self-government for over 300 years. Lincoln residents continue to value Town Meeting as a forum to meet fellow residents and local officials, to learn about local issues and initiatives, and to debate, deliberate, and participate in the legislative process of local government.

Question and Comment Period

In the survey, over half of respondents stated that they view Town Meeting as a place to debate and decide important local matters and to become informed before voting. Almost half (48.3%) of survey respondents agreed that Town Meeting provides enough opportunity for the discussion and debate needed to vote on important issues.

Approximately one third responded in a way that suggests a deliberative value to Town Meeting, stating that they had changed their position on an issue because of what they heard at Town Meeting, either from an official presentation or a comment from another resident.

Community Building Opportunities

Many residents value Town Meeting for the opportunities to build community through in-person interactions. It allows them to speak directly to a large audience of fellow residents, sharing their questions and positions on important issues. The nature of these interactions is generally considered to be friendlier and more consensus-building than purely online interactions with fellow residents. It invites participation in informal conversations as well as formal decision-making.

Community building encompasses meeting local officials and fellow residents as well as learning about local groups at tables before the meeting, enjoying student presentations (musical and otherwise), purchasing snacks from Girl Scout fundraisers, and sharing a luncheon meal. Many volunteer-led organizations use the event to reach residents and gather input.

Consent Calendar

Survey results indicate widespread support for conducting Town Meeting in an efficient and time-sensitive manner. Expanded use of the Consent Calendar is one way to accomplish this, as it expedites voting on matters requiring little deliberation, leaving more time for substantive discussion. The process also permits Town Meeting voters to call out items they wish to debate, so questions or opinions are not discouraged. Attendees do need to understand the origin and rationale for the Consent Calendar (which can be covered in education materials, as well as addressed by the Moderator at the meeting) but further use of it should be encouraged.

Clickers for Voting

At the March 2024 Annual Town Meeting, residents approved spending \$35,000 to purchase 1,200 electronic voting “clickers”, already used by 80 other towns in MA. Subsequently, at the March 2025 Annual Town Meeting, residents approved a bylaw change allowing clicker usage for Town Meeting votes at the Moderator’s discretion, and clicker usage was also demonstrated at that Meeting on a “fun” vote.

Clickers were used on consequential articles at the June 2025 Special Town Meeting and did noticeably speed up the voting process. Results from the TMSC survey indicate that residents feel the clickers contribute to efficiency, fairness, and accuracy of voting. The TMSC recommends that they be used throughout Town Meeting.

Enhanced Metrics for Evaluation

The TMSC was able to review Town Meeting attendance and ballot data going back several years. The outcomes of specific motions are recorded in annual Town Reports. The TMSC recommends tracking voter participation and satisfaction over time in more detail, using consistent metrics. Suggested indicators include:

- Number of attendees at deliberative and voting sessions (if separated)
- Number of voters per article (when clickers are used)
- Year-over-year changes in total participation rates
- Resident feedback on satisfaction, accessibility, and perceived fairness
- Attendance or engagement levels if remote viewing (not voting) options are provided

Monitoring these data points will allow the Town to evaluate whether changes to procedures improve participation, accessibility, and overall meeting effectiveness.

The TMSC also considered tracking demographic participation. While some demographics, such as age, are relatively straightforward to measure, others, such as race, gender, or socio-economic status, are more difficult to track reliably. In addition, the TMSC reached no consensus on an appropriate benchmark, such as matching townwide demographics or increasing participation among specific groups. As an initial objective, the TMSC agreed that a focus on maximizing overall participation, with a goal of coming closer to a ballot turnout year to year, was appropriate.

Reducing Length of Town Meeting

The length of Town Meeting varies greatly. When there are no major issues to debate, a Town Meeting that commences at 9am can close around noon. When there is a major building project, zoning issue or significant financial expenditure, Town Meeting can be an all-day affair. (In the past it has even spilled over into another day or evening.) This makes it difficult for voters, particularly those who work or have caregiver responsibilities that day, to commit their time or to predict when votes on major issues will take place.

Motivations & Supporting Evidence

Over 50% of survey respondents cited the length of Town Meeting as a key reason they do not attend or leave early. Schedule conflicts (including childcare) were often cited in comments.

Over the years, the Town Moderator and Select Board have taken actions to improve efficiency and shorten the length of Town Meeting.

- **Consent Calendar:** A Consent Calendar was first implemented at the 1976 Annual Town Meeting. This mechanism groups non-controversial items into a motion for a single vote, allowing residents to focus on more complex, strategic issues that require in-depth discussion and deliberation. Since its adoption, Town Meeting has been able to complete business with fewer time extensions.
- **Electronic Voting Devices (“clickers”):** The use of these devices materially sped up the tallying of votes compared with the prior “stand and be counted” manual process, particularly when a 2/3 majority is required to pass.
 - Standing votes counts related to the Housing Choice Act articles during the Special Town Meeting in December 2023 took over an hour.
 - Subsequently at the March 2024 Annual Town Meeting, residents approved spending \$35,000 to purchase 1,200 electronic voting “clickers.” Similar devices were already in use in 80 other towns in Massachusetts.
 - At the March 2025 Annual Town Meeting, residents approved a bylaw change allowing clicker usage for Town Meeting votes at the Moderator’s discretion. Clicker usage was also demonstrated at that Meeting on a non-binding “fun” vote.
 - At the June 2025 Special Town Meeting, electronic clickers were used for the first time for an official vote. This took a minute or two per vote.
 - Subsequently 95% of survey respondents supported using clickers for all or some votes.
- **Citizen Comment Time Limit:** The Town Moderator implemented a two-minute time limit for citizen comments. At the 2025 Town Meeting, a visible timer was used for the first time, allowing both the commenter and attendees to see the amount of time remaining.

■ Recommendations

- **Expand the use of the Consent Calendar** - The TMSC recommends the continued use of the Consent Calendar and encourages the Moderator and Select Board to look for opportunities to expand its use. A citizen can always ask for an item to be taken off the Consent Calendar if they have questions or believe it warrants further discussion.

