Attendance:

TMMA Officers:
Edith Sandy – (Chair Pct 6)
Marsha Baker (Treasurer Pct 7)
Jim Osten – (Clerk Pct 8)
David Kaufman – (Communications Pct 6)
Vicki Blier Pct 9 – (Appointed TMMA Email List Moderator)

Precinct Officers and Members:
Pct 1: Nancy Adler, Mary Bowes, Colin Hamilton
Pct 2: Joe Pato, Barry Orenstein
Pct 3: Darwin Adams
Pct 4: Gloria Bloom
Pct 5: Andrew Friedlich
Pct 6: Frank Sandy, Ann Kane
Pct 7:
Pct 8: David Horton
Pct 9: Francine Stiglitz

Other Town meeting Members : Adam Sacks Pct 2, Ahmed Shireen, David Kanter Pct 7, Thomas Griffiths Pct 7

Agenda:
Edith called the meeting to order at 7:30 PM. New officers were introduced and attendees welcomed.

Minutes of the February 12, 2008 and the Annual Meeting:
Minutes to be approved at a future meeting.

Treasurer’s Report:
Marsha noted a balance of $2352.55. This represents 100% of Town Meeting members paying their dues this year. Expenditures yet to be paid include:
$30 for printing the communications survey presented to Town Meeting Members – Vicki Blier
$4 for printing the itinerary for the Bus Tour – Edith Sandy
$183 for the pins honoring 30 year Town Meeting Members – Andy Friedlich

Town Meeting in Lexington booklets
A potential share of the cost of printing Town Meeting in Lexington booklets for new Town meeting Members. The cost for the most recent printing was shared with the League of Women Voters. Frank Sandy will review the existing booklet for accuracy and updates and contact the League about the mechanics of printing new copies. There was some discussion, with no resolution, as to whether hard-copies were still desirable
Other Business:

Edith began a brainstorming session in advance of the Moderators retrospective session to be held June 2, 2008.

1) Edith reported Ephraim Weiss’s suggestion that nametags be used at the first session of Town meeting
2) Less restrictive rules are needed on the use of each microphone to allow comments at the question mike
3) Mechanisms are needed to streamline the views of boards. This was in response to the request for the reasons for the minority votes on recommendations
4) The public microphone in the balcony should be watched by someone such as the Town Clerk so that citizens wanting to speak will be recognized.
5) Comments on the “Geneva Convention” and limits on debate and the subdivision of Article 52 on Countryside
6) Why do we have a seating rotation?
7) The length of town meeting has led to many members leaving after 10PM as evidenced by low vote tallies
8) The timing of the town meeting articles resulted in one of the 11 sessions being shortened. Request for better timing from boards and committees.
9) Request that answers be included to all of the questions posed in the Warrant Information booklet.

Email List and Survey

Edith and Vicki Blier began a discussion of the Email Survey and issues with respect to NOTICES, volume of email and restrictions on individual users. Vicki summarized the response to the survey and Edith presented prepared remarks on the issues facing the TMMA List. Edith's comments on the problem areas and ways to address are attached below.

A lengthy discussion ensued. A major point of discussion was the recent situation where the List Moderator imposed restrictions on one Town Meeting member. The TMMA has to decide whether/how to separate the "wheat from the chaff", either having a strong Moderator or having more freedom. One reason that the TMMA list might need more moderation than most email lists where members are free to join and leave, is that the TMMA email list exists to serve Town Meeting Members and provide information about Town issues, so we don’t want people leaving if we can help it.

