

Hi Town Governance Study Committee,

The pictures I sent last email didn't seem to show up. I'll try again. I'll note I tried to submit this via [this webpage](#) and lost all pictures and formatting as well. Anyhoo....

Thanks for sharing your findings the other night. I wanted to share some additional thoughts I had after having a chance to digest what I heard. Below are the things I think are important to me that I'd like to see considered to ensure we have the most efficient and effective form of government for the Town of Andover.

1. Resident Satisfaction

- A survey was mentioned being done with ~1K residents of Andover - can you share the questions and results of that survey to review in detail? It seemed really targeted around the Town Meeting and not really around other topics that are relevant to governance in the town of Andover, but I may of had that wrong. I really would like a satisfaction survey (quick google search examples: [Arlington](#), [Concord](#), [Bolton](#), [Southampton](#)) to be done in Andover, if it hasn't already been done, to ask specific questions around how well the town is doing on a broad set of categories to validate how they believe the town is working (or not) for them. I'm not clear we have a good gauge on satisfaction in current services the town operates and performs. I'm curious whether the committee believes this is useful input into their decision making. I think understanding how residents feel about how easy / hard / valuable / trustworthy / effective / efficient transparent "we" perceive government is.

2. Effective Communication

- In a perfect world, I want a clear understanding of what big decisions are on the table for the Town of Andover, when they are going to be decided, and ideally, a clear framing of what the problem is being solved, the solution to solve it, and assumptions around impact to relevant stakeholders. I want this available in a timely manner in advance (e.g., 2+ weeks) with the opportunity to ask questions to a real life human being that is informed on the issue. I don't see this now. I have hopes that an alternative process can resolve this for me. Does this exist in Town Meetings today that I don't know about? Am I alone in this need?

3. Informed Residents

- I find the current process for Town Meeting to review issues in the Annual Report / Finance Report, understand them, and get an informed opinion can be difficult. I find getting information can not be particularly timely, intuitive, efficient, information is not necessarily clear, context, background information seems missing and it is near impossible to target specific individuals "in the know" to get understanding prior to entering into a Town Meeting (e.g., could I talk to the people that put the article together? How?) During the meeting, there is information shared and an opportunity to clarify, but the time to digest and then vote is short. I question the current process enabling voters to be more informed than what could exist in a Council-Manager government. Has the committee done an analysis to validate how informed Andover residents are on complicated issues they voted for vs legislators in a Council-Manager government sampling in MA or elsewhere?

4. Equal representation

- I'm happy to see Precincts are well represented in Town Meetings. Have you done an analysis on the % of voters in Town Meeting based on age? (I have no data, but I theorize, based on past participation in Town Meetings, that the age participation tends to tilt to a much older demographic that may not be representative. I'd like to understand that relative to the overall voting population) I do want to ensure that the right incentives in the design of our governing structure exist to reflect the representation of the people and NOT money, special interests, selfish needs, those wanting to retain power, etc. It isn't clear to me whether the Open Town Meetings or the Council-Manager option is more prone to corruption. I'd like to understand if anyone on the Committee has data to support this one way or the other.

5. **Inclusive participation**

- Does the committee think the current number of attendees in Town Meeting is representative of "good" participation? I wonder if there is an example of a town that we believe is "successful" at all the measurements we may think, that has a higher participation (or not?) I worry that our current model, in its difficulty to be really well informed on all articles going into Town Meeting and the process around it, makes it less accessible, not more for participation. I am motivated to be engaged, but find the existing process one that makes me less inclined to because it is not easy.

6. **Agility**

- A monthly (or more frequent) cadence is without question more efficient to make decisions and adjust than the current 1 year process. Even though we've proven to be able to do special town meetings when we need them for big items, the inertia I perceive is strong to prevent action for smaller items or even accelerating adjudication of bigger items. I found myself, when wanting to present an article, missing a deadline and then feeling deflated that I'd have to wait another year. It was advised to create a special meeting, but felt it was an unnecessary burden / cost to the community for my 1 article to do such a thing. When I did present an article, I then wanted to modify it and was told to wait until the town meeting, doing it during the meeting was painful, a waste of many people's time. I wonder what our current design constraints do to prevent valuable efforts / engagement and/or accelerate to achieve value earlier. Is this something the committee can consider analyzing 1-3 "model" towns with a Council-Manager to assess this topic?

7. **Efficiency**

- I believe the Town Meetings are not efficient. There is a lot of time spent on items I've considered of little importance / impact to the community, administrative processes that make changing articles super painful and time intensive (see agility example.) Having such a large batch of items for 1 time a year over a multiple night process, isn't efficient. I want to be involved, but the current process makes me not want to be and with young kids, makes it near impossible lately. I can see a process by which there are options to propose items throughout the year, address them on a monthly basis, be able to have someone accountable to inform me, but still have the option to attend and comment on items to influence other precinct members seems much more efficient.

8. **Cost**

- Has the committee done an analysis on the cost to the town of Open Town Meeting vs Council-Manager? The comment of "requires most administrative effort" on the pros of cons makes me curious about the effort and cost.

