



STOUGHTON, MA

# Organizational Town Meeting

May 1, 2025

Bob Mullen, Moderator  
Carmel Drewes, Deputy Moderator

# Agenda

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- **6:00—6:15:** Get to Know Each Other
- **6:15—7:00:** Town Meeting 101
- **7:00—7:15:** Announcements & Updates
- **7:15—7:45:** Organizational Business
- **7:45 until finished:** Precincts select Vice Chair & Representatives to Standing Committees

## 6:00—6:15: Get to Know Each Other

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**Introduce yourself to the other reps in your precinct.**

- If you are New: ask questions!
- If you are Experienced: share your wisdom and suggestions!

# 6:15—7:00: Town Meeting 101

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- Town Meeting's role in local government
- Who attends Town Meeting and what are their roles
- Annual & Special Town Meetings
- General flow of a Motion (from making a motion through vote)
- Common Terms & Phrases
- Consent Agenda
- General Suggestions
- What happens if.....

# Town Meeting's role in Local Government

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- Town Meeting is the Legislative Body of the Town.
- There are two types of Town Meetings in Massachusetts:
  - Representative Town Meeting - Elected Representatives
  - Open Town Meeting – All Eligible Voters
- Stoughton has a Representative Town Meeting with 168 Town Meeting Representatives.
- Twenty-one representatives are elected to three-year terms from each of the eight Stoughton voting precincts.

# Who attends Town Meeting & their Roles

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- **Town Meeting Representatives** – Discuss, debate and vote on Articles Contained in the Warrant. The Warrant must state the time and place of the meeting and subjects (Articles) to be acted upon.
- **Any Member of the Public May Also Attend** – Non-representatives cannot vote and may or may not be able to ask questions or share pro/con position
- **Town Moderator** – Presides over Town Meeting, Decides all questions of order, Recognize speakers, Makes public declarations of all votes and Regulates the proceedings.

# Who attends Town Meeting & their Roles

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- **Town Clerk** – Swear in Town Meeting Reps, Determines quorum, Records all votes, Record minutes of the meeting
- **Town Counsel** – Answer legal questions and provides legal guidance as necessary
- **Select Board** – Prepares and issues the Town Warrant. The Annual Town Meeting is determined by the Town Charter, which is the first Monday in May. The Select Board sets the time and place for Special Town Meetings.
- **School Committee** – Attends Town Meeting and Presents as needed

# Who attends Town Meeting & their Roles

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- **Town Manager** – Makes Presentations and answer questions as needed
- **Superintendent of Schools** – Makes Presentations and answer questions as needed
- **Department Heads** – Make Presentations and answer questions as needed
- **Outside Presenters** – Sometimes there is a representative of an outside source (e.g. a contractor) who helps present an article because they have the background information.



# Annual & Special Town Meetings

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- **Organizational Town Meeting** – always the Thursday before Annual Town Meeting starts
- **Annual Town Meeting (ATM)** – starts the first Monday in May and continues each Monday and Wednesday night until all business is finished
- **Special Town Meetings (STM)** – may be called throughout the year, if needed, to address items that cannot wait until the next Annual Town Meeting.

# Annual & Special Town Meetings

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- A Special Town Meeting can be called “inside” of Annual Town Meeting – this happens when the warrant for the ATM was already closed when new items came up and needed to be addressed. If that happens close enough to the ATM, it can be run as a STM “inside” the ATM (instead of us having to return after the ATM to conduct the STM business).

# Annual & Special Town Meetings

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- You need to be sworn in to serve as a rep. If you didn't go to Town Hall to be sworn in, it can happen at Organizational Meeting or the first night of Town Meeting.
- **Note:** Town Meeting Representative terms until the municipal election in 1, 2, or 3 years, not just through the Annual Town Meeting. Committee meetings and Special Town Meetings may take place during the time after Annual Town Meeting and before the municipal election when your term expires.