Problems areas identified include:

1) Many members are not seeing the NOTICES for items such as information meetings, the bus tour and for changes in Town Meeting schedules.
2) There is too much information on the list. In one past year, 70 TMM's requested to be excluded from the list because of volume and content.
3) A small group accounts for 99% of the email volume. Some TMM's do not want the discussion so choose not to be on the list.
4) Many view the email list as an unsafe place to post opinions.
Solutions addressed in the general discussion included:

1) Creation of a strong moderator position with a formal process for controlling the list.
2) Adapt technology available on the YAHOO email to set up a special announcements list, to use threads (not available on Yahoo), to use digests and to safeguard members email addresses from unwanted intrusion.
3) Use of outreach to make TMM's aware of the options for receiving TMMA email.
4) Establish a period when the list is restricted to Town meeting articles and all messages have the article name and number in the heading.
5) Restrict posts to 2 per day per person (but there is no simple way to enforce this).
6) Establish the TMMA List Moderator as an elected position in the TMMA Executive.
7) A "Good Postmanship" list of rules has been prepared and distributed by Vicki.
8) Edith passed around the names and precincts of those TMM's who are not on the TMMA Email List and asked for the precinct people in attendance to contact those individuals not on the list, try to get email addresses for them and offer them the option of getting announcements only.

**TMMA List Moderator**

In advance of next year’s Annual Meeting, Andy Friedlich moved that Vicki Blier be appointed as the TMMA List Moderator and associate member of the Executive Board. Marsha Baker seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Edith reviews her prepared comments on the TMMA list issues. No actions were taken on these suggestions and they probably bear further discussion.

The email survey gave us some useful information, and also raised some questions.

In the run-up to Town Meeting, I had already learned that people didn’t always see my emails announcing meetings, etc., and people also didn’t see some of Jill Hai’s agendas until they had them pointed out. The survey suggested that many people feel sort of overwhelmed by the sheer volume of mail, and a few people suggested that they’d really prefer to get only announcements and information, not discussion. It turns out that it’s technically possible to individually set members of the list to be “announcements only” (though implementing this is a bit of a pain), and as you may have noticed, it’s also possible, with everyone’s cooperation, to also flag announcements with a “NOTICE” eyecatcher, which works as long as no one replies using the same subject line. So one thing we’d like to do is implement the “announcements only” feature. To that end, I’d like the precinct officers from each precinct take a look at the list of people for whom we don’t have email addresses, and call those from your precinct and ask them if they’d like to share their email addresses for this purpose. Incidentally, another thing we learned from the survey is that we don’t have a good way to learn when people finally get email accounts and want to be on the list.

Now for the harder stuff. Many people commented that they didn’t like off-topic posts, didn’t like interminable back-and-forth exchanges between two posters, and didn’t like snide or nasty remarks, and were concerned in general about the volume of non-useful mail. Many people were very pleased with the job Vicki is doing as moderator and several people explicitly called out the desirability of censoring violators. A noticeable minority, however, felt that moderation should be with a very light hand, if at all. Vicki’s and my numbers of these people differ a bit because I
counted people who said “I can delete posts I don’t like” or even “I automatically delete some posts” as more-or-less in the freedom-of-expression camp. In any case, there is some conflict between the desire to make the list comfortable for everyone to use and the desire to allow as broad freedom of expression as possible, not to mention that one person’s idea of relevance may be very different from another’s. In one case, a TMM was actually suspended from the list for a period of time, which understandably led to some bad feeling. I’d really like everyone’s input on how to deal with these issues in the future. To structure the debate a little bit, I’d like to offer my ideas, and then get yours.

First of all, no TMM should EVER be dropped from the list entirely, even for a brief period. It is possible to bar someone from posting, and that should be the ultimate recourse, and then only in pretty egregious circumstances. It is also possible to make an individual’s posting subject to moderation for a period of time, which means that they go to the moderator (or one of several people) for approval before they are released to the list. I’d like to suggest the following:

1st offense -- private warning email from moderator
2nd offense -- public warning email from moderator
3rd offense -- moderate the person’s postings for 1 week (or possibly more)
4th offense -- suspend person from posting privilege for 1 week (or possibly more) WITH THE APPROVAL of a supermajority of the TMMA officers

Further, (and this suggestion comes from John Bartenstein) the moderator should be a TMMA-wide elected position (like that of the Communications Officer) and should be one of the TMMA officers. This would give a certain element of “legitimacy” to the moderator’s position

Still further, to try to make the list as self-policing as possible, we’ve already started sending out, periodically, an email detailing the expected email “netiquette”, and hope that people will find it helpful and take it to heart.

Adjourn:
Edith adjourned the meeting at 9:30 PM