

# Town Meeting 101

April 14, 2021



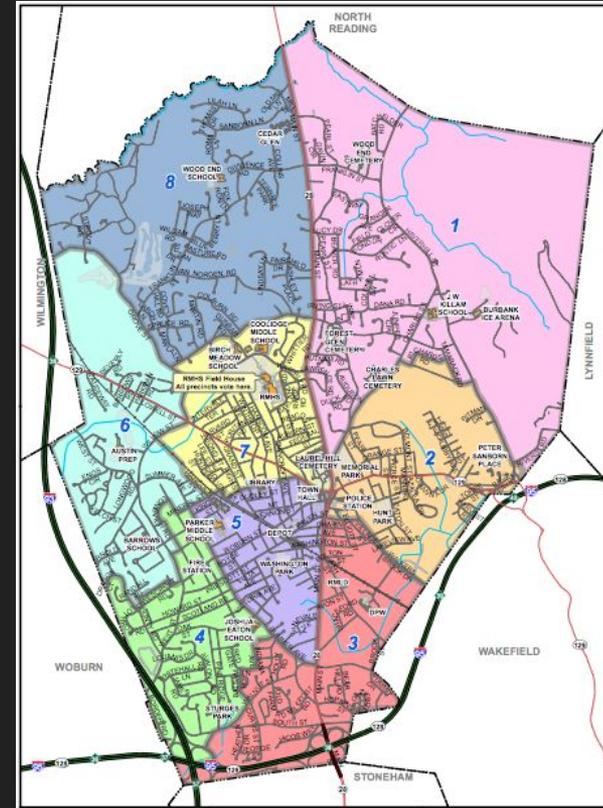
# Overview

- *What is Town Meeting?*
- *When is Town Meeting?*
- *What happens BEFORE Town Meeting?*
- *What happens DURING Town Meeting?*
- *What Happens AFTER Town Meeting?*
- *“Voice of the People” Video*



# What Is Town Meeting?

- An “Event” and an “Entity”
- Gathering of Elected Representatives to conduct public business
  - 1944 - Adopted Representative Town Meeting. Members are elected from 8 precincts. 24 town meeting members per precinct. Serve for overlapping 3 year terms. Total of 192 town meeting members.
- Legislative Body of the Town
  - Decides Bylaws & Budget of the Town.
  - Executive Branch - Select Board, School Committee and Library Board of Trustees.



# When Does Town Meeting Occur?

- **Annual Town Meeting** (April):
  - Mondays and Thursdays until complete.
  - Precinct Meetings - occur before Annual Town Meeting. Chair and clerk are elected, any vacancies may be filled until next election, and any other precinct business is conducted.
- **Subsequent Town Meeting** (November):
  - Mondays and Thursdays until complete.
  - Precinct Meetings can occur prior to Subsequent Town Meeting to fill vacancy until next election.
- **Special Town Meeting:**
  - Occurs as needed.
  - May be called by voters (20% of or 200 registered voters file written request) or Select Board.
- All Town Meetings take place at the RMHS Performing Arts Center unless otherwise noted in posting.



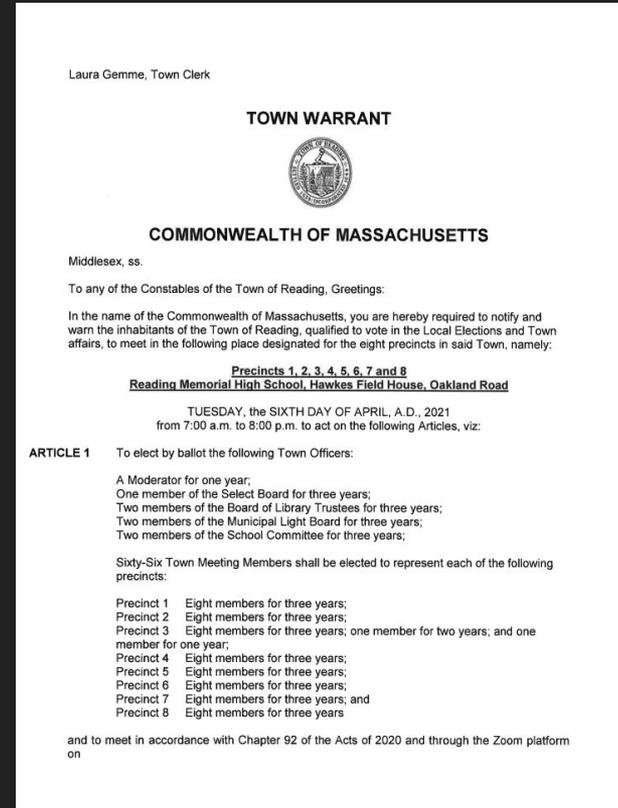
# When Is Town Meeting In 2021?

