

The aim of this newsletter is to provide information to town meeting members on the feedback I've received; improvements that have been adopted; and other initiatives that are underway. My goal is to continue to make improvements to your experience at town meeting and provide a more inviting atmosphere to increase attendance and participation.

Thank you
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Town Meetings 2009

In 2009, attendance at the Annual Town Meeting (ATM) and Special Town Meeting (STM) was:

- ATM, May 18, 2009 session – 176 voters
 - ATM, June 1, 2009 session – 104 voters
 - STM, August 25, 2009 – 82 voters
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Procedural Guide

The procedural guide, which provides instructions for town meeting members on procedures used at town meeting, has been reorganized and updated with new information.

Goals of the update:

- Reorganize to make it easier to find information
- Include descriptions of *all* rules available to town meeting members
- Make it useful for experienced town meeting members
- Make it useful for new town meeting members

A copy of the new guide can be obtained on the Plainville town website, at town hall, or at town meeting.

Communication

A concerted effort has been made to leverage the inexpensive use of email. I've established a list of groups and organizations that receive notice of upcoming town meetings via email; the email can then be passed on to the members.

If your organization would like to be added to the email list, please let me know.

Seminar: How Town Meeting Works

A town meeting seminar is scheduled for June 2, 2010 at 7:30 in the Senior Center.

Goals of the seminar:

- review and answer questions on town meeting procedures
- introduce the new town meeting guide
- encourage new participants
- raise awareness of the upcoming town meeting

If there is enough interest, I plan on holding a seminar each year, prior to the ATM.

Website Improvements

A new "Town Meeting" section has been added to the town website.

Goals of the updates:

- provide a location to communicate information about town meeting
 - provide a location to post the town meeting documents
 - provide a way for town meeting members to submit feedback or questions
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Your Feedback Needed!

Thank you to those who have already provided feedback!

In order to continue to make town meeting a better experience, your feedback is critical. Please let me know what you think can be improved. You can submit your input on the Plainville town website, at town hall, or at town meeting.

Mailing the Warrant

I've had questions on what it would take to start mailing the town warrant again, as the town did in the past.

I've done an assessment, with estimates based on these factors:

- how many warrants to mail
- how many pages the average warrant is
- how much copying would cost
- how much materials and packaging would cost
- how much labor would cost
- how much postage would cost

The cost to mail a warrant to each voter household would be, approximately:

\$10,000 for annual town meeting

\$3,000 for special town meeting (fewer pages is less expensive)

Another idea that was suggested to me was to mail voter households a post card reminder instead of the whole warrant.

The cost of designing, producing, packaging, and posting would be approximately \$1,000.

Given the availability of email as an opportunity, the price tag for mailing the town warrant or a postcard reminder is just not a cost effective alternative.

Register Your Email on the Town Website

To receive an email notice when the warrant is posted, register your email address with the town website. The warrant will be available on the website for you to download.

Facebook Group

If you're a member of Facebook, come join the new [Plainville, MA Town Meetings](#) group.

This will provide another way to keep people informed about Plainville's Town Meetings.

Child Care

Providing child care has come up as a way to enable parents with young children to attend town meetings.

I chose to pursue other improvement opportunities, based on the feedback I received in the survey results.

Other towns offer child care for parents with young children, with some success – even though they are typically larger in size than Plainville. But if we get even one parent who would otherwise not participate, that would be worth it.

So, I'm looking for anyone who has some expertise in this arena who could help me look into the feasibility of a child care offering for town meeting members who need it.

Other Attractions

There have been some great suggestions of other things we could do to increase interest in town meeting, e.g. providing dinner beforehand. I've chosen to put my initial efforts into things that will make it easier for voters and less intimidating for newcomers.

I'm hopeful that after the ATM this year, I will be able to put some energy into these ideas. If you have suggestions, please let me know.

Have a Question or Some Feedback?

Ways you can ask a question or give feedback:

- Send me an email
 - On the Town Meeting section of the town website
 - Leave your question or feedback at town hall
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Survey 2009 – Results

Surveys Returned

Between the two (2) ATM sessions and the STM, 18 surveys were returned.

