

Winchester Town Meeting Communications Study Committee

Survey of Town Meeting Members: Responses

The Communications Study Committee conducted a survey of Town Meeting Members who served in the 2021 Town Meetings.

The survey asked Town Meeting Members if communications ...

1. Between the Town's boards, committees and commissions and Town Meeting
2. Among Town Meeting members, and
3. Between Town Meeting members and their precinct constituents ...

... were sufficient for them to make well-informed votes.

The rating scale was 1 = Insufficient to 5 = Sufficient. Space was provided after each question for written comments. A copy of the survey form is at the end of this document.

A notice of the survey with a link to the Google Forms survey was distributed by email to 2021 Town Meeting Members in late March and early April 2022. The survey was closed on April 8, 2022.

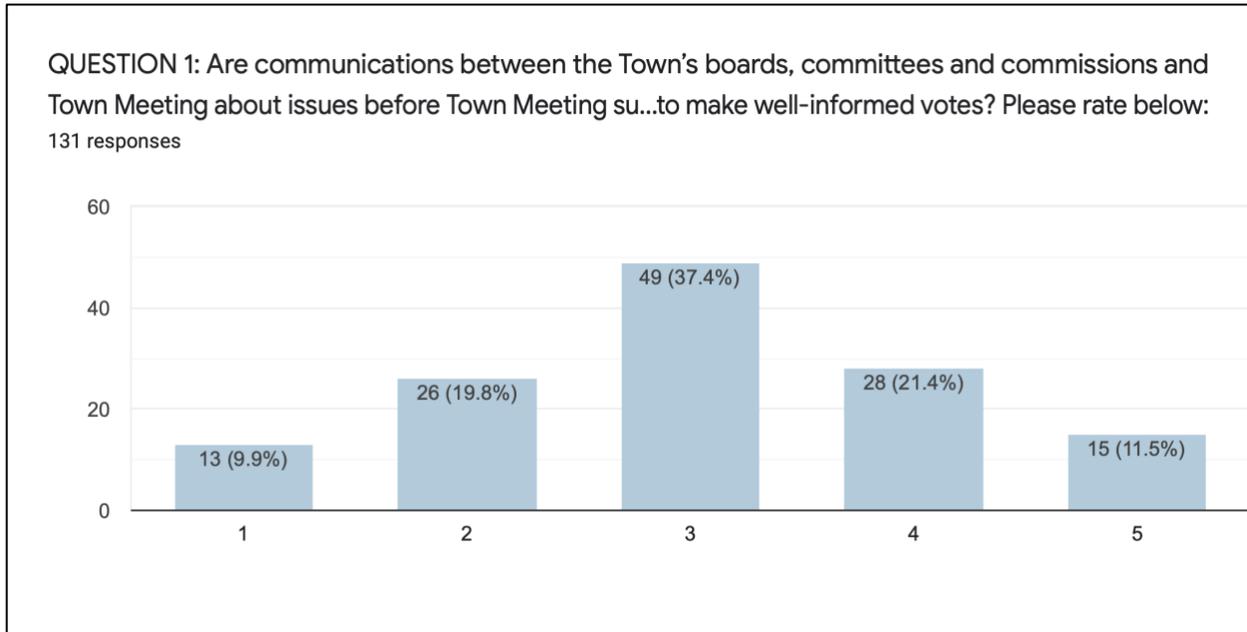
The Committee received 132 responses from the 186 serving 2021 Town Meeting Members (71 percent). (Six of the 192 Town Meeting seats were listed as vacant as of the 2021 Fall Town Meeting.) Responses by precinct were —

Precinct	Responses	2021 TMMs	Percent
1	18	23	78%
2	21	23	91%
3	18	23	78%
4	11	22	50%
5	16	23	70%
6	15	24	63%
7	15	24	63%
8	18	24	75%
Total	132	186	71%

Summaries of the ratings and lists of all comments follow:

QUESTION 1: Are communications between the Town's boards, committees and commissions and Town Meeting about issues before Town Meeting sufficient for you to make well-informed votes? Please rate below:

Rating scale: 1 = Insufficient to 5 = Sufficient



Comments (82 responses)

- The background sections on motions should provide more information. Links to reports and minutes of meetings where the articles were discussed would be helpful.
- Unless I am missing something, I don't think we get a committee summary before a vote via email. I know that we sometimes get letters from community members via email and in the mail, we don't get an official summary from a board or committee or commission before a vote. I know we get a lot of information though, so perhaps we do get it, but I am looking for something else.
- Sometimes information is too late to discuss it with anyone.
- By the time the materials before Town meeting are sent, many issues are no longer discussed at board and committee level. I have never received info from a town board or a commission regarding an issue.
- Communication between boards may be happening however, there is no go to system other than watch the meetings online to keep aware of what these communications are as they relate to town issues.

- The boards/committees/commissions all do great diligence but there seems to be a disconnect between that work and Town Meeting. Thus, It seems as if many Town Meeting members are not fully aware of issues/initiatives being put up for vote until Town Meeting begins, which is too late in the process. By that point, many initiatives, particularly the budget, are like runaway trains-- it's hard to meaningfully modify certain items in Town Meeting and proponents are often, and understandably, "dug in" by then. Inevitably someone at Town Meeting will comment that much work has been put in and Town Meeting members should essentially trust the process at that point. While well intentioned, this doesn't seem right.
- Sometimes sufficient. Certain committees (Finance - not all) sometimes play hide the ball.
- I believe that additional background information and documentation should be provided for many warrant articles. I also believe that better financial analysis and projections should be made and provided where relevant. I sometimes feel that minimal information is provided during article presentations and that TMMs are expected to just approve the article with little background or future projections.
- Yes, communication was clear most of the time. However, some issues could have been spelled out a little bit more.
- We only get full information in our packets, which arrive only a week before TM. Boards which weigh in on articles at Town meeting often perform a perfunctory analysis before their vote. It is useless and biases opinions at TM. I no longer ascribe any weight to a board's opinion (except for FinCom, of course). The Select Board is notorious for bringing complex articles to TM at the last minute, leaving us with little time to review them. Article backgrounds are either regurgitations of the article language or are too simplified to understand the ramifications of our vote.
- The information provided is always sufficient from the different groups but often I have felt that with SO many important issues and so much to educate oneself on to make the best decision, a website designed to have everything in one place that's posted by each group involved in a particular matter would be terrific.
- I don't feel like we hear very much from the boards, committees, etc. in between Town Meetings. I admit I have not been extremely active in seeking information myself, so perhaps there is more "out there" than I'm aware of.
- Some issues have many public meetings - such as the override vote for the high school or the turf field installation at the high school. Others have little to no outreach. The town managers informational meetings over the past 2 or so years have not been helpful - reading through the articles without answering questions is not a good use of anyone's time. Being elected to town meeting

should land you on a distribution list for information being pushed out from boards and committees - for example, an alert that FinCom will be discussing the proposed school beget on April 12. The onus is still on TMM to watch and engage, but it seems the first step is organizing the relevant information.

