



Town Meeting voters will be counting on change

By Michael Wyner

GateHouse News Service

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WAYLAND — Wayland will take old-style Town Meeting into the modern age next year with the addition of electronic keypads for voters.

Former selectman Alan Reiss introduced the proposal at the final night of annual Town Meeting on Wednesday, saying it will help alleviate the grumbling generated by contentious votes at recent town meetings.

In particular, a controversial article on the proposed Town Center project at last November's special Town Meeting passed, failed on a recount, and passed again under reconsideration. Reiss estimated the nearly three hours used to count standing votes could have been compressed into seven minutes with electronic keypads.

"If you've ever felt disgruntled or disenchanted with Town Meeting because the voting is too slow, too lengthy or because of a contentious revote ... this will enhance democracy, and change and rejuvenate Town Meeting," he said.

The estimated cost of the keypads is \$150,000 to \$175,000, but Reiss has negotiated a deal with Options Technology of Orlando, Fla., to test the system at next year's annual Town Meeting for free.

"The system is accurate and secure, and will not be hacked or jammed," Reiss said.

Westwood Town Administrator Michael Jaillet is also interested in bringing electronic voting to his town, saying it would allow people to "vote their conscience" instead of standing votes in which residents may feel ostracized.

"You can vote with your hearts and minds and with your pocketbooks," Reiss said.

After an article at Town Meeting is presented, residents will have one minute to vote on their keypad. They can change their minds as often as they want until the minute is up, with only the last vote pressed being counted.

After Town Meeting concludes, residents will return the keypads to a box on their way out.

Wayland will be the first town in the state to try this new technology next year, with Reiss hoping that the community "could lead the way ... Massachusetts and New England will be watching us."

Although the motion carried, not everyone at the podium on Wednesday night was thrilled with the idea.

Housing Authority member Susan Weinstein was concerned about allowing votes at Town Meeting to be private, noting that she is interested in affordable housing which "can be a somewhat unpopular subject."

Article 22 Electronic Voting - Main Motion and Speech from **WaylandVoter** on **Vimeo**.

While she liked the idea of expediting Town Meeting, she said, "If you care enough to vote, you should care enough to stand up for it."

Weinstein asked if the moderator might allow a compromise to have people stand up and push the button on their keypad.

Meanwhile, Stan Robinson was concerned about Wayland being "a guinea pig" in the experiment. He questioned whether the electronic keypads would be impervious to hacking, and said the transmitters would use the same harmful technology as cell phones.

"Not all of us believe cell phone technology is OK," he said. "The fact that everybody does it doesn't mean it's safe."

Dave Bernstein believes the new system of voting will result in improved attendance.

"People are frustrated by the process - it takes too long, it's inaccurate," he said. "Let's give it a try and then figure out what the true costs are."

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Comments (14)

ysiadeam

6 days ago

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I'm really concerned about Susan Weinstein's comments. I interpret what she is saying as 'I dare you to stand up and say you don't believe in affordable housing.' This is exactly the type of intimidation that electronic voting is striving to eliminate.

Parents

6 days ago

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I listened to Ms Weinstein's comments too and although I am a big supporter of affordable housing, it is generally unpopular so I can see what her concern is. But I do believe that anonymous voting at town meeting is what we need and people should not be forced into voting for something just because others are watching them. I am pleased that Mr. Reiss has taken the initiative to bring voting privacy to town meeting.

Jeff Baron

2 days ago

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Agreed on both counts. I think the most significant thing electronic voting will do is to restore equality on the TM floor. No longer will a group of people be able to intimidate voters into acting a certain way for fear of retribution. I don't know if it will necessarily change the results of votes, but the pure notion of privacy in expressing your opinion will likely change who is willing to vote. Kudos to Alan for all his hard work in bringing this article to the floor and getting in through. This was no small effort!

rvidboston

2 days ago

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Susan Weinstein does not understand, that voting intimidation goes both ways? Both yes- and no-voters feel pressure when they are required to stand up, so this field is equal IMHO. And pressure is not good for democracy. It is a way to totalitarianism.

What is a real trouble is how these meetings are conducted. I was there twice and have no further desire wasting half a day of my time. Attendance is so low that any result is far from democracy, as it only represent a fraction of Wayland population, highly skewed towards single/seniors, as parents don't have that much time and younger people just don't want to spend all that time. Therefore many decisions lack majority of Wayland population support.

\$150000, why is it so expensive? How many units are we talking about and what is the cost of each? From its look it should not be more than \$20-\$50 a piece.

Speaking as an engineer here...

AlanJReiss

2 days ago

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I appreciate the interest in this article and I appreciate that the voters of Wayland have agreed to give this a try next year.

