

A GUIDE TO TOWN MEETING IN WESTFORD

The League of Women Voters of Westford



**LEAGUE OF
WOMEN VOTERS®**

The League of Women Voters

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. It never supports or opposes political parties or candidates. The League takes action on selected matters of governmental concern that its members have studied. Membership in the League is open to both women and men.

Born out of the women's suffrage movement, the League has fought since 1920 to improve our government and engage all citizens in the decisions that impact their lives. It operates at national, state, and local levels through more than 800 state and local Leagues, in all 50 states as well as in Washington, DC, the Virgin Islands and Hong Kong.

The League of Women Voters of Westford has written this Guide to help you better understand, appreciate and participate in Town Meeting. We urge you to register to vote and take an active part in the nearly 300-year-old tradition of Town Meeting in Westford.

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Acknowledgments

The League of Women Voters of Westford researched and wrote the first edition of this Guide in 1999. Since then, League members, with help from others interested in the workings of Town Meeting, have updated and reprinted the Guide several times to keep it current with changes to the Town's bylaws and Town Meeting's practices. The League thanks all those who have generously given their time, talents and advice over the years to improve this Guide: Rachel Amato, Lynn Cohen, Erica Davidson, Mark Davidson, Laura Dickey, Elizabeth Elliott, Lisa Garvey, Ellen Harde, Chris Kandianis, Joan Keane, Fran Mower, Bob Price, Kelly Ross, Beth Shaw, Linda Stronge, Kaari Mai Tari, Emily Teller, and Leslie Vieth.

Much of the Guide's Glossary is from the Westford Finance Committee's *Report and Recommendations* on the 2016 Annual Town Meeting Warrant. In preparing the first edition of this Guide, the committee also consulted the following sources:

Bresler, Kenneth. *Citizen's Primer on Town Meeting*. Published by William Francis Galvin, Secretary of the Commonwealth, January 1996.

Concord Town Meeting Traditions and Procedures. First edition, Town of Concord, MA, March 1988.

Johnson, Richard B., Benjamin A. Trustman, and Charles Y. Wadsworth. *Town Meeting Time: A Handbook of Parliamentary Law*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1962.

Town Government Study Committee. *Groton Town Meeting*. Volume 1, October 1997.

Turner, Warren. *A Voters Guide to Town Meeting*. West Bridgewater, MA, 1998.

Winchester League of Women Voters. *A Guide to Winchester Town Meeting*. 1994. Available online at www.winchestermass.org/townmtg.html.

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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 and how to enjoy it.

Alexis de Tocqueville
(1805-1859)

The most important political office is that of the private citizen.

Louis Brandeis
(1856-1941)

In Westford, as in many New England towns, voters participate directly in the major decisions that affect how the Town runs itself and how it spends its money. Town Meeting is the legislative branch of Westford's government, and all registered voters may attend, speak and vote at our open Town Meeting. Town Meeting has two primary responsibilities: establishing an annual budget by voting to appropriate money for all Town departments, and voting on the Town's local statutes, called bylaws.

If you are a registered voter in Westford you can, and should, participate in Town Meeting. Renters as well as property owners, if registered to vote, may attend and vote at Town Meeting. You must attend in person, however; no absentee voting is allowed. If you are not a registered voter¹ you are welcome to attend Town Meeting as a visitor.

ANNUAL AND SPECIAL TOWN MEETINGS

State law requires towns to hold at least one Town Meeting – called the Annual Town Meeting – each year between February 1 and June 30. Westford bylaws set our Annual Town Meeting on the fourth Saturday in March. If the Selectmen determine that there is a conflict with a religious holiday, the meeting may be scheduled on a subsequent Saturday. The principal business of Annual Town Meeting is to appropriate money to fund the Town's expenses for the fiscal year that starts the following July 1. Annual Town Meeting acts on other issues as well.

