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Town Meeting Operation

1. What have been your biggest challenges as Moderator?

I'm constantly striving to find the right balance between efficiency, on the one hand, and robust debate and effective decision-making, on the other. Town meeting can't just be a rubber stamp, but we also can't expect to hold everyone's attention and time for weeks and weeks on end. Lexington is fortunate to have so many engaged, committed volunteers involved in its government, as well as a highly professional municipal and school management team. I want to respect their time by running as efficient a meeting as possible without sacrificing the quality of deliberation and decision-making. It's an ongoing challenge.

2. What changes, if any, to the Town Meeting rules of order do you think would improve the quality of the debate and the quality of the decision making?

One of the goals of my annual survey of members is to identify areas for improvement to our processes and procedures. This year's innovation, which was piloted at the fall Special Town Meeting, is the use of a large, clearly visible electronic timer so the three-minute and two-minute time limits don't sneak up on Town Meeting members and citizens.

3. Should more be done to encourage citizens to address Town Meeting?

I would expand this question, to wit: What can be done to increase citizen awareness of and engagement with Town Meeting? All of us involved with Town Meeting have a role to play in this. Town Meeting members, individually and collectively, are our best ambassadors. The League of Women Voters and the Town Meeting Members Association have outreach programs, and various

community associations and organizations host meet & greets and issue forums. The adoption of electronic voting and publication of full voting records is a tool to encourage dialogue between residents and their elected Town Meeting members. The Deputy Moderator and I endeavor to make ourselves available and welcoming to citizens who wish to observe or participate in the process. Municipal and School staff engage in outreach and education, as well. (The Town's popular annual "Citizens' Academy" deserves special recognition, as does the Schools' annual 8th Grade Mock Town Meeting.) Despite these and other efforts, it still feels like we're only scratching the surface, especially with regard to how best to leverage technology and social media to increase engagement.

It should be noted that we've traditionally experienced notable bumps in new citizen engagement during and after tax override campaigns - so there's an opportunity ahead with the likely debt exclusion question this spring.

4. *The Moderator appoints all members of the two finance committees – the Appropriation Committee and the Capital Expenditures Committee. These committees advise and report to Town Meeting on financial articles.*

What, from your perspective, are the finance committees doing right, and what could they do better during the budget process prior to Town Meeting, and later during Town Meeting?

Both the Appropriation Committee (AC) and the Capital Expenditures Committee (CEC) are doing an excellent job at their three critical tasks:

- (1) participating in the collaborative budget development and review process throughout the fall and winter with the Board of Selectmen and the School Committee;
- (2) thoughtfully analyzing the final municipal and school budget submissions (in the case of the CEC, focusing solely on capital items) and developing their recommendations to Town Meeting; and
- (3) communicating those recommendations to Town Meeting in clear and comprehensive fashion, both in writing and in their remarks at Town Meeting.

Both committees contribute in significant and meaningful ways to enterprise-wide discussion and development of sound fiscal policies and multi-year capital planning.

I'm also impressed with both committees' efforts, in their written reports (and often in their oral responses at Town Meeting), to describe the range of committee members' viewpoints and concerns (including dissenting views).

All candidates are asked to limit the response to each question to at most two or three paragraphs, and to provide the questionnaire responses by Sunday, Feb 7th, 2015. Responses will not be edited, and will run as submitted. They will be posted on lex-wiki.org in PDF format and announced through other town media. Questionnaire reviewer Vicki Blier. Questionnaire coordinator Andrei Radulescu-Banu (bitdribble@gmail.com, 617-216-8509).