- I think the information is generally available if I choose to seek it out. However, there isn't a general or organized repository that is easily accessible and, sometimes, timely. I don't always have time to attend meetings and detailed minutes would be helpful. This is especially true when WinCAM recordings aren't available. I rely heavily on Facebook to keep me abreast of current issues. I am grateful that residents are highly engaged across all interests.
- I would like to see more communications on important issues, providing detailed background information and financial analysis if possible.
- Most of the time the relevant boards and committees have an opportunity to consider important issues before they come to town meeting.
- Particularly difficult to find minutes of meetings--sometimes takes months before they are approved and posted.
- They are mostly sufficient, but I'd like them to be better.
- Interim video updates from town officials on matters likely to come to a TM vote might be useful, in addition to the final reports we receive close before TM.
- The background information for articles provided in the warrant is often too vague or mired in details which obscure assessing the impact of passage of the article to the town. A clear statement of a what a yes and no vote means in this respect would be very helpful. Minority views from the boards, committees and commissions are often not presented at Town Meeting unless a Town Meeting member asks for it. This is especially useful information when the board, committee, or commission is not presenting the views for a super majority and should be part of the board, committee or commission's recommendation. It would also be nice if a board, committee, or commission would state a reason for why they are in support of or against an article.
- It would be nice if they could email the TM members whether or not they recommend favorable action on agenda items after they vote (at their meetings). Rather than having us have to wait until TM to hear their decision.
- We need executive summaries for these huge articles.
- The information most boards/committees provide is usually good; however, a lot of information comes in right before (or sometimes during) town meeting.
- Getting all the information seems to require multiple attempts, it is eventually there but not easily.
- Think it is there if you investigate it.

- I believe that motions presented to Town Meeting are too often lacking in context. I believe this has been particularly true of Select Board sponsored motions and recommendations over the past few years. No motion or recommendation should be presented without a concise explanation of the issue the motion addresses, its background, the consequences of approval and and no approval and how the specific motion fits within a larger strategy or set of values, will support more informed decisions. Pre - Town Meeting presentations by the Finance Committee to Town Meeting Precincts also could be helpful. I also think whenever public health considerations allow, there should be a commitment to hold in-person meetings and the use of cell phones or other digital communication by board members during public meetings should be prohibited.
- In my opinion, many Town Meeting Members don't adequately understand the matters before Town Meeting ahead of time, requiring lengthy presentations and Q&A periods that unnecessarily lengthen Town Meeting. Eventually Members become exhausted and cease to give due consideration to warrant articles that come in the final hours of Town Meeting.
- Too much information all at once there needs to be smaller group workshops in person by precinct in advance of our first session.
- If I have enough time to read them, they are helpful, but not really sufficient.
- I need to be able to attend the meetings (hopefully remotely) in which work is really done to decide things. So many things come to town meeting as already decided and I have no idea of why the decisions were made. I need to know what person on which committee is really pushing the idea and why. I need to hear the discussions around that. If meetings were remote and recorded, I could find this information.
- Sometimes yes, sometimes no, it depends on the committee and the article, but is inconsistent. I do not have time to attend all the meetings I would need to attend to feel fully informed, though I do try to attend important ones I learn of. I subscribe to the "Notify Me" alerts for committees but the alerts do not indicate in the subject line what the hearings are about, so they don't serve well to publicize or indicate which hearings would be especially important or relevant for Town Meeting to attend. A digest or summary with links to meeting recordings would be very helpful -- a newsletter of sorts, or some better forum or web-based bulletin board where committee chairs could post updates to key project milestones that is accessible to all, perhaps managed by staff or a volunteer(s). I feel that the biggest shortcoming is in the area of financial analyses by proponents when an article involves spending, and we especially lack meaningful information on personnel spending. Also, Q&A's that summarize what was asked and answered in hearings that were held could save time in Town meeting. I realize that is asking more of volunteer proponents, but it could increase odds their hard work results in approval.

- Plenty of opportunity for communication.
- I'm encouraged by the upcoming effort by Precinct 3 Finance Committee members to share FY 23 budget information with Precinct 3 Town Meeting members prior to Town Meeting. I believe this is the first time it is being done.
- Not always, from my experience especially with the select board there are a lot of transparency issues and the board is quick to shut down comments or suggestions.
- The boards and committees do not have time to reach out individually to town meeting members. So, I am guessing that if TMM are to be informed it will be thru improved reports and minutes. I realize that There is only so much time that these public servants can give someone has to be responsible. Also. I think there should be a Conversation about when you vote for someone what do you or should you expect.
- There should be more opportunities to DISCUSS very summarized information sent in packets.
- In my experience there has been very little communication to Town Meeting members prior to Town Meeting. I am usually undecided on most disputed articles before hearing the debate at Town Meeting.
- It would be helpful to hear the perspective of the Select Board and Finance Committee prior to Town Meeting. There may be existing opportunities but I am not aware of them - alerting TM members would be helpful.
- I would appreciate more push notifications.
- Not all TMM attend the Public Hearings for warrant articles, and often the true "Background" is much more that what is printed in the Warrant. TMM really need to pay attention all year.
- All Town boards, committees and commissions can do a better job of providing timely information to Town Meeting members. At minimum, throughout the year links to documents could be sent to TM members that would provide context and background information for votes TM members may be asked to take, such as documents on the MBTA train station project, affordable housing and climate proposals. Updates on these issues have been from the local newspapers, not from the town. Being educated about issues on an on-going basis would help each of us be a more informed TM member. I am not asking for documents to be created, but rather asking that existing documents be sent to TM members. For example, Town Manager reports to the Select Board would be helpful for TM members to have (i.e., <https://www.winchester.us/AgendaCenter/ViewFile/Item/4160?fileID=11621>). It would also be helpful to have warrant hearings taped and posted for those unable to attend the hearing - and the links sent to TM members.
- Some issues are well communicated.