The Annual Town Meeting starts at 10 a.m. and takes an hour break for lunch. Sometimes community groups sell lunch, snacks or beverages. No food or beverages except water are allowed in the

¹ You can register to vote at the Westford Town Clerk's office in Town Hall at 55 Main Street. Or ask the Town Clerk to mail you a registration form (978-692-5515 or townclerk@westfordma.gov). Registration forms are also available at the J.V. Fletcher Library, at any city or town hall in Massachusetts, at many state agencies, including the Registry of Motor Vehicles, and online at www.sec.state.ma.us/OVR/.

hall. After lunch the meeting continues until it has completed all its business or until it decides to stop discussion and resume on another day. (See Adjournment on page 12.)

If additional matters come up at another time during the year, a Special Town Meeting can be called, either by the Board of Selectmen or by citizens' petition. Westford's current practice is to hold a Selectmen-called Special Town Meeting every fall to fine-tune the current fiscal year's budget, which Annual Town Meeting adopted the previous spring, and to address any other necessary matters.

For citizens to call a Special Town Meeting, 200 registered voters must sign a petition asking the Board of Selectmen to schedule a Special Town Meeting. The Selectmen must then call a Town Meeting to be held within 45 days of receipt of the petition.

Town bylaws specify that the Board of Selectmen can schedule a Special Town Meeting anytime on a Saturday or no earlier than 7:30 p.m. on any other day. In the recent past, all Special Town Meetings have been held on a weeknight.

THE WARRANT

The agenda for a Town Meeting is called the warrant. For Annual Town Meeting it consists of two parts: information about the Town election (held on the first Tuesday in May), and the issues, called articles, to be voted on at Town Meeting. Warrants for Special Town Meetings contain only articles.

A warrant is also literally a warning: it ensures that voters are alerted to when and where a Town Meeting will take place and what issues will be addressed. Town Meeting can only act on issues that are included on the warrant, and the actions of Town Meeting are valid only if voters have been adequately "warned."

Articles on the Warrant

The warrant is developed under the direction of the Board of Selectmen. Before both Annual and Special Town Meetings the

Selectmen publicly set a period during which the warrant is declared “open.” During this time Town departments, officials and citizens can ask the Selectmen to include articles on the warrant.

Citizens can also petition to place articles on a warrant. For an Annual Town Meeting, the signatures of at least 10 registered voters are required to place an article on the warrant. If the petition is presented to the Selectmen by 2:00 p.m. on the fourth Tuesday in January, the Selectmen must place the article on the warrant unless the petition asks the Town to do something illegal. For a Special Town Meeting, the Selectmen set the day and time that petition articles must be filed with the Town Clerk. The signatures of at least 100 registered voters are required to place an article on a Special Town Meeting warrant.

Notice

The Board of Selectmen must give notice of all Town Meetings at least 14 days before the meeting by posting the warrant at the Town Hall, the J.V. Fletcher Library and each Westford post office.

Town bylaws require the Finance Committee to mail its *Report and Recommendations* to all Westford households 10 days before the Annual Town Meeting. This booklet contains the complete warrant, the Finance Committee’s recommendations on articles relating to spending money, and an abundance of background information. For Special Town Meetings, the Selectmen are responsible for mailing information about the warrant to all residents at least 10 days before the meeting.

The warrant for both Annual and Special Town Meetings is also published on the Town’s website, www.westfordma.gov.

PREPARING FOR TOWN MEETING

There are many opportunities for you to learn about the issues to be decided at an upcoming Town Meeting.

Hearings and Forums

Prior to all Annual Town Meetings and some Special Town Meetings, the Finance Committee, School Committee and Planning

Board hold publicized hearings to offer voters an opportunity to prepare for Town Meeting discussion. Other boards may also hold special meetings to explain articles they sponsor.

Often Westford Community Access Television (WestfordCAT), which manages the local public-access cable channels, airs programs that review the warrant for the upcoming Town Meeting, including forums sponsored by the League. Watch the local media and check WestfordCAT's website (www.westfordcat.org) and its cable channels for announcements of these meetings and programs. Local media also usually publish their own news stories previewing an upcoming Town Meeting.

Finance Committee Report and Recommendations

The Finance Committee's *Report and Recommendations* is full of information and data that provide extensive background for the budget discussions at Annual Town Meeting. It also contains the text of all warrant articles. Reading this report goes a long way toward preparing yourself to understand and take part in deliberations at Annual Town Meeting.

