

Information Guides For Town Meeting Fall 2018

The Massachusetts Moderators Association [MMA] is recommending nine guides towns should consider publishing on their websites to give citizens important information about Town Meeting. The aim is to offer these guides as templates that towns could adapt for their own use.

The first four guides, *Introductory Guide to Town Meeting*, *Glossary of Town Meeting Terms*, *Guide to Town Meeting Motions*, and *Glossary of Common Municipal Finance Terms*, provide general information about town meeting. The *Introductory Guide to Town Meeting* is followed by representative and open town meeting examples collected from various town websites.

The remaining six guides address topics voters would find helpful about town meeting. Since practices vary by town, four of the topics include at least three examples from different towns. We commend these as “best practice” examples worthy of consideration, without judging any single one as *the* best practice. Or, as one moderator recently posted on the Gavel Line:

Not all corners are square and not all circles are round and instead of getting all bound up in technical details, let's use our common sense and do what is in the best interest of the community. Arthur Bourque, Lynnfield]

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Read each guide thoroughly to avoid copying information that does not fit your town. The words highlighted in RED are specific to the town being referenced.

Introductory Guide to Town Meeting

Town Meeting acts as the legislative branch of town government and considers a wide variety of decisions including:

- the type of programs and services that town government offers,
- the amount that the Town will spend annually on services including police, fire, education, and a myriad of other activities,
- by-laws and other rules and regulations including state enabling legislation,
- Other items that impact the quality of life in town.

The Warrant: The Board of Selectmen schedule Town Meeting and set the agenda by publishing the “Warrant.” Under state law, “Every town meeting shall be called by a warrant issued by the board of selectmen, which shall state the time and place at which the meeting is to convene and, by separate articles, the subject matter to be acted upon.” [MGL, Chapter 39, Section 10]

Key Participants

Quorum – The minimum number of voters, set by town by-law, required in attendance for Town Meeting. The quorum in _____ *town* _____ is _____ # _____.

The Moderator – The moderator presides (runs) the meeting. Under state law, “The moderator shall preside and regulate the proceedings, decide all questions of order, and make public declaration of all votes.” [MGL, Chapter 39, Section 15]

Town Clerk – Serves as clerk of the town meeting, and creates the official record of the proceedings. The record of the clerk is final and may not be changed or edited by the town meeting or anyone else but the clerk.

Board of Selectmen – Is the executive branch of town government. As the town’s executives the selectmen take an active role in presenting motions for various articles and make recommendations to the meeting.

Finance Committee – The Finance Committee (in some towns, Advisory Committee) is responsible for analyzing the fiscal impact of proposed warrant articles and making reports and recommendations to Town Meeting. [MGL, Chapter 39, Sec. 16]

Other Boards and Committees – When appropriate other committees, such as the Planning Board or Board of Health, will be called upon to give recommendation on articles pertaining to their areas of responsibility.

The Process

The Warrant - The warrant acts as the agenda for Town Meeting. It consists of a series of *articles*, each of which provides a *general* description of the action proposed. The moderator will typically follow the order of articles as contained in the warrant, although the order may be changed by the moderator or the meeting.

The Motion - All actions taken by a town meeting are taken by votes upon motions. While the article describes the general topic to be addressed, the *main motion* provides the specific details. The motion must be “within the scope” of the Article, which means that the proposed action in the motion is sufficiently close to what was stated in the Article that the voters have been sufficiently warned about the potential action in advance of the meeting. The moderator will customarily turn to the sponsor of an article to make the motion, although in some towns, the Finance Committee makes all the motions. The term “motion” also refers to various procedural actions that the Town Meeting might take, such as a Motion to Adjourn the meeting for that day and resume the following evening.

Debate - Following any presentation by the sponsor of the article and upon hearing the recommendations of town committees and boards, the moderator will “open the floor” for debate.

- All comments should be restricted to the subject being debated and conducted in a respectful and courteous manner.
- “No person shall address a town meeting without leave of the moderator, and all persons shall, at the request of the moderator, be silent.” [MGL, Chapter 39, Sec. 17]
- A motion can be amended so long as the amendment, just like the main motion itself, stays within “the scope of the article.” The amendment may consist of adding, deleting or substituting words in the motion to be amended¹ and requires majority vote for approval. Proposed amendments should [must] be in writing, except if they involve simple, one or two-word changes.

Vote - Once debate is concluded or a motion is passed to end debate, a vote is taken on the motion before the meeting. Many votes require a majority vote, though higher standards (typically two-thirds) may be required by Massachusetts law or town by-laws.