- When boards weigh in on an article and disagree (or partially disagree) with proponents, I usually find myself wanting to ask many follow up questions to understand why, but Roberts Rules limit the options. It's also hard when proponents answer questions with incorrect info.
- When we are told at Town Meeting, we are told how fin com or select board voted. In the cases where the vote is not unanimous it would be great to hear why each side voted the way they did, without having to be asked.
- The committees/boards really do try, but the information that I find enlightening tends to be (a) buried in with a ton of generic/unchanged information; (b) presented in a flurry of public committee meetings that most folks can't get to all of; or (c) very last minute.
- Intermittent, partial, often incomplete with only one recommendation vs options and analysis to support chosen option.
- School Committee meetings during the day can't be attended by TM members at work.
- I rely heavily on the boards favorable and unfavorable recommendations when I make my vote.
- They are absolutely sufficient but I do think they can be a little overly complicated.
- It varies widely. And I find following SB meetings is very helpful. But it's a lot of time. Increasing divisiveness in town the past several years has decreased people's willingness - ability? - to share info.
- While the outbound communications to Meeting members are generally quite good, I also seek and appreciate the feedback I get from neighbors and friends. But, so many of them are often only aware of 1 or 2 (and at most 3 or 4) of the major issues Town Meeting will be asked to consider for vote. Typically, these are projects involving bond and construction issues. Insert an "if only" plea here for our "old" Star newspaper ... or "coverage" in some functional equivalent.
- Unless you are an involved citizen, there is not a good place to be notified of issues. Too many emails & places to try to search for information.
- Watching full 1–2-hour replay videos of committees and boards is good for full transparency. But they are not always the best way to get information in a timely manner because report summaries may be sometimes delayed and not available in time for town meeting. I've ended up calling committee members for more info and context. I do not mind hearing all sides of an issue, but it takes time to gather it on complex issues.
- Some committees do a great job. Some assume a good deal of prior information or familiarity with processes and lingo.

- The quality of the information presented varies significantly from board to board and across individual presenters. Many presentations (and the background text in the motion book) present either too little or too much information and do so too late and without context. Financial impact information is often focused exclusively on “this year’s budget” without assessment of the longer-term benefits or risks. TM should establish a format for all presentations that spells out the key information to be covered in each presentation (e.g., problem/opportunity addressed, proposed solution/action, alternatives considered and why rejected, anticipated impacts, including budget and taxpayer financial impact, etc.). TM should also consider requiring briefings on anticipated articles before TM, perhaps as a part of the (now lightly attended) Town Manager public hearing.
- Up until recently I was also a member of FinCom and Capital Planning, and learned a lot of information about upcoming warrant articles and other news through those committees. This will be my first town meeting being only a town meeting member, so I'm not sure I can accurately answer that question yet. It seems like, aside from attending committee meetings on my own (which I don't have time for), attending the Town Manager's presentation of the warrant articles is the only way to learn about the warrant articles.
- Not sure. Sometimes I feel out of the loop so maybe there could be some improvement.
- While I have only been a member of Town Meeting for a year, I have felt that the presentations by various boards to Town Meeting have been informative. I also know that, on certain issues that I feel are particularly important, I can watch deliberations of the Select Board, School Board and other groups.
- There should be more communication between the town boards and Town Meeting members to let us know what is happening and what new negotiations are taking place. That way, when townspeople reach out to us on an issue, we know what is going on.
- Communications are sufficient if TM members (and candidates) take time educate themselves on upcoming issues.
- Unclear what is coming from a special interest group with an agenda (I.e. Network For Social Justice) or actual from Town Governance.
- Communications are too centered on why Town Meeting should go along with the conclusions the boards/committees/commissions ("BCCs") have reached. Information is communicated in conclusory ways. Background statistics - and particularly background financial numbers - are not a key part of written communications. Town BCC's seem disconnected from financial history, current finances, and future financial performance. Articles are often written in a way that leaves TMM with a Hobson's choice - for example Articles that combine multiple issues - some of which are readily supported - others not. Yet,

Article are often written in a way that requires a single binary choice - Yes or No - on multiple issues. An example that has existed for more than 20 years is the practice of Town Staff to account for Direct Cost separately from Indirect Cost. A 2000 Town Commission recommended that our accounts be structured in a way to show both the Direct Cost of (e.g.) Fire, the Indirect Cost of (e.g.) Fire, and the Total cost of (e.g.) Fire in Town Budgets prepared by the staff and given to Fin Comm and Town Meeting. This change has yet to be made. FinCom voted 11-0 in 2020 to asked Town Staff to implement this change. It has yet to be made. The "Indirect" item in Town Budget is now approaching \$20M per year. This includes pension, OPEB's (health care), (both large Town unfunded liabilities), and other indirect costs like unemployment compensation. This budget item has been increasing dramatically over the past two decades. What gets measured can be managed. Yet, this line item remains opaque - to much of Town Staff, and to Town Meeting. Fin Com spends an inordinate amount of time trying to tease this information out from existing data. This very large line item, why it is growing, and what to do about it remains largely opaque.

- Information is available in article booklets but it would be helpful to have the rationale of other town committees. I am torn on this article because I appreciate the debate and points of view during town meeting.
- You have to go back to old town meeting materials to recall what was voted or presented the last time or previous year. Where are TM minutes? I have old Finance Committee reports, but can't find any minutes. If a TM member made a presentation the only way to find that is by watching the recording (e.g., Planning Board (zoning change on North Main, finance/budget issues, e.g., Michelle Prior, John Miller). Finance Committee meetings are not recorded at all. Info on Select Board projects like the Waterfield development is on the SB page, but it's in reverse chronological order and hard to search. (The website's overall search function works very poorly and is extremely frustrating.) I find out more about projects with a Google search which brings up local newspaper articles, which often contain errors. I can understand why residents just ask a question on a Facebook page, it's easier. Information sessions on big projects, by Select Board (traffic projects, affordable housing), EFPBC/School Committee (Carriage House, Lynch), and the Planning Board/Town Planner on zoning changes that affect large areas (town center, North Main) are needed in advance of town meeting, and the financial aspects should be covered. A big presentation to town meeting on the night when members are expected to vote on on a large, complex, costly project is too late.
- The information provided is often incomplete.
- There could be better communication and more background information before TM starts. Also, we frequently vote to spend from the Free Cash account in a number of separate motions. So, it's hard to know if the motions to spend from Free Cash when totaled together will violate the Free Cash spending