- **Implement Visible Timer for all Presenters** – According to the Town Moderator, most official presenters from the podium exceed the amount of time that was agreed to at the Moderator’s meeting. In addition to using the visible timer for the citizen comment period, the TMSC recommends that there be a visible time for all presenters. TMSC recommends that the Moderator enforce that time limit, similar to the citizen comment time limit.
- **Limit the number of presentations by warrant article proponents**– When major items are on the warrant, it is common for the proponent to have multiple board and committee members speak from the podium, in support of the article. These presentations are often repetitive of points made by the initial speaker and the transition between speakers takes time. The TMSC recommends that the Moderator encourage presenters to consolidate how they present points from supporting groups. For example, the main presenter can show a slide, listing all the committees and boards that support the article. Those committee and board members are welcome to share additional comments during the citizen comment period. Limiting their podium time will also allow dissenting presentations without increasing the length of Town Meeting.

Presenting Articles in a Balanced Manner

Core Goals

Ideally, a Town Meeting governance format promotes informed, balanced decision-making. It should ensure that residents feel heard, are treated fairly and encourage structures that foster compromise and consensus. To keep meetings efficient and well-run, it is essential that critical information, disparate positions, and opposing views be considered well in advance of Town Meeting deliberations.

Motivations & Supporting Evidence

- **Democratic Health:** Decision-making can suffer when only one side is heard; competing perspectives reduce bias.
- **Impact on Outcomes:** Public debate shapes votes.
- **35.7%** of survey respondents changed their vote based on presentations
- **38.7%** changed their vote due to resident comments
- **Resident Demand:** 53% agree every significant issue should have a formal presentation of pro- and con- positions. 73.4% believe a pros-and-cons summary should be included directly in the published warrant.
- Survey insight: residents rely heavily on **Lincoln Talk (53%)** as their primary information source for preparing for Town Meeting.
- Other major sources are **not** typically accessible to opposing groups, making equal access to Lincoln Talk especially important.
 - “Positions taken by family, friends, or trusted groups,”
 - The Town Meeting warrant,
 - The Select Board Newsletter,

■ Recommendations (Organized by Timeline)

Fall: State of the Town Meeting

Begin publicizing issues that may become high-interest—**before** a formal warrant article or firm plan exists.

Fall → Winter: Encourage Boards to Solicit Views and Address Dissent

- For any issue likely to be high-interest, hold **at least one well-publicized, open-forum meeting** dedicated primarily to public discussion.
- When appropriate, consider meetings aimed at **compromise-building**, potentially using **ranked-choice voting** formats that have the potential to identify second choice options that satisfy a strong majority rather than first choice options that only satisfy a slim majority.
- If divisions persist, boards should **publicize the ability of residents to form an opposing view group** through petition.

Winter: Informing, Organizing Dissent, and Educating Before Town Meeting

We recommend that the Moderator allow a group opposing a motion be allowed to submit “Con” position summary for publication, and to make a presentation from the main podium at Town Meeting, under the following conditions. A potential opposing view group must:

- Collect **150 signatures** by a date as close to Town Meeting as feasible (at minimum 4 weeks prior).
- Submit a petition listing designated **leaders/organizers**
- Hold at least one public meeting to determine:
 - Who will write the official dissenting position for the warrant
 - Who will **present** at Town Meeting

The **board sponsoring the warrant article** may submit a proponent statement; the **Moderator** should determine the allowable length for both positions. Both pro and con positions statements should be published on the Town Meeting page of the Town website.

We further recommend that the Moderator:

- Encourage **LincolnTalk**, or other social forums, allow the official opposing group to post in the same manner permitted for Town boards.
- If multiple opposing groups form under the petition process, they be asked to **combine their positions and presentations**, just as Town boards must coordinate, or divide the allowed time between them.
- Frame the Meeting as an opportunity to **listen, learn, and remain open-minded.**

At Town Meeting

Given many stated concerns about the length of Town Meeting, we recommend the Moderator determine the shortest feasible time limits for proponent and opposing presentations. In addition, we recommend the use of:

- Designate one microphone for comments by voters in support and another microphone for comments by voters opposed.
- Provide an additional microphone for those who have only questions or procedural concerns.

Improving Town Meeting Access and Voting Procedures

To address residents' concerns regarding Town Meeting access and voting procedures the TMSC considered a variety of remedies to address barriers to greater participation.

Participation in Town Meeting voting is a central measure of civic engagement in Lincoln. While Town Meeting itself draws consistent attendance, participation in votes on individual articles can vary and, historically, overall meeting turnout is lower than participation in ballot elections. The gap indicates potential for increased participation. On average, over the last 10 years, the percent of residents who vote after Town Meeting (17.1%) is more than double the number who attend Town Meeting (8.1%).

