



# Town of Arlington

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RE: Town Meeting Procedures

Dear Town Meeting Members:

Welcome to the Town of Arlington's 216th Annual Town Meeting which will be held in person at Town Hall starting Monday, April 24, 2023. Please review the materials on the Town Meeting webpage prior to the start of Town Meeting (<https://www.arlingtonma.gov/townmeeting>), including the Annotated Warrant which organizes materials by Article.

We are returning to an in-person Town Meeting at Town Hall for the first time since 2019. To address the concerns of participants with elevated health risks related to COVID-19 exposure during this transition back to an in-person meeting, multiple seating locations are being arranged. Participation from outside the officially provided seating locations (e.g. remote participation via Zoom) will not be permitted.

Participants will use handsets not only for voting, as in previous years at Town Hall, but also to request to speak. Instructions on how to use the handsets' request-to-speak functionality will be shared in the coming days. This feature will ensure that speaking requests are recorded fairly, regardless of a participant's seating location.

Keeping with past practice, we will use a "Consent Agenda" for Articles that are expected to be noncontroversial, have a recommended vote of "no action", or update references that have become outdated or inconsistent over time. The Consent Agenda Articles will be shared ahead of time and Town Meeting will vote on the Consent Agenda on the first night. Town Meeting Members will have an opportunity at Town Meeting to "hold" Articles from the Consent Agenda, i.e. remove those Articles from the Consent Agenda so that they can be deliberated and voted separately. (The procedure for holding Articles from the Consent Agenda was modified last year to require a TMM to "second" the hold. This slowed the process likely without changing the outcome. Therefore, a "second" will not be required for a hold from the Consent Agenda this year.)

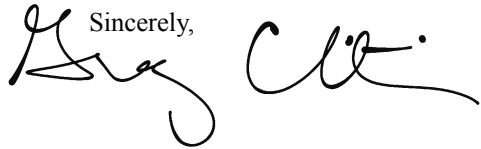
In order to give participants enough time to prepare for each Article, substitute motions and substantial amendments to motions must be submitted to me ([GChristiana@town.arlington.ma.us](mailto:GChristiana@town.arlington.ma.us)), the Town Clerk ([JBrazile@town.arlington.ma.us](mailto:JBrazile@town.arlington.ma.us)), and Town Counsel ([DHeim@town.arlington.ma.us](mailto:DHeim@town.arlington.ma.us)) – either by email or in triplicate on paper – at least 48 hours (specifically two business days) in advance of the start of the session in which the Article is considered and debated. I may allow exceptions to this advance filing requirement in cases of motions that are short, clear, concise and easy to understand, but such exceptions are within my exclusive discretion as Moderator. The only blanket exception to the 48-hour rule will be for Articles considered at the first session, April 24th; amendments and substitute motions for Articles taken up the first night must be submitted prior to April 18th – either by email to the addresses above or in person to the Town Clerk's Office at Town Hall.

To ensure that you are receiving the latest official information related to Town Meeting, please subscribe to the Town Meeting Members email distribution list ("TMM Email List") by visiting: <https://www.arlingtonma.gov/connect/email-subscription-lists>. At the bottom of the page, enter your email address into the text input field, click the "Submit" button, and after following the sign-in flow, check the box for "Town Meeting Members" under the "News" section of subscription topics.

I urge all members to begin preparing as early as possible for Town Meeting by reviewing reports of boards and committees which can be found in this packet and on the official Town Meeting web page at <https://www.arlingtonma.gov/townmeeting>. Reports on the web page are listed in the section titled **Reports to Town Meeting**. Announcements will be sent to the **TMM Email List** when new reports become available. (Note that this packet does not contain all reports, and reports may be updated online with corrections.) These reports contain a significant amount of information, including the full vote language that we will take up at Town Meeting. I expect members to be familiar with an Article's vote language (provided in the relevant report) before we begin deliberation on that Article at Town Meeting.

