

## **Guide to Citizens Petitions for Acton Town Meeting**

### **Instructions/Forms for Submission or Petition Articles for Town Meeting Warrant**

The [attached forms](#) are intended to serve as the proper process and format for submitting a petition article for insertion into a warrant for the Annual Town Meeting or a Special Town Meeting and should be used for all petition article submissions. Under Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 39, Section 10:

- Ten (10) registered voters of the Town may submit a petition article for inclusion in the Annual Town Meeting warrant.
- One hundred (100) registered voters of the Town may submit a petition article for inclusion in a Special Town Meeting warrant.
- Two hundred (200) registered voters of the Town may submit a petition to hold a Special Town Meeting.

You may copy the petition page as needed to secure enough signatures.

In addition to submitting the petition by the announced deadline for any Town Meeting, the petition article wording should be emailed to [clerk@actonma.gov](mailto:clerk@actonma.gov).

### **Guide to Citizens Petitions**

If you are a registered voter in Acton and attend Town Meeting, you are a member of Acton's legislature. Members may submit articles by citizen petition for the Meeting's consideration by using the following process.

#### **Process for citizen petition from idea to town meeting**

1. If a voter or group of voters has an idea that they believe is suitable for legislative/town meeting deliberation and vote, the first thing to do is to bring that idea to the relevant board or committee. There may be more than one board or committee that could have jurisdiction over the article's topic. The voters will then learn if that idea is already in progress for submission to Town Meeting. If so, the group can get behind the article to help it pass. If there isn't already an article, the committee or board may adopt it and include it in an article, or they may not want to adopt the idea, but could have some suggestions to help improve it. They could also oppose it.

2. Once it is determined that no board or committee is putting forth the idea, the article and summary should be drafted.
3. Gather feedback from multiple sources, including an attorney, to ensure the wording is in proper form to be considered by Town Meeting. **The Town's attorney is not available to the public for this purpose.** This will help ensure that the article says and does what is intended. Revise as needed to be as concise and as clear as possible, yet thorough enough that readers will understand what action the petitioner is seeking. Be sure it is clear what action the Meeting will take and potentially require or expect with a yes vote.
4. Finalize the language. **Once the language is finalized and the petition has been signed, it cannot be changed, including misunderstandings and errors of intent, content, or grammar.** The article and summary will be included in the warrant as written. The warrant is the agenda and the "notification" to voters about what will be included in the upcoming Town Meeting.
5. Ten registered voters must sign the article petition to be included in the warrant. More signatures are recommended to ensure that there are enough valid signatures included.
6. Submit the petition to the Town Clerk by the deadline set by the Selectboard, normally several weeks before Town Meeting.
7. While there is no requirement to engage voters to inform them and advocate for the article, it is recommended.
8. Petition articles are subject to review by the Finance Committee for any article requisitioning an appropriation of funds; by the Planning Board for zoning articles; and by the Select Board for all articles. The lead petitioner of each petition article will be notified of the date of a hearing or deliberation by the appropriate Town Board. If the Town Board supports the article, the Town will prepare the motion for consideration by Town Meeting. Town Counsel will review the submitted petition articles and opine as to their legal effect.
9. Submit any slides to the IT Department and the Moderator early in the week before Town Meeting and attend the Moderator's Meeting during that week. The presentation and any slides should be substantially completed at that time. Proponents should expect 5 minutes to present their article to the voters at Town Meeting.

10. Finally, attend Town Meeting. The lead petitioner is responsible for moving and presenting the article. Citizen Petitions are normally taken last on the warrant in the order in which they were submitted to the Town Clerk.

To recap:

1. Bring your idea to the appropriate board or committee with jurisdiction over the subject of your article. There may be more than one.
  - a. They may already have this idea in progress for an article
  - b. They may adopt your idea and include it in an article
  - c. They may not want to adopt your idea, but could have some suggestions for you
  - d. They may be opposed
2. Draft an article and a summary
3. Gather feedback from multiple sources to be sure that it says and does what you intend
  - a. Revise as needed to be concise and as clear as possible
4. Finalize the language - it cannot be changed once the petition is signed and submitted
5. Collect signatures
  - a. Ten signatures are required, but more will ensure that there are enough valid signatures
6. Submit to the Town Clerk by the deadline
  - a. Citizen petitions will be on the warrant in the order that they are submitted
7. Advocate and engage in community outreach to inform voters about your article
8. Attend any board or committee hearings related to the petition
9. Attend the moderator's meeting about one week before Town Meeting
  - a. Your presentation should be nearly done, and any slides submitted before the meeting
10. Attend Town Meeting
  - a. Present your article (5 minutes)

Amendments

Legislators (Voters/Town Meeting Members) may propose amendments to articles on the warrant. The proposed amendment must be within the scope of the article and submitted in writing to the Moderator, Town Clerk, Counsel, and IT staff. If the amendment is known before the meeting, it should be submitted as soon as the language is finalized. If a voter decides during deliberation to propose an amendment, they must submit it in writing to the moderator

before it can be acted upon. The voter can make the motion to amend and then submit the written language in real time.