

MASS. 559.2:C 49/2



Citizen's Guide to

Town Meetings



Published by
William Francis Galvin
Secretary of the Commonwealth
Citizen Information Service

GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS
COLLECTION

OCT 27 2000

University of Massachusetts
Depository Copy





*An Important Message for all
Massachusetts Town Residents,*

The purest form of democratic governing is practiced in a Town Meeting. In use for over 300 years and still today, it has proven to be a valuable means for many Massachusetts taxpayers to voice their opinions and directly effect change in their communities. Here in this ancient American assembly, you can make your voice heard as you and your neighbors decide the course of the government closest to you. This booklet outlines the forms and procedures used in Massachusetts Town Meetings. As the Commonwealth's information officer, I urge you to read it and make use of it as you engage in the debates and votes that give shape to your Town Government.

William Francis Galvin

William Francis Galvin,
Secretary of the Commonwealth

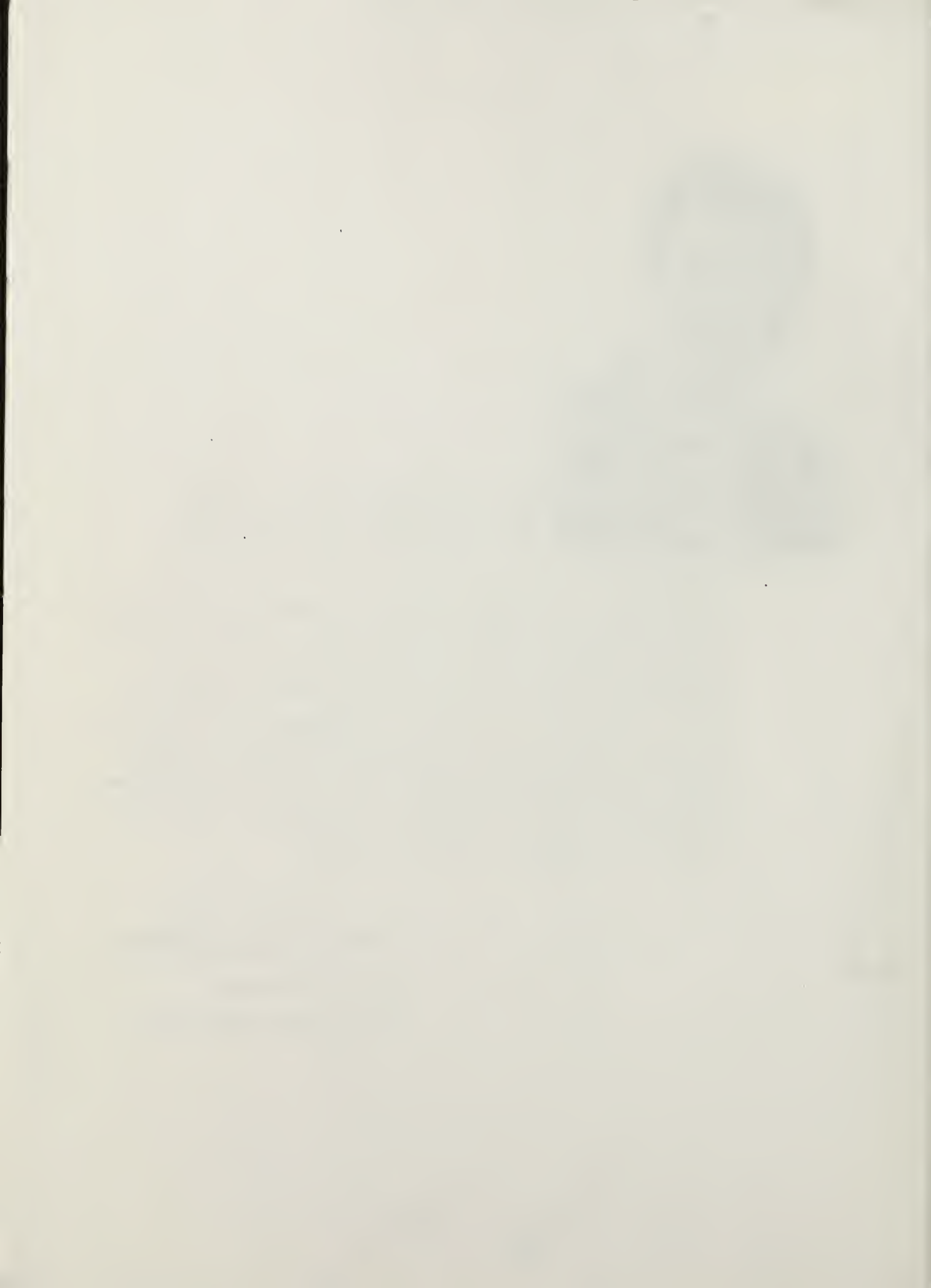


TABLE OF CONTENTS

Town Meeting Schedules	7
Town Meeting Basics	23
Open Town Meetings and Representative Town Meetings	23
Annual and Special Town Meetings	25
The Warrant.....	27
How Town Meetings Operate.....	28
Participating in Town Meetings	29
Procedure and Motions	30
After the Representative Town Meeting Dissolves	32
Conclusion.....	33
Bibliography.....	34
Acknowledgments	34



TOWN MEETING SCHEDULES

Town	Election	Annual Town Meeting	Open or Representative
Abington	1st Saturday after 1st Monday in May	1st Monday in May	Open
Acton	Tuesday before 1st Monday in April	1st Monday in April	Open
Acushnet	1st Monday in April	4th Monday in April	Open
Adams	1st Monday in May	Day After Memorial Day	Representative
Agawam	1st Tuesday in November	Town Council	
Alford	3rd Wednesday in May	2nd Tuesday in May	Open
Amesbury	Tuesday following 1st Monday in November	<i>Please contact Town Clerk at (508) 881-0101</i>	
Amherst	Set by Selectmen	4th Monday in April and 4th Monday in October	Representative
Andover	4th Tuesday in March	1st Monday and Tuesday of April, 1st Monday and Tuesday of May	Open
Aquinnah	2nd Wednesday in May	2nd Tuesday in May	Open
Arlington	1st Saturday in April	4th Monday in April	Representative
Ashburnham	4th Tuesday in April	1st Saturday in April	Open
Ashby	Last Monday in April	1st Saturday in May	Open
Ashfield	1st Saturday in May	1st Saturday in May	Open
Ashland	1st Tuesday in May	Wednesday following elections in May	Open
Athol	1st Monday in April	4th Monday following elections in May	Representative
Auburn	3rd Thursday in May	1st Thursday in May	Representative
Avon	2nd Monday in April	1st Tuesday in May	Open

