

0:07

Bang. The recording has started. Alicia, can I I don't believe I've met

0:14

you, but I see that you have an AI notetaker, and we've been advised by ads

0:20

to not have that um in our meetings. So unless um you need it need it, I'd ask

0:27

that you not um use it because we are recording this meeting and the recording

0:33

will be publicly available. Um but AI notetakers apparently

0:39

take our data into other places. So um I would appreciate if you could turn that

0:45

off.

0:50

Um okay. Um welcome everybody to Act 133's uh working group. Um

0:59

I am happy that you all are here and um we do have some new people. Um, and so I

1:07

think we should do um introductions first and I'll do um introductions from

1:14

our online folks uh first since I normally do introductions from our

1:19

in-person folks. So um Tim, can you go first please and introduce yourself?

1:25

Good morning. Uh Tim Arseno, uh assistant town clerk in Vernon and a

1:32

27year town moderator. Thank you. Um Kate uh Pearlberg. Uh BAM.

1:43

Got it. You got it. I'm Kate. Um and I am newly hired as the director of

1:50

community engagement for the Human Rights Commission. Um and I'm just attending the meetings uh just to orient

1:58

myself to the work the commission is doing. Caitlyn Rose is is still our design in these meetings. Um,

2:04

great tapping in. Thanks. Thank you, Kate LaRose.

2:11

Good morning, everyone. Kate LaRose. She her. I live in the Northeast Kingdom and I work with the Vermont Center for

2:17

Independent Living. And um, one of our key uh, missions is to make sure that

2:24

the civil rights of people with disabilities are met around the state, including the fundamental civil right to

2:30

vote in all elections. Thank you, Laura.

2:38

Good morning. Um, I'm Laura Kushman from Disability Rights Vermont. Um,

2:47

I guess that's pretty much all that's all there is. Um, Alicia

3:02

Alicia, are you able to get yourself off mute to introduce yourself?

3:11

Okay, I think Alicia might be having technical problems, so we'll move on to Sean. Alicia, if you can get off mute

3:17

and if you can hear us, please just um chime in to introduce yourself to this group at any moment. Um Sean,

3:24

I'm Sean. I'm the uh elections director here at the Secretary of State's office.

3:30

I'm Jenny Proser, the general counsel and director of municipal assistance at the Secretary of State's office.

3:36

I'm Lauren Hibbert. I'm the deputy secretary of state. I'm Susan Clark. I live in Middle Sex uh

3:42

and um uh am also a town moderator and um am uh trained on uh community

3:50

engagement and um I'm uh representing the Vermont League of Cities and Towns on this group.

3:56

One of them, Kelly Pyella. I am the assistant for the municipal assistance.

4:06

Um I'm Frank Nelson. I'm from Paul. I'm on the planning commission. I'm energy

4:11

coordinator. I'm also the leazison to the retrans

4:18

rail trail um advisory council and I've been

4:24

following over meeting laws since 2018 when I was hammering the legislature to

4:32

do essentially what we're doing here with the covering the basis for uh um

4:39

val attendees having um um an experience

4:44

where they can go to a meeting and and be included.

4:50

Thank you. Um Jenny, do you mind sharing the agenda so we all can see it on

4:57

screen?

5:05

And I have an agenda edit question when that is permitted. Sure,

5:15

please do while I find it. Thanks. Thank you. Um, so this is a small reframe but a really imperative and

5:21

important one. The act 133 wording is um studying investigating uh topics named

5:29

in act 133. They call them resources. So things like hearing devices and translators are resources. In the

5:35

agenda, it is labeled as incentives. And that's just I really just want to make sure that that is edited appropriately

5:41

because assist of technology and reasonable accommodations are not incentives.

5:50

I don't have anything but Kelly's email. So I'm trying to find the um

5:56

the PDF original on the website. It's on our website. Got it. That link in the email. Get it here.

6:06

I don't uh Kate, your suggestion for um I was waiting for the agenda to come up

6:12

is uh well uh well heard and I don't think there's any

6:18

problem with saying resources and incentives because I think there's we're doing both in that um in that section.

6:26

So um we can definitely do that and I agree with you. Um hearing devices and

6:33

other related things are not uh incentives

6:53

before. Let me add the link.

7:06

see if you can pull it cuz mine's got a blank space where or it's got a dead

7:11

spot where the pulling up spot is. If you go into her email, there's a link to it that's not working for you.

