

Arlington Town Government

Town Meeting is a uniquely New England form of grass-root based democracy that dates back to the colonial period. While all New England towns have Town Meetings, different regions have developed their own local traditions. Arlington has a Representative Town Meeting, where 12 representatives are elected from each of 21 precincts, for a total of 252 Town Meeting Members. One third of Members are elected each spring during the annual Town election.

Arlington's Annual Town Meeting is held beginning in late April, while Special Town Meetings can be called by citizens or the Select Board to address interim issues of import. Town Meeting's agenda is called the Warrant. Beginning in December, administrative bodies, committees, commissions and citizens of the Town begin to submit agenda items, called Articles, for inclusion in the Warrant. Warrant Articles generally address one of three topics: Town bylaws (laws particular to Arlington), Zoning issues, or Financial issues. After the Warrant submission period has closed in late January it is compiled and distributed to all residents as a 'warning' of what will be discussed at that year's meeting. Next, Articles are reviewed in public hearings by one of the three administrative bodies (Select Board, Arlington Redevelopment Board, Finance Committee) that report on each Article to the Meeting, including recommended votes. Residents are permitted to attend Town Meeting (viewing from the gallery) or watch the proceedings on local cable (ACMi).

Towns and Cities have different government structures and the guidelines Towns follow (as defined by Massachusetts General Laws) are set out in the Town Manager Act. A few basics are: voters elect a Select Board that manages certain permits and processes and appoints the Town's Chief Executive Officer, the Town Manager. The Town Manager and the Manager's staff are responsible for the day-to-day administration and operation of the Town and its various departments, including the hiring of department heads. The Manager's office is also responsible for the preparation of the Annual Report, Annual Financial Plan and the Town's budget. The budgetary planning process starts each fall and the completed budget is presented to the Finance Committee and Select Board each January for review. The Finance Committee's report is presented to the Annual Town Meeting which, as the Town's Legislative body, is responsible for approving all appropriations. And to insure transparency and financial accountability, the Select Board also appoints the Town Comptroller who reports directly to the Board. In addition, Arlington has 60 - 70 Committees and Commissions that are primarily volunteer-staffed and are critical to helping Arlington function efficiently. Members are most often appointed by the Manager subject to Select Board approval, and carry out a variety of essential tasks from historic preservation to cemetery oversight.

Additional information on all these topics is available on the [Town website](#) if you would like to learn more.

Adapted from Chapters 2 and 3 of the [Arlington Government Primer](#) prepared by the Fiscal Resources Task Group of Envision Arlington.