Town	Election	Annual Town Meeting	Open or Representative
Ayer	4th Monday in April	2nd Tuesday in May	Open
Barnstable	1st Tuesday in November	Town Council	
Barre	1st Monday in March	June, Set by Selectmen	Open
Becket	3rd Saturday in May	2nd Saturday in May	Open
Bedford	1st Saturday in March	4th Monday in March	Open
Belchertown	3rd Monday in May	2nd Monday in May	Open
Bellingham	1st Tuesday in May	4th Wednesday in May	Open
Belmont	1st Monday in April	4th Monday in April	Representative
Berlin	2nd Monday in May	1st Monday in May	Open
Bernardston	1st Monday in May	1st Monday in May	Open
Billerica	1st Saturday in April	1st Tuesday in May and 1st Tuesday in October	Representative
Blackstone	1st Monday in April	Last Tuesday in May	Open
Blandford	1st Saturday in May	2nd Monday in May	Open
Bolton	2nd Monday in May	1st Monday in May	Open
Bourne	1st Wednesday in April	2nd Monday in May	Open
Boxborough	3rd Monday in May	2nd Monday in May	Open
Boxford	3rd Tuesday in May	2nd Tuesday in May	Open
Boylston	1st Monday in May	2nd Monday in May	Open
Braintree	1st Tuesday in April	1st Monday in May	Representative
Brewster	3rd Tuesday in May	1st Monday in May	Open
Bridgewater	4th Saturday in April	1st Monday in May	Open
Brimfield	1st Monday in May	3rd Monday in June	Open
Brookfield	1st Saturday in May	1st Friday following elections in May	Open

Town	Election	Annual Town Meeting	Open or Representative
Brookline	1st or 2nd Tuesday in May, Set by Selectmen	Set by Selectmen	Representative
Buckland	1st Wednesday in May	1st Monday in May	Open
Burlington	April, Set by Selectman	2nd Monday in May	Representative
Canton	1st Tuesday in April	Last Monday in April	Open
Carlisle	Set by Selectmen	Set by Selectmen	Open
Carver	2nd Saturday in April	Set by Selectmen	Open
Charlemont	1st Monday in May	1st Monday in May	Open
Charlton	1st Saturday in May	3rd Monday in May	Open
Chatham	2nd Thursday in May	2nd Monday in May	Open
Chelmsford	1st Tuesday in April	Last Monday in April	Representative
Cheshire	1st Monday in May	2nd Monday in May	Open
Chester	1st Saturday in May	1st Saturday in May	Open
Chesterfield	1st Monday in May	2nd Monday in May	Open
Chilmark	Last Wednesday in April	Last Monday in April	Open
Clarksburg	3rd Tuesday in May	3rd Wednesday in May	Open
Clinton	1st Monday in May	Last Monday in April	Open
Cohasset	Set by Selectmen within 35 days after Town Meeting	Last Saturday in March	Open
Colrain	1st Monday in May	1st Tuesday in May	Open
Concord	March, Set by Selectmen	April, Set by Selectmen	Open
Conway	Thursday in April following Town Meeting	2nd Monday in April	Open
Cummington	1st Friday in May	1st Friday in May	Open
Dalton	1st Monday in May	1st Monday in May	Open

Town	Election	Annual Town Meeting	Open or Representative
Danvers	1st Tuesday in May	3rd Monday in May	Representative
Dartmouth	Set by Selectmen	Set by Selectmen	Representative
Dedham	3rd Saturday in March	2nd Monday in April	Representative
Deerfield	1st Monday in May	Last Monday in April	Open
Dennis	3rd Tuesday in May	1st Tuesday following 1st Monday in May	Open
Dighton	1st Monday in March	1st Monday in May	Open
Douglas	2nd Tuesday in May	Monday following elections in May	Open
Dover	3rd Monday in May	1st Monday in May	Open
Dracut	1st Monday in May	1st Monday in June	Open
Dudley	1st Monday in May	3rd Monday in May	Open
Dunstable	3rd Monday in May	2nd Monday in May	Open
Duxbury	4th Saturday in March	2nd Saturday in March	Open
East Bridgewater	2nd Saturday in April	1st Monday in April	Open
East Brookfield	1st Tuesday in May	1st Monday in May	Open
East Longmeadow	2nd Tuesday in April	1st Monday in May	Open
Eastham	3rd Tuesday in May	1st Monday in May	Open
Easthampton	Tuesday following 1st Monday in November	City Council	
Easton	4th Monday in April	2nd Monday in April	Open
Edgartown	2nd Thursday in April	2nd Tuesday in April	Open
Egremont	<i>Please contact Town Clerk at (413) 528-0182</i>		Open
Erving	1st Monday in May	1st Saturday in May	Open
Essex	2nd Monday in May	1st Monday in May	Open

Town	Election	Annual Town Meeting	Open or Representative
Fairhaven	1st Monday in April	1st Saturday in May	Representative
Falmouth	Set by Selectmen	Set by Selectmen	Representative
Florida	1st Monday in May	June, Set by Selectmen	Open
Foxborough	1st Monday in May	2nd Monday in May	Open
Framingham	1st Tuesday in March	3rd Tuesday in April	Representative
Franklin	Tuesday following 1st Monday in November	Town Council	
Freetown	1st Monday in March	1st Monday in May	Open
Georgetown	2nd Monday in May	Set by Selectmen	Open
Gill	3rd Monday in May	1st Saturday in May	Open
Goshen	1st Saturday in May	3rd Monday in May	Open
Gosnold	3rd Monday in May	3rd Monday in May	Open
Grafton	1st Monday in May	2nd Monday in May	Open
Granby	3rd Monday in May	1st Monday in June	Open
Granville	2nd Monday in April	2nd Monday in May	Open
Great Barrington	Set by Selectmen	Set by Selectmen	Open
Greenfield	2nd Tuesday in June	Town Council	
Groton	3rd Monday in May	Last Monday in April	Open
Groveland	1st Monday in May	4th Monday in April	Open
Hadley	2nd Tuesday in April	1st Thursday in May	Open
Halifax	2nd Saturday in May	2nd Monday in May	Open
Hamilton	2nd Thursday following Town Meeting	1st Monday in May	Open
Hampden	1st Monday in May	Last Monday in April	Open
Hancock	1st Monday in May	3rd Monday in May	Open