Don't be concerned if you don't understand all the articles and don't have time to attend any preparatory meetings. Additional information is always available at Town Meeting itself that will help you understand the issues being discussed. Handouts, including the Annual Town Report and additional information about some of the articles, are available on a table inside the hall. During the meeting, presentations are made about each article and all voters can ask questions.

TOWN MEETING PARTICIPANTS

A diagram of the layout of a typical Town Meeting – who usually sits where – is on page 13.

Voters

Every registered voter in Westford can attend, speak and vote at all Town Meetings. Visitors are welcome but cannot vote and are required to sit in a separate visitors' section established by the Moderator. Children may remain in the hall as long as they are not disruptive; no childcare services are currently provided.

A person who is not a registered Westford voter may address Town Meeting only if invited to do so by a two-thirds vote of the meeting.

Quorum

No quorum – that is, no minimum number of voters – is needed to conduct business at Annual Town Meeting.

At a Special Town Meeting, a quorum of 200 registered voters is required to begin the meeting. Westford’s bylaws allow the meeting to continue even if less than a quorum remains in attendance.

Moderator

Elected for a three-year term, the Moderator presides at Town Meeting, guiding the meeting through the warrant, deciding all questions of order and declaring the outcome of all votes. The Moderator aims to conduct the meeting as fairly and expeditiously as possible, protecting the rights of all to be heard while at the same time ensuring that the meeting moves efficiently through the warrant.

Town Clerk

The Town Clerk, appointed by the Town Manager, keeps the official record of the proceedings at Town Meeting and notifies those affected by its action. The Assistant Town Clerk sits with the Clerk.

Board of Selectmen

The Selectmen, elected for staggered three-year terms, set the warrant and have responsibility for carrying out the decisions of Town Meeting. The Selectmen hire the **Town Manager**, who sits with them and may speak on the Board’s behalf.

Town Counsel

Appointed by the Selectmen, Town Counsel is present to advise on legal matters. Such opinion is advisory only and not binding on the Town, any person, or Town Meeting.

Finance Committee

The Finance Committee, appointed by the Moderator for staggered three-year terms, makes recommendations to Town Meeting on all

articles relating to spending money. The **Finance Director**, hired by the Town Manager and responsible for the Town's financial management and planning, sits with the Finance Committee and is available to clarify financial issues.

Other Town Boards, Committees and Departments

Many other Town boards and committees, such as the School Committee, department heads, and employees, attend Town Meeting to speak to articles they have sponsored or budget items that affect their areas of responsibility.²

Tellers

The Tellers, appointed and paid by the Selectmen, sign in the voters and count votes as requested by the Moderator or by Town Meeting.

ARTICLES AND MOTIONS

Each article on the warrant describes the subject to be discussed (see Articles on the Warrant, page 2). For Town Meeting to take action on an article, its wording must be adjusted into the form of a motion. For example, an article to "see if the Town will vote to appropriate various sums in order to supplement operating budgets," when worded as a motion might be, "Moved that the Town appropriate \$1,000 for the Police Department, \$1,000 for the Highway Department and \$1,000 for the J.V. Fletcher Library."

Once an article is put before Town Meeting in the form of a motion, the motion must be seconded, then the meeting can discuss, amend and vote. The motions are always available at the Town Meeting, both as a handout and projected on a screen at the front of the hall. Sometimes the motion is identical to the article. At other times, the motion may be worded substantially differently to

² See the Blue Pages of the Westford Directory (in book form, online at www.westford.org/directory/towninfo.shtml, and as an app for Android and Apple iOS) and the Town's website (www.westfordma.gov) for descriptions of Town boards' and committees' duties as well as contact information and the times of their meetings.

reflect new information that came to light after the warrant was printed, though the intent of the motion must remain within the scope of the article.

