

Longmeadow Town Meeting

Once you become a registered voter in the Town of Longmeadow, you are eligible to serve as one of the town's legislators. While some towns and cities have Town Councils, Longmeadow has Town Meeting as its legislative body. It is open to all registered voters.

This website will provide some resources that might be useful to you in the work you do as a citizen. Please feel welcome to contact me at RTownsend@Longmeadow.org with any questions. I will honor confidentiality in my conversation with you.

The information below is based primarily in the Commonwealth's General Laws, our town Charter, Bylaws, and *Town Meeting Time* the rule book for Massachusetts Town Meetings.

PARTICIPANTS

At minimum, Town Meetings consist of voters, the Moderator, and the Town Clerk. In Longmeadow, they include the Finance Committee, Select Board and Town Manager, School Committee, Planning Board, and other relevant boards and committees. Usually town employees (Superintendent of Schools, Police Chief, Fire Chief, Heads of the Department of Public Works and Parks and Recreation) participate. Town Counsel, the attorney employed by the Select Board, is also usually present. The Moderator is the elected official who presides at and regulates Town Meeting. The Moderator decides all questions of order and calls the votes.

Voters enter the High School and check in with the Town Clerk's representatives staffing desks, just as they do for elections. Upon confirmation that a person is a registered voter, the Clerk's staff will provide a colored card that entitles the person to vote.

Annual Town Meeting is usually held in the Robert D'Agostino Gymnasium, and Special Town Meeting may be held there, or in the Michael Mucci Auditorium. Any member of the public may attend Town Meeting. Non-voters obtain credentials from the Clerk's office and are seated in a specially designated visitors' section. Fifty (50) voters constitute a quorum.

TIMING

Town Meetings occurs each spring (called the Annual Town Meeting). Traditionally, towns hold a Special Town Meeting in the fall, and other times as needed. The Select Board can call for a Town Meeting, or 200 registered voters may do so. Sometimes an urgent matter will arise after the agenda (warrant) has been "closed" (set) for a meeting, in which case a Special Town Meeting may be held "within" another Town Meeting.

WARRANT

The Select Board publish the warrant, basically the planned agenda for the meeting. The warrant serves as a "warning" to the town's voters of the topics that will be raised at Town Meeting. It mainly consists of a listing of separate articles, like items on an agenda. These articles may call for the spending or saving of money, the creation of a new bylaw, or the amendment of an existing bylaw.

For the Annual Town Meeting, ten (10) or more registered voters may place an article on the warrant. One hundred (100) voters may place an article on a Special Town Meeting warrant. Longmeadow's Bylaws 3-325. state that "The Moderator shall present to a Town Meeting the articles in the warrant in the order in which the articles appear in the warrant; but the meeting may direct a different order of business by an affirmative vote of two-thirds (2/3) of the voters present."

SPEAKING

All speech must be directed through the Moderator. To speak to an issue at Town Meeting, voters must wait to be recognized by the Moderator and identify themselves by name and address. They should be brief (under 2 minutes). Speakers are encouraged to add new points to the deliberation as opposed to repeating what others have already stated. Speech must be civil, respectful, and ethical.

People in line who have not yet had a chance to speak will be given preference over repeat-speakers whenever feasible. A voter may speak twice on a given issue and shall wait until others have had an opportunity to speak before he or she speaks a third time (except for clarification or explanation). Any speaker wishing to speak a fourth time must gain approval of Town Meeting.

Non-debatable motions (e.g., to move the previous question/come directly to a vote, or to lay or remove from the table) must be made *directly* after speaker identification. If such a motion comes at the end of a speech, it will be ruled out of order.

At least at Annual Meetings there will be three microphones for citizens. One will be for speakers in favor of a motion, one for those opposed to the motion, and one for those who wish to ask questions or make a motion. Board members or their representatives speaking on behalf of the board majority may use a microphone in the front of the room.

Non-voters may only speak if they have obtained prior approval from the Moderator. Approval is made on a case-by-case basis. Longmeadow voters are not permitted to allow non-voters to speak by proxy (via video or letter). Brief testimony is permitted, but extensive speech is not.

