

TOWN MEETING OVERVIEW

Town of Fairhaven, MA

June 15, 2022



AGENDA

- Forms of Local Government
- What does Town Meeting do?
- Forms and Frequency of Town Meeting
- How Town Meeting Works
- Other participants
- Other Resources

FORMS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN MASSACHUSETTS

- CITIES (58)
 - Mayor/Council (e.g. Boston, New Bedford, Fall River)
 - Council/Manager (e.g. Franklin, Lowell, Worcester)
- TOWNS (293)
 - Select Board/Town Manager or Executive Secretary/Open Town Meeting (260)
 - Select Board/Town Manager or Executive Secretary/Representative Town Meeting (33)

WHAT DOES TOWN MEETING DO?

- Town Meeting is the legislative body for towns in Massachusetts – Over 300 years of history in MA! *First in 1622 (Plymouth)
- A local legislative body typically has the power to establish general bylaws, zoning bylaws, adopt the budget and approve other spending
- According to the Secretary of State's Citizens Guide to Town Meeting, Town Meeting decides three major things:
 - It sets 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
- Two types of Town Meeting
 - Representative Town Meeting (Fairhaven)
 - Open Town Meeting (Acushnet)

FORMS AND FREQUENCY OF TOWN MEETING

FORMS

- Representative Town Meeting (Fairhaven)
 - Town Meeting Members are elected by precinct
 - Serve for a specified term
 - Only elected Town Meeting Members may vote at a town meeting
 - Number of Town Meeting Members is set by by-law/special act
- Open Town Meeting (Acushnet)
 - Any Town voter may vote at a town meeting

FREQUENCY

- Annual Town Meeting
- Special Town Meeting

How Town Meeting Works

SPECIAL vs. ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

Annual Town Meeting

- Each town must hold an annual Town Meeting and unless otherwise provided by special law or charter, must be held in Feb, Mar, Apr or May (SOS Guide)
- Must be called by the Selectmen
- Requires 7 days notice prior to meeting (GL 39, §10)

Special Town Meeting

- Additional Town Meetings are called special meetings. They may be called as many times during the year as necessary (SOS Guide)
- Can be called by the Selectmen or upon request in writing of 200 registered voters (GL 39, §10)
- Requires 14 days notice prior to meeting (GL 39, §10)

TOWN MEETING MEMBERS

MEMBER RESPONSIBILITIES

- Representative Town Meeting Members are elected by their precinct to vote on articles that come before Annual or Special Town Meetings
- Town Meeting Members represent the citizens in the their precincts and vote on matters that affect the entire town as well as their precinct.
- Debate Town Meeting articles and can make motions.

FAIRHAVEN TOWN MTG FACTS

- Representative, approximately 429 are elected divided among 6 precincts
- There are at large members including town-wide elected boards and state legislators who live in Fairhaven
- Generally serve 3 year terms and are staggered 1/3 per year
- Quorum is 100 Town Meeting Members
- Largest Rep Town Mtg in MA

THE PRECINCTS

FACTS

- Six Precincts
- Precinct meetings are held prior to Town Meeting and typically prior to the all precincts meeting and on Town Meeting day
- Precinct meets are held to:
 - Elect a chair
 - Fill Town Meeting vacancies between elections
 - Discuss Town Meeting articles

THE ROLE OF CHAIR

- Organize Precinct Meetings
- Chair / Conduct Precinct Meetings
- Make up to two appointments to the Finance Committee
- Communicate with the Town Clerk and Town Moderator on Town Meeting issues

MODERATOR

- The Moderator presides over each Town Meeting and is responsible for the orderly conduct of these meetings. The Moderator declares the outcome of all votes and determines matters of procedure (see GL 39, §15, 17)
- The Moderator is elected for a 3 year term
- The Moderator jointly appoints the at-large Finance Committee member and members of the Greater New Bedford Regional Vocational Technical High School Committee

WHAT IS THE WARRANT?

- It is the public notice and agenda for a Town Meeting
- Pursuant to GL 39, §10:
 - Every town meeting must be called through a warrant
 - The warrant lists all matters to be voted on at the Town Meeting as well as the date, time and location
 - The warrant is prepared by the Selectmen
 - For an Annual Town Meeting the warrant must be posted at least 7 days before the Annual Meeting or 14 days before a Special Town Meeting

**WARRANT AND REPORT OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE
FOR THE SPECIAL TOWN MEETING
SATURDAY, MAY 5, 2012 AT 9:15 A.M.
AT THE ELIZABETH I. HASTINGS MIDDLE SCHOOL**

COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
BRISTOL,
s.s

To the Constable of the Town of Fairhaven in said county:

GREETINGS:

In the name of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts you are hereby directed to notify and warn the inhabitants of the Town of Fairhaven qualified to vote on town affairs to meet as follows:

On Saturday, the fifth day of May 2012 at 9:15 a.m. in the Walter Silveira Auditorium at the Elizabeth I. Hastings Middle School, then and there, to act upon the following articles:

ARTICLE 1 - TOWN CHARGES

To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate, borrow or transfer from available funds a sum of money to fund additional salary and operating expenses for the following departments. Said sum to be added to previously voted appropriations for FY 2012, or to take any other action relative thereto.

GENERAL GOVERNMENT

1. Treasurer

a. Salary and Wages

Request: \$1,524.00

Recommend: \$1,524.00

WHAT IS AN ARTICLE?