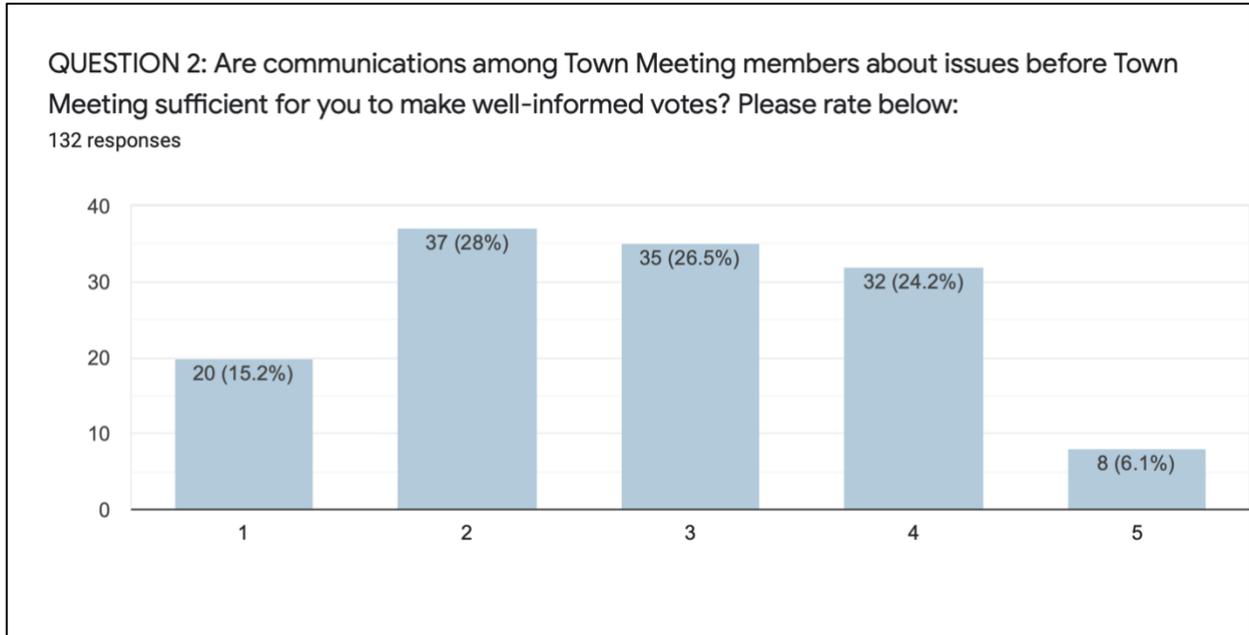
guidelines. So, for each motion to spend from Free Cash there should be a statement that the spending from Free Cash for that motion combined with the other motions on the warrant will not violate Free Cash spending guidelines.

- What format for questions would be least time consuming for TM members to become sufficiently informed on meeting's issues?
- From what I have witnessed so far in my short 2 years as a member (strictly through Zoom) the emails we get beforehand with pdfs of articles personally feel sufficient.
- I feel disconnected from the boards and the Town Meeting.
- If I followed meetings which led up to the statement presented to Town Meeting, I have some idea as to what transpired at meetings which led up to the issue presented to Town Meeting.
- In person communications allows the TTM to “read” all participants.
- It would be helpful to have summaries of the more elaborate articles being put forth.
- As a member of FinCom that is required to be educated and to vote on all financial issues involving town, I do not believe transparency is an issue. At least around us, there is no issue. I cannot speak for other Boards / Committees.
- There is plenty of information out there which I look for. Others may not.
- Some boards are better than others.
- Much of what I get is in the form of reports to the Town Meeting. There appear to be ample opportunities for me to attend meetings ahead of time.
- Having served on the BOH for 16 years, I think we would have benefited from more direct communication with Town Manager, Select Board, and School Committee.
- I only receive emails from the historic commission and the planning board.
- Let's start with the way agendas are posted. There are MA regs for this, and most of our boards are not aware of what's required. The agenda topics should provide enough information for citizens to determine whether an issue may be of interest and whether to attend a meeting. I realize the town clerk has many demands, but a memo to staff who support boards and to clerks of boards without staff would be a good way to start. After that, random reviews of agendas with follow-up where needed could be done.
- The Town Meeting information is well documented. The challenge is in gathering the public meeting information before each town meeting session to provide additional context.

- I find that I have to actively seek out information to obtain more information and details to help inform my vote. Materials are often provided with little time to review and follow up with questions prior to Town Meeting. I felt most informed when I was a member of Finance Committee, so I often reach out to FinCom members to ask additional questions.
- Info sessions prior to the meetings have been helpful.

QUESTION 2: Are communications among Town Meeting members about issues before Town Meeting sufficient for you to make well-informed votes? Please rate below:

Rating scale: 1 = Insufficient to 5 = Sufficient



Comments (72 responses)

- Very little communication
- Not sure that communication between town meeting members is crucial. We aren't there to come to consensus or compromise. We are there to listen to reports and follow town meeting members and then vote on articles.
- I feel that there is usually adequate time for comments and debate at Town Meeting.
- Not for all articles but it helps to have many points of view before some articles. This has occurred during prior town meetings via email.
- Like our community our committee is divide and only like-minded people speak to one another. I have some ideas how we can improve this matter.
- This falls into the “it depends” category. When there are contentious or highly visible issues before Town Meeting, there have been prepared emails of TMM thoughts on the matter and various positions. But for regular business, there is minimal communication.
- I see ZERO communication among TM members, even in my precinct (6).

- We definitely need better, more formal process for precinct meetings and other prep meetings for TMM to be more informed. This would also help keep TM from going really long on tough issues.
- The only opportunities to communicate with other TM members is when we take the initiative ourselves, reaching out to those members we know.
- It basically doesn't happen except on certain hot button topics where there is activism. Not sure what to recommend here because everyone is very busy and, in my opinion, disinclined to spend a bunch of time meeting with other Town Meeting Members when they know multiple lengthy evenings of Town Meeting are coming up.
- I rarely discuss issues with other town meeting members prior to Town Meeting other than a handful of friends who also serve on town meeting.
- Usually have a chance to talk to more members but I am guessing that even when an issue is discussed it might not be a perfect cross section of the town.
- Too much is debated on social media. We need to get back to in person meetings & info sessions
- With COVID, I've found that communications have broken down. That said, I don't think this form of communication is what's needed most. I miss independent press coverage.
- At least in Precinct 1, we don't typically discuss issues before Town Meeting.
- financial matters are very complex and I need more info for this.
- Many (though not all) TM members in my precinct are connected via a FB Messenger chat, which helps us to 'discuss' issues in advance.
- What communications among town meeting members???
- There isn't a formal opportunity for TMM to talk but I communicate with many, especially ones I think might clear my thinking. But no, not much communication between TMMs.
- I ask my TM friends if I need more info. If they know less than I do, then I bring them up to date as much as I can. The blind leading the blind sometimes. Again, it is essential that TMM attend and ask questions at the Public Hearings on each warrant article. I think a lot of times TMM are reluctant to ask probing or clarifying questions, thinking they "should" know about the topic already. But in our town, knowledge comes to those who PULL information to themselves with tenacious research. The town could explore ways to PUSH info to TMMs: email, snail mail, phone calls, text messages.
- Regular precinct meetings rarely occur to discuss any of the issues facing the town. We did have a couple of meetings prior to fall town meeting and it was very helpful to review the warrants. Committees must meet to discuss specific

issues and report to whomever the governing board is but not town meeting members.