7:19

copied the link, but I can't get Teams is not allowing me to

7:25

access it from the meeting. Well, the first thing on our agenda, I'm

7:30

going to move forward while we're waiting for it to come up on the screen, but the first thing on our agenda is followup from um our hybrid town meeting

7:39

um discussion um that included uh remote

7:44

voting. Um I know that conversation um was cut a little short. Um and so uh the

7:51

first topic there was um to brainstorm about the ideal hybrid town meeting. And

7:58

I don't know Susan if if you want to lead that discussion. Um

8:05

you can. You don't have to. You don't have to. No, I mean I I think that we we covered

8:11

a lot of ground last time in terms of we we covered um four I think it was case

8:17

studies each of them sort of addressing the question of remote town meeting participation in a different way kind of

8:26

gradual graduated way um and I feel like we are seeking um maybe as a group or

8:34

maybe we're seeking from the attorneys um clarity on which of those if any

8:41

hopefully is legal. Uh you know what do we um can can towns go ahead and do

8:46

these now? Um or uh is there a legal um tweak that needs to happen? Um,

8:55

basically what can what can towns what can towns do today to accommodate um uh

9:02

uh requests um to for accommodation requests and what would need to change

9:08

in order for towns to do accommodation requests while uh also maintaining that that balance with with um you know

9:15

terrific meetings. You know that it's like it's worth being involved. It's worth requesting zooming into this

9:21

meeting or whatever. Um, and so we talked about a bunch of those and this final one was basically to catch any

9:29

ideas. It was sort of like, well, what's our ideal hybrid town meeting um, participation? I'm not sure we need to

9:35

go through everything, but are there things that weren't captured either by

9:40

the Cambridge model or the Middle Sex model or the Jericho model or the Wayland Massachusetts model which has a

9:46

whole uh technology aspect to it um that we want to make sure uh get gets into

9:53

our considerations um in terms of in terms of legal but also in terms of technical uh what resources would be

9:59

needed uh training u things like that. So I guess I guess this is sort of a little bit of a

10:09

c a catch all but yes a catch all without I don't think that it need we need to go through all of the things

10:14

that we already said about the other about the other ones you know because there's so much more to do

10:22

and I we do have um gosh math um we have 35 minutes uh for

10:31

this topic So, um, do people have points on an ideal hybrid, um, that weren't

10:39

made last time? Um, and I think we can incorporate what resources would be

10:44

necessary, um, into this discussion now. So, do people have um, points that they

10:51

wanted to talk about in our last meeting that didn't get made or thoughts that

10:56

percolated after we last met? I think the technology

11:03

needs to be standardized and approved before use in towns by the by somebody

11:09

who's doing an improving body. Um I heard of a new one where there was a a

11:14

guy was said in an email where guy down the street who does this stuff. Um he

11:21



was at the graduation of his son and he saw a lot of people around with hearing

11:27

aids. And they were very frustrated because they couldn't hear what's going on. Background knows my mother used to

11:32

hate go never went to town meeting because of that she had hearing aids and she couldn't hear stuff because of all

11:38

the stuff going on. But he said they they can run a wire around the perimeter of

11:45

this place and it somehow it will give everybody with a hearing aids clear

11:50

hearing of the what's going on with the with the event. And I thought that was fascinating and I

11:56

never heard of that before. So there is some technologies out there that

12:02

we haven't really dug into researching if and have somebody come forward to speak on. So that's what I was sent out

12:09

that email and he would still be available come in this way or he come

12:15

here to talk about what they do uh in that capacity. Some of it's done with

12:21

Homeland Security and stuff. So they know, you know, the government

12:26

requirements in different spaces and invite others in to see cuz that's

12:32

really we we likely don't have time to add additional people to come in and talk,

12:38

but we definitely can investigate some of this as we're writing the report and recommend that people do. I mean, what

12:46

what he's talking about is a highly uh technical thing. Um, so we we could we

12:54

can explore that as we're writing the report for sure. Right. And if the legislature wants to have demonstrations

13:01

in committee, they can have demonstrations of various um Texas, you know, speech to text, uh,

13:09

various types of devices that act as aids for the, uh, hearing impaired and

13:16

and anything else that we can come up with. Absolutely. And I want to acknowledge that we have several experts who are

13:23

part of our working group on this too. So um you know part of our agenda is to talk about next steps and I just want to

13:29

forecast that next steps will include us uh reaching out to subject matter

13:34

experts who have been part of this group to talk about some things more in details as we're writing the report. And

13:40

I fully anticipate uh Kate and Laura that we will be calling on your expertise

13:46

um in that process. Um, Kate LaRose,

13:51

thanks. Yeah, so responding to the question about ideal hybrid town meeting brainstorm things to consider. Um, I

13:57

have I think it's three. We'll see how it goes as I enumerate. Um, the first is that the onus should never be on the

14:02

most marginalized to be asking for or moving forward the hybrid town meeting. Um so we saw that last uh meeting with

14:10

Jericho and the DEI committee members who were the ones doing the hard work for three years to make that possible.