Town of Reading Election and Town Meeting Calendar for 2021								
Event	Event Date	Last Day to Close Warrant	Last Day to Post Warrant	Voter Registration Closes - 8:00 PM	Nomination Papers Available No Later Than	Last Day to Obtain Nomination Papers	Nomination Papers Due - 5:00 PM	Withdraw Name - 5:00 PM
Town Election	April 06	March 02	March 30	March 17	January 06	February 12	February 16	March 04
Annual Town Meeting	April 26 April 29 May 03 May 06	March 02	March 30					
Subsequent Town Meeting	November 08 November 15 November 18 November 22	October 21	October 25					

# What Happens Before Town Meeting?

## *The Town Warrant*

- The Town Warrant is a document issued prior to Town Meeting announcing when and where Town Meeting will occur and what will be discussed and voted upon
- It gives prior public “Warning” of Town Meeting time, place, and agenda (“Articles”) from Select Board.
- Articles are the list of items to be voted on.
- Items vary significantly, from the annual operating budget of the town to adjustment of by-laws, and anything else that may be legally introduced.
- It can be picked up in advance of Town Meeting by Town Meeting Members at the Police Station or Town Clerk’s Office (available at least 7 days in advance).



# Who Determines What Is In The Warrant?

Except for procedural matters, the Select Board is in charge of placing all subjects on the Town Warrant. **The Select Board shall** place on such Warrants all subjects submitted by:

- Any **two (2) or more Select Board Members**;
- Any **board or committee**;
- Any **ten (10) or more voters** for the Annual, Subsequent or Special Town Meeting as defined in Section 2.14; or
- Any **other person or entity** as may be **authorized** by Town Bylaw or otherwise.

# Citizen Petition Form For Warrant Items

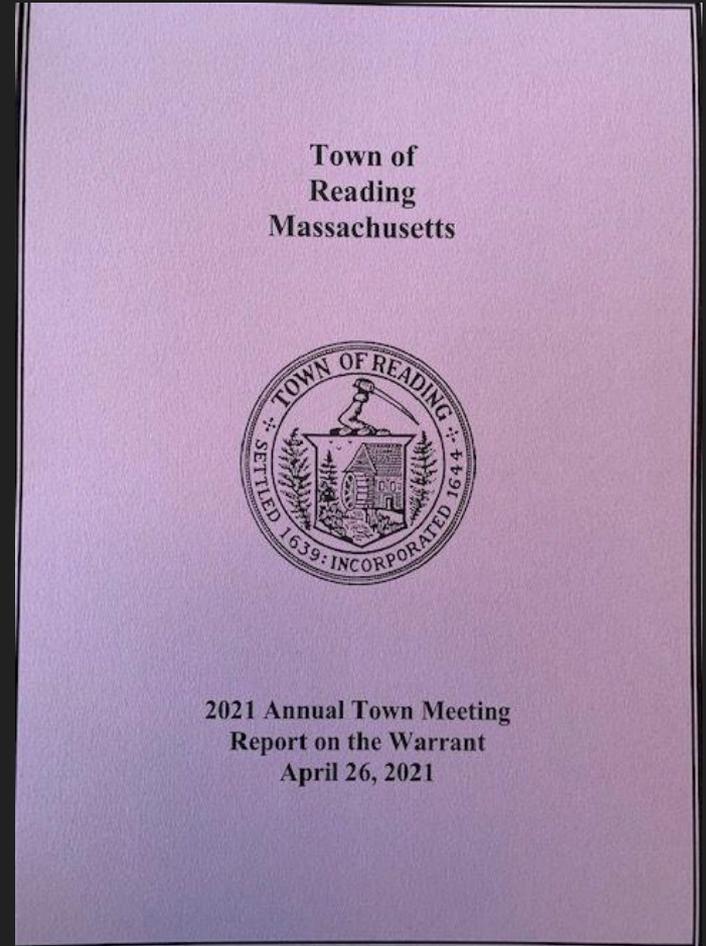
- A citizen can petition for an item to be put on the warrant
- Requires **10 signatures** for Town Meeting
- There are **deadlines** for these petitions - see Section 2.1.7 of the General Bylaws
- Forms:  
<https://www.readingma.gov/town-clerk/pages/to-wn-meeting-information>