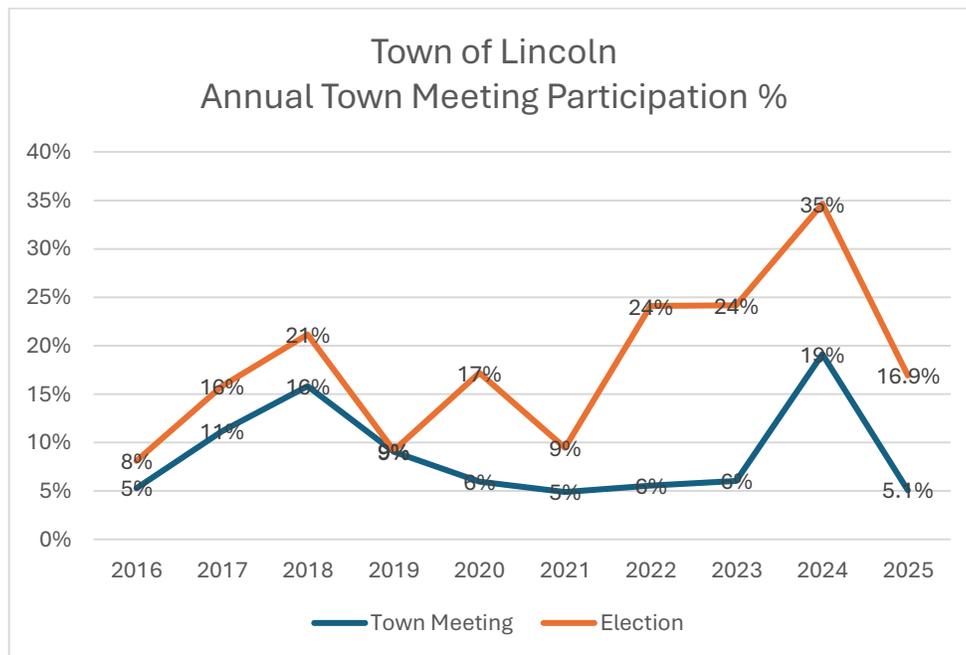


Figure 2: Annual Town Meeting Participation

TMSC working groups explored various means of reducing barriers to participation, increasing overall voter engagement, and narrowing the gap between ballot election turnout and Town Meeting voting. Common barriers include transportation, audio/visual access, childcare coverage, as well as time constraints and schedule conflicts. The TMSC sought to balance efficiency with meaningful participation, aiming to identify a practical approach that supports broad access while preserving the deliberative character of Town Meeting. The TMSC makes the recommendations below with the understanding that there will never be a solution that will universally address all concerns about participation and that some pilot efforts may be necessary to determine the best solution that works for our Town.

Motivations & Supporting Evidence

- Survey results and TMSC discussions indicate that many residents view the current Town Meeting format as difficult to attend.
- 63.5% of survey respondents expressed that voting should be conducted differently than the current method, and 36.5% were satisfied with the existing process.

- 13.8% supported remote or ballot-style voting at a separate time, although this option is not feasible under current Massachusetts General Law.
- The primary barriers to participation were schedule conflicts (61%) and meeting length (50.8%), with uncertainty of voting time cited by 16% as an additional obstacle.

In-Person Accessibility

Residents indicated that physical access to Town Meeting can be limiting. Some specific concerns cited were:

- Limited transportation availability
- Audio quality and hearing issues
- Childcare options
- Audiovisual quality in overflow spaces

The TMSC notes that Town staff have already implemented some improvements, including adjustable-height microphone stands and wireless hearing aid connections in the Lincoln School Auditorium. We encourage the staff to continue to innovate on how to coordinate the audio-visual setup between multiple rooms.

■ Recommendations

- Provide shuttles from remote parking areas for Town Meetings that are likely to generate high turnout.
- Provide a camera or two filming all resident comments at microphones, so that they are recorded and visible to all residents in all rooms.
- Publicize in advance the availability of the wireless hearing assistance devices and have signage mentioning their availability at check-in.
- Publicize childcare options widely in advance of Town Meeting.

Alternative Voting Procedures

The TMSC strongly recommends that the Select Board and Moderator start with implementing the time savings measures described above, and with Scheduling High-interest Motions First on the agenda. If that approach still results in significant voter dissatisfaction, then consider Scheduled Voting Times and only then, if approved by the Legislature and implementation challenges are addressed, Remote Participation and Voting.

Scheduling High-interest Motions First

The TMSC recommends that warrant articles of great interest (major expenditure, zoning change, building project, etc.), be scheduled first on the agenda, as has been recent practice. With the time-saving ideas already implemented and recommended in this report (voting clickers, enforcement of presentation time limits, limiting the number of proponent presentations from the podium, enforcement of citizen comment time limits) the TMSC believes that presentation, debate and voting can occur in a more efficient and

effective manner – in most cases, within two hours of the start of the presentation – which should allow those with caregiver responsibilities and other conflicts a better chance to participate and vote.

Scheduled Voting Times

Another means of addressing this concern is to schedule voting on key articles at a specified time, rather than immediately after Town Meeting deliberation. Survey data and community feedback show strong interest in exploring scheduled or split-session voting formats to improve Town Meeting accessibility, predictability, and participation. While the exact model should be determined through piloting and evaluation, flexibility in scheduling and a commitment to measuring outcomes will allow the Town to make evidence-based decisions that best serve the community.

The TMSC considered two key questions:

1. Whether the Town should implement a scheduled voting time for some or all warrant articles, separating deliberation and voting sessions; and
2. If so, how such a structure might be designed and implemented.

The TMSC also requested opinion from Town Counsel as to the legality of scheduling a vote on a specific motion at a specific time. The TMSC provided two potential scenarios:

1. *Article 1 - present the article, debate, citizen comment period, call the question. At that point hold off voting on Article 1 until a time that the Moderator previously announced prior to Town Meeting - let's say 12noon.*
2. *If the question is called on Article 1 at 10:30am, can the Moderator then move onto Article 2 - debate and vote Article 2, debate and vote on Article 3, etc. - up until noon. At that point, the Moderator now convenes the voting on Article 1.*

Town Counsel's response indicated that a bylaw change might be required:

...a section of the Town's Bylaws which states that the articles must be voted on in the order in which they appear on the warrant, "unless otherwise determined by vote of the meeting." Article II, s. 6. My understanding of scenario 2 below (and potentially 1) has the voting on article 1 occurring after votes would likely have been taken on articles 2, 3 4, etc. In my opinion, this would mean that article 1 would not be voted on "in the order in which" it appears on the warrant and would, therefore, require a vote of Town Meeting to postpone the vote on Article 1. Under the wording of Article II, s. 6 of the bylaw, the sequence of the voting is the key.

See Appendix B for the full text of the current bylaw.

Potential Benefits

- **Predictability:** Scheduled voting times could improve attendance planning and reduce voter fatigue.
- **Accessibility:** Structured voting periods could enable greater participation by those with work or family obligations. It might allow those who were unable to attend the deliberation session to watch a replay prior to voting, if available in time.

- **Representation:** Expanded participation opportunities could result in voter demographics that more closely reflect the overall population.
- **Efficiency:** Separating deliberation from voting could streamline both processes and make overall meeting management clearer.

Potential Drawbacks and Concerns

- **Deliberation Attendance:** A separate voting session could lead to reduced attendance at deliberative sessions, potentially narrowing discussion.
- **Informed Voting:** Voters who do not attend deliberation or review the recording of the deliberation session might rely on secondary sources, limiting understanding of the issues.
- **Complexity:** Scheduling, communication, and procedural requirements for a split voting session would add administrative challenges and cost to the town.
- **Two-Session Burden:** Requiring attendance at both sessions could be inconvenient for some residents.

