

Citizens Guide to Town Meeting

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1. Town Meeting Responsibilities

As the legislative branch of town government, one of Town Meeting's most important roles is to vote whether to approve operating budgets and capital budgets. Town Meeting also votes on motions to change town and zoning bylaws, motions that request changes to the Massachusetts General Laws (MGL) on behalf of Framingham, motions to create Town Meeting committees, as well as motions to approve contracts that last for three (3) years or more.

The operating budget funds town departments, as well as the schools and the library. The major expenses are for salaries, pension funds, health insurance, and debt service. The funds for these budgets comes from (1) property taxes, including a projection for new growth; (2) state aid, including Chapter 70 education aid, lottery proceeds and additional assistance; and (3) local receipts, which include motor vehicle excise taxes, room and meals taxes, building permits and other department permit fees, and user fees.

A number of town services operate separately from the general town budget, with specific fees used to fund expenses, e.g., the water enterprise fund and the sewer enterprise fund. Town Meeting votes to authorize the expenses from these funds.

2. Town Meeting Members

The voters in each of the town's 18 precincts elect 12 Town Meeting Members for a total of 216 Town Meeting Members. Town Meeting Members serve three-year terms. The Town Meeting Members in each precinct elect a chairperson, vice-chairperson, and a clerk during the Annual Town Meeting.

When there is a Town Meeting Member vacancy, the runner up at the last election fills the remainder of the term. If there is no single runner-up, the Town Meeting Members from the precinct elect someone, as an interim Town Meeting Member, to fill the position until the next election. At that election, the person elected as an interim Town Meeting Member must run as a new candidate, not as an incumbent.

To be placed on the ballot at the annual town election, you must obtain 25 signatures from registered voters in your precinct. Incumbent Town Meeting Members do not need to get signatures. They need only notify the Town Clerk by the designated date that they wish to run for re-election.

3. Town Moderator

The Town Moderator is elected at the annual town election for a term of one year.

The Town Moderator has two major responsibilities: to conduct Town Meeting in a fair and impartial manner and to make appointments to permanent committees as specified in the Town bylaws. On occasion, Town Meeting votes to create an ad-hoc committee and designates the Moderator to appoint the members to this committee.

The Moderator conducts Town Meeting according to the statutes of the Massachusetts General Law (MGL) and the Town bylaws. The Moderator is guided by *Town Meeting Time* (a book published by the Massachusetts Moderators Association). The Moderator is expected to run an orderly meeting, giving Town Meeting Members the opportunity to ask questions and express their opinions. In addition, the Moderator may recognize citizens of the Town who wish to speak.

When the discussion has ended, the Moderator re-states the motion or amendment, and then Town Meeting votes. A vote may be by a show of hands, a ballot vote, or a roll call vote. The Town Clerk records the votes and later publishes them in the *Annual Town Report*.

4. Town Meeting Date, Time and Location

The Board of Selectmen calls all Town Meetings. The bylaws state that the Annual Town Meeting shall be called for the third Tuesday in April and the Fall Town Meeting to be held on the third Tuesday of October, but the Board of Selectmen may change the date by a week. The Board of Selectmen may call a Special Town Meeting when necessary. This often occurs in the January. Any citizen who obtains 200 signatures may request that the Board of Selectmen call a Special Town Meeting.

The Town Clerk posts notices of meetings on the bulletin board which is outside the Town Clerk's office and on the town website, www.Framinghamma.gov, under Town Government.

All Town Meetings are held at the Memorial Building in Nevins Hall and are called for 7:30 pm. The Moderator and the Town Clerk sit on the stage. Town Meeting Members sit at tables in the front of the room. The Board of Selectmen, the Town Manager, and the Town Counsel sit at tables in front of the stage to the right. The Finance Committee sits at tables in front of the stage to the left. Town officials sit at designated tables on the right side.

The quorum for a Town Meeting is 80 Town Meeting Members.

5. Town Warrant

The articles in the warrant define the agenda for a Town Meeting. Discussion and motions on an article must pertain to the subject of the article. The warrant is prepared by the Board of Selectmen and is provided to Town Meeting Members and others attending Town Meeting. It is also posted on the town website and published in the local newspaper.