# Annual & Special Town Meetings

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- When you arrive to Town Meeting (in the High School auditorium):
  - Find your precinct chair, sign in, and get your “clicker” (used for voting) – you will get the same clicker each night, this is used to record your votes so don’t switch clickers with anyone!
  - You can sit wherever you want in the auditorium.
  - **Be sure to return your clicker to your precinct chair before you leave at the end of the night!**

# Annual & Special Town Meetings

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- The Annual (or Special) Town Meeting will be called to order the first night and then adjourned each evening, with a final adjournment at the end of the final night.
- *Questions?*

# General Flow of a Motion

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- Each Article in the Warrant Book contains a separate Proposed Motion
- The motion is made and is seconded by a Town Meeting Rep which puts the motion “on the floor” of Town Meeting (meaning: we are hearing it)
- Committee Reports are read to inform the body of their recommendations from the Public Hearings
- Presentation is made on the Motion that is before Town Meeting and is limited to 10 minutes per Article.

# General Flow of a Motion

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- **Technical Question Period** will begin once the Presentation has concluded. A limit of two questions per Town Meeting Rep per Article. Questions to the Presenter(s) during this period.
  - Non-debatable technical questions should be specifically forced on the content of the article and clarify information from the article (questions that answer things like who, when, where, how)
  - The person asking the question should not share their opinion of the article during their question time

# General Flow of a Motion

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- **Pro/Con Debate:** Remarks and statements are limited to 2–3 minutes.
  - Remain on topic, relevant, brief and focused. Due to time constraints and the number of Articles, the Moderator reserves the right to amend or change any of these time limits.
  - Restating information previously presented by another speaker is not necessarily helpful during pro/con debate.



# General Flow of a Motion

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- **Pro/Con Debate:** *New procedure this year:*
  - There will be two (2) PRO microphones and two (2) CON microphones. The microphones will be labeled accordingly.
  - Please line up at a microphone that corresponds to your position statement.

# General Flow of a Motion

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- During debate, if motion to “**Move The Question**” is made, the Town Meeting Rep is requesting to stop and end debate.
  - You cannot “move the question” after presenting a pro/con statement. You must begin your time by saying “move the question”.
  - The representatives will then vote – not voting on the article itself, voting on whether we should end debate (which will lead to voting on the article).
  - A 2/3 Yes vote is required to approve Moving the Question.
  - If 2/3 Yes is not reached, debate continues on the particular motion until the debate concludes or another motion to “Move The Question” is made, passes, and proceeds to a vote.
- *Questions?*

# Amending a Motion

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- First, the motion from the Town Warrant is made, seconded and is put on the floor.
- The Amendment may consist of adding, deleting or substituting words in the motion to be amended. It may also be a revised or different motion but a motion to substitute is still a motion to amend.
- An Amended (substitute) motion is made and seconded and put on the floor. This Amended Motion is first discussed, debated and voted on. **A motion to amend requires only a majority vote to be approved.**
- If this Amended Motion is approved, it is now called the **Main Motion As Amended** and replaces the original motion from the Warrant Book. Now the **Main Motion As Amended** must be acted upon and voted on, in the same process as any other motion.

# The Budget

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- Town Meeting reviews the Budget, Department by Department.
- We generally start with the Town Counsel's budget which begins on page 80 in the Budget Details Section of Book 1.
- We first review the Town's budget and then we review the School Department's budget. There is a difference with the School Department budget which is a bottom-line budget.
- Town Meeting Reps, by law, are only allowed to alter the bottom line within the School Department budget. This will be further explained by Town Counsel at the appropriate time during the budget debate.

# The Budget

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- Article 14, this year is the General Fund Operating Budget. The process is as follows: the Finance Director or her designee, will read each Department Name, Department Number and the Total Dollar Amount for each Department.
- If a Town Meeting Representative wants to question any part of that Department, the Town Meeting Rep must state “HOLD” during the momentary pause. The Moderator will ask for the name of the Town Meeting Rep and record the name and at the end of the process for the entire budget, Town Meeting will come back to each Department that has a HOLD on it and will request the Town Meeting Rep to state their issue or ask a question relating to the budget that they put a HOLD on.
- All Departments that did not have a “HOLD” placed on them, will be closed and NOT subject for further discussion.

