Town Moderator's Policy on Visual Aids at Town Meeting

The Town of Hamilton's Town Moderator hereby adopts the following policy ("Use of Visual Aids at Town Meeting") pursuant to Section 15 of Chapter 39 of the Massachusetts General Laws, which states that: "The moderator shall preside and regulate the proceedings, decide all questions of order, and make public declaration of all votes, and may administer in open meeting the oath of office to any town officer chosen thereat." *G.L.* c. 39 § 15.

This Visual Aids policy applies equally to the Town of Hamilton's Annual Town Meeting(s) and any necessary Special Town Meeting(s) and is meant to promote informed public participation and the free exercise of every registered voter's First Amendment right to free speech.

Use of Visual Aids at Town Meeting

Using visual aids (Power Point, etc.) can be an important enhancement to a Town Meeting presentation. However, visual aids that are "overdone" or done poorly can be ruinous. Do *not* feel you must use graphics to support your presentation. Only use them if they will truly enhance your message.

Here's why:

- It is very difficult to listen to a speaker, read a graphic, and understand the presentation at the same time; do not over-rely on graphics. Our auditorium is very dark and some Town Meeting attendees may not be able to see the screen.
- While a picture can be worth a thousand words, the right word can be worth a thousand pictures; a short concise summary of the key points will focus the audience's attention.
- A slide filled with too many words will not help your presentation. The audience will not be able to read it, likely will get confused and probably will lose interest.

The following are a few things to keep in mind if you do use graphics in your presentation. Section I outlines the Moderator's requirements which everyone must follow while Section II are suggestions (not requirements) that have proven effective in other town meetings:

I. Requirements for Use of Visual Aids at Town Meeting

If you decide to make a presentation with slides you *must*:

A. Submit your DRAFT presentation to the Moderator for approval of the format no later than one week before the first day of the meeting. 2

B. Submit your FINAL presentation to the Moderator and Town Manager's office no later than three business days before the first day of the meeting.

C. Use Microsoft PowerPoint (preferable) or other format compatible with the Town Manager's office equipment.

D. Be prepared to speak **without** your visuals. If technical problems occur, the Moderator may ask you to proceed without your audio-visual assistance.

II. Guidelines for Use of Visual Aids at Town Meeting

The following are **suggestions** to make your PowerPoint more effective at town meeting:

A. Bullets and Information

1. Use a picture, graph, map or table instead of text whenever possible.

2. Keep the text short and concise using the following rules of thumb:

      a. Only 4 or 5 bullet points per slide

      b. No more than 6 or 7 lines per slide

      c. Only 1 level of sub-bullets

      d. Do not use punctuation – it clutters the slide and is hard on the eyes

      e. Be sure not to cram too much text onto one slide. Unlike a document that you read, a slide is accompanied by audio (you, the speaker) to provide the detail.

B. Point Settings

1. Make the settings large – generally, as below:

a. # Titles at 36 Point

b. # Text at 28 Point

C. Font Selection

1. Serif fonts (such as this) are great for documents, but **not** for presentations.

2. Use a sans-serif font:

a. Arial is often a default in presentation software, but looks very heavy and is difficult to read; you are best to avoid it.

b. Verdana and Calibri are both easier to read from a distance.

3. Use the same font in the entire presentation.

D. Do's and Don't's

1. Only use **bold**, *italics*, and ***bold italics*** sparingly.

2. Don't underline – it slows reading and hinders comprehension.

3. DON'T USE ALL CAPS. IT IS HARD TO READ --- PLUS IT COMES ACROSS AS IF YOU WERE SHOUTING AT PEOPLE!!!

E. Photos and Other High-Resolution Graphics:

1. Computers are fast but it can still take a long time to load slides crammed with too many pictures.

2. Seconds can feel like minutes, both for the presenter and for the audience.

3. Limit yourself to one high-resolution graphic per slide.

4. Location maps should be simple and clear.

5. Survey maps and architectural plans often have WAY too much information, most of it irrelevant with labels that are too small.

F. Graphs, Tables, and Spreadsheets:

1. Graphs and tables can be helpful, but keep them simple.

2. Avoid spreadsheets; if you must use one, distribute a handout to voters.

G. Proofing:

1. Make sure there are no typos or grammatical errors – such errors can make it appear that you have not properly prepared.

2. Have a disinterested person, who is not informed on the topic, review your slides and provide comments. Choosing the right (or wrong) wording can affect your presentation.

H. Accuracy of Information:

1. The information on your slides should be accurate and not misleading and your oral presentation should indicate the source of data and whether the provided information is factually supported or an opinion.

2. If any of your information is proven to be inaccurate in the Town Meeting debate, it can discredit the legitimacy of all your information.

I. Timing:

1. Remember, you have five minutes (unless the Moderator has said otherwise).

2. Practice your presentation to ensure you are within the allotted timeframe.

3. A good rule of thumb is one minute per slide.

4. The last slide should sum up your case & ask the voters for your support.

Jennifer T. Scuteri

Hamilton Town Moderator

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