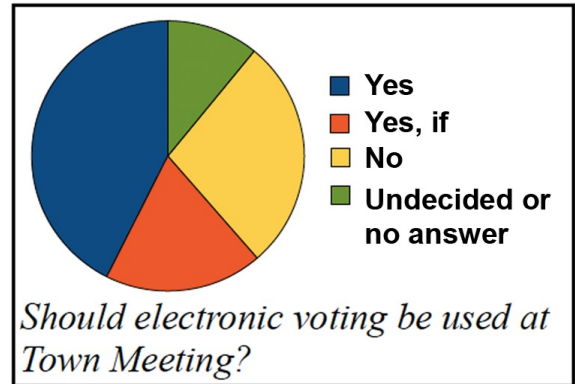


# Report of the Town Meeting Coordinating Committee on the possible use of electronic voting in Amherst Town Meeting

November, 2010

An interactive demonstration of the electronic voting system currently being used in the classroom at both Amherst College and UMass was held at the conclusion of the 2010 Annual Town Meeting on May 17, 2010. Following the demonstration, surveys were distributed to Town Meeting members, and over one hundred were returned. Although less than half of respondents were willing to offer unqualified support for the adoption of electronic voting, almost two-thirds expressed some level of interest in it, with cost being the most important consideration for those on the fence. About a quarter were opposed in any case. The full results of the survey were posted on the TMCC webpage <[www.amherstma.gov/tmcc#evoting](http://www.amherstma.gov/tmcc#evoting)> in Summer 2010.



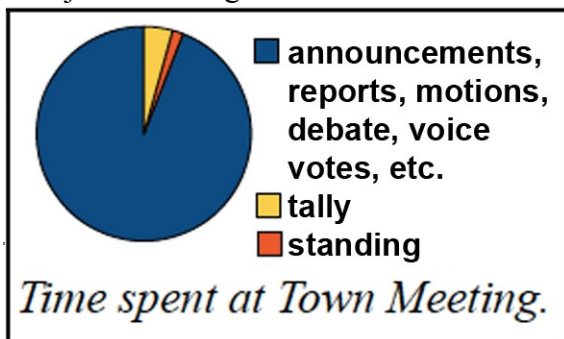
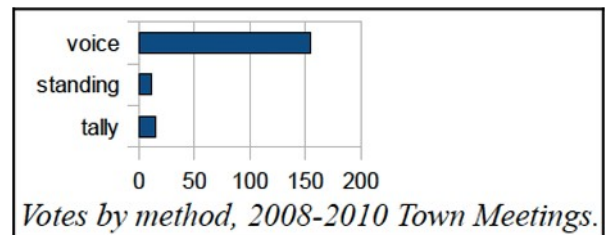
The TMCC report recommended six areas of further inquiry emerging from the survey responses. These are reproduced below, along with the action taken by TMCC and the data or information that was gathered.

**1. Recommendation:** Determine the actual cost of the current method of voting, including staff time.

**Response:** TMCC met with members of the Town Clerk's office and the IT department to gather data and estimate the cost of the current voting method:

- At the most recent available rates of \$0.09 per sheet for cardstock and \$0.02 per sheet for toner, tally cards cost about \$55.00 per session of Town Meeting. At eleven sessions per year (the recent average), the total annual cost is about \$605.00.
- Members of the Town Clerk's office spend about 1½ to 2 hours preparing tally cards before each session and then 3 to 4 hours recording attendance, sorting tally cards, and preparing reports after each session. It is expected that the time spent on these tasks could be reduced—though not eliminated—by the adoption of electronic voting.
- A member of the IT department is already present at every session of Town Meeting to provide technical support for the variety of electronic equipment in use. It is not known whether more IT staff time would be necessary to handle electronic voting.
- Two temporary employees assist with check-in for 2 to 3 hours each at every session. In order to collect and account for all clickers at the end of every session, these employees would probably have to stay all evening if electronic voting were adopted, instead of leaving at 9:00 or 9:30pm.