The directors of Town departments usually prepare articles for a warrant. The Chief Financial Officer (CFO) prepares the budget articles, and the Planning Board prepares the zoning articles. Town committees may also submit articles to the Board of Selectmen for inclusion in the warrant. Citizens who wish to sponsor an article must first obtain signatures from other citizens. Articles for the Annual Town Meeting require 10 signatures. For a Special Town Meeting, 100 signatures are required.

Sponsors of warrant articles also prepare background material as well as material that explain the article and describe the reason for the article. The sponsor must also prepare the motion that will be made under the article.

6. The Action at Town Meeting

The Moderator calls for a main motion under each article in the warrant. The Chief Financial Officer (CFO), for financial articles, or a Town Meeting Member, for non-financial articles, makes the main motion. The sponsor may then make a presentation of up to 10 minutes, describing the purpose of the motion.

Following the presentation, the Moderator asks for reports from committees. Then the Moderator calls on Town Meeting Members or members from the public to speak on the motion. The speakers may state why they support or do not support the motion, ask a question, or make an amendment to the motion. Amendments or secondary motions must be within the scope of the article. The Finance Committee may make a motion on a budget article.

A Town Meeting Member may move that the article be referred back to a committee for more study or make a motion to “move the question.” A “move the question” motion is voted upon immediately, and, if passed, the discussion terminates.

When the discussion is over, the Moderator calls for a vote. Only Town Meeting Members may vote. Votes are first taken by a show of hands. If the Moderator sees that the vote is close, or if seven Town Meeting Members so request, the vote is taken again and is counted by tellers. If 20 members ask for a ballot vote, the Town Clerk distributes ballots. Most votes require a majority to pass, but some motions require a two-thirds vote, e.g., motions on the capital budget or on zoning articles.

When all articles have been disposed of, the meeting is dissolved. Within seven days after the dissolution of a Town Meeting, a petition signed by at least 3% of the registered voters can call a special election for citizens to vote on an article previously voted at the Town Meeting. At least 20% of the registered voters must vote to reverse a vote of Town Meeting. A majority of those voting are needed to reverse the vote.

Town Meeting is shown live on Government Access TV. You can view any session of Town Meeting as streaming video from the town website, www.Framinghamma.gov.

7. The Annual Town Report

The Board of Selectmen prepares the Annual Town Report. It contains reports from elected boards, as well as from appointed boards, committees, and commissions. In addition, the Annual Town Report contains the *Town Meeting Journal*, prepared by the Town Clerk, which lists the warrant articles and the motions voted on by Town Meeting during the previous year. The Annual Town Report also contains the votes from all elections held in the town in the previous year.

8. Town Meeting Standing Committees

At the precinct meeting during the Annual Town Meeting, the Town Meeting Members from each precinct elect one representative to serve on each of seven Town Meeting Standing Committees. Standing Committees may have fewer than 18 members as some precincts do not elect a representative to each of the Committees. Some Committees have as few as 10 members.

These committees meet with the sponsor of warrant articles during the weeks before Town Meeting is held. Each committee discusses the subject of those articles relating to the committee and votes on a recommendation that the committee will make to Town Meeting.

The Town Meeting Standing Committees and their related governmental units are:

Standing Committee on Rules:

This committee is responsible for Town Meeting procedures.

Standing Committee on Ways and Means:

This committee is responsible for the Finance Committee, the Finance Division, the Human Resources Division, the Information Services Division, the Purchasing Department, the Legal Department, and the Media Services Department. The Committee is also responsible for the Selectmen, the Town Clerk, Town Elections, the Retirement Board, Capital Budget Committee, and the Government Study Committee.

Standing Committee on Planning and Zoning:

This committee is responsible for the Community and Economic Development Division, the Zoning Board of Appeals, the Planning Board, the Conservation Commission, the Historical Commission, the Metrowest Growth Management Commission, the Economic Development and Industrial Corporation, and the Historical District Commission.

Standing Committee on Public Works:

This committee is responsible for the Public Works Division and for the Town Buildings Department.

Standing Committee on Education:

This committee is responsible for the Library, the Framingham School Department, and the Keefe Vocational School.

Standing Committee on Public Safety:

This committee is responsible for the Police Division, the Fire Division, and the Inspection Services Division.

Standing Committee on Community Service:

This committee is responsible for the Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs Division, the Edgell Grove Cemetery, the Community Development Block Grant Committee, the Council on Aging, Human Relations, Veterans Service, and Fair Housing.

