

## **Moderator's Rules and Parliamentary Procedure for Town Meeting**

Town Meeting is a time honored tradition that dates back almost 300 years in Massachusetts. It represents democracy in its purest form where voters actively participate in decisions about how we govern ourselves. Since town meetings were first held in New England they have been subject to various rules, including initially the fact that all men eligible to vote were *required* to attend each and every town meeting. We do not have such a requirement today (perhaps we should!), but certain rules and procedures are required in an effort to make Town Meeting enjoyable and efficient. In adopting these rules, I hope to balance the two most frequent (and somewhat conflicting) complaints I hear about Town Meeting: (1) it takes too long because people speak too long and (2) there is not enough debate. Most importantly, I will strive to apply the rules consistently, relying largely on past precedent as well as some new initiatives which I hope will produce an enjoyable experience for all who attend. If so, please let your neighbors know so we can increase the interest in and attendance at Town Meeting!

### **Rules of Town Meeting**

1. 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. The name of the sponsoring organization must appear on the flyer/handout. No political flyers or signs will be allowed inside the building in which Town Meeting is being held.
2. Pro and con microphones will be set up in the meeting hall or auditorium.. If you wish to make a comment, approach an appropriate mike and wait to be recognized by the Moderator. Those with questions may use any microphone. We will attempt to accommodate those who cannot access a microphone by the use of a portable mike. If you wish to be recognized and cannot go to a mike, raise your hand and request a portable mike.
3. The motion is read by the Moderator and must be seconded. Simply call out “second” once the motion is read and that will put the article “in play.” The motion is what is voted on, not the article that appears in the warrant. The motion should, however, strongly resemble the article. The motion will also appear on the screen for audience members while it is being read.
4. Once the motion is made and seconded, the mover speaks first followed by the appropriate town Boards (typically the Selectmen and the Finance Committee) who will state their recommendation on the motion. Presenters (movers) are generally allowed 8 minutes to present an article to Town Meeting. If a presenter has a pressing need to speak for more than 8 minutes they must discuss the reasoning for extra time with the Moderator ahead of the meeting. If someone

wishes to make a rebuttal presentation, they must consult with the Moderator ahead of the meeting and follow all rules set out regarding presentations (see link to rules regarding presentations). Rebuttal presenters will be allowed 5 minutes for their presentation.

5. Any registered voter may speak to an article, but all must speak politely and respectfully. Civility is mandatory. Voters must be recognized by the Moderator and first give their name and address. The time limit for comments is 2 minutes. Brevity and new points are encouraged. Repetition of the same points suggests that it is time to call the question to cut off debate. Priority will be given to first time speakers, but voters can speak to an issue more than once if necessary.
6. Questions are allowed and encouraged, and are directed to the Moderator who shall determine the person to respond. Upon receipt of an answer a brief comment by the person who posed the question is permitted.
7. Voting is typically done initially by voice. We hope to implement electronic voting so that if the vote is close and the Moderator is unable to discern the outcome of a voice vote, we will turn immediately to electronic voting to determine the result of the vote.
8. The Moderator will generally accept a motion to cut off debate (“move the previous question”) once, in the Moderator’s determination, there has been enough debate that town meeting members are sufficiently informed as to the pros and cons of the motion.

The following are the more formal parliamentary procedures drawn from *Town Meeting Times*:

Add table and text from back end of warrant under “More Formal Parliamentary Procedure”