Ending the Meeting: “Adjournment” vs. “Dissolving” - The term “adjourn” refers to a temporary stop to a meeting with the intention to resume later. The term “dissolve” refers to the final closure of the meeting. A motion to dissolve is in order after all of the articles on the warrant have been addressed. “[O]nce the meeting has dissolved the action taken by it may not be reconsidered [taken up again], except pursuant to an article for that purpose in the warrant *for a future meeting*.”²

¹ Town Meeting Times, A Handbook of Parliamentary Law Third Edition 2001. p. 93

² Town Meeting Times, A Handbook of Parliamentary Law Third Edition 2001. p. 131

Guides to Town Meeting

Representative Town Meeting

Lexington:

<https://www.lexingtonma.gov/about-town-meeting>

Milton:

<https://www.townofmilton.org/town-moderator/pages/town-meeting>

Norwood:

http://www.norwoodma.gov/government/committees_boards/town_meeting/index.php

Open Town Meeting

Bedford:

https://www.bedfordma.gov/sites/bedfordma/files/file/file/guide_to_town_meeting.pdf

Boxborough:

http://www.boxborough-ma.gov/sites/boxboroughma/files/file/file/2017_box_townmtg_guide_final.pdf

Seekonk:

<http://www.seekonk-ma.gov/town-moderator/pages/seekonk-town-meeting>

Wareham:

http://www.wareham.ma.us/sites/warehamma/files/uploads/guide_to_warrant_articles_and_motions_-_depts.pdf

Westborough:

https://www.town.westborough.ma.us/sites/westboroughma/files/uploads/townmeetinghandbook_2015mar5.pdf

Weston:

<https://www.weston.org/DocumentCenter/View/469/Guide-to-Town-Meeting-Procedure-PDF>

Glossary of Town Meeting Terms

Article: Each of the individual items listed in a warrant for action by a Town Meeting.

Bylaw: A law made by a local authority (town) and which applies only in their area.

Consent Agenda: To facilitate efficient discussion, the Board of Selectmen may propose that a several articles be acted upon collectively, that is by a single vote. Typically, the articles included in a Consent Agenda cover topics that are legally required, but are considered routine and unlikely to be controversial. If a Town Meeting member opposes the inclusion of any proposed article on the consent agenda, the article/motion will be removed from the list and the remaining motions will be put before Town Meeting for a single vote. The removed article/motion will then be considered on its own.

MGL: Massachusetts General Law.

Motion: A “motion” is a proposal that the Town Meeting take some action. “Substantive motions” are proposals that the body take an official action (*e.g.*, adopt a bylaw, appropriate funds, *etc.*) and any amendments to such proposals already being considered. “Procedural motions” address how the business of the meeting will be conducted (*e.g.*, adjourn the meeting until the next evening, close debate, *etc.*). *The table on following page contains a detailed list describing the various types of motions.*

Quorum: The minimum number of voting members who must be present at a properly called meeting in order to conduct business in the name of the group. The quorum in [*insert Town name*] is [*insert quorum #*].

Warrant: A list of items to be acted on by Town Meeting.

Types of Motions

The following list of motions is adapted from *Town Meeting Time*, the procedural handbook that guides most Town Meetings in Massachusetts.

Privileged Motions: *Privileged motions relate to the conduct of the meeting, regardless of whatever particular question, if any, may be pending, and so have priority over all other motions*

1. **Dissolve:** Dissolution ends the meeting.
2. **Adjourn to a fixed time:** Temporarily stops the meeting. The motion should state fully and clearly the time and place when the meeting will resume.
3. **Point of no quorum:** This motion questions if a quorum is in place.
4. **Fix the time to (or at) which to adjourn:** This refers to two distinct motions. The first sets the time and place for resumption of the meeting following the next adjournment but does not immediately adjourn the meeting. This can be combined with the second, which sets that time at which the meeting will adjourn. *E.g.*, “I move that the when the meeting concludes the business pending as of 10 p.m, we adjourn to 7 pm tomorrow, in this hall.”
5. **Question of privilege:** Questions of privilege relate first to the rights and privileges of the meeting collectively, its safety, dignity and the integrity of the proceedings; and second to the rights, reputation and conduct of the voters or town meeting members individually, in their capacity as voters or members. For example, someone who is unable to hear the proceedings may request that the speaker speak more loudly, or that the sound system be adjusted.