After the motion has been made and seconded, a presentation may be made by the group or groups that submitted it. Before a vote is taken, the Moderator asks the Chair of the Board of Selectmen for the Selectmen's recommendation on the motion. For motions having a financial impact on the Town, the Moderator asks the Chair of the Finance Committee to give that committee's recommendation. The Planning Board is asked for its recommendation on all amendments to the zoning bylaws, and the Bylaw Review Committee is asked for its recommendation on all amendments to the Town's general bylaws.

Order of Consideration

Town Meeting takes up the articles in the numerical order in which they appear on the warrant. However, an article can be taken out of order if the Meeting votes to advance an article to earlier in its deliberations or to postpone it to later.

Usually motions made under articles are passed or rejected with or without amendment after debate, but they may also be dismissed or withdrawn. (See Dismissing Articles and Withdrawing Motions on page 10.)

The Budget

A major article on the Annual Town Meeting warrant is the Town's budget, prepared by the Town Manager for the following fiscal year. By custom Annual Town Meeting acts on the budget differently than it does on other articles. Rather than voting on the entire budget as one motion, Town Meeting takes it up a section or more at a time.

The Moderator reads the line items in groups of accounts and includes the amount of the Town Manager's recommended appropriation for each. Anyone having a question about or wishing to amend any line item can call out "hold" after the item has been read. When the Moderator finishes reading the section, Town Meeting votes on all items not on hold. Then the Moderator takes

up budget items that were held, calling for debate, possible amendments and a vote on each item.

Town Meeting can change any line item within a department's budget with the exception of the education accounts. For voters' information, the Westford Public Schools' line item budget is included in the *Finance Committee Report and Recommendations*, but as required by state law, Town Meeting may vote only on the total amount of the schools' budget. Town Meeting can amend the total amount allocated to the schools, but only the School Committee can direct how the funds will be spent. The same is true of Nashoba Valley Technical High School's budget.

THE DEBATE

Town Meeting proceedings are governed by the rules contained in *Town Meeting Time: A Handbook of Parliamentary Law*, most recent edition, except as modified by law, Town bylaws, or vote of Town Meeting. The Parliamentary Motions Guide on page 14 provides a summary of the motions most often used at Town Meeting. Don't let a lack of knowledge about Town Meeting procedures stop you from participating; if you're puzzled, feel free to ask the Moderator for help at any time before or during the meeting. (See Parliamentary Questions on page 11.)

Addressing the Meeting

For the sake of fairness and the efficient use of Town Meeting's time, current practice is to have three microphones on Town Meeting floor for voters to address the meeting: one for asking questions, making amendments and making other parliamentary motions; one for speaking in favor of a motion; and one for speaking against a motion. The Moderator points these out at the start of Town Meeting; the microphones are labeled as well.

To speak to Town Meeting, walk to the appropriate microphone and wait to be recognized by the Moderator. Then give your name and address. You may continue to speak as long as you speak directly to the motion or question under discussion and conduct yourself appropriately.

All comments from Town Meeting floor should be directed to the Moderator, not to Town Meeting or an individual, so you should not directly debate or ask questions of another speaker.

Amendments

If, in addition to speaking about the motion you wish to change it in some way, you must do so by moving to amend the motion.

You must submit a motion to amend to the Moderator in writing, which must state exactly how you wish to change the motion. Forms for writing out your amendment are available at the meeting on the back table and from the Tellers. Putting the motion in writing ensures that the Moderator knows exactly what it is you want to do before ruling on the motion or putting it to a vote. The Moderator must rule out of order any motion to amend that changes the original motion to the extent that it is no longer within the scope of the article.

Not more than two amendments to any motion may be pending at one time. According to Westford bylaws, “A motion and amendments to a motion shall be voted on in inverse order [that is, the last amendment is voted first], provided that when 2 amounts of money have been presented for appropriation by motion and amendment thereto, the largest amount shall be voted upon first.”

You can make a motion to amend an amendment, with the same constraints and requirements as the motions to amend described above.

Dividing a Question

At times a motion may comprise more than one part, but you want Town Meeting to vote on the parts separately. To do this, make a motion to “divide the question” and describe how you wish this to be done. You must submit your proposed division to the Moderator in writing as you do for proposing an amendment; each part must make sense, grammatically and otherwise, on its own.