Town	Election	Annual Town Meeting	Open or Representative
Hanover	Saturday following 1st Monday in May	1st Monday in May	Open
Hanson	3rd Saturday in May	1st Monday in May	Open
Hardwick	2nd Monday in April	2nd Saturday in May	Open
Harvard	4th Tuesday in March	Last Saturday in March	Open
Harwich	3rd Monday in May	1st Monday in May	Open
Hatfield	3rd Tuesday in May	2nd Tuesday in May	Open
Hawley	1st Monday in May	1st Monday in May	Open
Heath	1st Friday in May	1st Saturday in May	Open
Hingham	Last Saturday in April	Last Monday in April	Open
Hinsdale	Saturday following 3rd Wednesday in May	3rd Wednesday in May	Open
Holbrook	1st Tuesday in April	Set by Selectmen	Representative
Holden	2nd Monday in May	3rd Monday in May	Open
Holland	2nd Monday in June	4th Monday in June	Open
Holliston	4th Tuesday in May	2nd Tuesday in May	Open
Hopedale	2nd Tuesday in May	2nd Tuesday in April	Open
Hopkinton	3rd Monday in May	1st Monday in May	Open
Hubbardston	2nd Tuesday in May	Set by Selectmen	Open
Hudson	2nd Monday in May	1st Monday in May	Open
Hull	3rd Monday in May	Set by Selectmen	Open
Huntington	3rd Saturday in May	1st Monday in May	Open
Ipswich	2nd Tuesday in April	1st Monday in April	Open
Kingston	1st Saturday in May	2nd Saturday in May	Open
Lakeville	1st Saturday in May	2nd Monday in May	Open

Town	Election	Annual Town Meeting	Open or Representative
Lancaster	2nd Monday in May	1st Monday in May	Open
Lanesborough	3rd Tuesday in June	2nd Tuesday in June	Open
Lee	3rd Monday in May	2nd Thursday in May	Representative
Leicester	1st Monday in April	1st Monday in May	Open
Lenox	2nd Monday in May	1st Friday in May	Open
Leverett	Last Saturday in April	Last Saturday in April	Open
Lexington	1st Monday in March	Set by Selectmen	Representative
Leyden	3rd Monday in May	3rd Monday in May	Open
Lincoln	Last Monday in March	Last Saturday in March	Open
Littleton	1st Saturday in May	Monday following 1st Saturday in May	Open
Longmeadow	2nd Tuesday in May	2nd Tuesday in May	Open
Ludlow	4th Monday in March	1st Monday in May	Open
Lunenburg	1st Saturday in May	2nd Saturday in May	Open
Lynnfield	2nd Monday in April	Last Monday in April	Open
Manchester	2nd Monday in May	1st Monday in April	Open
Mansfield	3rd Monday in March	1st Saturday in April	Open
Marblehead	2nd Monday in May	1st Monday in May	Open
Marion	Last Friday in April	Last Monday in April	Open
Marshfield	Last Saturday in April	4th Monday in April	Open
Mashpee	Saturday following 1st Town Meeting	1st Monday in May and 1st Monday in October	Open
Mattapoissett	1st Tuesday in April	3rd Monday in May	Open
Maynard	1st Monday in May	3rd Monday in May	Open
Medfield	Last Monday in March	Last Monday in April	Open

Town	Election	Annual Town Meeting	Open or Representative
Medway	1st Monday in May	2nd Monday in May	Open
Mendon	1st Monday in May	Friday following elections in May	Open
Merrimac	2nd Monday in May	1st Monday in May	Open
Methuen	Tuesday following 1st Monday in November	Town Council	
Middleborough	1st Saturday in April	4th Monday in April	Open
Middlefield	1st Saturday in May	1st Saturday in May	Open
Middleton	Monday following Town Meeting in May	2nd Tuesday in May	Open
Milford	1st Monday in April	Set by Selectmen	Representative
Millbury	Last Tuesday in April	1st Tuesday in May	Open
Millis	1st Monday in May	2nd Monday in May	Open
Millville	1st Monday in April	2nd Monday in May	Open
Milton	Last Tuesday in April	1st Monday in May	Representative
Monroe	1st Monday in May	1st Monday in May	Open
Monson	2nd Monday in March	2nd Monday in May	Open
Montague	3rd Monday in May	1st Saturday in May	Representative
Monterey	1st Saturday in May	1st Saturday in May	Open
Montgomery	1st Monday in May	2nd Tuesday in May	Open
Mount Washington	2nd Tuesday in May	1st Tuesday in May	Open
Nahant	Last Saturday in April	Last Saturday in April	Open
Nantucket	1st Tuesday in April	3rd Monday in April	Open
Natick	Last Tuesday in March	2nd Tuesday in April	Representative
Needham	2nd Monday in April	1st Monday in May	Open

Town	Election	Annual Town Meeting	Open or Representative
New Ashford	4th Tuesday in May	3rd Tuesday in May	Open
New Braintree	1st Monday in May	2nd Monday in May	Open
New Marlborough	2nd Monday in May	1st Monday in May	Open
New Salem	1st Monday in May	2nd Monday in May	Open
Newbury	2nd Tuesday in May	4th Tuesday in April	Open
Norfolk	1st Tuesday in May	1st Saturday in May	Open
North Andover	3rd Tuesday in March	2nd Saturday in May	Open
North Attleborough	1st Monday in April	4th Monday in April	Representative
North Brookfield	1st Monday in May	1st Friday in May	Open
North Reading	Tuesday following 1st Monday in May	1st Monday in April and 1st Monday in October	Open
Northbridge	3rd Tuesday in May	1st Tuesday in May	Open
Northfield	1st Tuesday in May	1st Monday in May	Open
Norton	Last Monday in April	2nd Monday in May and 1st Monday in October	Open
Norwell	Saturday following 2nd Monday in March	Set by Selectmen	Open
Norwood	1st Monday in April	2nd Monday in May	Representative
Oak Bluffs	2nd Thursday in April	2nd Thursday in April	Open
Oakham	3rd Monday in May	2nd Monday in May	Open
Orange	1st Monday in March	1st Monday in May	Open
Orleans	3rd Tuesday in May	2nd Monday in May	Open
Otis	4th Tuesday in May	3rd Tuesday in May	Open
Oxford	3rd Tuesday in May	1st Friday in May	Open
Palmer	3rd Tuesday in April	Last Monday in April	Open

