

**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.

### Core Principles:

The TMSC will use the Town's vision statement and the following principles as criteria for its work:

- 1) The extent to which current and/or proposed policies lower barriers to understanding of and participation in Town Meeting.
- 2) The extent to which our residents have faith and confidence that the process is being fairly and effectively organized and managed.
- 3) The extent to which current and/or proposed practices prepare residents to be informed members of our legislative body.

### Tasks

- ◆ Conduct its business in an open and participatory manner, providing multiple opportunities for input from a broad cross section of Town residents through outreach which may include some or all of the following mechanisms: public meetings, workshops, other forums, and interviews, but that shall include a professionally developed and administered resident survey. Review the feedback provided by residents during the September 16<sup>th</sup> TMSC Kick-off Meeting as one early set of perspectives to be considered.
- ◆ Become familiar with the way Town Meeting is currently organized and facilitated, including related practices and procedures.
- ◆ Become familiar with the customs and traditions that have influenced the structure of Town Meeting as it operates currently.
- ◆ Consult with Town Counsel to understand the extent to which Massachusetts Law regulates Town Meeting procedures, the extent to which we have local discretion, and the legal procedures that would need to be followed to effectuate the changes that are recommended.
- ◆ Review town meeting improvement studies prepared by peer towns, the Massachusetts Moderators Association, and other leading sources to identify potential lessons learned and best practices that would be most relevant to our community.
- ◆ Review voter participation rates for our Town Meetings and Elections, over a time span deemed reasonable by the Committee, in comparison with those of neighboring towns to determine whether Lincoln's participation rate is comparable and identify any mechanisms for increasing participation that may have proven particularly helpful in these other towns.
- ◆ Identify any current practices and traditions that would benefit from additional clarification and codification. We anticipate that the drafting of any such documentation will be left to the relevant town official/s, nevertheless, the Committee is encouraged to cite examples that its research may uncover.
- ◆ Review voting methods and procedures, including electronic voting, and develop pros and cons of current practices and possible changes.
- ◆ Review the Town's Town Meeting communication and outreach efforts, identify opportunities for improvement, and try out new practices in its effort to gather input from residents.

- ◆ Review the Town's plans for accommodating the needs of residents and other who encounter barriers and challenges to participation and identify opportunities for improvement.
- ◆ Prepare a report for the Select Board and Moderator summarizing current procedures and practices, relevant legal considerations, resident feedback throughout the process, lessons learned from other communities, and possible actions, including an analysis of pros/cons. If the Committee's recommendations include the need to revise/update the Town's Town Meeting Bylaw, the Committee is urged to develop a draft for consideration by the Board and Moderator.

### Membership

The Town of Lincoln is an organization that believes that board and committee diversity strengthens performance, integrity, trust, and partnerships with our staff, community and guests.

The Committee will have up to 9 members, comprised of the following:

1. 1 member of the Select Board, designated by the Board.
2. The Town Moderator
3. Up to 7 At- Large Members, selected by majority vote of the three Select Board members and the Town Moderator

The Committee shall elect its own Chairperson.

The Town Administrator or his designee will serve as an ex-officio member attending meetings as appropriate and lending his professional guidance and support. Town Counsel will be available to the Committee throughout the course of its work.

#### At-Large Members:

The Board will make every effort to appoint folks who represent a diversity of viewpoints, and who possess a variety of personal and professional skills, backgrounds, and town government experience. Skills and backgrounds that would be especially relevant and helpful to the work of the Committee include: general familiarity with Town government and Town Meeting, legal training, research capabilities, communications and public engagement skills, survey skills, meeting facilitation skills, prior service on private, non-private, or town boards and committees, and the ability to work collaboratively.

Timetable

<i>Recruit Candidates</i>	October 1 – 14, 2024	
<i>Application Deadline</i>	October 14, 2024	Close of business
<i>Candidate Interviews</i>	October 21, 2024	
<i>Appointments</i>	October 21, 2024	At the close of the interview session
<i>Initial Committee Meeting</i>	Early-November, 2024	TBD
<i>Introduce Committee &amp; Its Charge to the Community</i>	December 7, 2024	State of the Town Meeting. Use the opportunity to engage residents on one or two questions that would benefit from early feedback
<i>Present Preliminary Report</i>	March 29, 2025	Annual Town Meeting
<i>Present Final Report &amp; Recommendations to Select Board and Moderator</i>	October, 2025	Report presented to joint meeting of Selects and Moderator
<i>Present Final Report &amp; Recommendations to Town Residents</i>	November or December (TBD). 2025 State of the Town Meeting	Select Board & Moderator present report and recommendations to the Town

Open Meeting & Public Records Requirements

The Committee, acting as an advisory special committee to the Select Board and Moderator, is subject to the requirements of the Open Meeting Law. The Committee shall conduct its affairs in an open and transparent manner, will post notice of its meetings (including an agenda), keep minutes and maintain its records in accordance with the provisions of the Open Meeting and Public Records laws. A dedicated webpage has been established for the Committee to post relevant materials as its process unfolds.

By the Select Board

& Town Moderator

Date: 09/30/24

  
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 Kim Bodnar, Chair

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 Sarah Cannon Holden

  
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 Jennifer Glass

  
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 Jim Hutchinson