14:17

Um also that when hybrid town meeting happens in any particular municipality

14:23

or town that it becomes universally available to all. So we saw that in the Cambridge model um there was one person

14:29

who had requested an ADA request. It was permitted um and then they were the only voter in the whole town who was offered

14:36

that. Um so universally available to all the onus should not be on the most marginalized as like for example

14:42

fighting for an ADA request. Um also um as we saw in Jericho um really best

14:48

practice is that you know only the what we've seen where this has moved forward um for at least not um for at least the

14:56

meeting portion of it not the voting portion um is that currently only the people allowed and able to be in the

15:02

room are able to make those changes through voting. So a best practice approach would be that either everyone

15:09

can have access to making that change or that that change is systemic um so that it automatically is available and

15:16

instituted um everywhere as universal design. Um and then my very last point

15:21

so I guess this is three and a half um is that this also should apply and be available to those in congregate care

15:28

including those who are incarcerated. So, if it requires a special um Zoom

15:34

account or Teams account or or anything like that, it just it needs to be it

15:40

needs to provide it needs to provide access in a way that would be compatible with people who are incarcerated so that

15:46

they too can be able to um to exercise their state and federal rights.

15:53

Thank you, Kate. Uh Tim, thank you. I'm very sensitive to many of

16:00

the things that Kate said and I just want to stress that universal access will mean universal access to everybody.

16:08

It will mean uh additional cost and it will mean additional training and we

16:13

can't back away because it might be difficult for some. I will say that we

16:18

need to make sure that the needs of the hard of hearing are also taken care of as a separate group from the needs of

16:25

our deaf community in Vermont. uh as the stepparent of a deaf adult, I am

16:32

continually uh hit upon with the u the reality that uh ASL is a separate and

16:41

distinct language from English and many of uh the deaf in Vermont are not uh

16:49

reading at a high enough level to be able to follow uh text from a meeting.

16:56

So, we need to make sure that we take care of both groups and I look forward to seeing what this group uh comes up

17:03

with. So, thank you very much.

17:08

Thank you. Um I'm just seeing the note that we still

17:14

have an AI assistant and I I would ask that that be removed from our meeting

17:19

again. Um Laura

17:25

Um, see, sorry. I've got all these popups coming

17:30

up about I'm Are you talking to me or the other Laura? Sorry. I was talking to the other Laura, but

17:36

I'm happy to see you. Laura Seagull. Actually, Laura's hand might have been

17:42

up before mine. Laura's hand up.

17:48

Why don't we go Laura Kushman and then Laura Seagull? Oh, I was just going to ask Kate for clarification on her point

17:54

three that she made uh about everyone having access. I I didn't quite catch

17:59

what she said there and I I wanted some clarification. Yeah. No, thank you. Um so, let's see if

18:07

I can go to the page number where it was uh Clark memo. Um, so if um, uh, in Susan's memo that she shared for the

18:15

last meeting, it had the case study of Cambridge, Vermont. Um, and I believe

18:21

it's on, you can look at page four. So, um, with that particular case study, um,

18:28

one voter requested an ADA accommodation. However, it was known

18:33

that there were other voters who also needed and would have benefited from that accommodation. But that

18:39

accommodation was only offered to that one voter on the day of voting.

18:44

I think I'm talking about the next point that you made. That was your

18:49

that was your universal for all point that you made, I think. But I was talking about you saying everyone having

18:57

access to making the changes and that's what I was confused about. So, for example, like in

19:05

Jericho, um the way the only way, my understanding, and the room full of attorneys can can totally correct me if

19:11

I'm wrong on this, the only way that town meeting that currently

19:17

um that uh places that do town meeting with the three different options of

19:22

voting, public, uh officers, and then budget. Um the only way those can be

19:28

changed to Australian ballot which right now is the only way to create inclusive town meetings um and elections. The only

19:35

way that can change is if the people who are there doing the floor votes on town meeting day vote for it to be so for the

19:42

following year. So for the with the example of of um of Jericho, what they had to do I keep

19:49

saying Jericho. Is it Jericho or Richmond? It's Jericho, right? Jericho. Yeah. Y um so like in Jericho what they had to

19:55

do is essentially the DEI committee including individuals with disabilities who had not been receiving full and

20:01

equal access um had to launch a public um a public awareness and um attitude

20:08

change campaign for like 3 years to be able to get the voters in the room to be like, "Okay, you're right. We want to

20:14

make sure that everybody has the right to vote." And it was pretty intensive.

20:20

Thank you. Um, I just also want to point out, I don't know if this has happened to other people, but I keep getting

20:27

these popups of people who want to be included in the chat. Uh, and I'm Is

20:33

this Alicia Weiss? Um, the AI uh translator or that we're

20:41

trying to keep out of the meeting. I I'm not sure what's happening.

20:48

So I I think Alicia Weiss joined our meeting. Is that correct? Do you want to

20:53



introduce yourself? Alicia or did she leave? Okay, she left.

