

TOWN MEETING GUIDE

What is a Town Meeting?

The Town Meeting is the occasion when the voters of the Town assemble to vote and act upon various Articles contained in the Warrant. The Town Moderator conducts the Meeting.

What is a Warrant?

A Warrant is the written notice delivered by the Board of Selectmen to all residences which lists the date, location and time of the upcoming Town Meeting. The Warrant also contains a list of Articles to be considered and debated at Town Meeting. Per our Town Charter, Warrants are mailed out at least 14 days prior to each Town Meeting, and are also made available at the Post Offices and on the town's website.

How often does Abington have a Town Meeting?

The Annual Town Meeting is held on the first Monday in April of every year, and it called to order at 7pm. Special Town Meetings may be called as needed, either by the Board of Selectmen or upon a petition of 200 registered voters of the Town.

Who may attend Town Meeting?

Any person may attend our Town Meeting, but only registered voters of Abington may vote. Non-resident town officials are allowed to speak at Town Meeting, and they may sit with their respective boards or committees. Other non-residents and non-voters must sit in the "non-voter seating section", and will only be allowed to speak if Town Meeting votes to allow it.

What is a Precinct? How do I check in at Town Meeting?

Our Town is divided into 4 geographical sections, or "Precincts". If you do not know which Precinct you live in, there will be posted lists of each Precinct and the streets included therein. Residents of Precincts 1 & 2 must check in via one entrance door (follow the signs), and 3 & 4 at the other. Please provide your name and street address to the tellers, and they will check to confirm that you are on the list of registered voters.

What is the difference between an Article and a Motion?

The Articles contained in the Warrant must contain a sufficient description of whatever is proposed to be voted upon at Town Meeting. A motion must be made by a voter in order to take action on each printed Article. Typical motions are motions to approve, to "pass over" (reject), or to amend an Article. A member of the Finance Committee is usually asked to make the first motion for each Article. If a voter moves to take an action which is beyond the scope of the printed Article, the Moderator may rule the motion to be out of order.

What are the voting procedures at Town Meeting?

Ordinarily, votes are taken by voice vote. After sufficient debate has concluded, the Moderator will ask "all those in favor, please signify by saying AYE; all those opposed, please signify by saying NO". If the Moderator deems the vote to be close, he may require a show of hands or a standing count. The Town Clerk then records the result of each vote.

How do I make a motion? How do I ask a question? Can I offer an amendment to a motion? What if I don't understand something?

If you would like to speak, ask a question, or offer your opinion, please approach one of the available microphones and wait for the Moderator to recognize you. When the Moderator notifies you that it is your turn to speak, please state your name and street address before you begin. A few general rules: speak clearly into the microphone so that others can hear you; remain courteous and respectful when speaking about others, as we will expect them to act the same way toward you; you must limit your opinions to the subject matter of the Article being discussed; please keep your comments and questions as brief as possible, so that others will also have an opportunity to be heard.

If you want to:	You say:	Can you interrupt another speaker to make your motion?	Is your motion debatable?	Can your motion be amended?	What vote is required to approve the motion?
Ask voters to vote FOR an Article	"I make a motion to (state the subject matter of the Article)..."	No	Yes	Yes	Most require majority vote; statutes require some votes to be 2/3, 4/5 or 9/10 votes
Ask voters to vote AGAINST an Article	"I make a motion to pass over this article", and then provide your reasons, if desired	No	Yes	No	Majority; but if a Motion to approve an article is also made, the "positive" motion will be voted first
Amend the wording of a motion	"I move that the motion be amended to read..."	No	Yes	Yes	Majority
Ask the Moderator to stop the debate and take a vote	"I move the question"	No	No	No	Majority
Ask for clarification or information before a vote is taken	"Mr. Moderator, Point of Information"	If urgent and to the point	No	No	No vote; Moderator's discretion
Object to an error in procedure, or object to a personal attack	"Mr. Moderator, Point of Order"	Yes	No	No	Moderator decides
Reconsider a Vote which was already taken	"I move we reconsider Article #___ because..."	No	Yes, if the original motion was debatable	No	Majority

Does Town Meeting follow any formal Rules of Procedure?