9. Moderator-appointed Committees

The Moderator appoints the six permanent committees defined in the bylaws. Some committees must consist of Town Meeting Members, some cannot have Town Meeting Members, and some may or may not have Town Meeting Members. The committees and the number of members in each are listed below.

Finance Committee	9 non Town Meeting Members
Capital Budget Committee	6 Town Meeting Members, plus 1 Finance Committee Member
Real Property Committee	10 Town Meeting Members, plus 7 others from 7 specified Boards, Committees, and Commissions
Government Study Committee	12 Members
Technology Advisory Committee	6 Members
Personnel Board	5 non Town Meeting Members

The responsibilities of each Moderator-appointed committee are listed below:

Finance Committee:

The Finance Committee makes recommendations to Town Meeting on the operating budget and on other financial articles in the warrant. The Committee consults with the Chief Financial Officer, who prepares the annual operating budget, and with Town department heads. The Finance Committee authorizes the transfer of funds from the Reserve Fund in response to emergencies that occur during the year. The Committee prepares an annual report for Town Meeting for distribution to each Town Meeting Member at least seven days before the Annual Town Meeting begins.

Capital Budget Committee:

The Capital Budget Committee considers expenditures by the Town for capital projects and makes recommendations to the Town Meeting. Capital expenditures are funded by borrowing. The motion approving the expenditure with borrowing requires a two-thirds vote by Town Meeting.

Real Property Committee:

The Real Property Committee considers the purchase or sale of Town land as suggested by Town officials and makes recommendations to Town Meeting concerning town properties.

Government Study Committee:

The Government Study Committee reviews all proposed bylaw changes, with the exception of zoning bylaw changes, and makes recommendations to Town Meeting. The Committee may also initiate a study of Town government and propose changes through bylaws.

Technology Advisory Committee:

The Technology Advisory Committee reviews budget articles in the warrant that relate to technology and reports its recommendations to Town Meeting. The committee may also advise town departments on the use of technology in their operations.

Personnel Board:

The Personnel Board reviews the resumes of finalists for managerial positions in the Town, serves as a grievance board for non-unionize employees, and acts as a consultant for the Human Resources Director and the Town Manager.

Town Meeting may vote to create a special temporary committee which has a limited duration. The motion usually states that the Moderator appoints the members of the committee though it may specify that the Board of Selectmen also appoint some of the members.

PILOT/Impact Study Committee:

On June 9, 2005, Town Meeting created the PILOT (Payment In Lieu Of Taxes)/Impact Study Committee made up of five members appointed by the Moderator and five members appointed by the Board of Selectmen.

The committee was asked to conduct a study of Social Services in Framingham and determine the monetary and environmental impact on town services, such as fire, police, schools and safety. The Board of Selectmen asked the committee to research and recommend a Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) Program for social service non-profit agencies in Framingham.

In 2006 the PILOT committee prepared a final report and a minority report. The committee presented a summary of the reports to Town Meeting, and the committee was dissolved.

Greener Framingham Committee:

On May 24, 2007, Town Meeting created the nine-member Greener Framingham Committee. Three members were appointed by the Board of Selectmen, three members were appointed by the School Committee, and three members were appointed by the Moderator. The term of the Committee members expired on June 31, 2010.

The Greener Framingham Committee was reviewing energy related expenses, including but not limited to new construction, new vehicle purchases, building maintenance and other energy related costs. The committee was to make recommendations to Town Meeting, the Board of Selectmen, the School Committee and other town departments, with the aim of integrating renewable energy and green technology into Framingham's infrastructure. The goal was to reduce the town's long-term energy expenses and negative impact on our environment.

10. References

The following references describe Town Meeting procedures:

Town Meeting Time

(available in the Library or from the Massachusetts Moderators Association)

Town Meeting Members Handbook

(obtained from the Town Clerk)

Guide for Town Meeting Committees

(obtained from the Town Clerk)

The following official documents describe Town Meeting actions. They are available for reference in the Library, from the Town Clerk, or online from the town website.

Town Bylaws

Zoning Bylaws

Massachusetts General Laws

The Annual Town Report for each year

The names of the following individuals can be obtained from the town website, www.Framinghamma.gov.

Town Meeting Members (by precinct)

Town Meeting Standing Committees

Moderator-appointed Committees