If you have a question that may require time for Department Heads or Board or Committee Members to prepare or research, please consider sharing your question directly with them in advance so that they can gather and prepare the necessary information. Contact information for Department Heads is available on the Town website. Requesting information in advance makes it less likely that an Article will be postponed until a later session while information is gathered.

When we convene later this month, let us be mindful of the civility pledge within the Town Meeting Member Oath of Office which appears in this packet. Out of hundreds of perspectives from twenty-one Precincts, we come together as one Town Meeting. I look forward to working with all of you to serve the best interests of our town.

Sincerely,  
  
Greg Christiana

## TOWN MEETING – FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **Q: What should I do to prepare for Town Meeting?**

A: There are several steps you can take to prepare for Town Meeting. The following steps apply to our Town Meetings in general:

- Sign up for the Town Meeting Members email distribution list to ensure that you're receiving timely announcements and updates. Visit <https://www.arlingtonma.gov/connect/email-subscription-lists>, enter your email address in the field at the bottom, click the "Submit" button, and after following the sign-in flow, check the box for "Town Meeting Members".
- Review the Town Bylaws relating to Town Meeting, Title I (General Government), Article 1 (Town Meetings). <https://www.arlingtonma.gov/town-governance/laws-and-regulations/town-bylaws>
- Read **The ABC's of Arlington Government** (prepared by the Fiscal Resources Task Group of Envision Arlington) for an overview of Town government:  
<https://www.arlingtonma.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/41026/637224522469130000>

For a particular Town Meeting, please take these additional steps:

- Review the materials that are available at the Town Meeting website and in this packet, including reports by the Select Board, Finance Committee, Redevelopment Board, and School Department. <https://www.arlingtonma.gov/townmeeting>
- Attend a Precinct Meeting for your Precinct. These are organized by TMMs in each Precinct.

### **Q: What is the Warrant?**

A: Required by State law, the Warrant enumerates the Articles on which Town Meeting deliberates and votes. It acts as a notice or 'warning' to town residents that the Town Meeting will take place with the Warrant Articles as the agenda items. Only items listed in the Warrant can be discussed at Town Meeting. All Articles in the Warrant must be disposed of (i.e. acted upon by Town Meeting) to dissolve Town Meeting.

### **Q: Where can Warrant Articles and their recommended votes be found?**

A: The Warrant is delivered to all residences in the town. The reports of the Select Board, Redevelopment Board, Finance Committee, and subsequent reports of these and other committees are available on the Town Meeting webpage, and on the Annotated Warrant, which can be found at: [arlingtonma.gov/townmeeting](https://www.arlingtonma.gov/townmeeting)

**Q: What happens when I arrive at Town Meeting?**

A: Town Meeting will be gavelled into session at 8 pm. You should arrive early, between 7:30 pm and 7:45 pm, to check in at your assigned location to pick up an electronic handset. Location assignments will be shared the week before Town Meeting begins based on Town Meeting Members' seating preferences and availability of meeting spaces in or near Town Hall. Your handset will be used during the meeting for requesting to speak and for voting, and must be returned before leaving each night.

**Q: Can I participate remotely?**

A: No. Participation in deliberating and voting at this Town Meeting requires participants to be located within the officially provided seating locations.

**Q: How do I share information or opinions with other TMMs?**

A: Here are some official channels for sharing information or opinions with other TMMs:

- Speak at Town Meeting (requires a request to speak and recognition from the Moderator). This may include slide presentations, charts, or videos submitted 48 hours (2 business days) in advance to the Town Moderator ([GChristiana@town.arlington.ma.us](mailto:GChristiana@town.arlington.ma.us)) to ensure that content is within scope and compatible with our presentation system.
- Email material to the Moderator and the Town Clerk to be posted to the Annotated Warrant online alongside a relevant Article. See **Town Meeting Member Submission Guidelines** at: <https://www.arlingtonma.gov/town-governance/town-meeting/members-email-list>
- Make several printed copies of material and leave a stack on the table at the back of Town Hall so that TMMs can opt to pick them up upon check-in each night. Volunteers will ensure that a portion of printed materials is made available at check-in for the other seating locations. Printed materials may be submitted by chairs of Town boards or committees, the Town Clerk, the Town Manager, department heads, and Town Meeting Members. All printed materials must be clearly marked as to who is submitting them, i.e. name and Precinct number or street address, or Town Department. Unidentified materials will not be distributed.