While there was broad support for exploring scheduled voting, given the constraint of requiring a bylaw change, the TMSC did not reach consensus on a single optimal mechanism. The TMSC therefore recommends a flexible approach that allows for piloting and monitoring alternative meeting formats, supported by clear metrics to evaluate their effectiveness. As this sub-group has identified other less complex improvements that could be implemented more easily, the TMSC recommends prioritizing incremental changes and monitoring their impact on participation before considering more substantial changes (such as multi-day Town Meeting formats). However, for future reference, multiple potential meeting formats are described in Appendix E.

■ Recommendations

1. **Establish Metrics to Monitor Town Meeting Participation:**

Establish a consistent, transparent process for data collection and analysis to measure the effects of any changes and guide future decision-making. This includes information available from the Town Clerk as well as establishing a consistent after-Town Meeting survey that goes out to Town Meeting or all residents.

2. **Get to Key Votes as Early as Possible:**

Schedule contested warrant articles earlier on the agenda and publish the Moderator's decision on presentation time limits so that residents can make their own estimate of when voting might take place. This would increase predictability for voters, with in the current Town Meeting process.

3. **Pilot Alternative Models:**

First implement other less complex changes to Town Meeting as provided by the TMSC and use metrics to monitor participation. If desired outcome is not realized, endorse piloting one or more of the proposed split or scheduled-vote models (see Appendix E) to evaluate their impact on attendance, participation, and meeting efficiency. Adjust as needed based on observed outcomes and resident feedback.

Remote Participation and Voting

Lincoln currently permits remote viewing of Town Meeting, but residents may not ask questions, offer a comment or amendment, or vote remotely. Remote participation is currently allowed and in use in North Andover, MA, but is reportedly cumbersome for both remote participants and Town administration and is resource intensive.

Currently, state law in Massachusetts only permits remote voting in towns with a representative form of government. The Town of Wayland has filed a Home Rule Petition (Bill H.2272) with the MA Legislature to allow remote participation and voting. Concord voted at their June 2025 TM to join Wayland and ask for a Home Rule Petition to allow remote participation and voting. Rep. Carmen Gentile and others also filed Bill H.2274, to allow all towns to implement remote participation and voting at annual Town Meetings. Bill H.2274 has the support of the League of Women Voters of Mass (LMVMA), the Mass Municipal Association and the Metropolitan Area Planning Council. The Joint Committee on Municipalities and Regional Government met on 7/22/25, with presentations by Rep. Gentile and representatives from Wayland, LWVMA and Concord. There is no known timetable for action at this point.

Potential Benefits

Remote, online participation could increase the number of voters and have a more representative group participating in Town Meeting, including those with:

- Schedule conflicts– join as schedule allows from home or elsewhere
- Caregiver challenges – those with issues obtaining care or don't want to leave their child/loved one for an indeterminate length of time, could participate from home
- Accessibility issues
- Those uncomfortable participating in person
- Illness on meeting day

Potential Drawbacks

Significant issues must be worked out to move this initiative forward:

- Lack of availability of proven, secure technology to implement remote voting for Town Meeting in Massachusetts
- Cost to implement & maintain the technology (software & hardware)
- Security challenge mitigations: unauthorized access, fraud, voting for others
- Technology issues: hardware, software or network issues during Town Meeting
- User education – time and effort to educate voters in the use of the system, and how to handle user technology questions during Town Meeting.

This change may decrease in the number of residents who attend in person – detrimental to the traditional community gathering aspects of Town Meeting, which fosters multigenerational and interpersonal connections. It is likely to increase procedural and technical complexity for the Moderator and staff,

especially upon initial implementation, as we work through start-up issues, leading to an increase in the length of Town Meeting.

■ Recommendations

- Defer asking Town Meeting to approve remote participation and remote voting until approved by the MA Legislature and the technical solution and costs are better known
- Monitor progress of the Bill through the Massachusetts Legislature
- Monitor Wayland's solution development progress
- Bring back to Town Meeting for consideration once successfully implemented at another town

Reducing Confusion and Discomfort with Town Meeting

To address concerns that residents may find Town Meeting participation confusing or its processes intimidating the TMSC considered a variety of educational and outreach activities that the Town might improve or adopt. Our recommendations are to:

- Identify or establish a group to undertake the systematic educational outreach work recommended here.
- Create educational and informational materials in multiple modalities
- Solicit feedback and revise materials for clarity and effectiveness
- Ensure that the content reaches audiences broadly throughout Town
- Undertake ongoing, directed outreach to new residents and new voters
- Provide real-time education and reminders during Town Meeting
- Maintain anonymity of voting using clicker devices, particularly in regard to high-interest issues.

Motivations & Supporting Evidence

According to survey results, many residents do not use town-supplied information resources to prepare for Town Meeting:

- Only 9% of respondents consulted the Town website
- Over 53% relied on the LincolnTalk listserv
- Only 21% relied on the State of The Town meeting

However, fully 57% of respondents said that the most important purpose of Town Meeting is to cast an informed vote. A summary (generated by A.I.) of 50 final comments indicated that respondents “want Town Meeting to be fair, respectful, inclusive, and efficient.” In addition, over 72% of respondents felt that clickers should be used for votes on all motions.

More information regarding the process and procedures of town governance and of a New England town meeting can be made available. The TMSC survey identified specific areas where this need is apparent:

- Clarification of the role of Town Meeting as the legislative branch of town government where decisions are made.
- Clarification of the role of the State of the Town meeting held in the fall each year.
- Clarification of the importance of board and committee meetings where matters are discussed in advance of Town Meeting.
- Clarification of deadlines, bylaws and state laws.

By providing a variety of educational resources and opportunities for engagement (beyond simply written materials) the Town can address these concerns. In the not-to-distant past, a volunteer League of Women Voters chapter provided such services. Recognizing that the activities recommended here could put a significant burden on Town administration, we encourage the appointment of a special-purpose committee to act as a “League of Lincoln Voters” to implement these recommendations. Given that there will be regular turnover of the voting population in Town we urge a deliberate effort to identify and reach new audiences.