Main Motions

The Moderator asks Town Meeting for a motion on an article. A voter at Town Meeting makes a motion on an article to take some kind of action on it (to approve, to adopt, to reject, to raise and appropriate, to form a committee, etc.). The Moderator calls for a "second." Any voter may call out "second" in order for deliberation on the motion to occur. The motion is then available for general deliberation— in favor, opposed, or questions.

In Longmeadow's tradition, after a motion has been made and seconded, the chief proponent of the motion speaks first, followed by a representative from appropriate Town Boards, who state the board's majority opinions, if applicable.

Motions may include the same words as are printed in the warrant, and they may differ somewhat. It is important for voters to listen to the exact motion that a speaker makes. Voters vote on the motion, not the article. Sometimes the wording of the motion is a little different than the article. Or, sometimes a motion may be made “in terms of the article” if there is no change from the printed article. Motions must make a specific action. The motion must propose an action that is within the scope of the article. The Moderator rules on all matters of scope.

Amendments

All motions for amendments must be in writing. Amendments must be within the scope and not frivolous.

Calling the Question

When a voter believes that enough information has been heard to come to a vote, she or he may move to “call the question” and bring the motion to a vote. This motion is only in order once five (5) people have spoken in favor, and (5) have spoken against it.

Longmeadow’s Bylaws (3-317. Motion to Cut Off Debate) state that “The Moderator shall not receive a motion to cut off debate on any motion that is before a meeting until at least five (5) voters have spoken for, and five (5) voters have spoken against, the pending motion; but if fewer than five (5) voters have asked to speak for or against the pending motion, the Moderator may receive a motion to cut off debate after the voters who have asked to speak, not to exceed five on either side, have had an opportunity to do so.”

This means that if there are 10 people in line to speak in favor (or opposed) to a motion, and no one who wishes to speak on the other side, a motion to call the question becomes in order once five (5) have spoken.

A motion to call the question is not debatable. A speaker cannot offer reasons for making the motion. The motion is made, seconded, and voted upon immediately. Should two-thirds of voters approve a motion to call the question, a vote on the main motion is taken immediately.

This motion is not necessary if there are no speakers wishing to speak on a main motion.

To Lay on the Table

This motion is in order when the Town Meeting does not have sufficient information to act on the main motion on an article. A motion that has been laid on the table may be taken up later in the meeting. Voters must be aware of this if they choose to leave the meeting before it ends. If a motion is not taken up by the dissolution of the meeting, no action will be taken on that article. (It essentially “dies.”) Voters who wish to vote down an article are discouraged from using this motion; a more certain result is obtained by simply voting “no.”

To Refer

This motion may be made when a voter would prefer to see a committee review an item. Voters may call for the creation of a committee as part of this motion if a relevant one does not already exist.

Motions of Doubtful Legality

Votes on motions at Town Meeting are subject to review by the Commonwealth's Attorney General's Office. Should Town Counsel advise in a preliminary review of the warrant articles, that a particular article would not be approved if moved as printed in the warrant, he or she will make that information available to voters at Town Meeting. Voters may still vote on it, however, it may not have the effect of law.

Motions to consider as a consent agenda (or as a group)

Sometimes motions ask the voters to consider more than one article at a time. If this motion is made and seconded, the Moderator will call out the article numbers in the proposal. Any voter who wants to consider an article separately will call out "hold," and the Moderator will remove that article from the consent agenda. Voting will proceed for the motion to approve (or reject) all the articles in the group.

There are many other kinds of motions and procedures. Should any voter want to understand how to take a certain action, or what something means, she or he should email the Moderator in advance, or ask on the floor when the issue arises.

VOTING

Only those registered voters issued a colored card may vote at Town Meeting. When the Moderator calls for the vote, voters shall raise this card so that it may be seen by the Moderator. Town Meeting voters must be seated in order to have their votes counted.

If there is a question or doubt about the result that the Moderator announces, that doubt should be raised immediately after the announcement. A voting card count shall be conducted. Counted votes will be conducted by tellers appointed by the Moderator. Tellers will work in pairs and only count in the section assigned to them. One will have a hand-clicker. The other will have a clipboard, pen, and tally sheet. Voters must pay attention to the directions the tellers make. They will instruct voters in a given row to raise their cards at a given time and will individually count each section. They will compare the subtotal immediately. If there's a discrepancy, they will recount that section right away, otherwise they will move on to the next row. Each pair of tellers will report their section's total votes to the Moderator via a microphone. The Moderator, Clerk, and Town Counsel will tally the votes, and the Moderator will announce the outcome.

