

Holliston Governance Committee

Select Board Update #6

Pros and Cons of a Three or Five Member Select Board

In Update #2, four arguments each were listed for maintaining a three-member Select Board and a five-member Select Board. Upon review of three detailed reports of other town Government Study Committees that wrestled with the Select Board size issue, this Update article expands the comparison with seven advantages and disadvantages for both options. Update #5 focused on the Study Committee make-up and time required to complete its work for four towns and included the links to the three reports referenced here.

Pros and Cons of a Three-Member Select Board

Advantages	Disadvantages
Every Select Board Member is vested in the job	Lack of one member can result in 1-1 tie votes
All Select Board deliberations remain transparent and open to the public	More likelihood of one Board member being isolated or dominating the others
Three members are more apt to reach a consensus	More limited access of residents to a Select Board member
Meetings are efficient and reasonable in length	Collusion among two members
Town Administrator communications with individual Select Board members would not increase	The duties of the Select Board and Town Administrator need to be better aligned.
Current level of authority and accountability would be maintained	A three-member Board does not position the town to cope with the complexity of the present and the future
Don't fix what is not broken	Less ability to communicate with Town committees

Pros and Cons of a Five-Member Select Board

Advantages	Disadvantages
Offers a broader representation of experiences, viewpoints and skill sets	No guarantee that a Board of five will be more efficient in solving the town's problems
More dilution of power and ill effects from one (rogue) member	Longer meetings and more likelihood of long, drawn-out debates
Two Board members may legally speak with one another (but not deliberate) without violating the Open Meeting Law	Without structural changes, the burden on the Town Administrator will increase significantly with a five-member Select Board.
Winning three votes, versus two, for Select Board votes will require greater collaboration	Appearance that it is OK for two of five to talk outside meetings, but not best practice
Allows for absences while maintaining a quorum	Collusion among three members
Ability to create subcommittees to explore issues	Creates more work for Town Hall staff
Better resident access to a Select Board member	Over past 11 years, too few contested elections in Holliston for three-member Board.