20:58

Okay, she left. Okay, so that we should try to I was I was thinking the notemaker was associated with a person who might

21:03

need to use that and I wanted to talk to her first, but it appears that question but it was the notemaker that was here

21:10

and she wasn't and then she just came in. What you saw was Alicia dot dot was actually the notemaker. Sorry, she keeps

21:16

requesting to be let back into the meeting and now I've been denying her to

21:22

re-entry into the meeting on my end because I keep getting these popups

21:27

asking if she should be coming into the meeting and I thought maybe that was

21:34

Laura. Do you mind not denying anybody? and Jenny and um Kelly will try and

21:39

manage who's in the meeting just because she keeps trying to join and I

21:46

Yeah. Well, I let her in. I did let her in and then there was the note about AI

21:52

assistance in the meeting and I thought, uh oh, maybe that's Alicia Weiss is the AI that people are

21:59

saying not to let in the meeting. And so when it came back up, I denied it twice.

22:05

So, just so you know, I I'm getting I don't know why I'm getting the popups,

22:10

but um I don't know why either. Okay. So, I think when when you had

22:17

asked for her to introduce herself, all that was in the meeting was the noteaker because it was Alyssa Alicia dot dot dot

22:23

and I could see on here that it was Alicia's noteaker. Since then, she has tried to come and go. Okay.

22:28

Um I think she is not here and we have the noteaker currently. So, there would be no reason for us to have the

22:33

noteaker. and that she is here. But if she is here, we might want to talk to her about why we're doing that. Great. Yeah. Yeah.

22:41

And Laura Seagull, um I was not sure if you wanted to add something to the

22:47

conversation. What we're talking about right now is ideal hybrid um town

22:52

meeting. Well, um, so yes, yesterday I just

23:01

uploaded a more up to date document on my website about how to make have your

23:06

meeting more accessible. But the thing is,

23:12

this is why I thought I could be an hour late. I went to a meeting and that meeting was very inaccessible using the

23:19

Zoom platform. And so I left and then I got a bunch of people text me, why did you leave? Why did you leave? And I

23:24

think because the medium is so inaccessible that it's like what's the point of me staying in that meeting?

23:30

The problem is if you're not seeing it through the lens of someone who's deaf heart of hearing death blind, it's

23:36

really hard for you as a hearing able person to take notice of things that is

23:42

considered inac. If that makes sense.

23:48

That makes a lot of sense and um I'm sorry that that happened. I mean, I'll give you an example. Yeah. Yeah. It's

23:56

never end. I like I said, it's it's about providing appropriate technical

24:01

guidance. Like I remember four years ago before I started my position with the state, a community member expressed

24:08

concern for her friend who's heard of hearing but not comfortable to advocate

24:13

for themselves. And it was regarding a town meeting that happened in the Northeast Kingdom area and what was

24:20

going on. and they were using the goto meat platform and unfortunately at the time I wasn't familiar with it but now

24:27

that I've seen it and been exposed to it I can see why she tried to advocate for

24:32

her friend but at the same time it's about like like for example right now for example everyone's videos everyone

24:39

video really need to be on not really especially when you have 80

24:45

100 people why you need all those video on and if you're speaking And it's

24:51

common currency to turn on your video and make sure you're facing straight at the camera because number one, you don't

24:58

know if someone rely on lip reading. Number two, sometime people want to look

25:03

out for the visual cues or body language even body language to

25:09

feel some level of inclusion so they feel more comfortable to participate in

25:14

any meeting that's being hosted to the public.

25:20

I agree with you. Oh, sorry.

25:27

No. Who Who said that? Who said that? Lauren. Lauren Hibbert. I interrupted you and I apologized.

25:33

No, no, no. That's okay. But I hope that that's helpful. Does that make sense? Yes. And what I was saying is that I

25:41

agree with you 100%. Um, I am not deaf or heart of hearing,

25:46

but I do rely significantly on people's body language to communicate. I think

25:51

the majority of us do. Um, and it really is very hard to connect with people when

25:57

people are off camera. So, I think that's a great example of universal design where it benefits everybody. Um,

26:04

but I do hear how it is particularly important if you are heart of hearing uh

26:10

or deaf. If you're blind, it doesn't it doesn't help. But um but if you are hard

26:16

of hearing or deaf, it definitely would. even if they're blind hearing or have any kind of hearing loss. Like for

26:22

example, if I knew ahead of time someone in this room had any kind of visual impairment, I would automatically say,

26:29

"Hi, this is I'm a white woman in my 40s with long brown hair, purple glass, and

26:36

wearing a black top with a blue a green background just to like feel some equal

26:41

level of inclusion." I mean, I wouldn't I wouldn't necessarily say that you would be the same thing in the room,

26:48

but on a hybrid format, it makes sense. You know what I mean?

26:56

That's a really helpful reminder, Laura. Thank you. Welcome.

