

ELECTRONIC VOTING STUDY COMMITTEE

MINUTES DECEMBER 22, 2014

Attendees: Ellen Baxendale, Jason Kauppi, Mark Haddad, Becky Pine, Michael Bouchard, Brian Davis, Michael Manugian, Bud Robertson

Not Present: Josh Degen

Meeting was called to order at 4:30 PM by Mr. Kauppi.

The first order of business was a presentation of an electronic voting system. Mark Fite, President and CEO of Option Technologies (Orlando, FL.) was present. After committee introductions, Mr. Fite presented some background on his company and its involvement with electronic voting systems and its applications. The company was formed in 1985 to build audience participation systems. Their system is used in many different environments, including supporting the Sheetworkers International convention in Las Vegas and the United Methodist Church distributed conferences (22 cities over 7 weeks).

Mr. Fite stated that Framingham, MA was the first to adopt electronic voting at their representative town meeting. Wayland, MA was the first to adopt electronic voting for an open town meeting. Option Technologies (OTI) worked with Wayland for three years to study the open town meeting process and develop a successful pilot. OTI was recently awarded a new three year contract as the winning bid responder. Westboro also has an open town meeting and recently awarded OTI a 2 year contract. Mr. Fite estimated that approximately two dozen towns are in various stages of studying electronic voting at town meeting.

Mr. Fite explained the process used in Wayland. A typical town meeting is three nights with anywhere from 300 to 2,000 attendees and 30- to 35 articles. There are 7 to 8 check-in books. After the voter has checked in, the voter's bar code (from the voter list) is scanned and linked to a scan of a handset barcode. The handset is activated at this time by the check in person. Wayland has implemented these procedures so that both check ins (town meeting and handset) are simultaneous.

To conduct a vote, the moderator calls for the vote. The voting light is lit, and voters cast votes via the handset during a 30 second window. It was pointed out that this window can be set to any time period and that Wayland chose 30 seconds. After the voting lamp is extinguished, the vote count is displayed on a monitor near the moderator and town clerk. The results are announced, and the vote record is expunged. The vote record does capture the handset number and the vote, which could be traced back to the voter, so it is expunged by Wayland's choice in the interest of voter privacy. If there is objection to the vote tabulation, an audit can be conducted. The moderator randomly chooses a number (twenty or thirty was mentioned) of handsets and the town clerk and moderator verify each individual handset vote displayed against the vote shown in the database.

With committee members and a number of public attendees, demonstration votes were conducted. The audience voted that their feeling was that Red Sox would not win the 2015 World Series, among other test votes.

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Mr. Fite was asked some ad-hoc and prepared questions:

1. Can you link the handset to a person in the event of a motion for reconsideration? This would be useful to determine if the person asking for reconsideration voted on the prevailing side.  
Response: This would not typically be done at an open town meeting since it is contrary to keeping each person's vote private.
2. How many town meetings have you supported? How long have you been in business? In what states and towns have you been involved?  
R: OTI has supported town meetings and other types of meetings in Massachusetts and in other states. Mostly, representative town meetings and other meetings which require roll call votes to be published. OTI feels they are a leader in applying voting technology to open town meetings.
3. How many failures or breakdowns have you experienced?  
R: In Wayland, in over three years and 500 votes, there was one time that the system could not be brought online. Handsets do sometimes fail. The number one problem is human error at check in. The electronic voting help desk would issue a new handset and the vote count would be amended by the moderator. Every town meeting has a test ballot, which verifies the system and helps the audience become familiar or refreshed on the use of the system.
4. How do you ensure system security? How do you deal with Wi-Fi hotspots?  
R: The handsets are equipped with proprietary algorithms and use frequency hopping spread spectrum for security. In addition to "cracking" the encryption and catching the correct frequency, the handshake between the handset and the server must be determined. The system operates on a closed VPN. Each handshake has a unique identifier which would also need to be spoofed.  
  
An abundance of wireless hotspots will slow system response, as all the wireless devices would be consuming the bandwidth. OTI regularly monitors bandwidth usage and can determine the number and locations of active hotspots.
5. How do you determine pricing?  
R: Mr. Fite recommended that the town determine its requirements and ask for pricing guidance. Should the town decide to move forward, a Request For Proposals (RFP) would be issued.
6. How does a random audit work? What if it fails?  
R: As explained previously, a random sample of handset votes are checked against the database. If the audit fails, the system would need to be investigated, and possibly not used further at that time.
7. Do you have to erase data after a vote? Can the system keep the vote log? How long?  
R: It would be our choice to erase votes and how long a vote record would be kept. In essence, this would be an adaption of what is done for representative town meeting.
8. How would you support a town meeting that goes three consecutive Mondays?  
Note: Mr. Bouchard was not present for this Q&A, but my understanding is that OTI would breakdown the system and reinstall for the next meeting night.
9. How would you propose to do a pilot? How much would that cost?

