# Town of Groton, MA Electronic Voting (EV) Study Committee (EVSC)

# Minutes of the Meeting of October 6, 2022

## Opening

Location: via Zoom

The meeting was called to order at 6:31 pm by Mr. Petropoulos.

Present: Michael Bouchard, Michael Manugian, Jack Petropoulos

Absent: Rob Anctil, Carolyn Perkins

Guests: Judy Anderson; Jason Kauppi, Town Manager; John Sopka

Mr. Petropoulos announced that the meeting was being recorded and all members verbally announced their presence.

## Public Comment Period

There were no public comments.

## Approval of Minutes

A motion to approve the minutes for September 29, 2022 as submitted was approved by unanimous rollcall vote. Because Ms. Perkins wasn’t present, the Committee deferred review of the minutes of September 22, 2022 until the next meeting.

## Review of Public Hearing / Town Meeting presentation

Mr. Bouchard presented his second draft. Mr. Bouchard will incorporate suggested minor changes in his next draft.

## Presentation by Meridia on possible demo at Town Meeting

Presented by Peter Babel (pronounced Bahbell) of Meridia.

Mr. Petropoulos suggested we ask all attendees if they wish to participate and give each of them clicker. We could ask two sample questions. He stated that the Moderator was concerned about the time required for the demo and that it not get out of control. The demo should take no longer than ten minutes.

Mr. Babel felt that we should be able to distribute 60 clickers in five minutes. In the next 5 minutes we could take three or four demonstration votes. Each vote should not take more than 15 seconds. The Moderator could choose whether or not yes-no vote totals were shown to all attendees.

The Groton Town Moderator has asked not to be involved in the demonstration.

Mr. Sopka asked if a demo with the assistance of a single vendor using the product of that vendor was acceptable according to procurement rules. Mr. Petropoulos stated that he has confirmed that this is acceptable.

Mr. Petropoulos asked what was required to set up for the demo.

Mr. Babel responded. He would need to be able to plug his demo voting computer into a projector to display results of the vote to Town Meeting attendees. He said he could bring a video switch to switch between the regular Town Meeting display computer and the voting computer. He said that he would require no more than 30 minutes on Friday evening before Town Meeting for setup. ACTION: Mr. Petropoulos: Confirm a setup time for the IT Mgr. and Mr. Babel on Friday evening October 21, 2022 to setup the demo computer.

Mr. Babel explained how the demo would work: We would prepare two or three questions in advance. The person acting as the moderator would open each vote for 15 seconds. The first vote should be a test question to test the performance of all clickers. For this test vote only, we will show the individual yes, no votes with each clicker number on a grid. He noted that there is no way to guarantee that everyone will vote on a particular question, so we should not expect to match total votes to the number of clickers.

Clickers will be handed out at random to people participating in the demonstration. Mr. Babel will also show how the individual voting data is cleared after each vote to help ensure anonymity of voting.

Mr. Babel demonstrated what would be displayed as this discussion progressed. This included what would be displayed to voters at Town Meeting and also additional control functions available to the operator of the voting computer.

A representative of Meridia will run the voting system.

Mr. Babel suggested that we play a particular sound at the start and end of each voting period. Alternatively, we could use a light visible to all to denote start and end. The primary Meridia software recommended for the demo does not include a countdown timer. In general, the person representing the moderator in the demo, should call out the start of the voting period, the warning that it is about to close, and the end of the voting period.

Mr. Babel noted that at least ten clients in the last month have asked Meridia to add a countdown clock to their Town Vote software product. This is the software which would be used in the demo.

Town vote displays total votes received in real time as the voting period progresses. It does not display the yes, no totals until voting is closed. The Moderator can also see yes, no counts before the general audience, if desired. This can be done via a separate private screen that only the Moderator can see. The Moderator can decide whether or not to display yes, no vote counts to the audience.

Mr. Kauppi, Groton Town Moderator, asked Mr. Babel what other towns typically do. Mr. Babel stated that most towns show yes, no vote counts to the audience at the end of each voting period. Mr. Kauppi then asked if we can set the percentage of yes votes required to pass each motion and whether the software can then determine whether the motion passed or failed. Mr. Babel stated that the software can do both. Mr. Kauppi then asked how easy it was to add ad hoc motions, such as motions to move the question. Mr. Babel then demonstrated how quickly a motion or amendment could be typed into the voting system. He said that this can generally be done in less time than it takes to explain the motion or amendment.