- It is an agenda item to be acted on
- The purpose of a warrant article is to apprise or “warn” the voters as to the subject matter to be discussed
- Can only be acted on by a motion, which must spell out the detail



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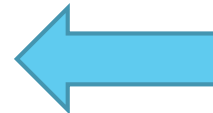
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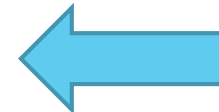
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TOWN MEETING MATERIALS

Town Meeting Members receive the following materials:

Mailed and available on the Town web-site

- ✓ Moderator Letter
- ✓ Town Warrant and Report of the Finance Committee
- ✓ Fiscal information from the Finance Director

Provided at the Town Meeting Precincts Meetings

- ✓ Motions
- ✓ Updates

Available at Town Meeting in the lobby

- ✓ Updated Motions
- ✓ Other materials regarding articles
- ✓ Annual Report

TOWN MEETING PROCEDURES

1. Town Meeting is called to order
2. Opening ceremonies
3. Instructions are provided to Town Meeting Members
4. Moderator offers procedural motions
5. Selectmen and Finance Committee chairs make opening statements
6. Procedural motions regarding the warrant, tax levy
7. Article presentations, debate, votes
8. Adjourn either Sein Die or to another date

TOWN MEETING RULES

- **Robert's Rules of Order** – Governs the overall order of the meeting
 - Main Motion – formally presents an article to Town Meeting for action
 - Amend – revises the Main Motion
 - Indefinitely Postpone – takes no further reaction on the article
- **State Laws** – Provide specific legal requirements
 - Zoning bylaws and borrowing authority require 2/3 vote
 - A Bill of Prior Year requires an 4/5 (annual) 9/10 (special) vote
- **Traditions**
 - Voting on the higher figure first
 - Selectmen generally make all main motions, Finance Committee seconds the motion

WHAT IS A MOTION?

- ▶ A **motion** is a formal proposal by a member, in a meeting that the assembly take certain action (Robert's Rules of Order – 10th Edition)

ARTICLE 10 – COMMUNITY PRESERVATION PROGRAM – HIGH SCHOOL FIRE ESCAPES

To see if the Town will vote to transfer \$105,000 from the ATM 5/5/2012 – Article #42E – Fairhaven High School – Exterior Restoration Project Phase II, and re-appropriate it toward the repair and/or replacement of the Fire Escapes on the west and east sides of the High School, or to take any other action relative thereto.

Petitioned by the Community Preservation Committee

Request: \$105,000 Recommend: \$105,000

MOTION: Move adoption and that the Town vote to transfer \$105,000 from ATM 5/5/2012-Article #42E-Fairhaven High School-Exterior Restoration Project Phase II toward the repair and/or replacement of the Fire Escapes on the west and east sides of the High School. However, that no CPC funds may be spent until the School Committee obtains the necessary additional funds to complete the project.

DEBATE

- Once a motion has been made and seconded, debate ensues
 - A **presentation** can be made by the sponsor/petitioner or their representative
 - Town Meeting Members can **speak** on an issue, **ask questions** or **offer other motions** (amend, IP) after being recognized by the Moderator
 - Town Meeting votes on the motion(s) on the table after debate has been exhausted or if a Town Meeting member “Calls the Question”, it is seconded and then approved by Town Meeting.

SELECT BOARD

- Call the Annual Town Meeting each year and can call Special Town Meetings as needed (Citizens can also call a Special Town Meeting by submitting a petition to the Town Clerk with signatures of 200 registered voters)
- Issue Town Meeting warrants
 - Place articles on the warrant and determine their order
 - Sign the warrant and order its posting
- Review all warrant articles and determine which articles they will support/move at Town Meeting (or yield to petitioner on)

FINANCE COMMITTEE

- GL c. 39 §16 establishes appropriation, advisory or finance committees
- Finance Committees review the proposed annual town budget and make recommendations to Town Meeting. Finance Committees review all fiscal articles and make recommendations to Town Meeting. In some towns, Finance Committees review all town meeting articles.

FAIRHAVEN FINCOM FACTS

- 13 Members
- 2/pct and 1 at large
- Pct members appointed by the Precinct Chair and at large by the Moderator, Fincom Chair and BOS Chair
- Produces a Report for the Annual Town Meeting
- Makes recommendations on fiscal articles
- Approves Reserve Fund Trans

TOWN MEETING PARTICIPANTS

TOWN CLERK

- Responsible for taking attendance at Town Meeting / verify quorum
- Takes minutes
- Oversees counted votes
 - By hand or ballot

TELLERS

- Town Meeting Members appointed by the Town Moderator to count hand votes

TOWN COUNSEL

- Provides legal guidance on warrant articles, municipal law and Town Meeting procedures

TOWN MEETING PARTICIPANTS

APPOINTED OFFICIALS

- Present and speak on Town sponsored articles and answer questions
 - Town Administrator
 - Supt. Of Schools
 - Police/Fire Chiefs
 - BPW Supt.
 - Treasurer

BOARDS & COMMITTEES

- Sponsor articles, make presentations and answer questions
 - School Committee
 - Planning Board
 - Board of Health
 - Board of Public Works
 - CPC
 - COA

TOWN MEETING PARTICIPANTS

PETITIONERS

- Individuals/groups that have acquired enough signatures to have an article placed on the warrant.
 - May or may not be a Town Meeting Member
 - Present the article and answer questions

RESIDENTS/CITIZENS

- Attend Town Meeting and may speak with permission from Town Meeting

Press/Cable Access

- Print journalists report on Town Mtg news and Cable Access provides live coverage / shows Town Mtg

RESOURCES

Helpful information for Town Meeting Members

- Secretary of State's Citizen's Guide to Town Meetings
<http://www.sec.state.ma.us/cis/cistwn/twnidx.htm>
- Massachusetts Municipal Association
<http://www.mma.org>
- MA Department of Revenue, Division of Local Services
<http://www.mass.gov/DLS>
- Town of Fairhaven Website
<http://www.fairhaven-ma.gov/pages/index>