(note: be sure to use the correct form for what you are requesting, i.e. Home Rule Charter Change v. Bylaw Change).



# Report On The Warrant

- Provides history and background on Articles in the Warrant.
- Town Meeting Members can pick up the Report in advance of Town Meeting.
- Also available online at <https://www.readingma.gov/town-clerk/pages/town-meeting>



# Budget Process

*All meetings open to the public*

1. Financial Forum. *Community engagement meeting in October.*
  - a. Review current year and preview upcoming year, including expected revenues and cost environment.
  - b. Finance Committee recommends budget target and free cash usage.
2. Town departments and Schools build budget in line with guidance and submit to Town Manager. *December-February.*
3. Town Manager submits balanced budget to Finance Committee. *March.*
4. Finance Committee reviews and votes to recommend the budget to Town Meeting. *March.*
5. Town Meeting votes the budget. *April.*

Town Meeting has authority over all appropriations, including the approval of a ~\$100 million budget.

Free Cash: accumulation of revenues in excess of estimate, and unspent budgeted costs. FinCom policy targets 7% of revenue.

Proposition 2 ½ limited overall tax revenue growth to 2.5% (excluding new growth). Costs have historically risen 3-3.5% annually. An override allows for a increase >2.5% to relieve budget pressure.

# What Happens During Town Meeting?

- *Who is Present?*
- *Town Meeting Overview*
- *Structure of Town Meeting*
- *Getting Down to Business*
- *How to Speak at Town Meeting*

# Who Is Present At Town Meeting?

- **Moderator** Alan Foulds - elected to run Town Meeting, declares outcomes of all votes.
- **Town Clerk** Laura Gemme - records all votes and takes minutes.
- **Town Manager** Bob LeLacheur - answers questions.
- **Town Counsel** Miyares and Harrington LLP
- **Committee Members** (Rule 9)
  - May debate but not vote unless also elected to Town Meeting.
  - Finance Committee to left of podium, Select Board to the right, School Committee in “audience”.
- **Town Meeting Members** - Need a majority for a quorum.
- **Town Leaders** - Superintendent, Police Chief, Fire Chief, etc.
- **The Public** - After Town Members have had an opportunity to speak, other attendees may be given the opportunity to speak on the subject for a maximum of 5 minutes.



# Town Meeting Overview

- Annual Town Meeting (April)
  - All **Fiscal matters** (including budget).
  - **State of the Town** given by Chair of Select Board.
  - **Financial Report** given by Chair of the Finance Committee.
- Subsequent Town Meeting (November)
  - **All Business** (including bylaws).
  - **State of the Schools** given by Chair of School Committee and Superintendent.
  - **RMLD Report**.

# Town Meeting Structure

- Call to Order (when quorum is met).
- Pledge of Allegiance.
- Invocation.
- Swearing in of new members.
- Warrant Articles.
  - Usually, Town Meeting considers the warrant's articles in order. However, Town Meeting may change the order.
  - The Moderator introduces each article or reads it entirely before starting debate.
- Removal of non-participating members.
- Adjourn.

# Getting Down To Business

## *Motions*

- A motion is made under a warrant article, telling Town Meeting exactly what we are discussing.
- The motion is seconded.
- The Moderator traditionally calls on the main proponent to discuss the motion.
- Reports from relevant advisory committees (Finance, Bylaw, etc.).
- The Moderator opens the floor to debate.