Town	Election	Annual Town Meeting	Open or Representative
Paxton	2nd Monday in May	1st Monday in May	Open
Pelham	2nd Monday in May	2nd Monday in May	Open
Pembroke	Last Saturday in April	4th Tuesday in April	Open
Pepperell	4th Monday in April	1st Monday in May	Open
Peru	3rd Monday in April	1st Saturday in June	Open
Petersham	1st Monday in March	3rd Monday in June	Open
Phillipston	1st Monday in May	1st Wednesday in May	Open
Plainfield	<i>Please contact Town Clerk at (413) 634-5417</i>		
Plainville	1st Monday in April	Last Monday in April	Open
Plymouth	2nd Saturday in May	1st Saturday in April	Representative
Princeton	2nd Monday in May	2nd Tuesday in May	Open
Provincetown	1st Tuesday in May	1st Monday in April	Open
Randolph	1st Tuesday in April	4th Monday in April	Representative
Raynham	4th Saturday in April	3rd Monday in May	Open
Reading	3rd Tuesday preceding 4th Monday in April	4th Monday in April	Representative
Rehoboth	1st Monday in April	2nd Monday in April	Open
Richmond	Saturday following 4th Wednesday in May	4th Wednesday in May	Open
Rochester	2nd Wednesday in April	1st Monday in June	Open
Rockland	2nd Saturday in April	3rd Monday in May	Open
Rockport	1st Tuesday in April	3rd Saturday in March	Open
Rowe	Saturday following 2nd Monday in May	2nd Monday in May	Open
Rowley	2nd Tuesday in May	2nd Monday in May	Open

Town	Election	Annual Town Meeting	Open or Representative
Royalston	1st Monday in April	1st Friday in May	Open
Russell	1st Monday in May	2nd Monday in May	Open
Rutland	2nd Monday in May	2nd Saturday in May	Open
Salisbury	2nd Tuesday in May	2nd Monday in May	Open
Sandisfield	1st Monday in May	2nd Saturday in May	Open
Sandwich	1st Thursday in May	1st Monday in May	Open
Saugus	1st Tuesday in November	1st Monday in May	Representative
Savoy	2nd Tuesday in May	1st Tuesday in May	Open
Scituate	4th Saturday in March	1st Monday in March	Open
Seekonk	1st Monday in April	May, Set by Selectmen	Open
Sharon	1st Tuesday in May	Monday following 1st Tuesday in May	Open
Sheffield	2nd Monday in May	1st Monday in May	Open
Shelburne	1st Monday of May	Tuesday following the 1st Monday in May	Open
Sherborn	2nd Tuesday in May	<i>Please contact Town Clerk at (508) 651-7853</i>	Open
Shirley	2nd Tuesday in May	Monday after 2nd Tuesday in May	Open
Shrewsbury	1st Monday in May	3rd Monday in May	Open
Shutesbury	1st Saturday in May	1st Saturday in May	Open
Somerset	2nd Monday in May	3rd Monday in May	Open
South Hadley	1st Monday in April	1st Saturday in May	Open
Southampton	1st Monday in May	1st Saturday in June	Open
Southborough	2nd Monday in May	2nd Monday in April	Open
Southbridge	1st Friday in June	Town Council	

Town	Election	Annual Town Meeting	Open or Representative
Southwick	2nd Wednesday in May	2nd Friday in May	Open
Spencer	1st Monday in May	Thursday following 1st Monday in May	Open
Sterling	3rd Monday in May	2nd Monday in May	Open
Stockbridge	3rd Monday in May	3rd Monday in May	Open
Stoneham	1st Tuesday in April	1st Monday in May	Open
Stoughton	1st Friday in April	1st Monday in May	Open
Stow	4th Tuesday in May	3rd Monday in May	Open
Sturbridge	2nd Monday in April	Last Monday in April	Open
Sudbury	Last Monday in March	1st Monday in April	Open
Sunderland	1st Saturday in May	Last Friday in April	Open
Sutton	4th Tuesday in May	2nd Monday in May and 3rd Monday in October	Open
Swampscott	4th Tuesday in April	Monday following 4th Tuesday in April	Representative
Swansea	2nd Monday in April	3rd Monday in May	Open
Templeton	1st Monday in May	2nd Tuesday in May	Open
Tewksbury	1st Saturday in April	1st Monday in May	Open
Tisbury	14 Days after Town Meeting	4th Tuesday in April	Open
Tolland	2nd Saturday in April	Set by Selectmen	Open
Topsfield	1st Thursday in May	1st Tuesday in May	Open
Townsend	Last Monday in April	1st Tuesday in May	Open
Truro	3rd Tuesday in May	2nd Tuesday in April	Open
Tyngsborough	2nd Tuesday in May	3rd Tuesday in May	Open
Tyringham	2nd Tuesday in May	3rd Monday in May	Open