Subsidiary Motions: *Subsidiary Motions deal directly with the business of a specific main motion. Privileged Motions (see above) have higher priority. The Subsidiary Motions have the following priority ranking among themselves.*

6. **Lay on the table:** This motion both brings an immediate end to debate *and* kills (disapproves) the motion to which it pertains.
7. **The previous question:** The phrases “I move the previous question” or “I move the question” or “I call the question” or “I move to end debate” all mean that the person has heard all the talk they want to hear and desires to vote on the question. In some towns, moderators exercise their discretion to postpone consideration of this motion if they determine that further debate is appropriate.
8. **Limit or extend debate:** This motion may be made to set or extend time limits with respect to any debatable motion or series of debatable motions.
9. **Postpone to a time certain:** The motion serves to postpone consideration of an article until a specified time.
10. **Commit or refer:** The motion refers an article to a committee or board. The motion should clearly state whether the matter is being referred for further study and report back on what should be done, or also confers authority to take action.

11. **Amend or substitute:** The motion serves to alter, modify, rephrase a motion on the floor. As with main motions, the amendment must stay within the scope (subject matter) of the article. For example, the main motion made under an article proposing to purchase a new police cruiser cannot be amended to purchase a pickup truck for the Department of Public Works.
12. **Postpone indefinitely:** The motion does exactly what its name suggests: postpones indefinitely any further consideration of the motion to which it relates.

Incidental Motions: *Incidental motions relate to the conduct of the meeting with respect to the pending business*

13. **Point of order:** A point of order is not a motion but a question about the proceedings. For example, if a speaker seems to be discussing a different article than the one then under consideration, a Town Meeting member may rise to a point of order asking the moderator to rule on the relevancy of the speaker's remarks.
14. **Appeal [a ruling of the Moderator]:** In Massachusetts, the moderator, by statute [MGL Chapter 39, Section 15], "decides all questions of order".
15. **Division of a question:** If a motion can readily and logically be divided into two or more parts for separate consideration, a motion to "divide the question" and vote on the parts separately is in order. Each part may be approved or disapproved separately.
16. **Separate consideration:** A motion for separate consideration closely resembles a motion to divide the question, but differs in two respects 1) It may be applied to a proposition, such as a building code, which falls naturally into parts but which is so interrelated that the parts will not stand alone; and 2) The action, if any, taken on each part is not final until the action on the whole proposition at the end.
17. **Fix method of voting:** Calls for a vote on the method a vote will be taken (for example, a voice vote, counted vote, or secret ballot).
18. **Nomination to committees:** A motion for individuals to serve on a committee elected by the meeting.
19. **Withdraw or modify a motion:** Once a motion has been made (and seconded, if so required), it cannot be withdrawn without consent of the meeting. This motion requests such consent.
20. **Suspension of rules:** Rules relating to the conduct of the meeting, such as order of business, may be suspended but require two-thirds vote unless there is unanimous consent. Rules protecting absentees may not be suspended at all. Rules protecting minorities may be suspended only by unanimous consent.

Main Motions: *These refer to the motions made to adopt or otherwise dispose of the matters addressed by each Article.*

21. **Main motion:** All actions taken by town meeting are taken by votes upon motions. The first motion made on an article is the main motion.
22. **Reconsider or rescind:**

- A Motion to Reconsider reopens debate on a question that had previously been decided. It results in a temporary postponement of final action and subjects the main motion to a new vote. Towns vary in their rules and procedures as to when and under what circumstances motions for reconsideration may be offered. *[If town bylaws, traditions, or practices govern this, moderators should add specifics here.]*
 - A Motion to Rescind combines a vote to reconsider and a vote to annul or reverse the previous action. In other words, when a Motion to Reconsider is made, the practical question is “Shall the Meeting reopen debate and thereafter take a second vote on the previous action?” For a Motion to Rescind, the practical question is “Shall the meeting reverse the previous action?”
23. **Take from the table:** A motion to resume debate on an article than had previously been laid on the table [*see #6 Lay on the table*]
24. **Advance an article:** In the absence of a by-law to the contrary, the meeting has the power to change the order of articles.

The table on the following page summarizes the procedural rules for each of the above motions.