We also recognize that many learning styles and preferences exist. We suggest the Select Board or Moderator investigate whether any student resources are available at Minuteman Tech or Lincoln-Sudbury High School to help produce multimedia materials, perhaps as a class or club project.

■ Recommendations

Create Educational and Informational Materials in Multiple Modalities

For the town website: The website can become a more effective source for residents with some content updates and design changes. In general, the website navigation and search options could be more user-friendly, but we specifically recommend:

- Placing a prominent link to Town Meeting resources on the homepage
- Posting the current Moderator's Town Meeting Primer
- Creating an FAQ page to address specific questions (see Appendix F for further details)
- Creating and posting short-form videos (under 3 minutes) on topics such as voting procedures (using clickers), Consent Calendar, amendments, or other procedures.

Videos can also be shared at in-person meetings or workshops. This would contribute to consistent messaging and take some burden off organizers or presenters.

In-person and online workshops should be offered prior to Town Meeting as informative tools. A goal should be to maximize dialog and interaction.

- We recommend that an educational session on Town Meeting processes be scheduled. The Moderator should participate but have another individual help develop content and act as host.
- We recommend that the board or commission sponsoring a major (or potentially controversial) Warrant Article hold a pre-Town Meeting workshop entirely devoted to discussing it with residents.
- We recommend workshops be held in-person or virtual, or preferably one of each format to give residents options on when and how to attend. However, we do *not* recommend hybrid formats for workshops, as that creates more challenges for interaction.

Review Materials for Clarity and Effectiveness

Writers and producers who are deeply involved often cannot judge well whether their content is achieving its educational intent. We recommend that all educational content (FAQ, videos, printed material, etc.) be tested with individuals who have minimal familiarity with Town Meeting and Town governance and improved based on their feedback.

Ensure that the Content Reaches Audiences Broadly

We recommend publicizing new educational content, including workshops or forums, to reach Town residents through a variety of channels, directing them to the Town Meeting page online. Channels to employ (listed in more detail in Appendix F) include:

- Flyers, posters, or brochures posted in multiple locations.
- Sandwich board posters and banners around town.
- Submissions to various organizations' publications and newsletters.

Town boards and commissions should also be encouraged to use these channels to publicize public input sessions on key issues.

Undertake Ongoing Outreach to New Residents and New Voters

An analysis of census data indicated that over 60% of the town's population move into Lincoln less than 15 years ago. Newer residents, especially those who are unfamiliar with New England town governance, deserve special attention to encourage their interest and participation in Town Meeting. To reach them, we recommend:

- For new homeowners: use publicly available information once annually (preferably September) to contact new homeowners by postal mail with content to acquaint them with our Town Meeting form of government.
- For new rental tenants: identify larger landlords (Lincoln Woods, The Commons, Oriole Landing, etc.) and ask their support in furnishing orientation material to new tenants. This could be ongoing (given at time of move-in) or annually as with homebuyers.
- For new voters: direct communication mailing or phone with newly registered voters can supplement those efforts.
- For non-registered residents: outreach to homebuyers and new tenants will reach people who might not register promptly to vote but may not reach all interested residents. An insert in mailings such as the townwide census or water bills could provide a way to engage them.
- Recruit volunteers to act as "Town Meeting friend" to familiarize new residents with processes and encourage their attendance.

Employ Real-time Education During Town Meeting

We recommend:

- Projecting a rotating slide show at Town Meeting before the start time, with key reminders of rules and procedures.
- Using slides at appropriate points during Town Meeting to remind voters of key points of process (such as when the question is called; when an amendment is proposed; when a 2/3 vote is required, etc.) Such visuals can support the oral reminders that the Moderator gives at these points in time.
- At the start of deliberation for each warrant article, the Moderator can remind voters of the 2-minute limitation on each speaker's remarks, to reach voters who might have arrived after the introductory explanations of procedures.

Ensure voter decisions on high-interest issues remain anonymous

Voting methods – voice only, standing count, or electronic clickers – are chosen at the Moderator’s discretion. We recommend that clickers be used for any motion that is potentially divisive or likely to generate neighborhood conflict (an example might be a zoning change that affects specific residents). This method reduces the likelihood of peer pressure and voter intimidation.

Closing

The members of the Town Meeting Study TMSC were honored to be selected to undertake this project and have done our best to fulfill the charge laid upon us. We sincerely hope the Select Board and residents will find it benefits Town governance overall.

APPENDIX A: Committee Charge

Full document is available at: <https://www.lincolntown.org/DocumentCenter/View/97789/Town-Meeting-Study-Committee-TMSC-Charge---101624-FINAL?bidId=>

Town Meeting Study Committee (TMSC) Charge from the Select Board & Town Moderator Issued September 30, 2024

Town Vision Statement

Lincoln is a town that cherishes its rural, agricultural character, its small-town heritage, its open space, and its historical legacy. The Town is committed to:

- Achieving a balance between preserving these values while making reasonable provision for citizens' safety and convenience;
- Fostering economic, racial/ethnic, and age diversity among its citizenry through its educational, housing and other public policy;
- Excellence in its public educational system; and
- ***The Town Meeting form of government and the traditions of civic leadership and volunteer public service.***

Background

Town Meeting is the cornerstone of Lincoln's form of government. It serves as our legislative body, the place where we come together as a community to debate and vote on budgets, capital projects, bylaws including zoning, and a broad variety of citizen petitions. The collective decisions we make at Town Meeting, and as sometimes affirmed at the ballot box, shape the quality of life that makes Lincoln the community we all cherish. Together we are the stewards of the Town and the body politic. The future vitality of Town Meeting requires that voters trust that it is being administered fairly and in keeping with the values of the community. Historically, town leadership has attempted to strike a balance by organizing processes that enable efficient debate and voting, while also taking time to acknowledge volunteer and staff contributions and celebrate community. Through the TMSC process, you our residents will determine whether the needle on the spectrum between small-town informality and meeting efficiency has been appropriately set, or should be reset, and what improvements should be made to get us to the spot preferred by the majority. Town leadership will steer the process in accordance with the consensus views of those who participate in the TMSC process.

