

UXBRIDGE

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:

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 may be zero.

The Moderator – 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, record its proceedings. 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 (or advisory committees) “shall consider any or all municipal questions for the purpose of making reports or recommendations to the town”. [MGL, Chapter 39, Sec. 16]

Other Boards and Committees – When appropriate other committees, like 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 and 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 is taken by votes upon motions. An article limits of the area within which the meeting may act. 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.

Debate:

Following any presentation by the sponsor of the article and upon hearing the recommendations of the town committee and boards, the motion will be opened up for debate.

- All comments will 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 it 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.

Vote:

Once debate is concluded or a motion is passed to end debate a vote is taken on the motion before the meeting. Massachusetts General Law [MGL] and town by-laws determine the vote required for passage.

To Dissolve the Meeting:

A motion to dissolve the meeting 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 the 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