Guide to Town Meeting Motions¹

Privileged Motions: Relate to Conduct of Entire Meeting							
Rank	Motion	Second Required	Debatable	Amendable	Vote Required	May Reconsider	May Interrupt
1	Dissolve (end) the meeting	Yes	No	No	Maj.	No	No
2	Adjourn to a fixed time or recess	Yes	Yes	Yes	Maj.	No	No
3	Point of no quorum	No	No	No	None	No	No
4	Fix the time to (or at) which to adjourn	Yes	Yes	Yes	Maj.	Yes	No
5	Question of privilege	No	No	No	None	No	Yes
Subsidiary Motions: Relate to Main Motion							
Rank	Motion	Second Required	Debatable	Amendable	Vote Required	May Reconsider	May Interrupt
6	Lay on the table (defer debate)	Yes	No	No	2/3	Yes	No
7	Call the question (end debate and vote)	Yes	No	No	2/3	No	No
8	Limit or extend debate	Yes	No	No	2/3	Yes	No
9	Postpone to a time certain	Yes	Yes	Yes	Maj.	Yes	No
10	Commit or refer	Yes	Yes	Yes	Maj.	Yes	No
11	Amend or substitute	Yes	Yes	Yes	Maj.	Yes	No
12	Postpone indefinitely	Yes	Yes	No	Maj.	Yes	No
Incidental Motions							
Rank	Motion	Second Required	Debatable	Amendable	Vote Required	May Reconsider	May Interrupt
Same rank as motion out of which it arises	Point of order	No	No	No	None	No	Yes
	Division of a question	Yes	Yes	Yes	Maj.	No	No
	Separate consideration	Yes	Yes	Yes	Maj.	No	No
	Fix the method of voting	Yes	Yes	Yes	Maj.	Yes	No
	Nominations to committees	No	No	No	Plur.	No	No
	Withdraw or modify a motion	No	No	No	Maj.	No	No
	Suspension of rules	Yes	No	No	2/3	No	No
Main Motions							
Rank	Motion	Second Required	Debatable	Amendable	Vote Required	May Reconsider	May Interrupt
None	Main motion	Yes	Yes	Yes	Var.	Yes	Yes
*	Reconsider or rescind	Yes	*	No	Maj.	No	No
None	Take from the table	Yes	No	No	Maj.	No	No
None	Advance an article	Yes	Yes	Yes	Maj.	Yes	No

¹ Adapted from *Town Meeting Time*, Johnson, Trustman and Wadsworth, Massachusetts Moderators Association, 3rd Edition (2001).

Glossary of Common Municipal Finance Terms

Appropriation: An authorization granted by a legislative body to make expenditures and to incur obligations for specific purposes. An appropriation is usually limited in amount and the time when it can be expended.

Assessments: Amounts the State automatically deducts from Local Aid to cover the cost of certain State and county programs. These include *e.g.*, the MBTA, Essex Regional Emergency Communications Centers, Mosquito Control, and others. Assessments are shown on the Cherry Sheet.

Budget: See Omnibus or Operating Budget

Capital Budget: A plan of proposed capital outlays for a fiscal year and the means of financing them. Capital items are items costing a certain amount, generally defined by a town's financial policy, and having a useful life of five or more years.

Capital Exclusion: A vote to exclude from the levy limit the cost of a capital project. This exclusion only affects the levy limit for the year in which the project was undertaken.

Chapter 70: Chapter 70 is the statute that describes the school funding formula and education aid distributed by the State.

Chapter 90: Funds distributed to cities and towns to fund highway projects. Chapter 90 is based on a formula consisting of road local mileage, local employment level, and population estimates.

Cherry Sheet: The official notification to cities, towns, and regional school districts of the next fiscal year's State aid and assessments. The name comes from the cherry colored paper on which they used to be printed.

Community Preservation Act [CPA]: The CPA helps communities preserve open space and historic sites, create affordable housing, and develop outdoor recreational facilities. The CPA is funded through a local option surcharge on property tax bills and a state match on those surcharges.

Convey: Conveyance is the act of transferring an ownership interest in property from one party to another. The term is used to transfer property from one town entity to another, and not an outside party.

Debt Exclusion: A vote to exclude from the levy limit the costs of debt service for capital projects. This exclusion remains in effect for the life of the debt; once the debt (principal and interest) is paid off the excluded amount is removed from the tax rate.

Debt Service: Payment of interest and principal related to debt.

Enterprise Fund: A standalone fund with its own assets, liabilities, fund balance, revenues and expenses in which a municipal service is operated as a business unit. Costs of the service are primarily recovered from user charges and may be supplemented by general revenues.

Expenditure: The spending of money by the town and schools for the programs or projects within the approved budget.

FTE: A full-time equivalent employee based on a 40-hourwork week. May be one or more employees, but the total weekly hours equal 40.

Fiscal Year (FY): A 12-month period, beginning July 1 and ending June 30, to which the annual budget applies and at the end of which a governmental unit determines its financial position and the results of its operations. The number attached to the letters “FY” represents the calendar year in which the fiscal year ends; for example, FY20 is the fiscal year which begins July 1, 2019 and ends June 30, 2020.

