

Senator Will Brownsberger

Town Meeting · June 1, 2026

Chronology of Open Meeting Rules Expansion

Four phases, from a baseline that barred fully remote boards to today's standing authorization



PRE-PANDEMIC BASELINE — 2009–2019

Remote tightly limited

Acts of 2009, c.28 (eff. 7/1/2010): consolidated the Open Meeting Law and moved enforcement to the Attorney General.

940 CMR 29.10 (2011): let individual members appear remotely, but a quorum — and the chair — still had to be physically present. No fully remote boards or town meetings.



PANDEMIC SHIFT — 2020

Fully remote enabled

Mar 12, 2020 — Baker Executive Order: suspended the physical-quorum rule; bodies could meet fully remotely with “adequate, alternative” public access.

Acts of 2020, c.92 (signed 6/5/2020): expressly let representative town meetings convene remotely, with Select Board + Moderator approval.



THE EXTENSION ERA — 2021–2023

Repeated short extensions

c.20 / 2021 (6/16/21) → Apr 1, 2022

c.22 / 2022 (2/12/22) → Jul 15, 2022

c.107 / 2022 (7/16/22) → Mar 31, 2023

c.2 / 2023 (3/29/23) → Mar 31, 2025



CURRENT FRAMEWORK — 2025

Standing authorization

Acts of 2025, c.2 (signed 3/28/2025): extended both authorizations to **June 30, 2027**.

Also struck the COVID-19 predicate for representative town meetings — moderators may now seek remote/hybrid authorization for any reason.

Where It Stands Today

Both meeting types are authorized under the same law and share one expiration date



General Public Bodies

City councils, select boards, planning boards, school committees, etc.

Expires **June 30, 2027**

Auth: Acts of 2025 c.2 §1, amending §30A of c.20 of 2021



Representative Town Meetings

Towns with a representative town meeting form of government.

Expires **June 30, 2027**

Auth: Acts of 2025 c.2 §§3–4, amending c.22 of 2022

KEY 2025 MODERNIZATION

The 2025 act decoupled remote town meetings from the pandemic. It struck the language tying the remote/hybrid option to “COVID-19 pandemic conditions,” so a town moderator may now request Select Board authorization for a remote or hybrid representative town meeting for any logistical reason — not only a public-health emergency.

The general public-meeting flexibilities remain temporary and still sunset on June 30, 2027.

Sources: Acts of 2025, c.2 (malegislature.gov); Mass.gov OML guidance (updated 4/8/2025).

Competing Approaches to Making Hybrid Permanent

The June 30, 2027 sunset is a placeholder. In the 194th General Court the real question is how to make remote/hybrid permanent — require it, or merely allow it.



GUARANTEE HYBRID ACCESS

Make remote access a right (mandate)

H.3299 — Rep. Antonio Cabral (New Bedford)
“An Act to Modernize Participation in Public Meetings”
Reported from committee as redraft H.4831 (12/18/2025)

Would **require** every public body to be open both in person and remotely — permanent hybrid, all levels of government.

Pairs the mandate with a multi-year phase-in and a state trust fund to help municipalities pay for the technology.



PERMIT, DON'T REQUIRE

Keep the format a local choice (option)

Gov. Healey's Municipal Empowerment Act
+ H.3342 (Rep. Gregoire) and S.2197 (Sen. Oliveira)
S2197 has moved forward to Senate Ways and Means

Would **permanently authorize — but not require** — cities and towns to offer remote or hybrid meetings.

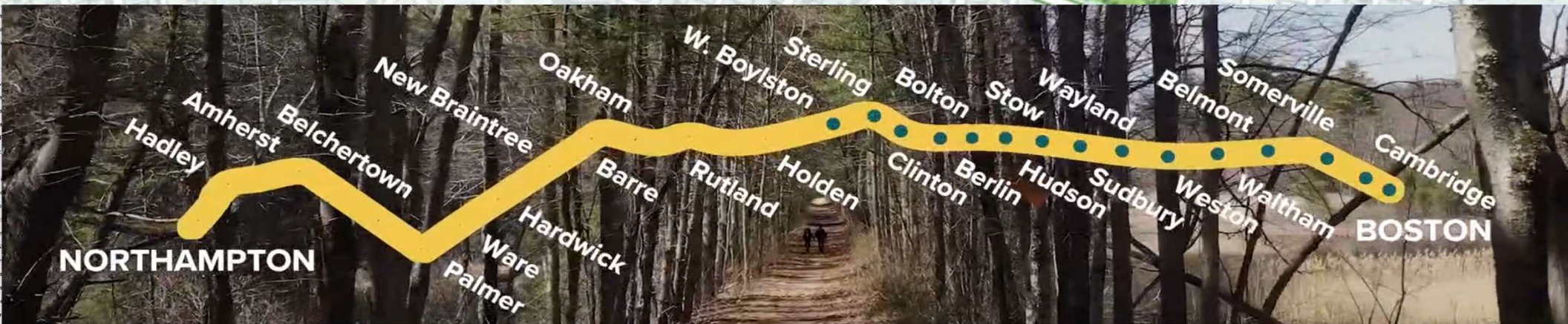
Leaves each body to decide its format; no new access mandate or funding requirement.



Belmont Home Rule Petition (Article 15 of 2026 Town Meeting) follows the “Permit, Don't Require” Approach

Making Connections – Across Belmont and Across the State

BelmontCommunityPath.Com



MassachusettsCentralRailTrail.Org

A major commitment of state/federal funds – Belmont (*phase 1 alone*): \$48,934,961

- **Major challenges surmounted through sustained effort**

- Route selection (a town challenge)
- Engineering disputes — tunnel-jacking vs. cut and cover
- MBTA — easement, tunnel coordination, shutdown planning
- Cost-escalation

- **State collaboration and commitment**

- Metropolitan Area Planning Council
- MassDOT staff
- Department of Conservation and Recreation
- MBTA — easement, tunnel coordination
- MassDOT Secretarial leadership – Phil Eng

- **Town leadership**

- Community Path Committee
- Town Staff and Consulting Engineers
- Select Board and Town Meeting

When the question is transparency, the answer is **‘YES.’**

- CTHRU – all state spending publicly viewable
- Competitive legislative procurement
- MBTA pension transparency
- MBTA fiscal and oversight board
- Environmental investments – Mass Save benefit cost analysis
- Affordable housing spending
- Legislative rules changes to assure *all* votes public

When the question is transparency, the answer is ‘YES.’

- **Public records** — support extension of public records law to cover the legislature (*most records already public*)
- **Audit of the legislature** — support voluntary compliance with court-clarified scope (*most requested documents already public*)
- **Constituent correspondence** — seeking your feedback on disclosure.

Major upcoming legislation

- **Recently sent to Governor**
 - Cannabis regulatory reform
- **Both branches acted, reconciling differences**
 - Budget (including local aid)
 - Transportation bonding (including “Chapter 90” local aid for roads)
 - Transportation/Education “Fair Share” supplemental budget
 - PROTECT Act to defend residents from ICE overreach
 - Bell-to-bell school cell phone ban
 - Early literacy
 - Higher education bond bill – public facilities
- **One branch acted, pending second branch action**
 - Energy affordability, climate mitigation
 - Environmental bond, climate resiliency
 - General data privacy
 - Animal cruelty – ban puppy mills
 - Targeted property tax relief
- **Other major issues**
 - Housing production – focus on permitting – moving in pieces
 - Primary care

Reach me anytime!

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