Town	Election	Annual Town Meeting	Open or Representative
Upton	1st Monday in May	Saturday following 1st Monday in May	Open
Uxbridge	2nd Tuesday in April	2nd Tuesday in May	Open
Wakefield	Last Tuesday in April	Last Tuesday in April	Open
Wales	4th Tuesday in May	3rd Wednesday in May	Open
Walpole	1st Saturday in June	3rd Wednesday in May	Representative
Ware	2nd Monday in April	2nd Monday in May	Open
Wareham	Last Wednesday in April	1st Thursday in April	Open
Warren	1st Tuesday in May	2nd Wednesday in May	Open
Warwick	2nd Saturday in May	1st Monday in May	Open
Washington	3rd Saturday in May	2nd Saturday in May	Open
Watertown	1st Tuesday in November	Town Council	
Wayland	Last Thursday in April	Last Tuesday in April	Open
Webster	1st Monday in May	2nd Monday in May	Open
Wellesley	1st Tuesday in March	Set by Selectmen	Representative
Wellfleet	Monday following 4th Monday in April	4th Monday in April	Open
Wendell	1st Monday in May	Set by Selectmen	Open
Wenham	1st Saturday in May	1st Saturday in May	Open
West Boylston	1st Tuesday in April	3rd Monday in May	Open
West Bridgewater	3rd Saturday in April	3rd Saturday in April	Open
West Brookfield	1st Tuesday in May	2nd Tuesday in May	Open
West Newbury	1st Monday in May	Last Monday in April	Open
West Springfield	1st Saturday in April	Last Saturday in April	Representative
West Stockbridge	2nd Monday in May	1st Monday in May	Open

Town	Election	Annual Town Meeting	Open or Representative
West Tisbury	2nd Thursday in April	2nd Tuesday in April	Open
Westborough	1st Tuesday in March	3rd Saturday in March	Open
Westford	1st Tuesday in May	Saturday in May after 1st Tuesday	Open
Westhampton	1st Saturday in June	2nd Saturday in May	Open
Westminster	Last Tuesday in April	1st Saturday in May	Open
Weston	Set by Selectmen	Set by Selectmen	Open
Westport	2nd Monday in March	1st Tuesday in April	Open
Westwood	Last Monday in April	1st Monday in May	Open
Weymouth	Tuesday following 1st Monday in November	Town Council	
Whately	3rd Tuesday in February	Last Tuesday in April	Open
Whitman	3rd Saturday in May	1st Monday in May	Open
Wilbraham	1st Saturday in May	1st Monday in May	Open
Williamsburg	2nd Tuesday in May	3rd Tuesday in May	Open
Williamstown	2nd Tuesday in May	3rd Tuesday in May	Open
Wilmington	2nd Saturday in April	3rd Saturday in April	Open
Winchendon	1st Monday in March	1st Monday in May	Open
Winchester	Last Tuesday in March	1st Monday in November	Open
Windsor	2nd Monday in May	1st Monday in May	Open
Winthrop	1st Monday in May	4th Thursday in May	Open
Worthington	1st Saturday in May	1st Saturday in May	Open
Wrentham	1st Monday in April	Last Monday in April	Open
Yarmouth	Day following Town Meeting	1st Monday after 1st Tuesday in April	Open

TOWN MEETING BASICS

What is a Town Meeting?

A Town Meeting is both an event and an entity. As an event, it is a gathering of a town's eligible voters, and is referred to as "the Town Meeting." As an entity, it is the legislative body for towns in Massachusetts, and is referred to simply as "Town Meeting." So you may say, "I went to the Town Meeting. Town Meeting approved the budget."

Do cities have Town Meetings?

No. A city's legislative body is called a city council or a board of aldermen. Citizens do not govern a city directly.

What's the difference between cities and towns? Size?

Municipalities decide whether to have a city or town form of government. Size is one factor in the decision. Towns with less than 12,000 inhabitants cannot adopt a city form of government.

Do all towns have Town Meetings?

Most but not all towns have Town Meetings. A few towns are governed by town councils. In sum, no cities have Town Meetings and most towns do have Town Meetings.

What does Town Meeting decide?

Town Meeting decides three major things:

- It sets the salaries for the elected officials.
- It votes to appropriate money to run the town.
- It votes on the town's local statutes, which are called by-laws.

OPEN TOWN MEETINGS AND REPRESENTATIVE TOWN MEETINGS

What's an open Town Meeting?

An open Town Meeting means that all of the town's voters may vote on all matters.

What's a representative Town Meeting?

In a representative Town Meeting, also called a limited Town Meeting, all of the town's voters may vote for what are called Town Meeting Members. After the voters elect the Town Meeting Members, the Town Meeting Members conduct and vote on the rest of the Town Meeting's business.

Other than who may vote, do open Town Meetings basically operate the same way as representative Town Meetings?

Yes.

How many Town Meeting Members does a representative Town Meeting have?

Apportionment of a precinct is based on Massachusetts General Law, town charter or a special act. The total elected representative Town Meeting membership can be as few as 45

or as many as 240. The actual number of the membership is calculated in approximate proportion to the number of inhabitants in each precinct to the total number of inhabitants in the town.

How is it determined whether a town has an open Town Meeting or a representative Town Meeting?

Towns with fewer than 6,000 inhabitants must have an open Town Meeting. Towns with more than 6,000 inhabitants may adopt either form of Town Meeting at their discretion.

How are Town Meeting Members elected?

Town Meeting members are elected within precincts by ballot at the Annual Town Election. Towns have as few as two precincts, and as many as 10 or more.

One-third of the Town Meeting Members are elected for 3 years, one-third is elected for 2 years and one-third is elected for 1 year at first election after adopting a representative Town Meeting or re-districting. Thereafter each member is elected for a 3 year term.

Are Town Meeting Members elected by party?

No, Town Meeting Members are not elected by party. Elections are nonpartisan. The party affiliation of a candidate for Town Meeting Member does not appear on the ballot distributed at the Town Meeting.

How do I run for Town Meeting Member?

Most towns hold general elections. Voters go to their usual polling places and vote for Town Meeting Members.

If you are interested in running, you need to circulate nomination papers before the Town Meeting. Consult your town clerk for more details. You cannot show up at the Town Meeting and decide then and there to run for Town Meeting Member.

What's a moderator?

Generally, a moderator's job is to run the Town Meeting. Specifically, the moderator declares the outcome of all voice votes. Some towns have detailed by-laws governing Town Meeting procedure. Other towns leave a lot of discretion to the moderator.

Moderators are usually elected at the Town Election at which voters go to their regular polling places. The term of office is one or three years. When the elected moderator is absent, a temporary moderator may be elected at the Town Meeting.

What's a selectman or selectwoman?