Foundation Budget: The spending target under the Education Reform Act of 1993 for each school district as the level necessary to provide an adequate education for all students.

Free Cash: Certified as of each July 1 by the State, this is the portion of Undesignated Fund Balance available for appropriation. It is not cash per se, but rather is the total of cash and receivables less current liabilities and earmarked reserves, reduced also by reserves for uncollected taxes. It is made up of Turn Backs (unexpended appropriations), revenues that came in higher than budgeted, and Free Cash carried forward from the prior fiscal year.

General Fund: The fund into which the general (non-earmarked) revenues of the town are deposited and from which money is appropriated to pay expenses.

General Obligation Bonds: Bonds issued by the Town that are backed by the full faith and credit of its taxing authority.

Level-Service Budget: A budget that describes the funding required for maintaining current levels of service or activity, plus cost increases for contractual and mandated obligations. It brings previously-approved programs forward at existing levels of service.

Levy or Property Tax Levy: The revenue a community can raise through real and personal property taxes.

Levy Ceiling: The maximum amount of property taxes a community can levy. The Levy Ceiling is equal to 2 ½ percent of the total full and fair cash values of all taxable real and personal property in the community.

Levy Limit: The maximum the levy can be in a given year. It is equal to the previous year’s levy limit times 2½% plus new growth and amounts authorized by overrides. The Levy Limit is determined annually by the Massachusetts Department of Revenue.

Local Aid: Revenue allocated by the State to cities, towns, and regional school districts. Local Aid is distributed by the Cherry Sheets.

Local Receipts: Locally generated revenues, other than real and personal property taxes. Examples include motor vehicle excise, hotel/motel/meals excise, permit fees, rentals, and charges.

New Growth: The additional value of new development and other growth in the tax base that is not the result of revaluation. New growth is calculated by multiplying the increases in assessed valuation by the tax rate.

Omnibus or Operating Budget: A plan for allocating resources to support particular services, purposes, and functions over a specified period of time. The Omnibus Budget is the spending plan for a particular fiscal year.

Other Post-Employment Benefits (OPEB): The set of benefits, other than pensions, that government employees earn while actively working, but do not receive until they retire. The most significant is health insurance for retirees, their spouses, and in some cases their beneficiaries.

Override: A vote to increase the amount of property tax revenue in excess of the automatic 2 ½ percent allowed under Proposition 2 ½. An override permanently raises the Levy Limit unless later reversed.

Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT): An agreement between a municipality and an entity not subject to taxation, such as a charitable or educational organization, in which the payer agrees to make a voluntary payment to the municipality.

Proposition 2 ½: A State law, enacted by citizen initiative petition in 1980, that regulates local property tax administration and limits the amount of revenue –the levy –a city or town may raise from local property taxes each year.

Raise or Raise and Appropriate: A phrase used to identify a funding source for an expenditure which refers to money generated by the tax levy or other local receipt.

Reserve Fund: A fund appropriated each year that may be used by vote of the Finance Committee for "extraordinary or unforeseen expenditures."

Revolving Fund: Those funds that may be used for special uses. For example, Recreation fees may be paid into a revolving fund and expenditures made without further appropriation. Revolving funds are established by State law and Town bylaw.

Stabilization Fund: A fund designed to accumulate amounts for capital and other future spending purposes, although it may be appropriated for any lawful purpose (MGL Ch. 40 §SB). Stabilization Funds may be established for different purposes and interest generated by such funds is added to and becomes part of the Stabilization Fund. A two-thirds vote of Town

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Meeting is required to establish, amend the purpose of, or appropriate money out of a Stabilization Fund.

Tax Title: A collection procedure that secures a city's or town's lien on real property and protects the municipality's right to payment of overdue property taxes

Turn Back: Unexpended funds from a prior fiscal year's operating budget which are returned to the Town and which ultimately revert to Free Cash.

Unclassified: Expenditure items that are not within a particular department's budget. Examples include regional pension assessments, insurances, unemployment, and others.

Underride: A vote to decrease the levy limit under Proposition 2 ½. An underride permanently reduces the Levy Limit unless later reversed.

Warrant: A list of items to be acted on by Town Meeting.

Warrant Article: Each of the individual items listed in a warrant for action by a Town Meeting.

