Electronic Voting Study Committee Meeting Minutes
January 17, 2019

In attendance: John Covey, Beth Casavant, Donna O'Connor, Pat Convery, Bryan Moss, Neena Mohanka, Sandy Wright, Chris Mehne

Vendor presentation by Voatz held via web conference. Jesse Andrews

Meeting called to order by Committee Chair Bryan Moss at 7:04. Motion to approve meeting minutes from January 16, 2019 made by John Covey, 2nd by Neena Mohanka, unanimously approved.

Voatz won a competition at South by Southwest in Austin and started up about 3 years ago. Voatz is a Boston based secure mobile voting platform accessible via smartphone and tablet. This system was used by both parties at conventions involving thousands of people. In Massachusetts, used by MassGOP and Mass Dems.

Used by Hopkinton, Millis

Concord April 9th (open town meeting), Norwell (open town meeting), Everett (City Council Platform)

No need to buy hardware. If someone does not have a phone or does not want to use their phone and iPad is provided by Voatz. System handles attendance, voter check-in, instant vote tabulation, on-site support, polling of residents via surveys beyond town meeting voting, and data.

Pilot program- introduce a few votes for fun to get people comfortable and a couple articles that are not highly contested. Demonstrate that the platform is intuitive and not intimidating. Leading up to the pilot would be 6-8 weeks of marketing prep within the community, radio, press release, local paper, local Facebook groups, teach-ins with Council on Aging to help with a demographic where people might be worried about using this type of voting.

Facial recognition, scan driver's license to match with voter role, or issue individual QR code for each town meeting member that they scan on their phone and a new, unique card would need to be issued each day. There is also geo-fencing on the app, so if someone leaves the auditorium and tries to vote from home, for example, the app will not let voting occur because the location is incorrect.

John Covey asked what to do if someone wants to vote on paper. If someone did not want to use the technology, voting could be done on paper and registered by hand and added into the tally. The reps reported having one instance of this happening. Their experience is that the holdouts are comfortable to use the devices once they understand how the system works, especially with the tablets.

A site visit prior to the meeting will evaluate the strength of the wifi and cell signal. If both are not great, Voatz can offer a hot spot type option for additional cost. The results and tabulation are all web/cloud based. Beth Casavant asked where the data lives after the meeting. The reps said that we are able to download the data and have Voatz wipe their server, or Voatz can keep our data in storage for a fee.

Results can be populated real time or after voting is closed. The Dashboard (list of town meeting members, warrant articles etc.) is managed by town staff. For the first few times, Voatz staff will train and set up the dashboard until the staff is comfortable and fully trained. The long term goal is for whoever is going to be managing the system for the town will be able to manage the system independently, although support from Voatz is always available for support.

Subgroups can be created within the system so this can be used for voting outside of town meetings. Ballots and votes can be created that are specific to subgroups.

Pricing:

Price is based on the number of unique users and the features that are needed. It is higher cost if we want the ability to poll the entire town. Donna O'Connor said that for now and for our committee's purposes we need to just focus on the cost for our town meeting.

How often does Voatz staff need to be onsite to manage the system is also part of the pricing initially. The fee for support for first town meeting is included in the price. No hotel because they are Boston based. Bryan Moss asked if we could have a per night cost. Paying for the cloud software and support.

Ballpark- $10k for 5 nights of town meeting. One time setup. So the first year will be the most expensive and in the following years it becomes less expensive.

Donna O'Connor asked how much lead time Voatz would need when we schedule our town meetings. In the short term when on-site support is needed Voatz would need 2-4 weeks notice for planning. Donna asked if we would be charged for weather cancellations. The rep said there is flexibility around the number of dates for the year and those types of cancellations would not impact the annual fee. We would need to commit for a certain number of nights per year as part of our service agreement and having fewer meetings would not lower the price.

Pat Convery asked about their experience in MA and contracting and if Voatz has experience responding to RFPs, going through the selection process, dealing with shorter term 3 year contracts. The answer is yes.

John Covey brought up IT 47 IT 48- state contracts for IT services and going through Dell or another vendor. The answer is no.

Donna asked how many town meetings Voatz has actually done in MA. They have only done a town meeting in Hopkinton as a paid pilot contract program. Hopkinton is open town meeting. They chose 2 articles to vote on and there were more than 500 people present. Pat Convery asked how many preferred tablets. 70-30 smartphones to iPads.

They set up a help desk with 5 Voatz team members and trained student volunteers during the first use to get people started. As people were voting, there is also on-site support. The more people that download the app and set up their accounts ahead of time the faster the process.

The first vote in Hopkinton took about 10 minutes. The next vote went faster. Votes can be timed, or the moderator can control the timing. Bryan asked if we could easily add in amendments or other motions from the floor. Yes and that is all done from the admin dashboard. Once a vote is submitted it can't be changed.

Results will show on each individual device. People will be able to see how each town meeting member voted on their own device.

Pat Convery asked if the software could be used to make sure there is an quorum. Yes.

Bryan Moss asked how data is provided for community use. Raw data is provided to the community and can be searched by date, catalogs former searches, and individual ballot results and is exportable or town website can be linked to the Voatz storage if that is what we choose. It can be customizable to meet our needs to an extent.

Bryan asked if the iPads would have to be shared for those not wanting to use their phones or could we have one for each person that needs one. The answer is yes.

Your phone can be used normally when you are not voting.

A single evening pilot with just a few articles can be done for about $2,500.

There was disagreement among the committee about the company and their level of organization. With this system there will be work on the back end for IT and the Town Clerk. There is a subscription model for pricing. They seem to be not mature enough as a company to provide an accurate picture of their costs.

There are about a dozen town meeting members that do not use email and can not be communicated with electronically.

Motion to adjourn by Donna O'Connor, 2nd Neena Mohanka, all in favor.
Minutes submitted by Beth Casavant