Regarding these slides, I thought I'd give direct feedback:

Open Town Meeting vs Council Manager - the cons I saw, but preference I heard seem misaligned - no?

For the below slide, I found it interesting that Open Town Meeting had cons of being least agile, efficient, required the most work for voters, had most administrative effort, and had a higher risk of uninformed legislators making decisions. Those seem like big problems, but yet had the preference of the committee. When I look at the Council-Manager cons, I don't see those as big and/or actual issues. A Council-Manager had cons that it wasn't participatory (which I don't understand as I believe I can still participate in voting for a representative, I can participate in attending and speaking in meetings - all the participation still exists with the exception of 1 - a direct vote for issues. I understand how that gap in control can be considered an issue.) I'm not clear how "insider's process" a Council-Manager vs Open Town Meeting is - I'd like for someone to clarify that for me. I can speak for myself saying that the complexity of things like zoning and the budget I consider is already an "insider's process" in the Open Town Meeting structure. I'd like to understand the variance being called out here. I can see it as a valid risk that council races are uncontested and that can be a problem. I'd like to understand how much of a problem that is in current Council-Manager towns - can we research that?

PROS AND CONS		
Open Town Meeting	Representative Town Meeting	Council-Manager
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Strongest voice & most control for residents● Residents can sponsor "legislation"● Maximum legislative transparency● Town administration must persuade whole community● Least agile option● Not efficient● Requires most voter effort● Requires most administrative effort● Sometimes uninformed "legislators"	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Voters have representatives to act on their behalf● Requires less voter effort● Requires less administrative effort● Voters cannot vote on their own behalf● Not agile● Not efficient● Potential of non-competitive rep. races, unfilled rep. seats, & rep. absenteeism	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Voters represented in the council● Requires less voter effort● Requires less administrative effort● Agile● Efficient● Only elected councilors can vote on legislation – not participatory● Big decisions (e.g., budget, zoning) an "insider's process"● Council races may be uncontested

In reviewing the below slide, what evidence do we have that a Council-Manager is "less participatory" or "accessible?" I understand the argument that all voters in Andover won't be able to *directly* vote in a Council-Manager government, but does that mean that there would be less participation or accessibility? I assume if I have to elect someone from my Precinct, I then have someone I can go to to get information from, ask questions to, try to influence, and hold accountable to meet my interests. I believe I also still have the ability to make comments and try to influence other Precinct members to

vote for / against something. I don't understand why we may think Council-Manager would be less participatory or accessible. I think "at odds with community history" is true with any change and isn't really a good reason to not do something IF we think it has value. I also would question if we could really measure Andover's "culture" in respect of whether one form of government fits better or worse in it.

COMMITTEE'S WORKING HYPOTHESIS		
Open Town Meeting	Representative Town Meeting	Council-Manager
Strong Preference	Not favored	Less Preferred
<ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ Most participatory❖ Most transparent❖ Good decisions for Andover❖ Consistent with community history and culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ Less participatory/ accessible❖ Retains disadvantages of Town Meeting without the advantages of a council	<ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ Less participatory/ accessible❖ At odds with community history and culture

Population and Governance Structure - considering US and future growth should change the narrative - no?

The point the committee made I believe on the data below is where we are today in population for our town in comparison to other towns in MA of the same size, there is a mix of the 3 types of governance structures. A more important point I think, which I don't know why wasn't mentioned (which leads me to question whether the committee is biased in picking out data that supports a specific narrative because the emphasis was the population we were today there wasn't a clear pattern) is there isn't one municipality over 36K that has an Open Town Meeting. As I understand it, we've grown 6K since the last time we've looked at Town Governance. 10 years from now, if we are a population of 42K, how does that change the committee's thinking on this point?

WHAT DOES OUR POPULATION SIZE SUGGEST?



Below 30,000 residents:
86% have Open Town Meeting

Above 36,000 residents:
91% have a council

30,000 – 36,000 residents:
Equal mix of forms

Andover's size as a large town – and not a small town or a city – does not suggest any particular form of government

I also find it interesting that although [this slide](#) I got on the committee's resource page, outlines what governance the rest of the United States uses, it was oddly not presented as a data point. Assuming I'm interpreting this correctly, the fact that 93% of residents in the US use a governance structure that is not an Open Town Meeting should be considered as a relevant point if the goal of the previous slide was to make the case that there is (or is not) a clear pattern of specific governance.

Data Regarding Forms of Government

- United States
 - 49% Council-Manager
 - 44% Council-Mayor

Thanks for considering my feedback. It is clear the committee has narrowed down the choices to 2 potential forms of government and is strongly tilted at the moment in focusing on the past in Andover and our existing model - I'd like for the committee to strongly consider investing time in engaging with "model" towns that have a Council-Manager form of government to understand their pros / cons and experiences, consider a town survey to understand how residents think the town is doing for relevant topics, research whether the age of voters in Town Meetings is representative of registered voters or varied, and considering clarifying some of the items I have gaps in understanding I've outlined. Thanks again for the work you are doing and this consideration!

Cheers,
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