27:04

Um, AJ Weiss, I believe you've joined and you are not the same as Alys as

27:14

Alicia's notetaker. Is that correct? Or are you using the AI?

27:22

Oh, we can't hear you. Can you hear me now?

27:28

Yes. Okay. Sorry. Uh, I apologize about the four. Um, I don't even have Otter. I'm

27:35

not sure why it started. It is used was used last night for an accessibility

27:40

committee meeting I heard and it may have just paired. So, I I am Alicia

27:45

Weiss. I'm the same person. I apologize about the uh Otter AI previously. It

27:52

wasn't my intention. So, I'm signed in from another account. That's the only way I could get in without loading

27:59

Otter. I don't know what's going on, but I'm going to talk to my town clerk to solve it.

28:05

Okay. Well, thank you very much, and I'm sorry uh for the confusion on letting you back in, and we're happy to have you

28:10

here. Thank you. Okay. Um we have about 10 more minutes

28:17

to talk about hybrid town meeting. And Frank, I see your hand is up.

28:22

Yeah. in the in the general theme of things because we've heard a lot of

28:28

people repeating the same message is that I think the way to start out the report is as as an educational piece on

28:36

uh universal design and then meld in the concerns of everybody uh on the elements

28:46

of element of the universal design that the legislature needs to pay attention

28:51

to And you can summarize that from the from all the meetings we've had. Obviously,

28:56

I hear your suggestion. I don't know what shape the the report's going to, but that might make sense because it might make sense. I just don't know.

29:03

We haven't put pen to paper or or fingers to keys yet. So, how many of the legislative people know

29:09

universal dyn.

29:15

So that would be a good start maybe to start off with an educational thing and then later in the examples

29:22

that's just a suggestion brainstorm. I accept your suggestion and I take it to heart.

29:31

Um and acknowledging Laura's this is Sean. I'm just acknowledging Laura's suggestion here. Uh for those of us in

29:38

the conference room to identify ourselves before speaking as like Lee Small on the Kim

29:46

Um this is Lauren Hibbert. Are there any more suggestions related to um ideal

29:54

hybrid town meeting including um training equipment and funding all very

30:00

important.

30:07

I have one um Oh, sorry Lauria. You can go.

30:14

No, no, no, no. Just can I can I can go? Okay. So, like the hybrid meeting,

30:19

that's the other thing I think I mentioned in the last meeting. I've been learning in the past two weeks. I've

30:25

been trying to gather more information about different public places that like

30:31



have meeting rooms or conference room, but do they have any kind of like an additive hearing um I'm sorry,

30:37

assistive listening system or device? And what I'm finding is not many places

30:43

have it. So people keep asking me for the funding and I'm beside I have no money

30:49

and I'm not even sure where to direct people to get the money to have that kind of accommodation implemented into

30:56

wherever they located. That's when I first met you guys in the beginning. I was asking if you had a

31:02

budget to work with and you so it makes me wonder. We have a large percentage of

31:08

people living in our state who are hard of hearing. They don't they're not always open about it. But I would love

31:13

to see you know it increase somehow and so people can be more I don't know

31:19

like out and open about their hearing loss so they don't come across as being difficult. And this is the pattern I'm

31:26

hearing. Like for example yesterday somebody called me up and they said we're having a conference in Clinton but

31:32

none of the rooms have a m a microphone. And I was like, "But why don't you just flush that person into the room that

31:38

does have a microphone to accommodate them?" And they're like, "I don't know."  
Common sense.

31:44

Yeah. This is um this is Lauren Hibbert again.

31:49

Um, I think that and I I need to uh say that when we redid um our office of

31:58

professional regulations boardroom, it is has uh hearing aid compatibility in

32:04

it. Um we probably should have been having this meeting in that that board

32:09

meeting room this whole time. Um and even when you have it, you can forget

32:15

it. So um and I did that. Um, so but I

32:20

do know that we made that decision intentionally when we were redoing that room and we  
hired an expert to help us

32:27

with that and it did have an expense and um I would have to go back in our

32:33

invoices to understand that expense but um well worth it I think because we have

32:40

many board members in our professions that and attendees to our board meetings

32:45

that are hard of hearing. Um but um the funding is a big piece that

32:52

we're going to have to weave into this report in multiple places because um the

32:57

ideal or um best practices can't happen without funding and the funding needs to

33:05

come from somewhere and that can be choices made at the municipal level or it can be funding from the state level.