How did you hear about the date/time of the town meeting? (check any that apply)

- Newspaper: 4
- Posted Signs: 12
- School Newsletter: 4
- Town Website: 2
- Email from Org: 3
- Other: 4
 - from a colleague
 - from a selectman
 - it's my civic duty
 - committee member

Comments:

- I'm on a town email list, but didn't get notified
- You could get a large portion of the town thru email
- A website posting would be great

How did you receive your copy of the town warrant? (check any that apply)

- Town Hall: 3
- At Town Meeting: 10
- Town Website: 1
- Email from Org: 1
- Other: 2
 - (did not specify)
 - Parks Dept Mtg

Comments:

- I will register my email with the website in the future

Is there any town meeting procedure for which you would like to see better explanations?

- Yes, maybe a booklet of town meeting procedure explanations.
- Many people seem confused when a vote is taken to call a question/end discussion
- Who is allowed to ask questions? What questions/discussions are appropriate?
- ...the warrant was incredibly confusing...articles relating to town center development...In contrast, many of the articles with recommendations of the finance committee did have helpful explanations and commentary...

Would you attend a seminar about town meeting procedures?

- Yes: 7
- No: 8
 - But, I would attend a meeting where the purpose was to explain the various articles...

Would you take advantage of child care service if it were offered during town meeting?

- Yes: 6
 - Would have when kids were younger
- No: 10
 - The meetings run too late
 - ...any child who would need child care probably shouldn't be staying up until 10pm...

Can you recommend other ways we can increase attendance at town meeting?

- Make meeting expedient and less overwhelming time-wise
- Make the articles available ahead of time
- Use more email
- Use schools as a communication outlet (phone, handouts, emails, PTO)
- Spaghetti supper
- Really get the word out to people about why this is so important...

Survey 2009 – Results

Do you have other recommendations for how we can improve town meeting?

- ... I don't want to vote if I don't understand...I was thoroughly intimidated when I found out the document was 26 pages long and totally unintelligible to those of us not already familiar with the matters...***I think it could be very beneficial to make a concerted effort to explain the articles on the warrants in layman's terms***...similar to the comments offered by the finance committee on their recommendations – good job!...
Offer a pre-town meeting meeting where the sponsors (and detractors) are available to explain and answer questions...
- Publish the warrant on the website with explanations under them so people can understand the "legal-eze"
- ...the incredibly skewed demographics of the constituency of town meeting... the under 50 crowd has a lot to do on Monday nights in May and June... ***If they knew better why it's a good use of our precious time to be at town meeting***, more of us would make the effort to come...
- Would like to see meeting start promptly at 7:30; check in needs to be quicker
- Moderator needs to use the microphone better
- Train the people making motions to make the motion separately from commenting on the motion
- The second needs to be withdrawn before the rewording of a motion
- The meeting date was on the website and in the local paper, but the time was on neither site
- Great Job! ... It went well! ... Congratulations!
- *(And of course, there's always one comedian):* The moderator should wear a hat; there was a lot of glare.

Survey 2009 – Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the feedback received in the surveys and additional discussions with voters, here are some conclusions and recommendations for improving town meeting.

- Posted signs appear to be the most effective way people are finding out about town meeting. We need to get better at using other communication methods, e.g. email.
- The first time a majority of voters see the warrant is at town meeting. We need to get better at informing and educating voters about the availability of the warrant.
 - A Town Meeting section of the web site is in the process of being added.
 - I've established an email distribution list, using existing organizations in Plainville. This will allow me to send a reminder when the warrant is published and when town meeting is being held to a much wider audience.
 - Whenever we talk about the town meeting date/time, we should also refer to the warrant and when it's available (and the town meeting seminar, too!).
- A number of the town meeting procedures are not explained very well. We need to update the current guide.
 - An updated revision of the procedural guide will be available at the next town meeting.
- Several voters don't feel they are given enough information to make an informed decision on how to vote on an issue.
 - I like the recommendation that a voter made of providing additional information, like the Finance Committee's recommendations, for all of the articles on the warrant.
- There are a number of opportunities to make the meeting more efficient.
 - With a revision of the town meeting guide, a number of the procedural reminders that are typically done at the start of the meeting will be eliminated.
 - I will also be making a few adjustments at the meeting to improve some of the logistical things that have been raised, e.g. labeling of town meeting materials so voters can find the information they need.
- There is some interest in a town meeting seminar.
 - A town meeting seminar – that will help voters understand how town meeting works – is scheduled the week before town meeting.
- The interest in providing child care is mixed.
 - I've chosen to focus on other areas of improvement, but I am looking for someone who can help me coordinate something for next year.