Selectmen are a town's executive officers. Voters elect them to the Board of Selectmen, which usually has three or five members. Selectmen are authorized to call a Town Meeting provided that they have posted a warrant. In small towns, the Board of Selectmen runs the town and supervises town workers. In larger towns, the Board of Selectmen picks and supervises a person, who, in turn, runs the town and supervises town workers. Depending on the town, that person has various authority, duties, and title. That person is known as the town manager, town administrator, executive secretary, or administrative secretary.

What does the town clerk do?

At the Town Meeting, the clerk records all votes and takes minutes. Town clerks are elected or appointed. In the event of all of the selectman/selectwomen resigning, the town clerk is authorized to call a town meeting.

What is a town counsel?

The town counsel is a lawyer who either works for the town as an employee, or is a private lawyer who counts the town among his or her clients. The town counsel often prepares the warrant (the Town Meeting's agenda). During the Town Meeting, the town counsel answers legal questions that come up. He or she is appointed by the selectmen.

What are ex officio members?

Ex officio (pronounced "o-fish-ee-o") members of a representative Town Meeting are granted membership because of the office they hold. For example, a town's by-laws might state that selectmen are ex officio members of the Town Meeting. That means that selectmen do not have to run for election as Town Meeting Members; they are already members because they have been elected to the office of selectmen.

What's a select committee?

A select committee is assigned to investigate and report back to the Town Meeting on a certain subject, or to undertake a certain substantive task. The moderator frequently appoints its chairperson and members. Select committees are also called special committees.

What's a standing committee?

A standing committee is a permanent committee. A town might have standing committees for the following areas: public works, planning and zoning, recreation, and personnel. The most important standing committee is the finance committee.

What does the finance committee do?

The finance committee prepares the budget in the months before the annual Town Meeting starts. It also prepares financial articles (which are agenda items). Its recommendations are advisory. In some towns, the committee is known as the warrant committee or the advisory committee.

Depending on a town's by-laws, members of the finance committee are appointed by the selectmen or moderator, or elected by voters or the Town Meeting. In many towns, the finance committee's report is distributed to all residences.

ANNUAL AND SPECIAL TOWN MEETINGS

What's the difference between annual and special meetings?

Each town must hold an annual Town Meeting. Additional Town Meetings are called special meetings. They may be called as many times during the year as necessary.

When are Town Meetings?

Annual Town Meetings, unless otherwise provided by special law or charter, must be held in February, March, April or May. The Board of Selectman or Town Council may delay the annual meeting, but it must be completed by June 30th.

What does it mean when a Town Meeting is divided into an election and a business meeting?

Most towns elect officers on one day, and begin conducting other business on a later day. Many towns wait a week or more between the election of officers and the business meeting. A few towns may elect officers as early as November of one year, and conduct the business meeting in the next year. The Town Meeting and Town Election may be called on the same warrant, but are separate events. In the past Town Meetings and Town Elections took place on the same day as a single event, but that is not the case today.

What does it mean that some towns have two business meetings?

A town may divide its business meeting into two meetings. Towns that do so hold one business meeting at the beginning of the year. The focus is primarily on the budget, finances, and taxes. The second business meeting is held in the fall. It is still part of the annual Town Meeting. The focus is on zoning, planning and by-laws.

In sum....

November: Some towns hold elections.

January, February, March, April, May, June: Some towns that held elections in November and December hold business meetings. Some towns hold both elections and business meetings.

Fall: Some towns hold second business meetings.

How do I find out when the annual meeting will take place?

Watch your local newspaper. Signs are posted around some towns. In some towns, every citizen is notified at home. Check your town's website, if it has one. And you may always call town hall, ask for the clerk's office, and ask when the annual meeting will take place.

How do I find out about special meetings?

Special meetings, by their very nature, are not held at the same time every year. Watch your local newspaper and watch for signs posted around some towns. Some towns will notify you at home. The towns with websites usually announce special meetings on-line.

Who calls special Town Meetings?

Generally, the selectmen call special Town Meetings.

May voters call a special Town Meeting?

Yes, voters may call a special Town Meeting. Two hundred registered voters or 20% of the total number of registered voters, whichever is less in number, may request a special Town Meeting. The special Town Meeting must be held no later than 45 days after the Board of Selectmen receive the request.

What's the procedure for voters calling a special Town Meeting?

The requisite number of voters must sign a written request for a special Town Meeting. The format of the written request is flexible. Voters should include their addresses after their signatures.

Voters deliver the written request to the Board of Selectmen. The Board of Selectmen must then call a special meeting within 45 days.

May a special Town Meeting be called for more than one reason?

Yes, a special Town Meeting may be called for more than one reason. For example, a special Town Meeting could be called to consider amending the zoning code and buying a new fire truck.

THE WARRANT

What's a warrant?

The warrant lists a meeting's time, place, and agenda. A warrant is also known as a warning. A Town Meeting's action is not valid unless the subject was listed on the warrant.

When is the warrant available?

A warrant is available at least 7 days before an annual meeting, and at least 14 days before a special meeting.

How do I see the warrant?

It depends on your town and its by-laws. Warrants are posted in public places, published in the local newspaper, delivered to every residence, or a combination of all three. Towns with websites may publish their warrants on-line. If a town's by-laws do not specify the manner in which a warrant can be posted, the town must vote or the Attorney General must approve the manner in which the warrant is posted.

Who makes up the warrant?

The selectmen, who "issue" it.

What are articles?

Articles are items on the warrant. Appropriations for each town function or department may be in separate articles. Or one article on the warrant may propose appropriations for all necessary town expenses.

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 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.

HOW TOWN MEETINGS OPERATE

What is the quorum for a Town Meeting?

In an open Town Meeting, the minimum number of voters who may conduct business is established by the individual town's by-laws. The quorum in some towns is zero; if only a single citizen appears, the Town Meeting may start and conduct business.

In a representative Town Meeting, a majority of the Town Meeting Members may conduct business.

Who may attend?

Any member of the public may attend a Town Meeting.

Who may speak?

All of a town's registered voters may speak in an open or representative Town Meeting. In a representative Town Meeting, a registered voter who is not a town meeting member has a right to speak subject to conditions prescribed by the meeting.

Non-voters may speak at the discretion of the moderator or Town Meeting.

Who may vote?

In an open Town Meeting, the town's voters may vote.

In a representative Town Meeting only Town Meeting Members may vote on business matters.