- We don't have communication with other Town Meeting members other than at Town Meeting.
- It would be helpful to have a repository of the letters and emails that TMMs write - all in one place - instead of getting emails at various times throughout the week leading up to TM.
- I do think that debate is often rather thorough and I do obtain additional information or view points to help me decide. However, if we are not receiving enough information, it takes longer to debate and it may not be as informed as it could be. I do believe that it may be helpful to hold real meetings (even if precinct meetings) prior to TM so that communication among the members is increased.
- I really liked a comment about having informal Precinct meetings (re-) instituted (that was mentioned at the "run-off" vote held for Precinct 4).
- I depend more on the opinions of boards and committees initiating and evaluating warrant articles than I do on my fellow TMM to inform my own vote. Having said that I do find value in talking issues through with other TMM (my precinct or others) and wish it would happen more.
- There is very little formal communication among TM members but this might not be necessary if hearing from the SB and FinCom.
- I have been a TM member for only two years and there have been no communications among TM members prior to the TM.
- Communications between TMM's is very limited and typically only between acquaintances or like-minded people.
- I think amongst town meeting members communication is fine re how people feel about a certain matter. But again, like question 2, I feel like a virtual billeting board of some sort would be better. One with tabs where people could read information and then a contact person if we had a question or comment...
- Typically, I have received an email or two about a hot button issue but there isn't much communication.
- Recently, in precinct 1, we've started meeting before the town meeting to discuss the article amongst ourselves. This is helpful.
- Lately I notice more lobbying among TM members which could tend to limit a member's independent consideration of the issues.
- Again, I don't feel like there is a lot of interaction of TMM before Town Meeting. A recent exception was the flurry of emails proposing amendments to an article that happened RIGHT before the meeting. There wasn't time to read and digest the information. That was far from ideal.

- Talking with other Town Meeting members occurs on occasion when we meet at various functions or informal gatherings.
- In person it is easy to see how many people are in line to comment on something and after hearing their concerns and comments I can make a decision.
- Since the information presented to Boards is incomplete, it is necessarily incomplete when it gets to town meeting members.
- Scheduling a limited number of Zoom meetings for Town Meeting Members by key boards and committee on the budget and other motions thought to be of high priority and/or debate could be helpful. Perhaps questions could be submitted in advance and a declared limited amount of time allotted for questions during the call. Of course, this is a two way street and to have enough Town Meeting Member participation to make this effort worthwhile Members will need to be educated and encouraged regarding their duty as an elected representative of their precinct to be informed.
- If you make an effort to call a circle of other people, you can discuss things, identify gaps or inconsistencies you both can investigate and talk further on, but it's possible but there may be major issues or objections you don't hear about from your friends within the precinct or your circle of friends in town. I do have friends or acquaintances I usually disagree with, but few. Should precinct meetings be organized before town meetings? I don't know all my fellow precinct members; we only convene during the break at in-person town meetings and there's been turnover. I have heard other precincts have a precinct page on Facebook or are considering that (but no one wants to moderate it). Should all precincts be doing that? Parents who attend parent association meetings can help each other stay informed on school issues and the school budget, but there's no similar structure for other residents. (And there are fewer PTO meetings now than formerly, the pandemic had an impact, etc.) The Town Manager's reports are helpful, if people would subscribe to them.
- Facebook is not the answer. I wish I had a good suggestion where people could present info and offer comment/ask questions in a non-biased, non-judgmental way, but that may be asking too much from Facebook.
- I cannot speak for other precincts, but communication among town meeting members in Precinct 2 as a group is lacking. We are trying to change that by planning a meet and greet get together soon. Our precinct captain is excellent, he is constantly updating us about meetings and important issues. But as a group we have never gotten together to discuss warrant articles. How can we fairly represent our precinct constituents if we don't discuss issues among town meeting members or reach out to constituents? One thought was to divide the precinct into email groups by neighborhoods with a town meeting contact

person to find out where people stand on certain issues, then share the information.

- We need in-person sessions of Town Meeting - so members can discuss the issues at the meeting.
- Being prepared to make a well-informed decision is less about talking with fellow TM members prior to Town Meeting and more about fully understanding warrant article issues and the impact on the town. In general, I feel that the time allowed for questions and comments during TM sessions is sufficient for understanding the positions of fellow members. However, having a precinct meeting prior to TM (see comments below) could be helpful in hearing various points of views on issues before TM.in order to make an informed vote.
- My precinct has (at least in the past) had no regular meetings or other forums for precinct-wide discussion of upcoming TMtg articles. TMtg should establish guidelines (recommended best practices) for precinct communications and help precinct captains set up in-person or remote meetings. With many people now practiced at using Zoom, it should be easier to organize precinct meetings and for boards and committees to brief precinct representatives about issues.
- In my experience town meeting members who feel strongly about something often do reach out to other town meeting members via email.
- Thanks to Zoom meetings of the Select Board, Planning Board etc. etc. it is quite easy for TM members and residents to engage. I personally wish that in person meetings are also available with Zoom links in the future. Attending 7 - 7:30 meetings don't always work for residents who work and/or have to be at home to take care of their kids.
- As you are probably aware, there have been some email efforts to communicate information or thoughts prior to Town Meeting; however, I don't find that to be an effective forum. Perhaps scheduled Precinct sessions prior to Town Meeting to enable Precinct members to come together for discussion prior to TMM would be helpful.
- This town seems more and more divided, so comms among town meeting members of different precincts don't happen a lot, IMHO. Communications with other town meeting members within my own precinct our great, very dynamic.
- I try to inform myself before Town Meeting, by attending the Town Manager hearing, fin com budget discussions, reading the materials, doing other research, and sometimes discussing topics with other town meeting members, but it would be helpful to have more organized ways to have quality conversation in advance of town meeting. Facebook has become the "educational" forum for many people, and though it is sometimes useful, it has many shortcomings, does not substitute for in person conversation, and is not accessible to all. I would like to see Town Meeting members take more

responsibility for informing themselves prior to Town Meeting, and holding discussions by topic or by precinct, perhaps throughout the year. I'm not sure what is practical, but too often TMM's are uninformed and learning about issues as they come to the floor. It might make sense for proponents to invite Town Meeting to key hearings, or for precincts to hold regular discussions.