# Getting Down To Business

## *Proposed Amendments*

- Any Town Meeting Member may propose an amendment to the proposal. Discussion then turns to the amendment. When discussion on the proposed amendment is finished, we vote on the amendment, then discussion returns to the main motion, either as amended or as it originally stood.
- Amendments can be given in writing to Moderator and/or Town Clerk in advance of Town Meeting.

## *Ending Debate*

- Called “Moving the Previous Question”.
- Requires two-thirds vote.
- Cannot be made by someone discussing the merits of the issue.

# Getting Down To Business



## *Voting*

- When discussion is finished, the vote is called for.
- Hand counts.
- Standing counts.
  - Used when more than a majority vote is required or a hand count is in question.
- Quantum of votes (Majority, two-thirds, other).

## *Adjournment*

- For the evening.
- Sine Die (“Without day”) - Town Meeting is closed.

# Other Points

- Point of Order
- Point of Personal Privilege
- Questioning a count
- The issue of scope
- Indefinite Postponement - “not now vote,” effectively defeating.
- Reconsideration - moved by someone on the winning side, “second thoughts not second chances”, see General Bylaws 2.2.4.

# Motions

<b>The term. . .</b>	<b>Means. . .</b>
Postpone an article indefinitely	To defeat it
Take no action on an article	To defeat it
Lay the question on the table	To put aside temporarily
Table the question	To put aside temporarily
Move the previous question	To cut off debate and vote on the issue at hand

# Instructional Motion

- *Non-binding Resolution.*
- *Essentially asking someone to look into something for the next meeting.*
- *Author must give to Moderator and Town Clerk in writing before session begins.*
- *Form available on Town Website*

# *Speaking at Town Meeting*

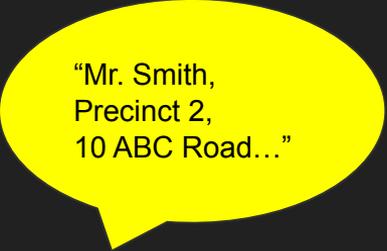
Who (are you)?

What topic?  
(on topic)

Speak to Moderator  
(not other members)

Attack Arguments  
(not people!)

Limited to 10 minutes  
unless granted permission



"Mr. Smith,  
Precinct 2,  
10 ABC Road..."



"Mr. Moderator: I  
support this proposal  
because...."



"I disagree with the  
**argument we just  
heard** because...."



"The previous speaker  
is wrong because...."

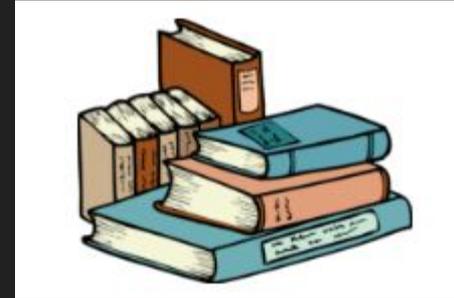
# What happens After Town Meeting?

