

An Outline of Town Meeting Procedures

Set forth below is a brief description of some basic Town Meeting procedures which govern the presentation, consideration and voting on matters which come before Town Meeting. It is hoped this summary will answer some questions which citizens have regarding Town Meeting.

Warrant - The Warrant is the Agenda for the actions to come before Town Meeting. It constitutes official notice to the Town of the matters to be considered in general terms and indicates the sponsoring Town Department or Agency which will present the Motion and lead the discussion with respect to action to be taken under each Article. The Motion can be virtually identical with the Article, or it can be somewhat more precise and specific as long as it is within the “scope” of the Article. As the Article serves the purpose of giving notice to the Town as to what is to be considered no Motion, nor any Amendment to a Motion, can go beyond or cover matters outside of what could reasonably be considered to have been included in the Article. For example, if the Article is to see if the Town will vote to purchase a police cruiser for \$50,000, it would not be within the scope of the Article for the Motion to be to purchase a police cruiser and a fire engine for \$150,000. It is up to the Moderator to determine if a motion or an amendment to a motion meets the “scope” requirement.

The Articles in the Warrant will be taken up at the Meeting in order unless the meeting votes to take an Article out of order. One exception to this rule is Articles which are on the Consent Calendar discussed below. Also, if there are two or more Articles which deal with the same or similar issues, often the sponsor of the Articles will ask to make some general comments about all the related Articles before presenting the individual Motions under each one.

Motions - If it happens that prior to Town Meeting but after the Warrant has been printed and posted the sponsor of the Article decides not to go forward with it, there must still be a Motion to dispose of the Article, the usual one being a motion to “pass over” the Article.

As you come into the auditorium for the Meeting, please pick up the “Salmon Colored Sheet” which lists the proposed Motions to be made under each of the Articles. There may be some Articles (usually referring to by-law amendments) which state that the amendment is on file at the Town Clerk’s office. These amendments will also be included in the Motion Sheet. When the Article is called for presentation the sponsor may read the Motion as printed if it is short or may make the Motion “as printed on the “Salmon Colored Sheet” if it is longer. If there are any changes or refinements to the printed Motion, these will be noted. An explanation of the proposed action will then be made by the sponsor, some of which will be very brief, and some may require more detailed explanation. In advance of the Meeting, the Moderator will have met with the sponsors and asked that presentations be brief.

Before the Meeting will open for general discussion and debate from the floor, other Town Boards may wish to speak. If you wish to speak please go to one of the standing microphones. If getting to a microphone is difficult you may raise your hand to be recognized and someone will deliver you a portable microphone. When called upon to speak please give your name and your street address before making your comment. Please keep your comments to no more than two minutes.

Amendments to a Motion can always be made, assuming they fall within the scope of the Article, as discussed above. If someone knows in advance of an Amendment they wish to make, it would be helpful to provide the text of that Amendment in writing to the Moderator. However it is not necessary to have a carefully worked out Amendment in advance. The Moderator and Town Counsel are willing and able to help with the wording of any proposed Amendments.

Voting - Most motions which are made at Town Meeting require a majority vote, although there are a few which by reason of a statute or Town By-Law require two-thirds vote – e.g. motions to borrow or to amend the Zoning By-Laws.

Amendments. If there are amendments made to Motions, after discussion the meeting first votes on the Amendment and then, after discussion on the Main Motion as amended, if the amendment passes, or on the Main Motion without the amendment, if it fails. Voting is done first by voice vote and if the Moderator is uncertain of the outcome (sometimes those in the minority have louder voices!) the Moderator will call for a standing vote and if it is still unclear there will be a count by tellers appointed by the Moderator. The Moderator's determination of the results is final, unless seven voters stand and challenge the determination, in which event a count will be made.

Calling the Question – After a full airing of questions and concerns someone may rise to “Call the Question.” The person may not make a statement first. A vote will be taken on whether or not cut off debate. If passed debate will end and a vote on the Motion will be taken immediately.

Procedures for Voting on the Budget - The Budget (See Table 1) as printed in this booklet is presented by the Finance Committee. Following the presentation the Moderator will go down the Budget line by line and ask if anyone wishes to hold out any line item for further discussion or amendment. To hold a budget item out, simply raise your hand to be recognized and identify the budget line item number of concern. Once this process is completed, the Budget excluding the items held out will be voted on, without further discussion. We will then go back and take up each line item which has been held out for discussion and take separate votes. The Moderator will typically return to the person holding out each item to begin the discussion.

Consent Calendar - Pursuant to the Town's By-Laws the Moderator may designate certain Articles which are considered to be routine, non-controversial and/or of a minor nature and which are not expected to generate discussion or opposition to be placed on the Consent Calendar. The Articles so designated, and the motions to be made under each Article, are listed on the Consent Calendar which is included in this mailing. When the Meeting reaches the first of these Articles the entire Consent Calendar will be considered. The Moderator will first go down the list of Articles on the Consent Calendar to determine if anyone wants to remove an Article. Any individual voter can do so by indicating the Article to be removed, in which event it will be taken up in the normal manner in its regular sequence on the Warrant. The Motions under the Articles remaining on the Consent Calendar will be adopted with a single vote. This procedure expedites the conduct of the business of the Meeting by not requiring individual presentations discussions and votes on those Articles which are deemed to qualify for Consent Calendar treatment.

Participation. Citizen engagement is vital in making Town Meeting an effective form of government. Please do not hesitate to ask questions or to express opinions or concerns.