

NEEDHAM TOWN MEETING

OVER 300 YEARS OF LOCAL SELF-GOVERNANCE AT ITS FINEST

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NEEDHAM TOWN MODERATOR

I.YOUR PLACE IN HISTORY

ANCIENT IDEAS BECOME AMERICAN IDEALS

- The Mayflower Compact (1620)
 - “...combine ourselves into a Civil Body Politic for better ordering and preservation...[and] to enact such just and equal laws ... [which] shall be thought most meet and convenient for the general good of the Colony.”

A FORUM FOR
DISCUSSION OF
TAXATION, SPENDING,
EDUCATION, PUBLIC
SAFETY





THE BOSTON TEA PARTY AND TOWN MEETING 1773

LORD GEORGE S. GERMAINE: MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT (1774) SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE AMERICAN COLONIES (1775 - 1782)



- “This is what becomes of their wretched town meetings – these are the proceedings of a tumultuous and riotous rabble who ought, if they had the least prudence, to follow their mercantile employment and not trouble themselves with politics and government, which they do not understand.”

~~THE FOUNDATION~~
FOR OUR
DEMOCRACY



II. NEEDHAM TOWN MEETING

NEEDHAM TOWN MEETING

- Needham was part of Dedham (founded 1636)
- 1710: Citizens west of the Charles River applied for a Charter to the Royal Governor and Queen Anne. Access to Town Meeting was paramount.
- Earliest Warrant in the Town Archives: 1719.
- 1823: “Post warrant for two Sundays previous to the meeting at each Congregational Church.”
- 1935: Move from Open Town Meeting to Limited (Representative)

SOURCES OF GUIDANCE FOR TOWN MEETING



Massachusetts General Laws



Needham Town Charter



Needham General By-Laws



Town Meeting Time: A Handbook of Parliamentary Law



Needham Town Meeting Manual



Tradition

TOWN MEETING PARTICIPANTS

- **Moderator:** Elected. Presiding officer at the meeting. Rules on all matters of procedure and declares votes. (M.G.L. c. 39, Sections 14 and 15).
- **Town Clerk:** Elected. Keeps records, supervises admission to the hall, records all votes declared final by the Moderator.
- **Select Board:** Elected. Acts as the Warrant Committee. The proponents for many of the Articles contained in the Warrant. The Executive Branch.
- **Finance Committee:** Appointed by the Moderator. Presents Annual Operating Budget and gives a recommendation on items with fiscal implications.

TOWN MEETING PARTICIPANTS (CONT.)

- **Other Elected and Appointed Boards and Committees:**
 - **Planning Board**
 - **Community Preservation Act Committee**
 - **Permanent Public Building Committee (PPBC)**
 - **School Committee**
 - **Personnel Board**
 - **Park and Recreation Commission**
- **Town Manager:** Responds to questions concerning operations and management

TOWN MEETING PARTICIPANTS (CONT.)

- **Members:** Once assembled, our 254 Town Meeting Members (elected and at-large) *are* the Town. Members may propose amendments, use parliamentary rules to make motions, speak to the merits of a Main Motion and other pending motions. Only Members may vote.
- **Registered Voters of the Town:** May attend Town Meeting and be recognized to speak to matters on the floor. They cannot propose amendments, make motions or vote.

TOWN MEETING

- Town Meeting is a non-partisan forum for civil discussion and voting.
- Individual Town Meeting members represent their Precinct and the Town as a whole, not any group, faction or caucus.
- A Legislative Chamber: Formality and rules apply. Restrictions of where one may sit and how one may act; speakers must be recognized to speak and then address only the Moderator; *all* in attendance must be respectful and observe rules and time limits.
- Moderator enforces all rules of procedure and maintains order.

III. TOWN MEETING PROCEDURE

TOWN MEETING IN ACTION

- An Article is placed in the Warrant by the Warrant Committee. May include Citizens' Petitions.
- The Warrant provides notice to all that certain business will occur.
- Article is notice only. A Main Affirmative Motion is filed for each Article.
- Consent Calendar: The Articles Members – not the Moderator -- consider routine or fully developed. Passed by unanimous consent to save time.
- Withdrawn Articles: Proponents no longer wish to present the Main Motion to Town Meeting. These matters are never reached.

TOWN MEETING IN ACTION

- Moderator calls the Article and places the Main Motion on the floor of Town Meeting.
- Proponents tell Town Meeting why it should vote for the Motion.
- Finance Committee delivers its recommendation.
- Discussion and debate among the Members.
Additional motions – e.g., motion to amend, motions to refer – may be introduced.
- Moderator calls for the vote, tallies the vote, and reports the results.
- Moderator declares result (e.g. “motion carries” or “motion fails”) and gavels the Article “disposed of.”

DISCUSSION AND VOTING

- Those who wish to speak must first be recognized by the Moderator. Stand and call out for recognition. Time limits for remarks: 5 minutes in total per Article.
- All remarks must be directed to the Moderator as chair of the meeting.
- Requests for additional information must be made to the Moderator, who will call on someone to answer.
- Mutual respect, civility and formality. No discourtesy. The Moderator enforces order.
- Most votes are taken through voice vote (“aye” or “nay”). If Moderator is in doubt, unconflicted tellers are drawn from Town Meeting. They count by show of hands (or standing) and report results to the Moderator who tallies and reports.

NEEDHAM TOWN MEETING IN ORDINARY TIMES

- Held in James Hugh Powers Hall at Needham Town Hall.
- Pledge of Allegiance and sometimes patriotic music.
- A Call for Spiritual Guidance (invocation) is delivered each night (NICA).
- Begin at 7:30 p.m. and usually end promptly at 11:00 p.m.
- Needham requires no “seconds.”
- Members may “Move the Previous Question” (ask TM to end debate and vote).
- Annual Town Meeting is generally completed in three to four sessions. Specials usually completed in one.
- At the third ATM session, we hold a Special Town Meeting.

TOWN MEETING DURING A PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY

- Meeting held outdoors at Memorial Park Parking Lot
- Presentations by Proponents and the Finance Committee's recommendations are pre-recorded and viewed before Town Meeting.
- No materials are distributed at the meeting or displayed on the screen. Instead, supporting materials are posted to the Town website for advance review.
- When the Moderator places a Main Motion on the floor, discussion and debate among Town Meeting Members begins immediately. Questions may be directed to proponents, the Finance Committee or others through the Moderator. Proceed to a vote.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

PREPARATION

- You are a Town Meeting Member throughout the year. Please stay informed and engaged.
- Prior to Town Meeting, read the Warrant. The Warrant contains a plethora of information beyond the Articles: the Finance Committee's Annual Letter, neutral descriptions of each Article, revenue and expense information, the Operating Budget, as well as additional information relating town personnel and town debt.
- Watch the videos posted to the town website and read the materials as well.
- Access recordings of meetings held in advance of Town Meeting. Speak to your constituents.
- The more you know, the better representative you will be!

CLOSING THOUGHT

- One foreign visitor's observation:
 - **“Town Meetings are to liberty, what primary schools are to science; they bring it within the people's reach, they teach men how to use it and enjoy it.”**
- Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (1823)