33:12

Um, but if it's made at the municipal level, and I think we talked about this a little bit, um, maybe last meeting or

33:19

the meeting before, um, these are not really negotiable, like these are

33:26

essential spending as opposed to non-essential, but that's being made at a very, uh, town by town basis and can

33:35

be made incorrectly. Um and there's not a lot of guidance from anybody around those decision-m. So um the funding will

33:45

have to be a big piece of the report, Laura. And maybe we can move the needle a little bit on the funding for these um

33:52

really appropriate resources um to be better incorporated throughout the

33:58

state. Um AJ, you had your hand up next. Okay. Thank you. Um, I apologize if

34:05

someone said this because I did join late for which I apologize. I think what Laura was speaking to was not having a a

34:13

hearing loop in every facility, which would be ideal. That is the that is the

34:19

best practice and would really be universal design in the sense that it

34:26

would obiate the need for people to make individual requests. uh it assumes

34:32

disability is a is a natural part of the human condition and that there will be people who are hearing impaired. Uh

34:39

correct me if I'm wrong, Laura, but I think what she was saying is that often in meetings there are not even

34:45

microphones that are being passed around to speakers. Uh I see that a lot. I just

34:51

brought this up once again. Uh we had an important town meeting uh that was

34:56

hosted by a very well-meaning, intentioned and

35:02

um inclusivityminded nonprofit in Vermont. But once they got

35:10

to and that they had mics that were passed around and people were reminded to use them in responding in a large

35:18

meeting, but once they got to we got to breakout rooms, it was assumed that

35:23

people could hear and I know people who had to leave and left in frustration and

35:28

this was um you know a meeting about the future of the town. So really uh aside

35:34

from the need for loops and when there are not loops um auxiliary devices which

35:41

are part of you know which should be able to be requested as an ADA accommodation uh in other words um

35:49

assisted listening devices al but other you know portable ones um may not be as

35:57

great as an inclusive as a loop but that's a backup but just reminding

36:02

people that even in small what they believe are small rooms when everyone

36:08

can hear and even if you talk loud we hear that a lot. I well I talk loud everybody I know everybody can hear me

36:15

well not maybe not so um to remind speakers to identify themselves

36:23

and uh for visually impaired for people who have cognitive issues where they may have even if you spoke five minutes ago

36:30

may not remember your name just standard practice and everybody uses the mic no

36:37

exceptions there's perhaps someone at the table speaker's table, but there is one or two mobile mics regardless of the

36:44

size of the room that go around. Thank you. Thank you, Hate.

36:53

Thank you. Um, so I want to push back on the framing that this is needs to be a

37:00

clear request to the legislature for funding. And there are two reasons why.

37:05

Um, of course funding is always nice, but globally, um, this is a kick the can

37:11

down the road, wrong pocket issue that we're that we're framing it as. And I don't believe that to be the case. We do

37:16

not tell the legislature that towns require funding from them for other fundamental operational expenses such as

37:23

snowplowing, electricity, or heat. Um, we say that is a cost of doing business.

37:29

elections including elections and meetings that are inclusive and accessible to all is a cost of doing

37:36

business. The more that we continue to frame this as something new or different

37:41

um actually harms all of us. So this is uh fundamental cost of doing business.

37:48

There is no reasons operationally that a town should look at their budgets any other way with this than they do with

37:54

any other fundamental cost. The second is that requirements under state and

37:59

federal laws relating to meeting the needs of people who've been historically and currently marginalized, including

38:04

people with disabilities, those living in poverty without transportation, and those for whom English is not their

38:10

first language. We are told time and time and time again that we don't we

38:15

will not have our needs met because it is an undue burden. We are told that there is no time. we are told that there

38:21

is no money when in reality that's actually not a legitimate excuse but

38:26

it's an excuse that towns will use as shorthand. Um so I just I really want to

38:32

push back on this framing from this committee and from the secretary of

38:37

state's office that this is a funding issue when fundamentally I believe is an access and an attitudinal issue.

38:43

I hear you Kate and I just want to say that I think um I'm being misunderstood

38:49

a little bit because what I was saying is I'm I feel like there has been historically putting those at the

38:56

municipal level there's too much discretion involved and that towns have

39:01

not made the choices that you are saying. So I don't know what the solution is. that what I was saying is I

39:07

don't know what the solution is, but the current practice of putting that at the

39:12

town level without any statewide requirements is not working. And I've heard that from you very clearly. So, I

39:18

just want to make sure that you understand that. I wasn't saying that the legislature has to be the hero and

39:24

provide funding to every town. I don't I don't think that's going to be possible quite frankly. And I agree with you.