- It is difficult to easily contact all Town Meeting members in a precinct. The town should provide email services for this.
- More communication among Town Meeting members and particularly within my precinct is needed.
- again, i seek input from some especially well-informed TMM.
- In Our precinct we should be meeting together prior to Town Meeting as well as actively garnering input from our precinct's residents.
- We do not meet that often before Town Meeting.
- I thought we weren't supposed to reach out to all TM members... MaryEllen [Lannon] reaches out to tell us to save it for the meeting if people start sending stuff out. Maybe I am mistaken.
- Not that it is required, but often the only discussion and debate occurs minutes before the vote, with TM members saying "if we had more time", "I wish we had", "does anyone know if" -- if there is a practical mechanism for portions of TM to become educated AND share their thoughts, there would be real value to the Town.
- In my experience there has been very little, if any, communication among TM member before votes, though I'm not sure there needs to be a lot. We're not a jury, seeking to get to a unanimous decision within the precinct. As long as I have enough info from the committees/boards, I am comfortable with my votes.
- Generally, we know where "our" members stand and where members in the back corner of the auditorium stand. But there can be surprises. That's why we need to come to the meeting. Newspapers do not publish positions well - and usually not at all.
- There is always room for improvement.
- I think that Town meeting members have always been free to reach out to other members and solicit opinions.
- This question seems somewhat irrelevant. Town Meeting Members are elected by precincts to bring their different perspectives on things to Town Meeting. Why would it be a good idea to encourage new (and separate) blocks of voting groups within the Precincts?
- I do not feel like there was enough discussion between Town meeting members in advance of Town Mtg. Perhaps pre-meetings with just town mtg members would be good idea now and again.

- We communicate beforehand? :). Seriously though, we don't do much. I could certainly have been more proactive to force conversations, but ultimately, I wasn't.
- Like any other communications, Town Meeting members seem to operate in circles of familiarity which can create echo chambers and/or resort to use of Facebook/social media, where discourse can be lacking and/or charged.
- Perhaps I have not sought out opportunities to hear discussions or even to read responses to various articles. If these opportunities exist, I must find out how to take advantage of them.
- Often communications are made right before Town Meeting from individual TMM that create confusion and are inaccurate.
- Outside of email chains regarding specific emails, I don't have much communication with fellow town meeting members, although I still try to make the most logical and well-informed votes that I can.
- There is little communication among town meeting members.
- I would like to see more discussions between members.
- Communication between TM members outside of the actual meeting is difficult. There is no way to easily send email to members and no support for organizing precinct meetings. Members need to be kept engaged throughout the year, not just at actual TM.
- Similar to above.
- I don't think that there is anything to really facilitate this. On issues that are more contentious, sponsors/dissenters reach out to TMMs to encourage their point, but actual beforehand communication between TMMs is not there.

QUESTION 3: Are communications between you as a Town Meeting member and your precinct constituents — to inform your constituents and to hear from your constituents — sufficient for you to make well-informed votes? Please rate below:

Rating scale: 1 = Insufficient to 5 = Sufficient



Comments (80 responses)

- Not all folks gather or give information in the same way. Phone, print communications and social media are all used differently by different people. I find people find a way to engage if there is an issue that is important to them.
- Yes, to make well informed votes.
- I don't feel that I have sufficient time and opportunity to discuss the issues before Town Meeting with constituents in my precinct. I acknowledge that this could be a failure on my part to create such opportunities, however, it would be helpful to have guidance / support in doing this.
- I really don't know how to do this other than informal conversations with my neighbors. It would be great to have some guidance around this.
- I think Precinct 5 has been communicative in general during my tenure as an elected TMM. We have had precinct meetings and I communicate with my neighbors to let them know about different WA.
- I see ZERO communication from my precinct constituents.

- I'd really like more opportunity to talk to people in my precinct. I usually just don't have the bandwidth or resources to do anything beyond ad hoc discussions with immediate neighbors.
- I have never heard of a gathering or opportunity for constituents to communicate with TM members or vice versa.
- I wish I heard MORE from constituents--I seldom receive input before Town Meeting. I do feel that I represent my precinct and when I receive input it sometimes changes my vote.
- How do I communicate without spending my own money to mail letters? I don't know their email addresses. And it's impractical to walk around putting notes in every mailbox. There really is no easy way to do it. On a couple of occasions, I have put notes in mailboxes in my immediate vicinity, but to do the entire precinct would be virtually impossible.
- I have rarely been contacted by constituents. And I have not reached out in a formal way.
- Barely. I try to get a feeling for where people are in my precinct but not in any organized way. I'm more likely to hear from friends than people I don't know. Having said that, I don't know how I could get more input. Nobody answers surveys anymore. If I were to schedule an in-person precinct meeting I know I wouldn't get a representative sample of precinct voters. I've had the best luck speaking with random neighbors who sometimes ask questions about Town Meeting if they know I'm a TMM - they tend to be less likely to share my opinions or have an ideological ax to grind.
- I rarely speak with other people in my district about issues presented at town meeting other than some friends/neighbors who ask what is going on at town meeting.
- Never had any communications from my precinct constituents. I once reached out but nobody responded. Not sure if they were not interested or simply too busy to provide anything.
- I don't often hear from my precinct constituents unless I reach out to them....
- Communications not great but getting better. This is the easiest problem to solve. Precinct meetings notes etc.
- It is time consuming to get a list of residents & create emails to inform residents. Would be good if we could have a newspaper again - on line & in print.
- I'm in touch with many neighbors, and the fact that I've lived in the same house for more than thirty years helps. So does the fact that I garden! My sense is younger people know a lot of parents of kids in school but are not well-connected with the older residents. Beyond that, my impression is that people are busier than ever and would be hard to reach to get the desired feedback.