Town Meeting follows the procedures outlined in the latest edition of *Town Meeting Time: A Handbook of Parliamentary Law*, except as otherwise provided by the Massachusetts General Laws, Abington's General Bylaws, the Town Charter, or in some circumstances, traditions set by many years of prior meetings. *Town Meeting Time* is a handbook of parliamentary law which is prepared and edited by the Massachusetts Moderators Association. The procedures detailed in this handbook are simpler and easier to understand than the well-known but more rigid *Robert's Rules of Order*.

What roles do the Moderator and Town Clerk perform?

Both the Moderator and the Town Clerk are elected by the residents of Abington. At Town Meeting, the Town Clerk is required to record the results of all votes and to keep the minutes of the meeting. For that reason, it is important for all speakers to clearly state their name and address to the Clerk before they begin speaking. The Moderator serves as the presiding officer of Town Meeting, and must decide all questions of order and must make public declaration of all votes. The Moderator's goal is to conduct the Town Meeting in an impartial yet expeditious manner, allowing all points of view to be heard, while keeping the process moving. All speakers should direct their comments and questions to the Moderator, and he will in turn recognize the appropriate person or town official to provide your requested information.

How are Articles inserted into the Warrant?

Articles are inserted by a vote of the Board of Selectmen. Per our Town Charter, any board, committee or official can submit an Article for consideration by the Selectmen. Residents can file an Article by petition, and such an Article must then be inserted into the Warrant. For an Annual Town Meeting, a submitted petition article must be supported by the signatures of 10 registered Abington voters; for a Special Town Meeting, 100 signatures are required. The Town Clerk's Office can provide you with more information about the procedures required for petition articles.

What is the quorum requirement at Town Meetings?

Currently, we must have 150 registered Abington voters (the quorum requirement) at Town Meeting in order to start any Annual or Special Town Meeting.

What are the roles of the various Boards and Committees relative to Town Meeting?

Town Manager & Board of Selectmen: Prepares the Warrant for each Town Meeting and are available at Town Meeting to explain and answer questions concerning the various articles. They also submit their recommended Town Budget for the upcoming fiscal year at each Annual Town Meeting. The Selectmen are unpaid volunteers who are elected by the residents of Abington for staggered 3-year terms.

Finance Committee: Reports upon and makes recommendations (usually in the form of motions) for each article in the Warrant, including the Town Budget usually found in Article 3 of the Annual Town Meeting Warrant. The "FinCom" is comprised of nine unpaid volunteer residents who are appointed by the Moderator. The FinCom submits their own proposed Budget at the Annual Town Meeting which may be similar, identical, or vastly different from the Budget proposed by the Town Manager/Board of Selectmen.

Town Counsel: Answers questions concerning legal matters which may arise during the course of the Town Meeting, or which may arise as a result of votes to be taken during Town Meeting.

School Committee: Speaks upon and is available to answer questions on school-related articles and other articles which are under their jurisdiction and control. By state law, the School Committee has sole authority over the specific line items contained in the school budget. School Committee members are unpaid volunteers who are elected by the residents of Abington for staggered 3-year terms.

Planning Board: Makes recommendations upon those articles which are within their area of responsibility, such as zoning amendments and street acceptances. Planning Board members are unpaid volunteers who are elected by residents of Abington for staggered 5-year terms.

How can I get more information?

Town Clerk's Office: 781-982-2112

Moderator Shawn P. Reilly: 781-878-2568 x15

Town Manager & Selectmen's Office: 781-982-2100

A Citizen's Guide to Abington's Town Meeting



This Town Meeting Guide includes answers to frequently asked questions concerning the Town Meeting process.

The information provided herein is necessarily brief. More information can be found in the applicable provisions of our Town's General Bylaws, our Town Charter, and the General Laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

This pamphlet has been prepared by Town Moderator Shawn P. Reilly. If you have any questions or suggested revisions, please contact me at 781-878-2568 x15. Additional copies of this pamphlet may be obtained at the Town Clerk's Office and on the town's website.

www.AbingtonMass.com