For the demo Meridia will provide an extra monitor for display of whatever purpose we desire. He felt that he would be able to setup the system, train participants and thoroughly test on the setup period on the Friday before Town Meeting. Mr. Petropoulos suggested that the Meridian representative should be located in the best physical location to make the demo a success. Mr. Kauppi stated that the Meridia rep would be allowed to sit in any location.

Mr. Babel stated that the clicker number is on a clearly visible label on the clicker.

Mr. Petropoulos wished to have as many people as possible (200 or more) participate in the demo. ACTION: Mr. Petropoulos: Create a draft script for the demo. Script will provide instructions for all participants including the person acting as Town Moderator, volunteers to hand out and collect clickers, the voting computer operator, and the volunteer participants at Town Meeting who will do the demo voting. It will include all the locations of participants such as:

* the location of people handing out clickers and explaining voting to people who volunteer to vote,
* the location of the voting computer and operator,
* the location of the person acting as Town Moderator,
* any tables, chairs, signage, or other props required.

A motion was made and seconded to do the demo at the fall Town Meeting. The motion passed on a two yes, one no vote. Mr. Manugian voted no. He was concerned that with limited time and resources to prepare and so many people participating in the demo with no advance knowledge of the process, that there was a risk that the demo might not run smoothly. He felt that running the demo under these conditions was more difficult than preparing for use at an actual Town Meeting; and the demo might not be representative of how well the process would actually work at Town Meeting.

Mr. Petropoulos asked about ways to educate voters about electronic voting. Mr. Babel offered to provide contact information for the town of Longmeadow which prepared voters for electronic voting over a period of three years. This included a number of community events, demonstrations, and presentations by the vendor. Many hours of community involvement went into it. Mr. Babel felt that this effort helped. ACTION: Mr. Petropoulos: Obtain the contact information and ask the representatives of the Town of Longmeadow if they would be willing to provide information on the process they used.

Mr. Sopka asked if the vote on the Town Meeting warrant article for Electronic Voting was the only vote that would be required, or if it would be broken into parts so that a subsequent vote would be required in order for Groton to move to electronic voting. Mr. Petropoulos replied that this would be the only vote required; if this article passed with its associated funding, the Town Manager would then be empowered to purchase a system and, with the guidance of the Moderator, implement electronic voting at Town Meeting.

## Review Documents that we may want to make available at Town Meeting

The Committee discussed the documents to be included in the Electronic Voting information packet to be handed out at Town Meeting. The packet will include the following:

* How to participate in the Town Meeting Electronic Voting demonstration
* The previously reviewed policy and procedure recommendations with appropriate changes to support inclusion in the packet
* A revised version of the vendor cost and rent vs. buy comparison document
* A Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document

ACTION: All Committee Members: Submit FAQs to Mr. Bouchard for the FAQ document.
ACTION: Mr. Bouchard: Compile FAQ document
ACTION: Mr. Bouchard: Give documents to Town Manager.
ACTION: Mr. Manugian : Revise the recommendations document for inclusion in the packet.
ACTION: Mr. Bouchard: Combine all packet documents and get them to the Town Manager in time to meet the packet deadline for Town Meeting.

Mr. Sopka volunteered to send questions he would like answered to Mr. Bouchard for inclusion in the FAQs.

Jack: Suggests one EV volunteer outside each door, with ten clickers per bag. Sopka: Signage for handout stations.

ACTION: Mr. Petropoulos: Create the How to Participate in Electronic Voting document for the packet.

## Closing

The meeting was adjourned at 8:19 pm.

The next meeting of this Committee will include the Public Hearing at the Community Room at the Groton Center on Thursday October 13, 2022 at 7:00 pm to be posted by Mr. Bouchard with the meeting agenda on the Town of Groton website. The Public Hearing portion of the meeting will be followed by a regular meeting of the Committee. This is the last time the Committee will meet prior to submission of the Town Meeting presentation and information packet.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael Manugian, Clerk