Frequently Asked Questions

Andover:

1. [How to place an article on the Annual Town Meeting Warrant?](#)
2. [How to place an article on a Special Town Meeting Warrant?](#)
3. [How to attend Town Meeting?](#)
4. [How to move a Warrant article at Town Meeting?](#)
5. [How to be recognized to speak at Town Meeting?](#)
6. [How to Make a Motion & Amend an Article?](#)

Bedford:

- [What do I need to know about the check in process for Town Meeting?](#)
- [Last fall I could not find a parking place for Town Meeting. Where do I park if the lots in front of the High School are full?](#)
- [Who can attend Town Meeting? Who can vote? Who can speak?](#)
- [What is the Warrant? Why is the motion made at Town Meeting sometimes different from what is published in the Warrant?](#)
- [Where can I read the rules?](#)
- [What to Think About Before You Speak at Town Meeting.](#)
- [Why Do Voters Need to Attend Town Meeting?](#)
- [What Is an Open Town Meeting?](#)
- [What Bedford's Town Meeting is NOT.](#)
- [How can I volunteer to be on a town committee?](#)
- [How do I submit a Petitioner's Article for the Town Warrant?](#)
- [When is Town Meeting?](#)

Middleton:

1. [What is the quorum for a Town Meeting?](#)
2. [Who may speak?](#)
3. [Who may vote?](#)
4. [Is the warrant the agenda?](#)
5. [How do I know which article the Town Meeting is considering?](#)
6. [How is the budget considered?](#)
7. [When is the Town Meeting ended?](#)

Guides for Submitting Citizen's Petitions

MGL, Chapter 39, Sec. 10:

“The selectmen shall insert in the warrant for the annual meeting all subjects the insertion of which shall be requested of them in writing by ten or more registered voters of the town and in the warrant for every special town meeting all subjects the insertion of which shall be requested of them in writing by one hundred registered voters or by ten per cent of the total number of registered voters of the town whichever number is the lesser.”

Andover:

If you intend to present an article to an Annual or a Special Town Meeting use the forms shown below and review these suggestions that may help you with the process:

- Make sure you check the date that the warrant closes -- the Town Clerk's Office will have these dates. Allow time to gather the necessary signatures in support of your article.
- The name of the person petitioning the article is generally listed first on the form.
- A registered voter must be able to read the proposed warrant article when signing. Signatures should appear on the petition with the proposed warrant article. Circulate as many petition forms as necessary to get the required number of signatures.
- For all articles, we suggest that you contact the appropriate department for help with the wording of the article. We encourage you to do this early so that departments can effectively help you through the process.
- It is recommended that the petitioner use the words “To see if the Town will vote to.” at the start of the article.
- The petitioner may be called to a public hearing of the Finance Committee or other committees, like the Planning Board, and asked to speak to the merits of the article.
- Citizen petitions must be moved by a registered voter at the meeting. If someone other than the petitioner will move the article, we ask for this information so that the Moderator may call on the person by name at the Meeting.
- Please check with the Town Clerk for any questions you may have.

<https://andoverma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/664/Private-Warrant-Article-Form---Annual-Town-Meeting-PDF->

<https://andoverma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/666/Private-Warrant-Article-Form---Scheduled-Special-Town-Meeting-PDF->

Colrain:

May voters place articles on the warrant?

Yes, voters may “insert” articles in the warrant. They have to do it before selectmen “close” the warrant.

To insert an article in the warrant for an annual Town Meeting, at least 10 registered voters of the town must sign a written request. The written request of registered voters for the insertion of subjects in town meeting warrants shall not be valid unless the required number of registered

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voters not only sign their names but also state their residence, with street and number, if any. Voters do not have to include their addresses after their signatures, but it is a good idea.

If you want a sample of an article to use to draft your article, go to town hall and ask for a copy of the annual report, or check if your town has a website and publishes the annual report there. The annual report will have warrants from the previous year's Town Meeting, which you can use as samples. For further assistance, contact the town clerk or town counsel.

Citizens may insert an article in the warrant for a special Town Meeting. Selectmen shall insert in the warrant for every special town meeting all subjects which shall be requested by 100 registered voters or 10% of the total number of voters, whichever is lesser.

Eastham:

https://www.eastham-ma.gov/sites/easthamma/files/uploads/petitioned_articles_instructions.pdf

Nahant:

http://www.nahant.org/documents/clerk/town_of_nahant_citizen_petition_form_2017.pdf

Swampscott:

http://www.town.swampscott.ma.us/sites/swampscottma/files/uploads/town_meeting_citizen_petition_form.pdf

Guides for Offering Amendments

Boxborough:

Amendments can be offered to any article [motion] being debated. To offer an amendment, a voter will be asked to give the text to the Town Moderator and Town Clerk in writing. The Moderator will then recognize the mover of the amendment, and the amendment will be debated and voted up or down before returning to debate on the article as a whole.

