

# A Brief Guide to Weston Town Meeting Procedure

Town Meeting is the legislative body of the Town. All registered voters may attend, participate in and vote at Town Meeting. Town Meeting determines how our Town government raises and spends your tax dollars.

Town Meeting can seem mysterious to newcomers, however, voters should not worry about being unfamiliar with parliamentary rules. We hope this pamphlet will help. Voters should always feel comfortable prior to or at Town Meeting to ask the Moderator to clarify a procedure, explain what the vote is for or the effect of the passage of a pending motion, assist with potential amendments, or answer other questions. Anyone may also email the Moderator with questions at [moderator@westonmass.org](mailto:moderator@westonmass.org). The Moderator is also available one-half hour before each Town Meeting to answer questions.

## Who Runs Town Meeting—Some Basics



The moderator is available prior to Town Meeting. Email [Moderator@westonmass.org](mailto:Moderator@westonmass.org)

The Moderator is elected by Weston voters to preside over and regulate the proceedings of all Town Meetings, decide all questions of order and make public declaration of all votes. Voters can help accomplish the business of the Town efficiently and democratically by being concise, avoiding points that have already been made; and being courteous to Town employees, volunteers and fellow voters.

In order to be recognized, speakers are required to formally address the Moderator (“Mister Moderator” or “Madam Moderator”), give their name and address for the record, and wait for the Moderator to authorize the speaker to proceed. Speakers may only ask questions or raise a point of order through the Moderator. Speakers should avoid references to and comments about others, including names and personalities (for example, “As a previous speaker indicated”).

No one may interrupt a speaker who has the floor except to raise a “Question of Procedure” or “Point of Order,” such as: What is being voted on? What is the effect of the passage of the pending motion? Is the speaker entitled to the floor? Is the pending action or what the speaker is saying or proposing, indecorous, frivolous, irrelevant, illegal or contrary to proper procedure? Can visibility or audibility be improved?

## Who May Speak

All registered voters are entitled to speak at Town Meeting according to the following procedures. Speaking limits are subject to Town Meeting consent.

**PRE-ARRANGED ARTICLE PRESENTATIONS ARE LIMITED** to five minutes per speaker, generally, whether for or against a motion. Exceptions are made by prearrangement for the presentation of the annual operating budget, large capital expenditures, the community preservation committee annual report, significant zoning bylaw changes, and other significant articles.

**SPEAKERS, OTHER THAN PRESENTERS, ARE LIMITED** to five minutes, with the opportunity to speak again if

there is new information to add after others have had a turn to comment. The Moderator will signal when a speaker has 30 seconds to conclude remarks.

**MOTIONS, PRESENTATIONS AND QUESTIONS WILL BE MADE AT THE PODIUM.** After a motion is made and seconded, the Moderator will first invite prearranged presenters to speak for and against an article.

**PARTICIPATION IN THE DEBATE MUST BE MADE FROM ANY OF THE MICROPHONES IN THE AUDITORIUM,** including the podium. Voters seeking to be recognized should line up near a microphone. If a voter is unable to rise from his or her

seat, the voter should hold their hand up for a page to bring a portable microphone. In the event of overflow, arrangements will be made for voters in an overflow location, such as the gymnasium, to speak.

**BEFORE MAKING A COMMENT OR ASKING A QUESTION,** a voter must formally address the Moderator, state his or her name and address for the record, and wait for the Moderator to tell you to proceed.

**ONLY QUESTIONS OF PROCEDURE OR POINTS OF ORDER** can be made from the floor without first being formally recognized by the Moderator.

Contact the Moderator prior to the meeting at:

[moderator@westonmass.org](mailto:moderator@westonmass.org)

Town Counsel is also available at Town Meeting to help prepare motions and amendments and to provide advice on procedure.



**WHO CAN VOTE** All voters registered in the Town of Weston are eligible to vote. Others are welcome to attend Town Meeting, but will be separated from registered voters in a designated area. Past practice has been to allow non-voters to speak at the discretion of the Moderator, or the Moderator may submit the question to Town Meeting whether to allow non-voters to speak.

## What is a Motion?

A “motion” is the formal term for taking action in a meeting

A **MAIN MOTION** proposes action under the article of the warrant being considered. The main motion places the matter before Town Meeting, and sets the stage for the debate. Motions must be “seconded” before they can be debated. Approval of a main motion typically requires a majority or 2/3 vote, depending on the subject matter, but there are exceptions where a larger quantum of vote, (for example 4/5, or 9/10) is needed. The warrant specifies the quantum of vote required for passage.