The official website of this article has recently been rebuilt and is under continuous construction. More information to come.

www.ElectronicVoting.info

You can contact me via the Welcome page. I will be happy to answer your questions and consider your comments. But I will not be responding here. Regards, Alan wayland voter

1 day ago

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Exciting for Wayland to be able to test electronic voting. I sure hope that picture isn't what the actual keypads will look like. Way too complicated. It only needs to be a very simple design and not cost \$150k. Many people, especially senior citizens would be very intimidated with a complicated device. Strange that the group pushing this talks about voter intimidation but hasn't even mentioned the intimidation factor of being forced to use technology rather than voting the traditional way. I wonder why. Makes me wonder what this group's agenda is. They like to use the rhetoric of intimidation and privacy. But what about transparency, usually another favorite theme. Why would Town Meeting votes require all those number keys? Let's not make it more complicated and expensive than it needs to be.

WaylandWatcher

1 day ago

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Ya wayland voter it looks way too complicated. Its got just as many keys as a telephone and senior citizens would certainly be intimidated by using a telephone.

And that old fashioned way ? Didn't the moderator call article 21 as pass and then had to take a standing counted vote which failed article 21 by almost 2 to 1 ?

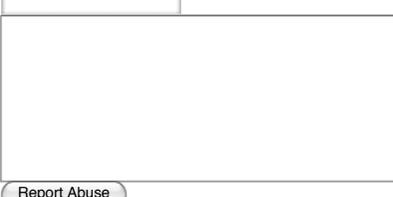
I guess some people don't see the value of actually having an accurate vote. Or is it that they want a vote that is as accurate as the one they can intimidate out of people?

rvidboston

23 hours ago

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agree about too many buttons. It should be no more complex then restaurant RF tag with no more than 3 big buttons (Yes, No, Abstain). Green light should come on when device is in the network, should blink when vote time, should show red light when vote is recorded. Dump those numeric keys.

JohnF

23 hours ago

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Technology certainly can be overwhelmingly complicated for the elderly. But it can also be surprisingly simple. This falls in the latter category. It basically looks like a telephone, which most people aged 3 - 99 seem to have no problem with.

I think it is a stretch to say that these handsets would be too complicated for people, which should be pretty clear just by looking at the photo.

The points WV is raising sound like someone trying to throw cold water on an idea, regardless of the lack of a compelling opposing argument. 'Intimidation by being forced to use technology rather than voting the traditional way'?

'Makes me wonder what this group's agenda is?' So, if you can't shoot them down on solid evidence or facts, you just use innuendos to create doubt? C'mon!

wayland voter
12 hours ago
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Surprisingly simple? It makes no sense to use a numeric keypad for this application when the options for voting are YES, NO or ABSTAIN -- three straightforward options, none of which involve pressing a number. There is no reason whatsoever to use a device that looks like a calculator, or a phone or a remote control for this application. I can't imagine why anyone would call that 'a stretch to say.' My elderly parents have said this approach would intimidate them, so please don't quash my view just because it's different from yours. Personally, I stand by my previous statement that the technology is exciting so please calm down.

WaylandWatcher
9 hours ago
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wayland voter - your view is correct about the keypads, it would be better to have 3 buttons and yes the technology is very exciting.

From what I read on the site, the keypads are standard as numerical keypads so they would be the least cost to buy. If custom keypads were to be created then it would increase the cost. Perhaps this is a trade-off that is made to keep the cost down or maybe this could be solved in the future... that is what it says.

JohnF
5 hours ago
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As I look at the photo of the keypad, I'm guessing that the instructions will be very clear, perhaps something like this:

Ignore all the button on your units except the top row labeled 1, 2, 3.

- 1=Yes
- 2=No
- 3=Abstain

Considering that our paper ballots confused a lot of people last month - not just the elderly- where MANY people seem to have missed the Debt Exclusion question that was at the very bottom and looked more like fine print than actually part of the ballot, I'd say that these keypads can be presented in a way that the vast majority of ALL voters will find easy to use, including the elderly.

They just need to make sure the instructions are clear.

truth4wayland
3 hours ago
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The way certain people are promoting this and the way they seem to get the company to respond makes it appear that their is some sort of financial benefit coming to the supporters.

I have heard JohnF make similar comments about development of the CVS and others about the TownCenter. Why does everything have to be tainted this way? I think this is a great opportunity for Wayland to improve but so are the other projects.

As far as simple to use I disagree. JohnF makes a good point about even paper ballots that we all have been using being confusing and we are not forced to make a quick decision. I can only imagine how many mis votes this system will cause.

JohnF

2 hours ago

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I believe that you are mistaking me for someone else. I'm quite sure I've never commented on either CVS or the Town Center.

Login or register to post a comment:

Login

Username:

Password:

Forgot password

Login

Register

Email:

First Name:

Last Name:

- I agree to the terms of use
- I am over 13 years of age

NOTE: Your inbox must accept emails from "no-reply@gatehousemedia.com"

Register

All across Massachusetts, cops are stepping up seat belt enforcement.



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