39:29

It's kicking the can down the road. But I do think that we need to grapple as a state of what do towns need to do and

39:37

there needs to be something more concrete so that these decisions become less discretionary because right now

39:43

they're too discretionary and that is creating inequity. So that that is what

39:49

I was trying to say. Um Frank I think emphasizing is not discre on the

39:56

discretionary thing. No. No. Okay. But if you attach a carrot to it, which is a

40:03



grant application, by the way, to qualify, you have to fill out this grant application. If the money's available,

40:09

we're we'll assist you with all your needs. If it's not available, then you get in in a line. And that's budgeting

40:16

responsibility to legislature. If they weren't fully funded around one option of those applications, then there is no

40:24

excuse because the highway departments, the paving of the roads, everything is

40:29

done through these grant processes and the towns don't have the money and they and it comes down through from the

40:35

state. There's there's lots of ways to solve this and that towns do to to cover

40:42

their budgets on whole and towns make a wide variety of choices to fund one

40:47

thing over another thing. There's a lot of competing priorities. There's a one pot of money. But I think what Kate's

40:54

been saying and um is that there are basic and Kate, correct me if I'm wrong,

41:00

but and because I want to make sure that I'm hearing you and understanding you and reflecting your position. I think

41:06

what Kate's been saying is there's some things that are non-negotiable that towns just have to fund and the

41:14

accessibility features that would allow everyone in the community to participate in open meeting um conversations and

41:22

meetings um and not just the meeting but the the breakout conversations

41:28

um and elections need to be a need to be part of the standardbased operation for

41:35

a But I think um I still think and and this is something that I really want to

41:41

work with you Laura on is what is that what do we need to ask towns to to

41:48

provide because I've heard a lot of um I think I think of the world very much in

41:54

good better best um and I think we need to figure out what is good what's better

42:01

and what's best so that we can help towns prepare so that someone and again

42:07

picking up a thread of what Kate said so that someone doesn't have to make specific requests. Towns are ready for

42:14

everybody. But I still don't have a clear picture of how a town can be ready

42:19

for everybody. So, I'm I'm thinking actually that Laura Seagull, it would be

42:25

really helpful if you could forward that document that you posted to your website um to this group on um hybrid meetings.

42:33

but also Laura Kushman, I'm really hoping as we start working on the report that I can get some of your expertise on

42:41

what a community needs to do to be ready for anybody to walk in the door and have

42:49

accessibility understanding that there's going to be things that we can't anticipate and there's going to need to be modifications. I think that's pretty

42:56

baseline and needs to be in the report. But um it would be really helpful I think to as we're making a

43:03

recommendation about to the legislature about what should be required or to towns that would you know we're not

43:09

going to be the deciders. Our report is not going to be the be all end all. We can't enforce anything and um but we are

43:18

providing recommendations. So um I'm gonna Susan uh thank you. Yeah, I think this is

43:25

super super helpful. Um and um I I do think there's there's a push pull in terms of um not forcing marginalized

43:33

populations to have to step up and raise their hand and yell and scream. We should be able to provide uh the meet

43:40

their needs without them having to ask. And also towns and the state need to be

43:45

informed about what those are. I think that's what what you're saying is that that we can't read minds, you know, no

43:50

town can do that. And so having clarity a lot from the advocacy groups super super helpful to say you know that as

43:57

you said good better best and I think that it's also important on the funding issue to recognize that towns have a

44:03

budget and they get their money their money from um taxpayers

44:10

us um and um what we hear a lot from towns I've heard for decades and decades

44:16

is the legislature keeps giving us unfunded mandates what we call unfunded mandates My background is actually in

44:22

the environmental world. Um, and I worked for an environmental group for many years and people were the towns

44:29

were like blah, you know, how can you you're telling us that we have to do these environmental things, but they

44:35

cost money. Where is the money going to come from? It's not that we're anti-environment. It's not that we don't want clean rivers, but you know, and of

44:42

course, as an environmentalist, it was like, well, look, you know, you don't value rivers enough if you're not willing to pay this money.

44:48

I put that to both. But um that's that was my that that was

44:53

my feeling. I I do think that we need to connect the dots because

45:00

when we ask um when when there is a a mandate, the town is either going to

45:07

meet that mand they're going to meet that mandate somehow. And if the mandate is that, you know, these roads, for

45:14

example, these roads need this many culverts uh in order to meet this standard

45:20

and it's like that's too expensive. We can't put in those culverts. The town might throw up the road. Literally, the

45:26

town might say we can't maintain that road anymore. We just can't have that road. It's too expensive. And therefore,

45:33

that mode of transportation for that town goes away. And you know, we just

45:38

have fewer roads because it costs too much money to have the roads. That literally happens. And I'm concerned

45:45

that that can happen about democracy. I'm concerned that we can say it's just

45:50

too expensive to have in-person meetings. They need to be hybrid. We need to have every form of technology,

45:55

all of this stuff. And meetings are great, but the if you know, so so we

46:01

need to the good, better, best element is important. I think when we when we're

46:06

thinking about what kind of democracy do we want to have just like what kind of transportation system do we want to

46:12

have? How can we make these how can we deal with these issues with with grace

46:18

and understanding so that we can truly get the both and that that of

46:24

Yes. Laura Seagull.

46:32

Um, I have an idea if we're going to make recommendations

46:38

later. And before we get to that point, I need your help with something. Um, so

46:45

like I mentioned, in the past two weeks, I've been working on trying to make my map more. This map is to list all of the

46:52

places in the map that has any kind of an assistive listening device or system.