# Common Terms & Phrases

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- **Point of Order:** Speaker to be recognized by the Moderator and discusses the issue that speaker wants to inform the body.
- **Move the Question:** Speaker to be recognized by the Moderator and states “Move the Question” during pro/con debate means the speaker believes that the body has heard enough discussion and wishes to stop debate. This requires a 2/3 Yes vote of the body and if passes, debate ends and the body votes on the motion on the floor.
- **Free Cash:** Money that is not otherwise allocated (i.e. free to use), it does not mean “money that we’re getting for free”.
- **Suspend the Rules:** This means we would make a change to the standing rules to do something differently (e.g. take articles out of order, take up new business after 10:30pm)
- *Questions? Other terms that would be helpful to review?*

# Consent Agenda

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- A Consent Agenda is a process to help speed up Town Meeting.
- The Moderator compiles a list of Articles that have generally been approved in prior Town Meetings with little or no debate. The list of Articles is contained in the Consent Agenda with a Motion to approve that whole set of Articles with one vote. If successful, the listed Articles are approved with one vote and are not discussed individually.
- *Questions?*

# General Suggestions

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- **Review the Warrant in advance** – the articles are listed first, supporting documentation is later in the book
- **Check the Virtual Front Table** (on the town website) before each Town Meeting night
- **Check the actual Front Table** outside the auditorium when entering each night
- **Check your email:** Make sure the Town Clerk's Office has a correct email address for you (you can create an email specific to your Town Meeting role, but be sure you check that if it's not your main email!)



# General Suggestions

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- **Attend Public Hearings** (before the next Special or Annual Town Meeting, or view recordings online) where these articles have presented and discussed – many of your questions may have already been answered at a public hearing
- **Attend any presentations by the Town Manager or other Department Heads** (or view recordings online) – again, many of your questions may have already been addressed
- Contact the Town Manager or Department Heads outside of Town Meeting with general questions or clarifications about town operations. During Town Meeting we focus on the specific articles, not general procedural or operational questions.
- *Questions?*

# What Happens if.....

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- If a motion fails: There is no further debate on the motion regarding the Article in the Warrant. The vote is recorded and the body moves on to the next Article and Motion in the Warrant.
- If we don't have quorum: The body may do no business and the Moderator will set a date for the body to continue the Town Meeting.
- *(what else are you wondering about?)*

# 7:00—7:15: Announcements & Updates

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- There will be childcare available for Town Meeting nights (provided by YMCA staff). There is a Google Form to fill out. Please submit that by noon the day you need childcare.
- There is a group of reps working on creating a website with information about TM Reps so that it's easier for our constituents to about us and to be helpful at election times. You'll get more information about that as the project continues.

# 7:15—7:45: Organizational Business

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These items are presented in this order because it is outlined as such in the town charter.

1. Select Precinct Chairs & Clerks
2. Select Deputy Moderator
3. Select Governing Rules & Procedures

# 7:15—7:45: Organizational Business

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## **1. Select Precinct Chairs & Clerks**

- The Chair is responsible for communication with precinct representatives, including distributing voting clickers at each Town Meeting night. The Chair serves as a member of the Rules Committee
- The Clerk records votes within the precinct, such as electing representatives to standing committees or voting during a precinct caucus

# 7:15—7:45: Organizational Business

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## **2. Select Deputy Moderator**

- The Deputy Moderator stands in to facilitate Town Meeting in the absence or recusal of the moderator
- The Deputy Moderator serves as a member of the Charter Review Committee

# 7:15—7:45: Organizational Business

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## **3. Select Governing Rules & Procedures**

- We have traditionally used “Town Meeting Time, version 3”

# 7:45 Until Finished

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- Each precinct will now meet to select their Vice Chair plus Representatives to standing committees. When finished, provide the results to the Town Clerk and then your precinct is free to leave.
- The standing committees hold public hearings in advance of each Annual or Special Town Meeting. These public hearings are an important opportunity for articles to be explained and vetted. The standing committees take a vote on each article which is recorded and stated when the article is heard during Town Meeting. Town Meeting Reps are encouraged to attend.



# 7:45 Until Finished

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- **Committee on Finance and Taxation (“Fin Com”)**: Reviews articles that have monetary costs and/or spending considerations
- **Municipal Regulations (“Muni Regs”)**: Reviews articles related to bylaws and zoning regulations
- **Municipal Operations (“Muni Opps”)**: Reviews articles that affect functions performed by offices and departments of the town
- **Intergovernmental Relations (“IGR”)**: Reviews articles which affect the relations of the town with other municipalities, regional governments, and county/state/federal government
- **Charter Review (2 yr terms)**: Reviews the town charter and proposes any needed or suggested changes as Town Meeting articles

# 7:45 Until Finished

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- Any final questions before we move to precincts to select committee representatives?