Charge

The TMSC will serve as an advisory committee to the Select Board and Town Moderator. It will examine our current Town Meeting procedures, identify what is working well and not, and develop possible strategies for improvement. Our Town Meeting procedures have evolved over time in response to lessons learned, feedback from our residents, and best practices borrowed from other towns. A fresh look will help us identify new opportunities for improvement.

APPENDIX B: Current Town Meeting Bylaw

ARTICLE II Town Meetings

Section 1. Time

The Annual Town Meeting shall be held on the Saturday before the last Monday in March in each year at 9:30 A.M. for the transaction of all business except that the election of officers and the determination of such matters as by law are required to be elected or determined by ballot shall take place on the last Monday in March, when the polls shall be open from 7:30 A.M. until 7:00 P.M., or to such later time up to 8:00 P.M. as the Moderator may determine, provided, however, that whenever the date for the Annual Town Meeting, as hereby established, falls on the Saturday before Easter Sunday, the Annual Town Meeting shall be held on the preceding Saturday, although the Election and ballot questions hereinabove described shall still be held on the last Monday in March.

Section 2. Special Meetings

Special meetings may be called at any time by the Select Board or in any other manner provided by law.

Section 3. Warrant

Every Town Meeting shall be called pursuant to a Warrant under the hands of the Select Board stating the time and place of holding the same and the subjects to be acted upon, notice of which Warrant shall be given at least seven (7) days before the Annual Town Meeting and at least fourteen.

(14) days before any Special Town Meeting by a constable or other person to whom it is directed, who shall attest and post copies thereof in or on three or more buildings belonging to the Town or any three public places in the Town and make their¹ return of service thereof to the Select Board. In addition, the Select Board shall send by mail or otherwise to each household within the Town, at least seven days before the time appointed for such meeting, a copy of such notice and Warrant, but failure to receive such notice and Warrant shall not invalidate any action taken at such meeting.

Section 4. Registered voters

Admission to the place of meeting or to a defined portion set aside for the holding thereof shall be open only to registered voters whose names appear on the check list thereof. The Moderator shall enforce this Section throughout each meeting.

Section 5. Quorum

The number of voters necessary to constitute a quorum at any Town Meeting shall be 100, provided, however, that a number less than a quorum may from time to time adjourn the same. This Section shall not apply to such parts of meetings as are devoted to the election of Town Officers.

¹ Pursuant to Article 24 passed in the 2021 Annual Town Meeting to make non-substantive changes to the General By-laws to ensure gender neutrality, all gendered pronouns were removed.

Section 6. Action on Articles

Articles of the warrant shall be acted upon in the order in which they appear unless otherwise determined by vote of the meeting.

Section 7. Motions

A motion shall, if required by the Moderator, be reduced to writing before being submitted to the meeting.

Section 8. Questions

When a question is put, the sense of the meeting shall be determined by voice vote unless otherwise provided by law, and the Moderator shall declare the vote as it appears to the Moderator. If the Moderator is in doubt as to the result of such voice vote, or if the Moderator's decision is immediately questioned by seven or more voters rising in their places for that purpose, the Moderator shall call for another vote to be taken, as the Moderator may decide, by show of hands, by standing vote, by use of the check list, or by ballots. Whenever a two-thirds vote of a town meeting is required by statute the Moderator may declare the motion passed by voice vote without a count if it appears that the two-thirds vote has been obtained, provided that if seven or more voters question the Moderator's declaration, another vote shall be taken in the manner prescribed in this Section.

Section 9. Question - Motions

When a question is before the meeting, the following motions, to wit:

1. 1) To adjourn
2. 2) To lay on the table
3. 3) For the previous question
4. 4) To postpone to a certain time
5. 5) To commit, recommit or refer
6. 6) To amend
7. 7) To postpone indefinitely

shall be received and shall have preference in the foregoing order; and the first three shall be decided without debate, and the second and the third by two-thirds vote.

Section 10. Motion to dissolve

No motion, the effect of which would be to dissolve the meeting, shall be in order until every article in the warrant for such meeting has been finally disposed of, but this shall not preclude an adjournment of the meeting to some other date.

Section 11. Amendments involving money

On proposed amendments involving the expenditure of sums of money, the larger or largest amount to be disbursed shall be put to the question first, and an affirmative vote thereon shall be a negative vote on the other amount or amounts.

Section 12. Committee Reports

A. All committees (hereinafter select committees) the appointment of which was authorized by the Town Meeting, other than permanent committees, shall report as directed by the Town. When a

3

report of such a committee is placed in the hands of the Moderator, it shall be deemed to be properly before the meeting for its action thereon, and a vote to accept the same shall discharge the committee excepting that if a committee requests that it be continued to a specified date in order to complete its assignment and if the Town so votes, said committee shall be continued to said specified date.

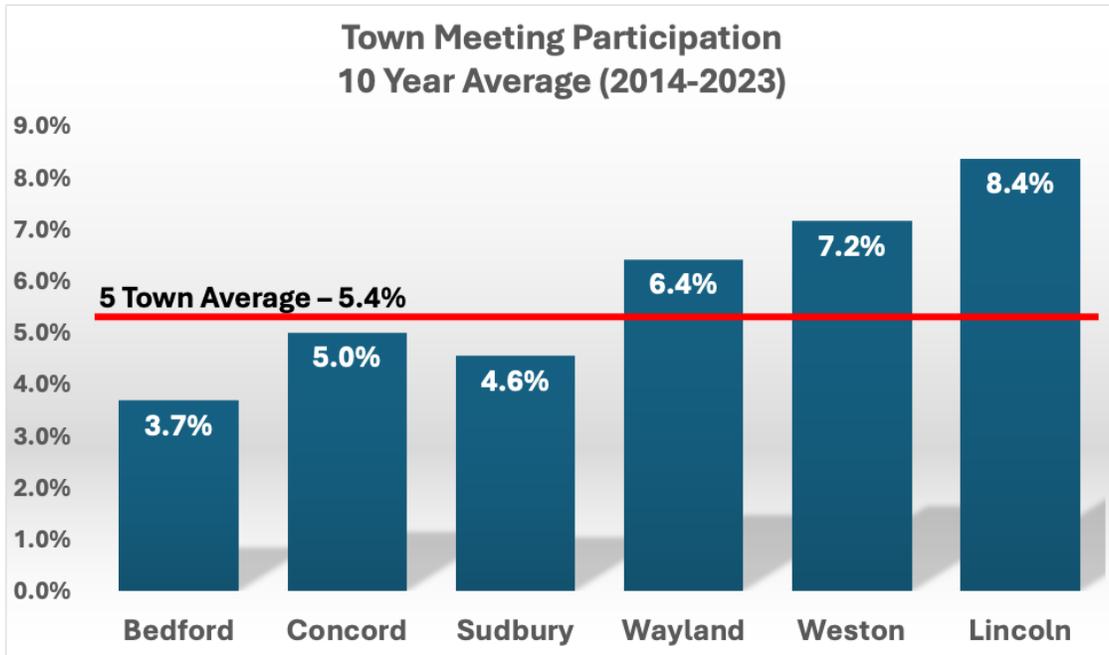
B. If a select committee shall make no report by the time specified when it was created or, in the absence of any such specified time, within one year after its appointment, such select committees shall be discharged unless in the meantime the Town shall have granted an extension to a specified date.