46:58

And right now on my map, I don't have any town location. Like if you're a town

47:04

clerk office and that's where you host your public meeting. I don't have that information on the map. I'm wondering if

47:10

you can help like send out a mass email to all the town cook. And just to get the idea, do you have one? If yes, what

47:18

kind? Do you have an FM system? Do you have a infant system? Do you have a hand? Do you have Bluetooth? Do you have

47:25

Wi-Fi? And if we do and then I can add to the map and I can start tracking and that might help us give a better

47:30

determination of what kind of funding you're asking for in terms of to support

47:36

more towns that may not have some kind of an assisted listening device or system. That part face toerson meeting

47:45

at least we have some idea of what's there and what's not there. And then on top of that, we need to encourage more

47:51

people to read my guide because everything I say in my guide, I I'm

47:56

confident it covers all the high points of what people need to know. But then sometimes there little nittygritty

48:03

detail that I don't mention that seems to me seem trivial um and common sense. But then again, I

48:10

can't assume everyone has common sense. So unfortunately not. Laura, I'm going to

48:16

um I I think we can do that and I think it's useful for this group um and this

48:23

um report and I'm going to ask um Sean Shihen uh our elections director to

48:29

reach out to you and get those questions that we should ask the town clerks um

48:34

because there were a lot of details there that I I didn't catch and I think there's probably some specificity that

48:39

would be helpful. Um, and I can send out a survey uh to town clerks and ask that

48:46

question. And and I'm just going to tell you, we typically get about 65% response rate.

48:52

So, um, I can't promise 100% response. We don't get it. But, um, 60 65% that

48:59

would be good data for us to have. Um, Kate

49:05

Pearl Pearlberg Kav, how do you pronounce your last name, Kate? I really want to get it right and I'm probably

49:11

butchering it. It's Pearlberg Quam, but um Kaitlyn Rose had their hand up before me. Her hand up

49:17

before me. Oh, sorry Kate. Thank you. I'll make this quick. Um so I

49:22

I just want to say that I appreciate the spirit of the intent of what Frank and Susan are sharing. And I really really

49:28



feel it necessary to reiterate that state and federal civil rights and two articles of the state constitution are

49:33

not new and they are not unfunded mandates. They are civil and human rights laws of the land that have been

49:39

on the books for decades, right? So the awareness from towns, select board

49:44

members and clerks of their responsibilities and accountabilities under the laws might be new, but the

49:50

requirements are not. So that is like super important for me that that is what the understanding of this group and in

49:57

the report is. So their awareness of their responsibilities under the laws are new, but the laws themselves are not

50:03

new. Voting rights and access to town governance is a requirement, but paved roads are not.

50:09

And I just want to say and and give Susan an opportunity to respond, but my

50:14

understanding was not from Susan that that those requirements were new, but that towns frequently have to grapple

50:21

with other new requirements such as covert um ratios and all sorts of things. I can

50:28

tell you that the the the amount of things that the legislature puts on towns and state agencies quite frankly

50:36

without um funding is significant. And but I don't I didn't necessarily hear

50:43

Susan's comment as saying accessibility was a new mandate. I heard her saying

50:48

that towns are grappling with new mandates all the time, but not that this this accessibility is a new mandate.

50:55

that and yeah no I thank thank you for that and thanks for making that point um Kate

51:00

I agree with you it's yes the the mandates aren't new the awareness is emerging

51:07

um but um what is changing really quickly and really is new is the

51:12

technology um and since co people's um

51:17

interest in awareness of expectations about um being able to join with

51:23

technology has just it's been a J curve um which is fantastic for accessibility

51:30

as as I as I know you have said and it's also hard to keep up um for uh it's hard

51:38

to keep up in it's uh in terms of skill and money uh and resources. So so in

51:44

that sense I think um there is it's a brave new world that we need to adapt to.

51:51

Um I'm going to go to AJ and then Frank. Oh, Kate, uh, other Kate, would you like

51:57

to add anything? Yeah, I was basically gonna say the same thing that that Kate was going to say

52:02

and just comment as a first-time attendee to this group, it does seem like the the framing of the funding

52:09

challenge, which is of course a challenge, does seem to be sort of repeatedly like halfless. You know,

52:16

we're saying things like, well, we can't read minds. We don't know what, you know, what the community needs. And it,

52:22

you know, it it sort of makes me think that maybe we hadn't had disabled people in our community for all of human

52:28

history, right? And there's been plenty of writing about what's needed. But I hear you about the technology being um

52:35

the the most mysterious piece of the puzzle here. And I I just Yeah. to reiterate that finally we have access to

52:43

the tools we need to follow the law. So let's Yeah. You know, let's follow the law. Well, I think this is Lauren Hibbert

52:50

again. I think that that's part of why this working

53:40

need some help coming up with what are the recommendations for what?