**Q: Who has the right to speak at Town Meeting? When can they speak? And for how long?**

A: Town Meeting Members have the right to speak once recognized by the Town Moderator. A button on your electronic handset will transmit a request to speak. The Moderator will consult the list of speaking requests to identify and recognize speakers. Arlington residents may speak once introduced by a Town Meeting Member (TMM). Non-residents may also speak, but only with the approval of the assembled Town Meeting Members. Our Town Bylaws, in Title I, Article 1, §7 (c), specify that a speaker on each article is limited to seven minutes of speaking time upon their first time being recognized and five minutes if speaking for a second time on the same article; speakers for reports and announcements are limited to four minutes. Please refrain from using the meeting's time to repeat a point that has been previously made.

**Q: What exactly is voted on?**

A: Town Meeting considers and votes upon the recommended vote of the respective committee or board that heard the Article prior to Town Meeting. If no committee submits a recommended vote, then the Article's proponent must present a substitute motion. The recommended vote on an Article can be amended or substituted by TMMs. A substitute motion or a motion to amend must be submitted to the Town Moderator ([GChristiana@town.arlington.ma.us](mailto:GChristiana@town.arlington.ma.us)), the Town Clerk ([JBrazile@town.arlington.ma.us](mailto:JBrazile@town.arlington.ma.us)), and Town Counsel ([DHeim@town.arlington.ma.us](mailto:DHeim@town.arlington.ma.us)) – either by email or in triplicate on paper – at least 48 hours (two business days) in advance of the commencement of the session in which the Article is expected to be considered and debated. If submitting electronically, please include all three recipients on the same email. The Moderator may allow exceptions to this advance filing requirement in cases of motions that are short, clear, concise and easy to understand, but such exceptions are within the exclusive discretion of the Moderator.

**Q: Are Articles deliberated in number order?**

A: The Select Board establishes the numbered ordering of Articles in the Warrant, and Town Meeting generally follows that ordering. However, it is not uncommon for Articles to be taken out of order. This can happen for various reasons, for example when a presenter who is expected to present background information or field questions about an Article is unable to attend. In such cases, a motion can be made to "lay the Article on the table" or to "Postpone the Article to a time certain," and the meeting votes on whether to accept the motion.

**Q: What Rules of Order does Town Meeting use?**

A: Town Meetings operate in accordance with rules of procedure established by: Massachusetts General Laws; Town Bylaws (Title I, Article 1); local customs and traditions; and *Town Meeting Time: A Handbook of Parliamentary Law, 3rd edition*, a parliamentary handbook that provides a framework for the procedures of the meeting. Copies of *Town Meeting Time* can be purchased for \$27.00 each from the website of the Massachusetts Moderators Association: [massmoderators.org](http://massmoderators.org). The book is not available in digital form at this time, but release of a digital format is under consideration.

**Q: Where can I find a general overview of Town Meetings in Massachusetts?**

A: See the "Citizen's Guide to Town Meetings" on the website of the Secretary of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts at: <https://www.sec.state.ma.us/cis/cistwn/twnidx.htm>. The guide covers both open Town Meetings and representative Town Meetings; Arlington's Town Meeting is the latter.

Credit to Mr. John Leone for the original version of the FAQ from which elements of this version have been derived.

## OATH OF OFFICE

Raise your right hand, repeat after me using your own name, I \_\_\_\_\_, will participate fully and will fairly evaluate all matters before Town Meeting; and vote in the best interests of the Town. I support free speech and will treat others with mutual respect and will conduct myself in a civil manner that is becoming of an elected Town Meeting Member.

I do solemnly swear that I will faithfully and impartially perform the duties incumbent upon me as a Town Meeting member of the Town of Arlington in accordance with the by-laws, the Town Manager Act and the General Laws of the Commonwealth, so help me God.