TMCC also analyzed Town Meeting votes for the last two years and discovered that over 85% of questions were decided by voice vote, with the average amount of time spent on a standing vote just over four minutes and on a tally vote just under eight minutes.



The total of 26 standing or tally votes over the 18 sessions took up about 6% of all time spent in Town Meeting, or an average of less than 90 minutes per year. See all the data at <[www.amherstma.gov/tmcc#evoting](http://www.amherstma.gov/tmcc#evoting)>.

**2. Recommendation:** Explore possible cost reductions in the current method of voting.

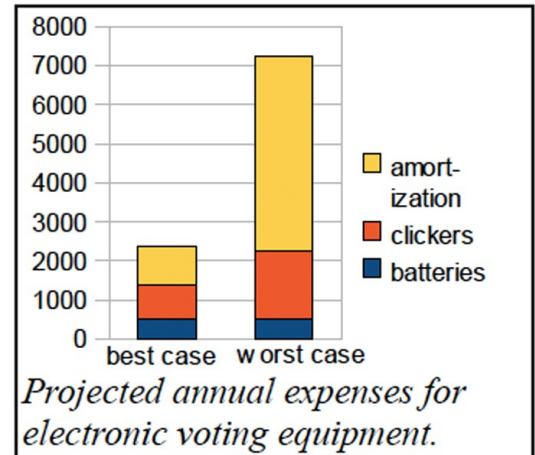
**Response:** TMCC has proposed reducing the amount of paper currently used in tally card voting by switching to a single set of tally cards per Town Meeting for each member. The Town Clerk and Moderator are considering the practical, legal, and financial ramifications of this option, which could be implemented regardless of whether electronic voting is adopted.

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**3. Recommendation:** Secure firm estimates for the lifetime cost of an electronic voting system.

**Response:** TMCC met with the director of the IT department to gather data and estimate the cost of an electronic voting system:

- Funding of the initial \$20,000-25,000 purchase price would be secured through a capital plan request by the IT department, competing with the town's other capital needs.
- Handheld remotes may need to be replaced about every five to ten years, at an estimated cost of \$7500-\$10,000.
- Batteries may need to be replaced once per year, at an estimated cost of \$500.
- Amortizing the cost of the system and adding annual expenses for "clickers" and batteries yield an annual equipment cost in the range of \$2375 to \$7250 for electronic voting, depending on the price of the system chosen and the number of years over which it may be expected to be functional.
- Recent IT equipment costs associated with Town Meeting have included \$3000 for a projector bulb, \$2500 for an overhead projector, \$600 for cable, and \$200 for a switcher.



**4. Recommendation:** Conduct another demonstration and survey if/when a reasonable cost can be found and technical glitches and other considerations can be resolved.

**Response:** TMCC continues to analyze factors involved in adoption of electronic voting and expects to make a recommendation on further pursuit of this option in the near future. If the recommendation is positive, another demonstration will be conducted.

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**5. Recommendation:** Research bylaw changes necessary for the adoption of electronic voting.

**Response:** TMCC collaborated with the Town Moderator to develop a list of issues—including bylaw provisions and practical matters such as the security of and responsibility for handheld clickers—that must be addressed before electronic voting could be adopted.

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**6. Recommendation:** Make a priority of improving the sound system in the auditorium.

**Response:** TMCC consulted with ACTV and the town's and schools' IT departments to make the following recommendations to enhance sound, minimize potential audio signal interferences in the auditorium and accommodate the range of hearing levels and acuity abilities of Town Meeting members this Fall:

- Request that individual electronic devices and cell phones be on vibrate mode.
- Reposition time clocks.
- Purchase eight new table microphones.
- Purchase assistive hearing devices.

Additionally, ACTV will produce a PSA video to help inform TM members, boards, staff, and others in attendance of our roles in effecting audio experiences at Town Meeting.

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The Town Meeting Coordinating Committee welcomes questions and comments about this report by email at <townmeeting@amherstma.gov> or on paper at the Select Board office in Town Hall.