A **MOTION TO AMEND** is a proposal to change the main motion, and always requires a

majority vote. This “primary amendment” may also be amended by a “secondary amendment.” No further amendments are permitted. All amendments are voted prior to the vote on the main motion.

A **MOTION TO TERMINATE DEBATE**, also referred to as a **Motion Call the Question or Move the Previous Question**, is a call to end debate immediately and vote on the pending matter. The motion may not be made immediately after you speak or by yelling from your seat. Once made, the meeting immediately votes on the matter of whether to stop debate, and

approval requires a 2/3 vote.

A **MOTION TO TABLE** is generally not used in Weston, and is disfavored as it technically requires Town Meeting to vote to bring the matter back for debate at a later time before dissolution of the meeting

A **MOTION TO TAKE AN ARTICLE OUT OF ORDER** is the preferred motion to advance or postpone action on an article until an earlier or later time at Town Meeting. This motion is debatable and approval requires a 2/3 vote.

A **MOTION TO PASS OVER** (or, in some towns, a **Motion to Indefinitely Postpone**) is typically appro-

priate when there is no interest in taking action under an article. The effect of such a motion is to defeat that article. (The Moderator will also declare an article “passed over” if no motion is made or seconded on the article itself.)

A **MOTION TO ADJOURN** may be made at any time to a specified time, date and place. Such a motion is typically appropriate when the business of Town Meeting has not concluded and the hour grows late. The effect of the motion is to continue the meeting to another date and time.

A **MOTION TO DISSOLVE** the meeting is in order when all articles in the warrant have been disposed of, and signifies the end of the meeting.

## Summary of Motions

Under **CONSENT AGENDA**, non-controversial articles are bundled together and voted without debate, but ten or more voters may request any article be considered separately under normal rules of debate.

Main Motions:	Debatable	Vote Needed
Motion to take action under article	Yes	Majority or 2/3*
Motion to take articles out of order	Yes	2/3
Motion to reconsider an article acted upon and disposed of (permitted only on same night as main motion is made)	Yes	2/3
<b>Subsidiary Motions:</b>		
Motion to pass over	Yes	Majority
Motion to amend main motion	Yes	Majority
Motion to lay on the table	No	2/3
Motion to Move the Question or Previous question (to end debate)	No	2/3
<b>Privileged Motions:</b>		
To dissolve	No	Majority
To adjourn to a fixed time or recess	No	Majority
Question quorum (quorum currently 80)	No	None

*\*The substance of the article dictates the quantum of vote required to approve the same*

## How Voting Works

Town Meeting voting process is regulated by Town Bylaws, which were amended in 2017 to allow for the use of handheld, electronic voting devices. By utilizing electronic handsets, voters will be able to register their votes quickly and accurately without the use of placards or standing counts.



The handset will be given to voters upon check-in. It is intended for your exclusive use and will have been checked for performance prior to the meeting. You’ll notice that the handset looks similar to a TV remote. When the time comes to cast your vote, the Moderator will make the announcement and set a timer for 30 seconds. At that time, simply press the “1” button to vote YES, or press the “2” button to vote NO. Your vote will be shown on the handset’s display. If you pressed the wrong button, simply press the one you intended. Votes are transmitted wirelessly to a computer and the last button pressed is recorded at the end of the 30-second voting period.

An instruction sheet will be available at Town Meeting, as well as additional assistance if any issues should arise. A practice vote will also be taken at the start of the meeting to get everyone accustomed to the handset.

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## Financial Interest Disclosure

A brief statement made prior to speaking on an article being discussed

A speaker at Town Meeting, who is speaking in his/her individual capacity (and not on behalf of a Town Board or Committee) who has a financial interest in an article shall declare any such interest prior to speaking on the substance of the article.

For the purposes of this rule, the term “financial interest” shall mean that the speaker or “family member” (defined as the speaker’s spouse, parents, children, brothers and sisters, where such family interest may be by blood or adoption) has a reasonably foreseeable financial interest in the article, whether directly or through a legal entity (including without limitation, corporations, trusts, partnerships and limited liability companies), whether the financial interest is large or small, negative or positive, for which the speaker or family member is an owner (or holds any type of ownership interest), officer, director, member, trustee, partner or employee, and further, with respect to matters involving land, a financial interest shall be deemed to exist if a speaker or any of the persons or entities set forth above is an abutter, or an abutter to an abutter within 300 feet, or owns property directly opposite to, a parcel of land at issue.

Questions or objections about a speaker's potential financial interest may be raised by a Point of Order while the person is speaking or immediately thereafter.

