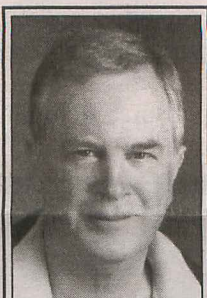


# Electronic Options

**D**uxbury's open town meeting is a surviving instance of the species "New England town meeting" with a long, venerable and honorable history. Like all members of the genus "legislative bodies" it combines robust features that have served well for centuries with some arguably rather archaic aspects that perhaps could be updated without damage to the underlying institution. One of the most interesting of these is the possibility of



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replacing the current methods for voting at Duxbury town meeting with new, high-tech, electronic options.

The real pioneer in advancing the New England town meeting into the electronic frontier is Alan J. Reiss, an electrical engineer by trade, long-time (since 1988) resident of Wayland, Massachusetts and former selectman there (2005-2008).

Convinced that there had to be a better way to count votes at Wayland's Town Meeting, Reiss spearheaded an effort to bring electronic voting to Wayland. That resulted, after a trial run, to passage at Wayland's Town Meeting last year (in April 2012) of a citizen petition article to support funding of electronic voting through 2015.

In his campaign for the adoption of electronic voting in Wayland, Reiss argued that electronic voting "technology solves three of the most important problems which plague modern day New England open town meeting" by enabling

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votes to be counted fast (in no more than 60 seconds), accurately, and privately. He created a web site ([electronicvoting.info](http://electronicvoting.info)) to promote the idea, not just in Wayland, but throughout New England.

Although clearly an advocacy site promoting electronic voting, Reiss's web site is also an excellent resource with extensive information specifically about the options for

electronic voting at traditional New England town meetings. It is an exemplary advocacy site in that it emphasizes information, verifiable facts and reasonable argument over simple cheerleading. It provides detailed information on the technology and its costs. It also offers excellent basic information on the institution of town meeting in Massachusetts – open and representative – with links to additional resources.

One of the most interesting aspects of Reiss's approach is that unlike some, who would prefer simply to toss out the traditional town meeting entirely and replace it with something more streamlined – but that further distances citizens from the process of government – Reiss sees electronic voting as a means to strengthen the institution of the New England town meeting by making it easier and more convenient for more citizens to be more involved in their local government by providing them with a more efficient and more effective way to do it.

It is due, in large part, to Reiss's efforts that a growing number of Massachusetts towns are adopting or are at least considering adopting electronic voting options for town meeting. These currently include, in addition to Wayland: Arlington, Amherst, Framingham, Hingham, Lexington, Westborough and Westwood – and now, of course, Duxbury as well. Reiss's fact-based carefully reasoned advocacy of electronic voting may prove to be a significant factor in ensuring the ongoing survival of what has become an endangered species: the New England open town meeting.

This is not to say that Duxbury ought automatically and uncritically to adopt electronic voting at town meeting. But we surely ought to give it a fair hearing and to consider seriously the proposal that will likely be brought forward to Duxbury's 2014 Annual Town Meeting in March. Interested voters can get a great head start by taking a good look at Reiss's web site to learn more about it now. Check it out.

*The Duxbury Clipper "Opinion" pages present the thoughts and opinions of Clipper columnists and readers, and do not necessarily represent the views of the Clipper management and/or staff.*