Resource List

- For a listing of relevant laws, please see "Massachusetts Laws About Town Meetings" <http://www.mass.gov/courts/case-legal-res/law-lib/laws-by-subj/about/townmeeting.html>
- Secretary of State's Office for the "Citizen's Guide to Town Meetings" <http://www.sec.state.ma.us/cis/cistwn/twnidx.htm>
- Town Charter: <http://www.longmeadow.org/documentcenter/view/1549>
- Longmeadow's Bylaws: <http://www.longmeadow.org/282/Town-Bylaws>
- *Town Meeting Time* is the rulebook our Town Meeting follows. It is available at the Storrs Library and for purchase via the Massachusetts Moderators Association <http://massmoderators.org/tmt.html>

- Videos:
 - Annual Town Meeting 10 May 2016.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cf1kmo6Q61A>
 - Our Town (Arlene Miller interviews Moderator Rebecca Townsend) 27 April 2016 <https://youtu.be/yAsyjk2JbHo>
 - Special Town Meeting 3 Nov. 2015
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fJNkH0YEEok>
- National Coalition of Dialogue and Deliberation <http://ncdd.org/rc/>

Scholarship and other publications on Town Meeting:

Clark, S. & Bryan, F. *All Those in Favor: Rediscovering the Secrets of Town Meeting and Community*. Montpelier, VT: RavenMark Publication, 2005.

Bryan, F. *Real Democracy: The New England Town Meeting and How it Works*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.

---. "Town Meeting," and "Orville Gibson" in John J. Duffy, Samuel B. Hand, and Ralph H. Orth (eds.) *The Vermont Encyclopedia*. Hanover: University Press of New England, 2003.

---. ["Town Meeting: A Space for Communal Liberty."](#) *Vermont Commons* (Winter 2008)

---. ["Town Meeting: The People's Congress."](#) *Burlington Free Press* (March 4, 2007).

---. ["Women Rule at Town Meeting."](#) *Burlington Free Press* (March 4, 2007).

---. ["A Schoolhouse of Civility."](#) *Sunday Rutland Herald* (March 4, 2007).

---. "The New England Town Meeting in Action" (Review) *The American Political Science Review* (June, 2001), 489-490.

---. "Town Meeting: Keeper of the Sacred Flame," (Essay accompanying Vermont's Contribution to the Smithsonian's *20th Century Collections*, Washington, DC, 2000).

---. ["Town Meeting."](#) *The Sovereign Citizen* (Fall, 1988).

---. ["Town Meeting Debate."](#) *Vermont Life* 40 (Spring, 1986).

---. "Learning Through Conflict," *Teaching Political Science* (Winter, 1983).

---. ["Town Meetings -- A Relic."](#) *New York Times* (April 3, 1982).

---. "Town Meeting: A Rural Option for Urban America?" *National Civic Review* (December, 1978).

---. "Town Meeting—Pure Democracy in Action," in *What This Community Needs . . . An*

Anthology of Advocates Views (Helena, Montana: State Commission on Local Government, January, 1976).

---. "Town Meeting Support in Vermont," *National Civic Review* (July, 1972).

---. "The Politics of Town Meeting Another View," *Chittenden* (February, 1970).

---. "Town Meetings or Regional Government?" *Vermonters* (August, 1966).

Mansbridge, J. *Beyond Adversary Democracy*. Chicago: U of Chicago P. 1980.

Townsend, R.M. "Town Meeting as a Communication Event: Democracy's Act Sequence." *Research on Language and Social Interaction*. 42 (2009): 68-89.

---. "Local Communication Studies." Lead Review Essay. *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 92 (2006): 202-222.

---. "Widening the Circumference of Scene: Local Politics, Local Metaphysics." *KBJournal*. Spring 2006. www.kbjournal.org/townsend

---. "Representative Town Meeting." Participedia. 21 Dec. 2011.

<http://participedia.net/cases/representative-town-meeting>

Zimmerman, J.A. *The New England Town Meeting: Democracy in Action*. Westport, CT: Praeger. 1999.