Bedford:

1. Be recognized by the Moderator (stand at a microphone in the aisles or raise your hand) following a motion being made.
2. State your name and address.
3. State the motion: "I move to amend the motion as follows ..."
4. The amendment must be in writing and you must give two copies to the Moderator.
5. Wait for another voter to second your motion.
6. The amendment must be within the scope of the original motion [article].
 - An article in the warrant may be amended if it includes the language "do anything in relation thereto" or other similar language.
 - General bylaws may not be amended except to correct an error in printing.
 - Zoning bylaws may only be amended to make them less restrictive.
7. The Moderator will allow you to make a presentation explaining the reason for the amendment to the motion in accordance with the debate rules.
8. An amendment may be amended. Only two (2) amendments may be on the floor at one time.
9. Town Meeting will vote on the amendments first. Then Town Meeting will vote on the amended main motion (if any amendments are adopted) or on the original motion.

Guidelines for Presentations at Town Meeting

Acton:

PowerPoint presentations have been prepared and used for articles/motions presented at Town Meeting. Preparation of such presentations is a time consuming process that typically is done by staff. As a result, the Moderator requests that if a presenter wishes to use such a presentation at Town Meeting, it be submitted to the Town Manager's office completed at least **10** days prior to the start of the Town Meeting and that the Moderator be notified by the presenter of the intent to use a presentation.

The Moderator believes such presentations should be limited to articles or other of highly significant importance to town meeting members and will discourage the use of PowerPoint presentations in all other cases. Please consult with the Moderator if you wish to use a PowerPoint presentation and be prepared to rationalize its use. Generally PowerPoint presentations should be used only for budget articles or highly complex issues.

The Moderator will have all presentations placed on the Town of Acton web site **10** days prior to the start of Town Meeting in order for town meeting members to review them prior to the meeting. In addition, all presentations will be loaded on the town computer prior to the commencement of Town Meeting. Under no circumstances will PowerPoint presentations be allowed at Town Meeting if these rules have not been met.

The following guidelines are intended to streamline the presentations made at Town Meeting, to better inform the public, and improve the visibility of such presentations.

A presentation to Town Meeting whether in PowerPoint or as a short verbal presentation should answer the following basic questions:

1. What is the need or problem?
2. What is the proposed solution and why is it the best solution?
3. How much will it cost and how will it be funded (if applicable)?
4. What are the implications if this article does not pass?

Presentations will generally be limited to **5-8** minutes by the proponent.

The Moderator generally holds a pre-Town Meeting conference and this will be used in part to discuss any requests to exceed this time limitation.

Do not try to anticipate all arguments against your presentation as you deliver it – these are likely to come up during the debate and the Moderator will allow the presenter to respond to questions as well as to any issues that are raised that are factual in nature.

If you are giving a PowerPoint presentation, assume the Town's residents will have read the warrant and likely reviewed the presentation ahead of time. **DO NOT** read the text of the PowerPoint to the audience – the bullets on the slides should serve as a springboard for your remarks.

As of 2018-10-21

In this vein it is important that you rehearse your presentation prior to Town Meeting to be sure it meets the time requirement.

Presentation slides should meet the following guidelines:

- Text should be in Arial, Times Roman or Verdana, minimum 28 point font with titles at least 32 point font.
- The motion should be included as the first and last page of the presentation
- Do not exceed 6-7 lines per slide
- Maximize the contrast between text and background for greatest clarity for the audience
- Graphs, charts, maps and tables should have clearly visible titles and labels; detailed graphs and tables should be available in hard copy or be included in the warrant.
- Since the presenter is allotted 5-8 minutes and a good rule of thumb is one minute per slide, most presentations should be less than 10 pages in length

Carlisle

[Presentation Guidelines and Tips \(PDF\)](#)

[Template for PowerPoint Presentations \(PDF\)](#)

Rules Regarding Handouts as One Enters Town Meeting

- Those wishing to provide handouts and other informational material should consult with the Town Clerk and/or the Moderator in advance of the meeting.
- Flyers and other informational material are allowed as long as they are issued by Town Boards or Committees and/or relate directly to the business of Town Meeting.
- No political flyers or signs will be allowed inside the building in which Town Meeting is being held.

Source??

Rules for Civil Debate at Town Meeting

Town Meeting is a time honored tradition that dates back almost 300 years in Massachusetts. It is a unique form of government and represents democracy in its purest form where voters actively participate in decisions about how we govern ourselves. From the beginning, the meetings have been subject to certain rules and procedures. These are required to maintain order and promote efficiency.

Bedford:

The Town of Bedford respects and recognizes each citizen's right to free speech. In order to guarantee all people's right to free speech and to ensure productive civil discourse, we request that all citizens respect the following guidelines.