Is the warrant the agenda?

Yes, the warrant generally states the things to be voted on, but the moderator may interpret the articles liberally.

Usually, the Town Meeting considers the warrant's articles in order. However, the moderator or Town Meeting itself may change the order. Some towns decide the order of warrants by lottery.

How do I know which article the Town Meeting is considering?

The moderator summarizes each article or reads it entirely before starting debate.

How is the budget considered?

The selectmen or appointed budget committee must print and distribute information regarding appropriations at or before the annual Town Meeting. Different towns handle the budget article differently. Towns have three general ways:

First: The moderator: reads a budget item; calls for a recommendation from the finance committee on that item; calls for debate on that item; and calls for a vote on that item. Then the moderator does the same with the next budget item.

Second: The moderator reads each budget item, but doesn't stop for debate. If a voter wants to debate an item, he or she calls out, "Hold!" or a similar word, depending on the Town Meeting. The moderator will "lay aside" that item, and get back to it later. After reading all budget items, the moderator calls for a vote on all items that were not laid aside. Then the moderator takes up budget items that were laid aside. The moderator calls for debate, possible amendments, and a vote on each item.

Third: The moderator summarizes the budget article. The chairman of the finance committee moves that the Town Meeting appropriate the money recommended in the finance committee's report. Then the moderator entertains motions to amend the budget article. When the Town Meeting has voted on all amendments, the Town Meeting votes on the finance chairman's motion as originally presented or amended.

PARTICIPATING IN TOWN MEETINGS

How do I vote?

Voters in open Town Meeting vote by various methods.

Voice vote. Many Town Meeting votes are by voice. The moderator asks that all in favor (everyone voting "yes") say, "Yea" (which is pronounced "yay"). Then the moderator asks that all opposed (everyone voting "no") say, "Nay." The moderator listens and decides which side prevailed. Voters who are unfamiliar with the difference between "yea" and "nay" may find this reminder useful: "Yea" and "yes" both start with "y." "Nay" and "no" both start with "n."

Show of hands. The moderator asks that all in favor raise their hands. Then the moderator asks that all opposed raise their hands. The moderator looks at the number of hands in general and decides which side prevailed. Or hands are counted.

Roll call. Voters are called by name and answer "Yea" or "Nay."

Standing vote or rising vote. All in favor are asked to stand or rise. They are counted. Next, all voters who are opposed are asked to stand. They are counted. This form of vote is also known as dividing the meeting.

Secret ballots. When voters vote by secret ballot is determined by a town's by-laws. In some towns, the moderator can call for a secret ballot. In some towns, if a certain number of voters request it, a vote will be by secret ballot. In other towns, a vote will be by secret ballot if 25 % percent of the voters present and voting ask for it.

Does a representative Town Meeting use the same methods of voting?

Yes, a representative Town Meeting does use the same methods of voting. However, a representative Town Meeting can take a vote by secret ballot only if 2/3 of the Town Meeting Members present and voting approve it.

Are there votes that cannot be taken by voice?

Yes, there are votes that cannot be taken by voice. Suppose that a town's by-laws require that 2/3 of the voters, not a simple majority, vote to approve the budget for it to pass. Unless the voice vote is unanimous in favor of the budget, the moderator will find it hard to determine if more than 2/3 of the voters said "yea." A vote requiring a super-majority (more than a simple majority) is usually decided by a vote other than voice vote.

What if I think that the moderator did not decide correctly a voice vote or an informal show of hands?

Stand immediately and say one of the following: "I doubt it," "I doubt the vote," or "I question it." If at least six other voters stand with you, the moderator must count votes more formally. The moderator must then verify the vote by polling the voters or by dividing the meeting or by the method provided for by the municipal by-laws.

How do I speak in debate?

If you wish to speak, stand up and wait for the moderator to acknowledge you. When the moderator acknowledges you, state your name, your precinct if you know it, and your address.

Speak about the topic being discussed. Don't speak about a previous topic (unless there is a motion to rescind or reconsider).

Make your comments to the moderator, not to the Town Meeting or individual Town Meeting Members.

For example, do not say, "I have something to say to the Town Meeting," or "Mr. Smith, you said something as a Town Meeting Member that I want to respond to." Instead, say something like, "Mr. Moderator, these are my thoughts on this article."

You may attack a previous speaker's argument, but do not attack a previous speaker. For example, do not say, "The previous speaker is dead wrong." Instead, say something like, "I disagree with the argument we just heard."

Try to avoid referring to previous speakers by name. For example, try not to say, "I agree with Mr. Jones' argument." Instead, say something like, "I agree with the argument that we can afford this budget item."

Since you make your comments to the moderator, you may not directly debate or ask questions of a previous speaker. For example, do not say, "Mr. Johnson, you say that we should make another exception to the zoning law. I'm asking you: When do we draw the line and stop making exceptions?"

Instead, say something like, "Mr. Moderator, we have heard the argument that we should make just one more exception to the zoning law. But I say it's time to stop making exceptions."

PROCEDURE AND MOTIONS

Do I need to know "parliamentary" procedure to attend a Town Meeting?

No, you do not need to know "parliamentary" procedure to attend a Town Meeting. The moderator will take care of it.

Are Town Meetings run according to Roberts' Rules of Order?

Some are; some are not. Please consult your town clerk.

Does the majority always rule?

No, the majority does not always rule. Sometimes a super-majority (more than a simple majority) is needed for votes on some specific issues. For example, authorizing selectmen to purchase or take land by eminent domain requires a 2/3 vote.

Are a town's by-laws the final word on how the Town Meeting runs?

No, by-laws may be suspended in some circumstances. A town's by-laws themselves explain how to suspend them. It might require a 2/3 vote or a unanimous vote to suspend a provision in the by-laws.

Are the moderator's rulings final?

In some areas, yes, the moderator's rulings are final. In other areas, it is unclear whether a moderator's ruling can be appealed. It depends on the practice of the moderator and Town Meeting. In Town Meetings where a moderator's rulings are appealed, here is the usual procedure.

A voter or Town Meeting Member makes a point of order. The moderator rules on the point of order. A voter or Town Meeting Member then says, "I appeal from the ruling of the moderator / chair." Someone else seconds the appeal. The moderator then announces a vote on the question, "Should the decision of the moderator be reversed?"