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Note: Mr. Bouchard was not present for this Q&A, but my understanding is that pilot demonstrations are determined on a case-by-case basis.

10. How could we prevent proxy voting?

Wayland reminds voters that proxy voting is not allowed. Wayland relies on voters observing whether others are using more than one handset.

11. If we ran out of handsets for a meeting, how would hand counting work? Who would handle “hand count” voters?

R: The town would need a procedure. Wayland reverts to hand counting, as they feel every voter should have the same access to voting.

12. What has been their experience with lost units? Who is responsible?

R: In three years in Wayland, one handset has been lost. The cost of lost handsets is borne by the town. An exceptions report is issued at the close of town meeting. The town clerk follows up with to retrieve handsets.

13. Can we save costs with regionalization?

In general, sharing with other towns would not save costs because the electronic voting system must be set up in each new location for each day of voting and this is a significant part of the cost.

14. How does a simultaneous “yes and no” vote (meaning if a voter pressed “yes” and “no” together) affect the system and the particular vote?

R: The handset won’t allow a simultaneous vote.

15. What are the pre-meeting administration and setup requirements?

R: A lot would depend upon the number of rooms needed. A check in area needs to be set up for voter check in and handset scanning. Notebook computers are assigned to the check in which have copies of the voter list. A check in station is recommended for every 100 voters. Extra tables are needed to perform the handset scan. Groton would likely need to reconfigure the check in area and train potentially additional personnel to accommodate the extra handset scan step

16. How much time is required to set-up?

R: Wayland setup occurs in one day. Cables are permanently installed. For a first time event, setup would occur the day before the meeting.

17. Can your staff be CORI-checked?

R: OTI staff is CORI-checked as a matter of practice, as they deal with municipalities in many states.

18. How many vendor and town staff are required at town meeting? What do they do?

R: The number of staff is driven by town meeting attendance. Groton would probably require three OTI staff. Check in and handset scanning would be done by the town clerk and volunteers.

19. Why should Groton go with OTI?

R: Mr. Fite addressed this earlier in the presentation by stating they feel they are a leader in this area and have made significant investments in the technology after working with client towns.

20. What else does OTI do?

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R: Mr. Fite covered the history of the company and its services earlier in the presentation.

21. What happens if a voter can't vote during the voting window?

R: It would depend upon the issue, but procedures can be developed.

Ms. Pine asked Mr. Fite what a "ballpark" cost of a system to support 400 voters for three nights would be. Mr. Fite responded that the pricing model is evolving, and asked if we could submit requirements to him. OTI would provide pricing guidance.

Mr. Manugian asked how it could be validated that a vote was actually counted in the vote totals. Mr. Fite responded that the random audit is available. It is also possible to publish a list of votes, up until the point where the votes are expunged. This would display the handset number and the vote, which could be linked to the person. Mr. Manugian stated that this type of audit is inconsistent with maintaining voter privacy. He stated that maintaining voter privacy and performing a complete audit were mutually incompatible with electronic voting.

A member of the audience asked if the Massachusetts Moderators Association had recommendations for electronic voting. Mr. Kauppi stated that no guidelines had been developed.

At this point, the committee thanked Mr. Fite for his presentation.

The minutes from December 15 were approved as amended by unanimous vote. Mr. Robertson abstained.

Ms. Pine asked how the committee would like to move forward on a request for a "ballpark" cost. Mr. Davis will communicate the committee's parameters to OTI. We are asking for cost guidance for a meetings with 400, 500 and 600 voters to be held in one room. We would like guidance for each voter level if the meeting were held for three consecutive nights, and if it were held on three consecutive Mondays.

Mr. Haddad stated that the question of electronic voting seems to be boiling down to the cost the town might be willing to pay to gain vote privacy at town meeting.

Mr. Davis stated that the system would probably allow that records be kept until the dissolution of town meeting to accommodate reconsiderations motions. Mr. Manugian stated his position that this is inconsistent with maintaining voter privacy. Mr. Robertson asked if this level of checking was really need for a vote reconsideration, considering that no individual records are kept in today's environment. Mr. Kauppi added that being on the prevailing side is Groton's tradition, but that the real hurdle for reconsideration is the presentation of new information.

Mr. Haddad suggested we send an RFP to multiple vendors. Mr. Manugian stated that Wayland suggests that OTI is the only credible vendor, but we should look at multiple vendors as part of due diligence. We should talk to at least one more vendor to verify functionality and cost. Ms. Pine thought

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we might needed to choose to become another vendor's guinea pig if not using OTI. The committee agreed that we should evaluate at least another vendor, unless it's clear that no one else does this.

Mr. Davis will update the committee's web page.

Mr. Manugian will prepare a draft presentation outline to help the committee focus on our town meeting report.

The next meeting will be on January 12, 2015 at 4:30 in the second floor meeting room. The agenda will be:

- Vendor presentation (if available)
- Review of draft presentation
- Schedule a public hearing

The meeting was adjourned at 6:05 PM.

Respectfully,

Michael Bouchard

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