- I never hear from residents in Precinct 1 apart from the occasional neighbor chat.
- P7 is very weak. my worry is constituents will make a decision - but not have the advantage of hearing the debate and the favorable or unfavorable recommendations of the boards.
- I usually only hear from one informed voter on a regular basis. When I talk informally with voters, they occasionally are interested. I have not heard from other town meeting members - there are no others from the Ledges. My knowledge of issues comes from watching WinCAM.
- I always answer any queries I get but mostly I do not get any.
- a town precinct mailing list would be very helpful - to both hear from other neighbors about their concerns and also to share information and thoughts among precinct members.
- I vote my principles and my convictions. In the past I have never thought of myself as representing 'constituents'. I am heartily in favor of the new system of recording and reporting on every TMM's votes. That way, if the TMM's voting goes counter to the wishes of their constituents, the constituents can vote them out.
- I will discuss issues with neighbors and a few other TMMs but there really has been no mechanism to be available to large numbers of precinct constituents. To keep informed about the issues I have to follow meetings on Win Cam and read what is happening on the websites for the various boards. I am also concerned that most people in the precincts have no idea who their TMMs are. I am a member of the LWVW steering committee. Last year we developed the online voter guide to address this issue and provide information to the public about the candidates running for office.
- I have never reached out personally, by phone or e-mail, to people in my precinct, because I am not sure if that would be welcomed. I have been contacted on issues in the past, since Town Meeting members' phone numbers and e-mails are available to the public, and I appreciate when residents let me know their opinions and ask for support. When I talk to people in person when I see them, and we discuss their opinions on issues, I use that information to make a well-informed and representative vote.
- I am able to reach out to constituents via email and through a neighborhood Facebook group.
- I, personally, do not hear from my precinct constituents. It did not appear to be usual to reach out or hold town hall type meetings with constituents. This could be improved. At a minimum, I am now willing to at least reach out via social media to see if anyone has any comments on any of the warrant articles.
- See comments for Q1, above.

- A tricky question. There is very little formal opportunity for communication between residents and their TM representatives for sure. However, the act of being voted into TM implies a level of trust from residents for those individuals to advocate on their behalf. It would be nice if the information about TMM was easier to find on the website. Perhaps a permanent booth focused on town government at the Farmer's Market with representatives from different precincts each week (plus a FinCom, SB, SC member, etc.) would help make community connections.
- Yes, I make a point to talk about and solicit feedback from others in our precinct prior to TM.
- There are no mechanisms I'm aware of to encourage TM members to discuss upcoming issues prior to TM. I suppose once the warrant articles are printed out, I could find ways to talk to people. I'm not aware of any reporting on how I've voted in the event that my neighbors wanted to hold me accountable for those votes. I follow the rule of listening to the presentations, hearing comments from committee members who have worked hard on a particular agenda item and trying to make my best reasoned judgement when voting.
- Constituents contact me with concerns.
- No central mechanism by which I can view comments and views from my constituents. I do not look at the FB resident page because it has an agenda driven Moderator and is filled with woke false virtue as a shield to be cruel to others.
- I rarely hear from my constituents. I also don't proactively reach out to them either as I only have a few email addresses of mostly neighbors and friends. I have occasionally informed them of the results of a vote when asked. Many of them were interested to hear more about what was/is happening with the Waterfield lot.
- We email with one another. That seems fine, good.
- Only receive emails from a few people; I don't think the town as a whole is very informed or involved.
- I would love email addresses for everyone in my precinct so I could introduce myself and ask for feedback on issues. It would be too costly for me to get street addresses and send out mailers to the Precinct.
- I have no children in the school system and am otherwise somewhat anti-social. I interact with a lot of constituents because of my work on various issues. I will not go on Facebook -- that's not going to help.
- Here's where I know that I could make more of an effort, to perhaps engage with other TMM members in my precinct or with my neighbors so that I could truly try to have my vote reflect or at least take into consideration my neighbors' preferences too.

- I have had people in my precinct email me and give me their thoughts on certain items.
- No one contracts me and I feel I should do a better job reaching out. I get a lot of requests from people asking how they should vote in elections.
- Talking with constituents has usually been a result of some constituents approaching me and asking questions.
- I know what my neighbors feel. But there are many constituents that I do not know. It would be great if there was a central page for each precinct to post their comments/concerns or if there was a bi-monthly meeting to hear same.
- I don't think residents expect to hear from individual town meeting members, but I think that there could be better communication about town issues to residents. I thought that the interviews of candidates by Future Winchester was very well done and could be a model for information sharing.
- Before the Spring and Fall Town Meeting perhaps each Precinct captain could invite Precinct Town Meeting Members to an in person or zoom call to review key motions, hear comments on overall spending and budget priorities, and hear questions and comments. Precinct Members could encourage residents within the Precinct to join the call.
- I get an occasional phone call from a constituent. Should each precinct chair or town meeting representative have a town email where constituents could reach out? I occasionally see a neighbor at the supermarket or out walking the dog and ask for input on a big issue. I do call around to a few neighbors/constituents on really big issues (Waterfield, school overrides, the general override, change in school start time, all day kindergarten) but find I am answering questions and many times they haven't thought about it until I call. Again, if there were well-publicized info sessions maybe a few more people would have baseline information, ask questions, and understand some pro's and con's. Or a local newspaper.
- My concern is that only the most active/vocal of the constituents reach out, and that may skew the desires of the silent majority. For example, TMM votes do not always line up well when similar town wide votes are taken.
- I answered above.
- My constituents seldom discuss town issues with me.
- In general, constituent communication is an area for improvement. Every year there is at least one warrant article that motivates constituents to email me with their thoughts to which I respond. Presently, there is no opportunity (that I am aware of) for constituents to formally meet with elected TM members in each precinct. In Arlington, many precinct captains organize an open meeting for elected representatives and constituents before TM and after reports are available for TM. These meetings take place either in schools (with permission

of the superintendent) or in town hall. Meeting attendance varies by precincts and issues before TM. Not all precincts hold constituent meetings and some have regular meetings throughout the year. These meetings provide an opportunity for constituent and elected member communication.