C. For the adoption of any of the recommendations of a select committee, a specific vote shall be required.

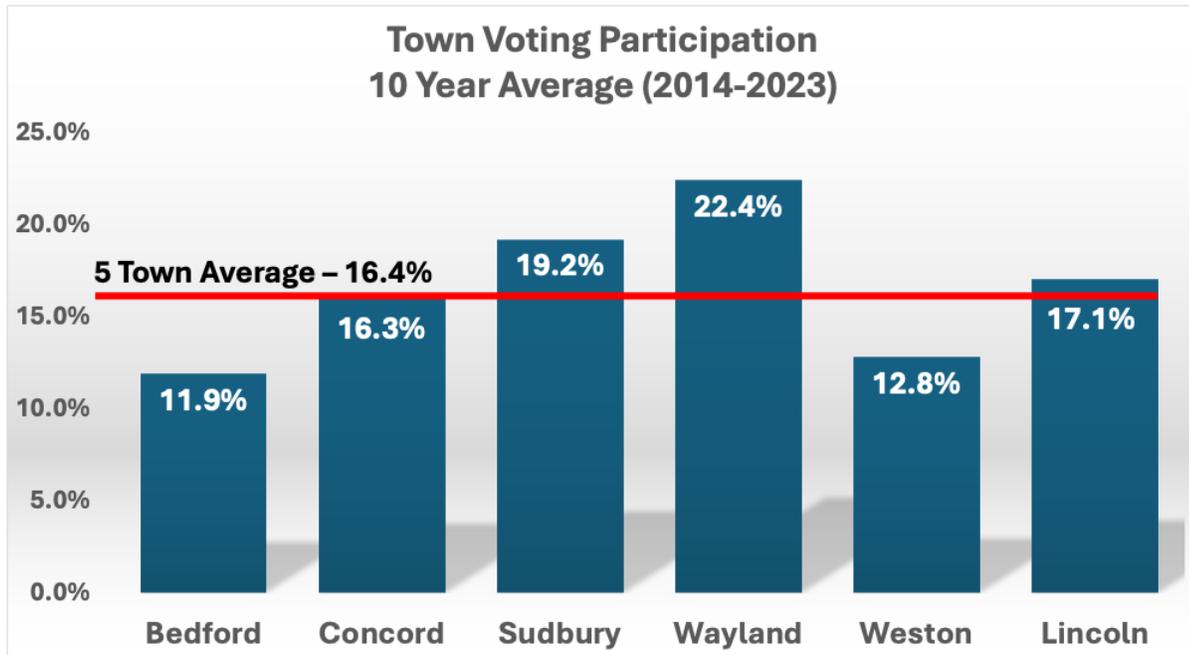
Section 13. Consent Calendar

Before any Annual Town Meeting the Moderator may select from the Warrant those articles which in the Moderator's judgment are likely to be adopted without debate and cause such articles and the motions to be made under each one to be published in a Consent Calendar, copies of which shall be sent by mail or otherwise to each household at least seven days before the date of such meeting. At an appropriate time in the meeting, the Moderator may announce consideration of the Consent Calendar. Notwithstanding the provisions of Section 6 and 9 of this Article II, a motion is then in order to adopt the motions in the Consent Calendar as a group without debate. After seconding of the motion the Moderator shall recognize any voter for the purpose of holding out any article and shall cause any article thus held out to be deleted from the motion to adopt. When all requests to hold out articles have been received, the Moderator shall put the motion as modified to a vote. Adoption of the motion by unanimous vote shall constitute adoption of all of the motions contained therein. Thereafter all articles held out, or if the motion to adopt is not voted unanimously, all articles in the Consent Calendar, shall be acted upon in accordance with the provisions of Sections 6 and 9 of this Article.

