



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

April 16, 2022

**Winchester Residents Have a Lot to Say about Communications**  
***Two Public Listening Sessions Prompt Lively Discussions***

**Winchester, MA** – On April 13, Winchester residents participated in two lively discussions to share their thoughts about town government communications. The public listening sessions were organized by the Communications Study Committee (CSC), a committee appointed last fall by Winchester Town Meeting to study ways to improve town government communication.

To encourage as much public participation as possible, the CSC hosted both afternoon and evening events, and organized the sessions as “hybrid” (in person and Zoom) meetings. Overall, fifty residents participated.

In introductory remarks, CSC Chair Lance Grenzeback explained that this is the first phase of the CSC’s work, saying, “We are working now to understand current communications challenges. Our next step will be to identify the best, most cost-effective ways to address those challenges.”

In a brief presentation, Grenzeback pointed out that, “The Town Meeting form of local government depends on a well-informed citizenry.” However, he noted that “the communications environment and media landscape have changed dramatically.” Many in the audience—both in person and on Zoom—echoed this point, lamenting the decline in local news and the merging of local newspapers, which is making it harder to stay informed and connected as a community.

Reflecting on the need for a regular news source in town, Town Meeting member Sally Quinn said, “It’s pretty clear we’ve got a problem.” Quinn explained she gathers a lot of information by talking to people, but she gets her information from “certain sources, as does everybody.” Quinn also expressed concern that too many sources of information can lead to confusion. “We need Walter Cronkite back,” she quipped. “We have to have a trusted source,” she added, so “we can try to keep it to the facts and not to all the noise that we hear from the Facebook pages.”

Brian Vernaglia, who has served on both elected and appointed boards, spoke via Zoom. “I’ve been struggling with communications in town for a decade,” he said. He suggested that the information is all there, but it takes time to find it. “Watching six meetings a week isn’t feasible,” he said, and added that “everybody wants different information.”

Susan Verdicchio, a recent member of the Select Board, agreed and said that a major challenge is “getting government and community information together in one place.”

Dot Butler, an active community leader, acknowledged that, “I have not always been tuned in [to town government]. I am one of those residents from before who was not paying attention.” She recognized the need to increase civic engagement, noting that many new families to town are “very involved in their jobs, working long hours and come home to families,” but the elections got their attention. Butler said, “We’ve got their attention and we need to capitalize on engaging them.”

Others also underscored the need to engage more people in local government. During the evening session, Bob Johnson, who referred to himself one of the town's oldest Town Meeting members, observed that "communication is breaking down all over the country." He expressed support for the committee's charge, saying, "we're in dire need of the steps you're taking" to reach the public. As a veteran Town Meeting member, Johnson strives to engage new neighbors and suggested it would be "a big help if Town Meeting members themselves became individual communicators and tried to push out what's going on."

Town Meeting member Susan Carney agreed that Town Meeting could do more outreach, adding, "We're making decisions in Town Meeting, but we're not reaching the people we're representing." She looked forward to the committee's thoughts on "how do we do that."

John Brown, another Town Meeting member, shared Carney's frustrations, and noted that in Lexington there's a Town Meeting discussion board, which he said is "open to the public to view but only Town Meeting members can post." He suggested this would be a good option for the committee to study.

Town Meeting member William Band urged the committee to "look at how people consume information," noting that in today's media landscape, it is important to know where residents are getting their information "outside of the Town Meeting bubble."

School Committee member Chris Nixon expressed support for the committee's charge, and indicated his committee is working to share information about the Lynch School renovation project on a website that contains videos, emphasizing the need to share information about "what's happened and what's coming." Nixon also cautioned that comparisons to other communities should look at how their administrative and financial support compares to Winchester's.

Joyce Maxwell shared her perspective as a resident who moved here from outside the region, and she pointed out that residents who don't work in Winchester or have children in the schools don't receive much town information. She pointed out that residents can opt in to get information, but not everyone does, and suggested sending paper mailings to residents. "Everyone has a mailbox," she said, "this could be a way to reach those not opting in."

In addition to the Listening Sessions, CSC members interviewed representatives of different government and civic groups to get their ideas and feedback. Those interviewed included members of Town boards, committees, and commissions; Town Meeting members; and representatives of local nonprofit and civic organizations. In addition, a communications survey was distributed to all Fall 2021 Town Meeting members, and a future survey is planned for all residents.

The CSC is scheduled to report its preliminary findings to Spring Town Meeting on April 25. The group will continue its work over the summer, and a final report with recommendations will be presented to Fall Town Meeting. As Committee Chair Grenzeback noted, the committee will continue to solicit public input and, "we'll be picking your brains all summer for good ideas."

Recordings of the Listening Sessions can be found on the CSC web page and the WinCAM On Demand channel. Residents are encouraged to continue to send any comments or suggestions to the CSC at: [winchestercsc@gmail.com](mailto:winchestercsc@gmail.com).

*The CSC was established by Winchester's 2021 Fall Town Meeting to respond to dramatic changes in the communications environment, with a particular focus on how residents learn about the work and decisions of*

*Town Meeting and the Town's elected and appointed boards. The Committee is charged with evaluating opportunities to improve effective communication among the Town's boards, commissions and committees, Town Meeting members, and residents, especially communication about articles and motions considered at Town Meetings. More information available at [www.tinyurl.com/wincsc](http://www.tinyurl.com/wincsc).*

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PHOTO CAPTION: Residents attend the afternoon Listening Session of the Communication Study



Photo Caption: Attendees gather at the Afternoon Listening Session  
Front L to R: Dot Butler, Maura Sullivan, Casey Bauer, Sally Quinn



Photo Caption:  
Participant Vincent Dixon is greeted by CSC Committee member Jennifer Haefeli