Recognize a person's right to advocate ideas that are different from your own.

"Democracy is a means of living together despite our differences. Democratic deliberation is an alternative to physical violence. It is predicated on the assumption that it's possible to disagree agreeably, that it's better to laugh than cry, that one can vigorously contest the positions of one's adversary without questioning his or her personal integrity or motivation, and that parties to a debate are entitled to the presumption that their views are legitimate if not correct." -Thomas Mann

Show respect for others.

- Discuss policies and ideas, not people
- Only one person should be speaking at any given time
- Use helpful, not hurtful language.

Speak as you would like to be spoken to.

- Use courtesy titles (Mr., Ms., Sir, etc.) and ask if unsure
- Restate ideas when asked
- Use a civil tone of voice

Agree to listen.

- Respectfully hear and listen to differing points of view
- When unsure, clarify what you heard
- Realize that what you say and what people understand you to have said may be different
- Recognize that people can agree to disagree

Speak for yourself, not others.

- Speak from your own experience
- Use "I" statements ("I think that the ideas presented...")

Wellesley:

DEBATE

A. Persons Authorized

All residents of Wellesley, whether or not Town Meeting Members or registered voters, may address the Meeting. Non-residents may address the Meeting with the approval of the Moderator or a majority of the Meeting.

B. Permission of the Moderator

Persons wishing to address the Meeting shall raise their hand or stand and wait until they are recognized by the Moderator and no one shall address the Meeting without first requesting and receiving the permission of the Moderator.

C. Identification of Speaker

Each person addressing the Meeting shall begin by stating his or her name and precinct, if a resident of Wellesley, or place of residence if a non-resident

D. Conduct

All remarks should be limited to the subject then under discussion. It is improper to indulge in references to personalities and all expressions of approval or disapproval, such as applause or booing, are out of order. The Moderator may request any person to keep silent. If, after warning from the Moderator, a person refuses to be silent or persists in other disorderly behavior, the Moderator may order such person to withdraw and if he or she fails to withdraw, may order a police officer to remove such person from the Meeting.

E. Personal or Financial Interest

Individuals who have a personal or financial interest with respect to a matter may speak or vote thereon but should frankly disclose their interest before speaking. However, no Town Meeting Member should accept compensation for speaking to or voting at the Meeting.

F. Time

There is no time limit to the debate of any question. Accordingly, motions to limit time for debate or to call the question are not in order. However, each individual who speaks to the Meeting should make an effort to be as brief as possible, out of consideration for the others attending the Meeting and the need to give adequate time to all matters coming before it. The Moderator may request that all persons who intend to speak for more than five minutes give him/her notice before the start of the session.

G. Repeated Speaking

In order to give all a fair opportunity to speak, no one who has addressed the Meeting on any particular motion shall speak again, except to answer questions, until all others wishing to speak to the motion have done so.

H. Maps

The Planning Board has slides of Town maps available for use at all Meetings and may be requested on reasonable notice to make available a slide of any map appropriate to the subject under discussion.

Westborough:

Discussion Conducted?

At each session of the meeting, after preliminary activities the Moderator introduces each article in order. The department or individual responsible for it is asked to make an appropriate motion and explain the supporting reasons. While articles may be general in their wording, motions are always specific. For example, a specific source of funds is selected. The Town Meeting acts on motions, not articles. A motion may be identical to the article under which it is made, or it may differ, either from the outset or through amendment. However, it may not go beyond the scope of the article.

No one may speak without first being recognized by the Moderator. Voters who wish to be recognized may stand in line near one of the microphones placed in the auditorium.

What Are the Guidelines For Speaking at the Meeting?

Each speaker begins by giving their name and street address for identification. After introductory statements, a maximum of **three to five** minutes per speech is a good guideline.

It is our long-standing tradition not to applaud, heckle or interrupt at any time when debate is in progress, out of courtesy and mutual respect for one another and our differing opinions. No one may speak more than twice on any question until others who have not spoken and who wish to be heard have had an opportunity to speak; even then, the consent of the meeting must be obtained. Exceptions to this rule are made for those speaking simply to answer a question, or supply information requested.

Although it should not be done prematurely, a voter who feels that there has been sufficient discussion may move to end debate. However, it is our custom not to allow this motion as part of a speech, not even a short one. A voter who wishes to propose that debate be ended must first be recognized and identify himself or herself; then he or she should simply say, "I move that debate be ended." If in the Moderator's view there has been sufficient opportunity for debate, the motion will be accepted and put to a vote.