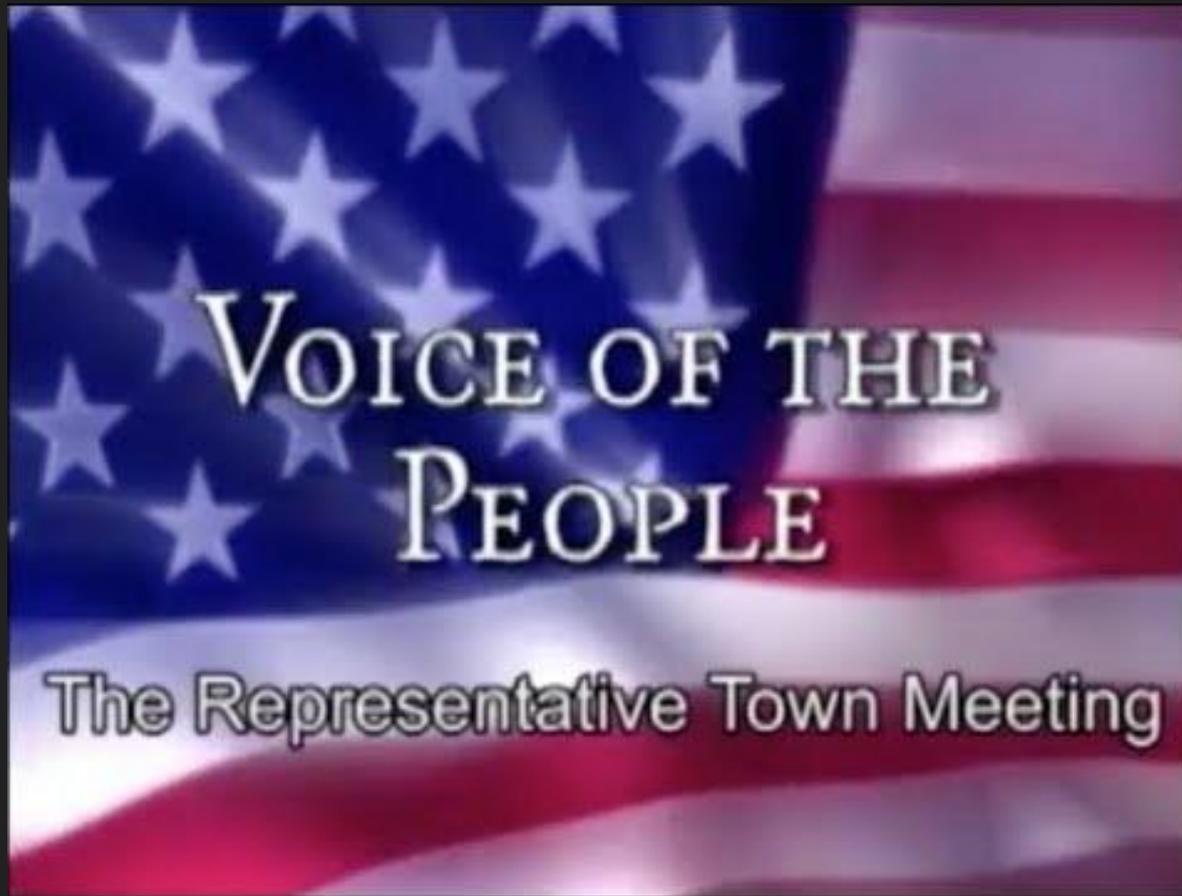
*No affirmative vote of Town Meeting becomes effective until **7 days** following the dissolution of Town Meeting (with a few exceptions), therefore If a registered voter wishes to suspend the vote they must do so within 7 days by filing a **referendum petition** as outlined in the Home Rule Charter.*

*The effect is that the Article is submitted to the voters in the form of a ballot question (20% of voters must cast ballots).*

# Town Meeting Resources

- Town Meeting Time: A Handbook of Parliamentary Law  
(available in Town Clerk's Office)
- Citizen's Guide to Town Meeting:  
<https://www.sec.state.ma.us/cis/cistwn/twnidx.htm>
- Town of Reading Home Rule Charter, Article 2:  
[https://www.readingma.gov/sites/readingma/files/file/file/2015-04-21\\_reading\\_home\\_rule\\_charter.pdf](https://www.readingma.gov/sites/readingma/files/file/file/2015-04-21_reading_home_rule_charter.pdf)
- Town of Reading General ByLaws, Article 2:  
[https://www.readingma.gov/sites/readingma/files/uploads/2019-05\\_general\\_bylaw.pdf](https://www.readingma.gov/sites/readingma/files/uploads/2019-05_general_bylaw.pdf)
- RCTV broadcasts town meeting live and has past meetings available at: <http://www.rctv.org/>
- Massachusetts General Laws, chapter 39 and 43A





Video: "Voice of the People"

This presentation was a partnership between:

Town Moderator: Alan Foulds

Town Clerk: Laura Gemme (lgemme@ci.reading.ma.us)

Town Meeting Members: Jennifer Hillery, Tom Grant, Eric Burkhart, Nick Boivin

Images from:

Town of Reading website, Reading Public Schools Websites, RCTV website, Town of Cohasset Website, Sweet Clip Art