- Other than personal conversations, I seldom hear from my constituents unless I seek them out. I have the email addresses of TMMs in my precinct but no way of routinely contacting all registered voters in my precinct. Communications through Facebook and other social media pages too often divert into partisan bickering and trolling. Most TMMs and residents get their information about town government actions through the Town webpage. The Town webpage needs a complete overhaul. Beyond the front pages, the information is often hard to find, and incomplete and out of date if available. The “search” function is near useless, and most committees and board have no email or phone number listed under “contact us.” In the age of 24/7 digital communications, the Town needs to send information (at least highlights about current and emerging issues, etc.) to its residents instead of expecting residents to search out information.
- This is an area where things could certainly be improved. I wonder if the town could facilitate this by creating a website where each town meeting member has a page where he or she could easily receive input from and reach out to constituents.
- This is a difficult question to answer. P5 residents I know well sometimes approach me when they're not happy about something that is going on in their neighborhood. On the bright side, I'm also encouraged when residents thank me for all of the good work of P5 TM members. I wondered about mailing a "newsletter" to residents prior to TM.
- I have been contemplating options to engage more proactively within my Precinct, both with fellow TMM and other neighbors and friends. Covid has obviously limited opportunities; however, I think it would serve the Town and Town Meeting well to find a way to engage more with residents that may not be as involved or informed about issues facing the town.
- I often talk to precinct constituents about issues. Our precinct captain is working on creating a group that would increase these kinds of communications.
- There is a big opportunity area -- there is no organized communication between Town Meeting and residents, and the lack of reliable news coverage hurts all of us. I try to do my best to make well-informed votes based on the research I do prior to Town meeting and weighing the debate, but I do not communicate in any organized way with residents or constituents in my precinct. I do consider input by people who "lobby" me or contact me with questions or statements on issues that come before us. I do also informally talk to my neighbors about issues the Town is managing, but we usually talk in general terms about projects the town is undertaking and their questions can be helpful to shape

my thinking. They are often uninformed about state policies or mandates that affect the town, or how town government works -- so I do my best to explain and educate them. I had something succinct & electronic I could forward to neighbors about issues that were coming before Town Meeting or if we held more precinct conversations, I would do more outreach, but most of the materials come too late and not in a form that is easy to share. Volunteers and staff are stretched thin, so it would have to be relatively easy to do. The Town Manager e-newsletter should be converted to a more resident-friendly format with "did you know" content and committees could provide inputs/updates to it.

- How about email groups for each precinct that are simple to access and use?
- I hear from very few constituents. Given the difficulty obtaining contact information, I'm sure some people just give up. Some of the barriers are: 1. it's too hard to navigate the Town's website to get to the lists of town meeting members (you have to know to look under government -> town clerk); 2. using the search feature for 'town meeting members' on the Town's website provides too many hits and the link to the meeting member page isn't even in the top 50
- This, too, should be better than it is.
- COVID has decreased everyone's ability to discuss politics or anything else!
- See my comments above.
- I might get a few recommendations from constituents by E-mail or conversation before Town Meeting.
- Each town meeting, I hear from just a handful of residents reaching out to express an opinion. There is not a lot of feedback headed my way.
- If TM isn't always well informed on issues, imagine how poor the general voting population - look at voter turnout, and questions/comments in FB forums as examples (and opportunities to raise collective knowledge); TM members are "members" of the town and their 1/8 community, they are also "representative" not in the sense of representing someone else, but being representative of everyone else.
- It could always improve, but I almost always get feedback via phone or email from concerned precinct constituents before each town meeting.
- "We" talk among ourselves and "they" talk among themselves. Constituents only call the TM Members that they trust. We have always been, but are becoming more divided - more dug-in on most issues.
- Communications between Town Meeting members and their constituents have not had a formal process as far as I know. I have received issue emails from town residents but these have mostly been town-wide.
- I have been a TM member for a long time and I am generally available to discuss issues with constituents.

- This question is somewhat circular. If neither residents nor Town Meeting Members are accurately informed of what the BCC's are doing, there is not much point in robust exchange between constituents and Town Meeting Members about the content of "non-information". My belief is that transparency needs to come from the Select Board (25-30% of Town Budget) and from School Committee (70-75% of Town Budget). Hopefully, much of the issue that is raised by Question 3 will sort itself out from better informed residents - (some of whom are Town Meeting Members). We have a Representative Town Meeting structure. Residents are in charge under the Charter. The Communications Committee should focus on informing residents, rather than informing a subset of residents (Town Meeting Members). We should not be encouraging three different levels of information availability within the Town: (i) Town officials and staff; (ii) Town Meeting Members and (iii) residents. Our charter is based on the theory that there are only two levels. (i) Town officials and staff; and (ii) residents.
- Not sure how to solve for that one - some neighbors would talk to me about issues but most didn't.
- Communication to me fell into two categories: (1) ad-hoc conversations with friends and neighbors or (2) pro-forma email that was sent to all TMM, which were typically on-way.
- This one is on me individually and know I can do better. I do speak with neighbors about issues when I can but not enough.
- I so wish that communication between constituents and TM members was possible for those so interested.
- Overall, sufficient.
- I have few active lines of communication with members of the town outside of my household. I am no longer on Facebook, so I don't have access to the Winchester residents page, which I feel like used to be the best (albeit biased) chamber of feedback from the town.
- This could be improved.
- I never get unsolicited opinions from constituents.
- We have Facebook chat group.
- With COVID, this has been very tough. Before COVID, and now that things are loosening up, I would ask neighbors/friends who are in my precinct what their opinion is about particular issues. I would typically do this on issues that were more relevant.

Winchester Town Meeting
Communications
Study Committee



Town Meeting Members Survey

The 2021 Fall Town Meeting created a Town Meeting Communications Study Committee and asked it to recommend ways to establish robust and effective communications –

- Between the Town's boards, committees and commissions and Town Meeting
- Among Town Meeting members, and
- Between Town Meeting members and their precinct constituents.

The Committee would like to have your initial comments on these communications.

Enter your First & Last Name *

Short answer text

QUESTION 1: Are communications between the Town's boards, committees and commissions and Town Meeting about issues before Town Meeting sufficient for you to make well-informed votes?
Please rate below:

1 2 3 4 5

Insufficient Sufficient

QUESTION 1: Comments?

Long answer text

QUESTION 2: Are communications among Town Meeting members about issues before Town Meeting sufficient for you to make well-informed votes? Please rate below:

	1	2	3	4	5	
Insufficient	<input type="radio"/>	Sufficient				

QUESTION 2: Comments?

Long answer text
.....

QUESTION 3: Are communications between you as a Town Meeting member and your precinct constituents — to inform your constituents and to hear from your constituents — sufficient for you to make well-informed votes? Please rate below:

	1	2	3	4	5	
Insufficient	<input type="radio"/>	Sufficient				

⋮

QUESTION 3: Comments?

Long answer text
.....

If you have more comments and would like a committee member to contact you for a follow-up conversation, please leave your name and email or phone number here:

Long answer text
.....

THANK YOU.

Information about the Town Meeting Communications Study Committee is posted on the Town webpage at <https://www.winchester.us/847/Communications-Study-Committee>.