What do the following terms mean?

<i>The term...</i>	<i>means...</i>
dismiss an article to	defeat it
postpone an article indefinitely to	defeat it
take no action on an article to	defeat it
lay the question on the table	to kill or postpone (depending on the town) a measure
table the question	to kill or postpone (depending on the town) a measure
move the previous question	to cut off debate and vote on the issue at hand

What does a motion to take from the table mean?

Tabling a motion or laying a question on the table generally means to kill it, but it does not mean to kill it finally. To take an issue from the table means to consider an issue that the Town Meeting previously tabled.

If I'm not familiar with making motions, how do I make one?

Rather than make a motion that may require the moderator to untangle and decode it, stand up and ask the moderator from the floor how to make a motion to achieve what you want to do.

How do I call for a vote?

Move the previous question, which means to call for a vote. Under the by-laws of many towns, you must make certain motions, such as those involving money, in writing.

What's the difference between reconsideration and rescission?

A vote to reconsider a previous vote temporarily postpones final action on that vote. A vote to rescind a previous vote cancels it.

What's the difference among adjourning, recessing, and dissolving?

Dissolving the Town Meeting means that it is over until the next Town Meeting, which must be called by a new warrant. If the Town Meeting has not dissolved, but is taking a break, and will resume on the same day, it has **recessed**.

"Adjourning" is an imprecise word. It is sometimes used to mean "dissolving"; sometimes "recessing"; and sometimes that one day of the Town Meeting has ended, and that the Town Meeting will resume on a later day.

What does it mean to adjourn without day?

Adjourning without day means that the Town Meeting has dissolved. Adjourning without day is also called adjourning sine day (pronounced “si-nee day” or “si-nee die”). In other words, the Town Meeting has adjourned without setting another day to reconvene. A new warrant is needed to reconvene.

AFTER THE REPRESENTATIVE TOWN MEETING DISSOLVES

Do I have control over the votes of Town Meeting Members?

Generally, yes. In some towns, the votes of representative Town Meetings do not take effect until a certain number of days after the Town Meeting expires. In other towns, only votes on certain subjects do not take effect immediately.

In all towns, votes on the following subjects do not take effect for seven days, not counting Sundays and holidays: special appropriations of \$20,000 or more; establishing, abolishing, or merging town boards or offices; establishing a term of office for town officers; changing the number of a town board’s members; adopting a new by-law and amending an existing by-law.

To try to overturn decisions described in the previous paragraph, voters may circulate petitions within seven days after Town Meeting dissolved. The petition must be signed by at least 3% of the town’s voters, with their names and addresses. The petition must be filed with the selectmen.

To try to overturn other decisions by a representative Town Meeting, voters should check their respective towns’ by-laws yes or no. No action of a representative town meeting can be reversed unless at least 20% of the registered voters vote to do such.

Petitions to overturn representative Town Meeting decisions go to the Board of Selectmen. The Selectmen then schedule an election at which the following question appears on the ballot: “Should the town vote to approve the action of the representative Town Meeting whereby it was voted [brief description of the vote]?” Voters go to the polls and vote yes or no.

For more details, look at your town’s by-laws.

Where do I find the statutes governing Town Meetings?

Go to your local library. Ask to see the Massachusetts General Laws, chapters 39 and 43A. Parts of other chapters apply to Town Meetings, but chapters 39 and 43A are the major ones. Check with your town clerk if your Town Meeting is governed by special act or town charter.

Where do I get my town’s by-laws?

Call your town hall and ask the clerk’s office. When you ask for the by-laws, also ask if the Massachusetts Legislature has passed any law that applies specifically to your town or if your town has accepted any specific Massachusetts General Laws.

Where do I get my town’s charter?

Ask the clerk’s office or check your town’s website.

Can I see a video of a previous Town Meeting?

Some towns videotape their Town Meetings. If you want to get a sense of a Town Meeting before you attend, find out if a videotape exists. Contact the town clerk's office, your local library, or your local cable television company.

Is there anything else I should get?

Some towns publish policies or guidelines, similar to this primer, in print or on-line. In some towns, it is part of the warrant or of the finance committee's report. In other towns, the local newspaper publishes such a primer as a newspaper article. In still other towns, the local League of Women Voters publishes a primer.

Should I check my town's website?

Yes! Your town's website might contain the warrant, minutes of past meetings, notices of special meetings, and a primer, such as this one.

To find if your town has a website, call your town clerk, or log on to www.state.ma.us/cc

CONCLUSION

Each town has a different way of running its Town Meeting. Sometimes the customs and traditions are written down; sometimes they are not. This guide is designed to make you comfortable enough to find out more. The best way to find out more is to attend your Town Meeting (see the preceding schedule for details on your town).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Massachusetts Constitution Articles of Amendment, Article 2 and Article 89.

Massachusetts General Laws, chapters 39, 40, 43A, and 54.

Town Meeting Time: A Handbook of Parliamentary Law, Richard B. Johnson, Benjamin A.

Trustman. Charles Y. Wadsworth, 2nd ed., Robert D. Krieger Publishing Co. (Malabar, Fla. 1984)

Your Massachusetts Government, Donald Levitan, Elwyn E. Mariner, 10th ed., Government Research Publications (Newton Centre, Mass. 1984)

Manual for New Moderators, Massachusetts Moderators Association, 2nd ed. (1995)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Citizen's Guide to Town Meetings is edited and published by the Office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth. The Secretary of the Commonwealth would like to acknowledge Attorney Kenneth Bresler who provided the original text found in the *Citizen's Primer on Town Meeting*, a former publication by the Office of the Secretary.

Kenneth Bresler is a lawyer who lives in Newton, Massachusetts. He wrote Citizen's Guide to Drafting Legislation, which the Secretary of the Commonwealth also publishes.



William Francis Galvin
Secretary of the Commonwealth
Citizen Information Service
One Ashburton Place, Room 1611
Boston, Massachusetts 02108
Telephone: (617) 727-7030
Toll-free: 1-800-392-6090 (*in MA only, TTY also*)
TTY: (617) 878-3889
Fax: (617) 742-4528
Website: www.state.ma.us/sec/cis
updated 7/7/00