APPENDIX C: Lincoln Town Meeting Participation

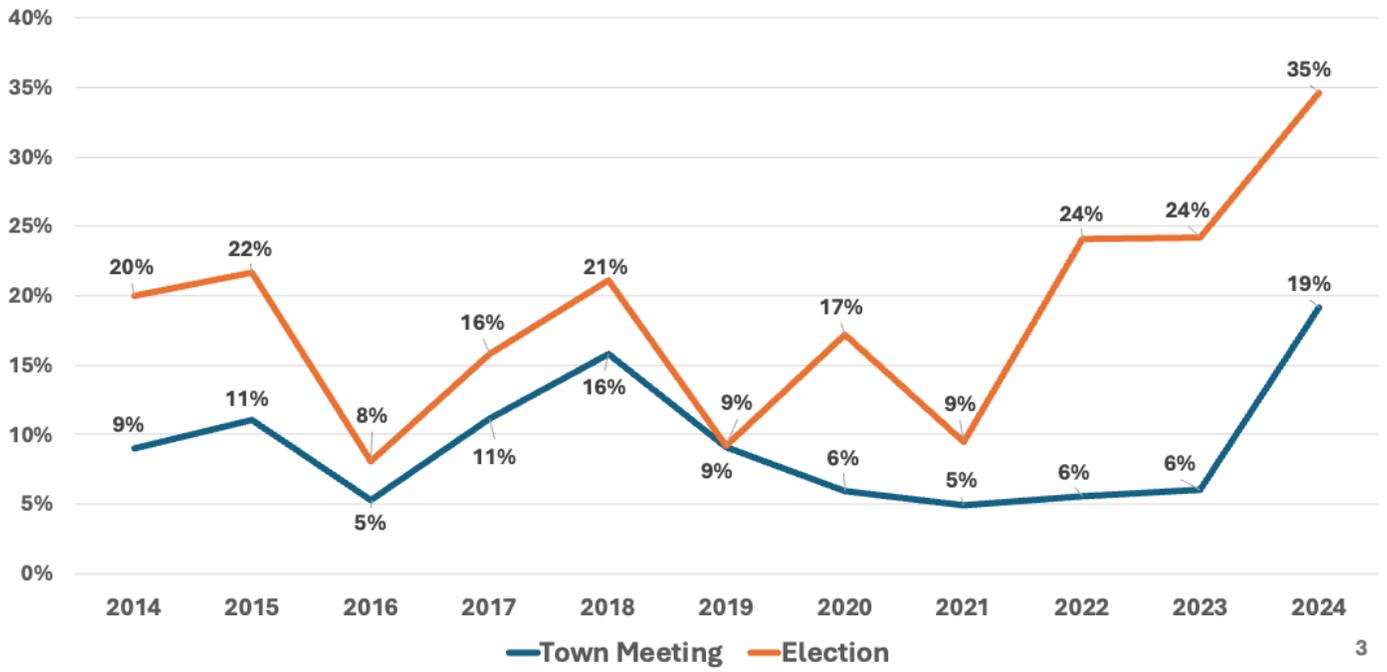


1



2

Town of Lincoln Annual Participation %



APPENDIX D: Survey Consultant's Report

The report and analysis of TMSC survey results is posted on the Town website at:

<https://www.lincolntown.org/DocumentCenter/View/105350>

APPENDIX E: Scheduled Voting Models

The Committee identified several possible models for structured voting:

- **Format 0: Schedule Warrant votes at a specific time**
Approach: Based on articles submitted in the warrant, the Moderator would determine which articles should have a scheduled vote no later than six weeks before Town Meeting. These votes would be schedule at an approximate time during town meeting, well within the time for deliberation to have completed (e.g. deliberation first at 9AM, scheduled vote approx 1PM)
Benefit: Least disruptive format
Concern: Requires bi-law change per Town Counsel
- **Format 1: Selected Warrants with Scheduled Votes**
Approach: Based on submitted articles, the Moderator would determine which articles should have scheduled votes no later than two months before Town Meeting. These votes would occur on the Tuesday following Town Meeting at 6:30 p.m.
Benefit: Allows flexibility for high-interest or complex issues.
Concern: Could create inconsistency or confusion about which articles are scheduled. Increased cost and complexity to run multiple sessions
- **Format 2: All Warrants with Scheduled Votes**
Approach: All deliberation would occur during the traditional Town Meeting date, and voting on all articles would take place the following Tuesday.
Benefit: Predictable and uniform process.
Concern: Could lower attendance at deliberation if some residents wait only for the vote. Increased cost and complexity to run multiple sessions
- **Format 3: Traditional Combined Session (Current Model)**
Approach: Each article is discussed and voted on sequentially at the same meeting.
Benefit: Familiar process that connects debate and decision-making.
Concern: Extended length discourages attendance and increases time burden.

APPENDIX F: Outreach & Education

Website FAQ Content

We recommend that the Town website homepage include a link to a page of Town Meeting FAQs (frequently asked questions). Such a link could be widely circulated through various information channels listed below. The FAQ page can include links to existing information, such as the Moderator's Guide or other educational media.

The FAQ should have only *very* brief initial answers to each question, in recognition of limited attention spans and the fact that most readers don't seek or need comprehensive answers to every question. Each short answer can include a link "for more detail," to serve those who need or want more comprehensive information on a topic.

Suggested FAQ topics to address:

- How is the Town of Lincoln governed?
- What is the purpose of Town Meeting?
- When is the Town Meeting held?
- How does the Town prepare for Town Meeting?
- What is the State of The Town meeting?
- What is a Special Town Meeting?
- What is the Warrant?
- Who can vote?
- How are votes counted?
- Can I attend remotely?
- How long does the meeting take?
- Can I bring my children to the meeting?
- Why can't I vote remotely?
- What is the role of the Moderator?
- How is the Moderator elected?
- What are the rules for speaking at Town Meeting?

Publicizing Content and Workshops

Boards or Commissions can help increase awareness of issues and publicize community forums by posting notices in key physical locations, and distributing electronic notices as widely as possible. Potential venues include those listed below.

Locations to post flyers, posters, or brochures:

- Town Offices

- Library
- Transfer Station
- Donelan's Supermarket
- Twisted Tree
- Post Offices (Station and Old Town Hall)
- Bemis Hall/Community Center
- The Commons
- Hartwell Building/Parks & Rec office
- Codman Farm
- St. Vincent dePaul food pantry (at St. Joseph Church)
- Lincoln Woods center
- First Parish and St. Anne's churches
- Condominium bulletin boards/Homeowner Associations
 - Farrar Pond Village
 - Todd Pond Condos
 - Battle Road Farm
 - Minuteman condos
 - Greenridge condominiums

Sandwich Board Locations

Public intersections allowed by bylaw: Codman/126; LincolnRd/117; LincolnRd/Bedford (5 Corners); Bedford/Sunnyside Rd

Lincoln Station: RLF lawn

Submissions To Other Organizations' Publications

- Select Board Newsletter (Select Connect)
- Garden Club
- Parent Teachers Organization (PTO)
- Lincoln Family Association
- Scouting and Girl Scouts
- Codman Farm newsletter
- Lincoln Squirrel
- COA&HS (News from Bemis Hall/Community Center)
- Lincoln Land Conservation Trust
- LincolnTalk email listserve

APPENDIX G: References

[Lincoln Town Meeting Primer](#)

[Mass Moderators Association – “Town Meeting of the Future” report](#)

[Wayland Town Meeting – Remote Participation](#)

VIDEO: [League of Women Voters presentation](#)

VIDEO: [Wayland electronic voting procedures](#)