Laying a Motion on the Table

There are times when temporarily deferring debate and delaying a decision on a motion seem reasonable. Perhaps time is needed for

Town officials to research information that would help the meeting come to a decision. To do this, make a motion to “lay the motion on the table.” This delays a decision until later in the meeting.

To bring back the motion so it can be discussed and acted on, you make a motion to “take it from the table.” Town Meeting cannot adjourn (that is, end) until all tabled motions have been taken from the table and dealt with.

Dismissing Articles and Withdrawing Motions

It is possible for Town Meeting to decide not to take action on an article. This decision is usually made because new or additional information has come to light after the preparation of the warrant indicating that action on the article is unnecessary, unwise or illegal. If you want no action to be taken under an article, you can make a motion to “dismiss the article.”

If you have made a motion, you can move to “withdraw the motion” if you have second thoughts or new information. Only the person who has made the motion can move to withdraw it. A motion to withdraw can be made any time during the debate of the motion but cannot be made after the Moderator calls for the vote.

Reconsideration

Town Meeting can take up an article it has already voted on, either on the same day or at an adjourned session. On the same day that an article has been voted on, a majority of the voters can approve a motion for reconsideration. To reconsider an article that was acted on at a previous session of the same Town Meeting, Westford bylaws require a two-thirds vote in favor of reconsideration.

In every case, the motion to reconsider must be made by a person who voted on the prevailing side in the original vote.

Limits on Debate

There is no prescribed limit to debate except common sense. The Moderator can limit debate and can ask speakers to stop if they are straying from the subject, repeating points already made or talking at unnecessary length.

Town Meeting itself can also terminate debate. To do so, you may go to a microphone, wait to be recognized by the Moderator, and say, "I move the previous question." This motion is not debatable, and if seconded and voted by a two-thirds majority, debate ends and the motion under discussion is immediately put to a vote.

Parliamentary Questions

You can interrupt any speaker, if necessary, to obtain information from the Moderator if you have a question about parliamentary rule or what procedures are permissible. The question must be relevant to pending business. No vote is required.

Point of Order

If you think that a parliamentary rule is not being followed, you can raise a "point of order." This tells the Moderator that you feel something is wrong – for instance, an amendment is not relevant to the issue or a motion is out of order. The Moderator can either make an independent decision with no debate or put the question to the Town Meeting as a motion to be voted on, which may be debated.

VOTING

Most motions are decided by a simple majority vote of those voting, although state laws or Town bylaws may require a larger majority to decide certain matters. The Moderator announces before each vote whether a simple majority or more is needed to pass the motion. Amendments to zoning bylaws, approving bond issues, and a few parliamentary procedures, for example, require a two-thirds vote.

Voting Methods

Voting is usually done by voice, with the Moderator asking that all in favor say "aye," then asking that all opposed say "nay." If the Moderator cannot determine the outcome, voters may be asked to raise their hands or stand. If the vote is still too close to call by sight, the Moderator can direct the Tellers to count the vote. If a count has not been made and you disagree with the Moderator's ruling, you can challenge it. If at least six other voters agree with you, the Tellers must take an official count.

You can also ask for a secret written ballot on any motion or amendment. Westford bylaws allow secret balloting if 20 voters request it. The Moderator will explain to the voters how to vote by secret ballot, and the Tellers will count the ballots.

RESOLUTIONS

A resolution is a way for Town Meeting to express its sentiments about a matter whether or not it is the subject of a warrant article. Any voter can present a resolution to Town Meeting. Unlike a warrant article, a resolution is advisory only and has no binding effect on Town boards.

Traditionally in Westford, resolutions are used primarily for three purposes: to allow Town Meeting to extend thanks or offer other courtesies to a person or organization; to give direction to a Town board; or to express Town Meeting's opinion on a matter not subject to its action such as issues at the state or national level.

You can make a motion to propose a resolution at any time during the meeting as long as no other motion is before the meeting. If possible, it is good practice to discuss the timing of introducing a resolution with the Moderator before the meeting. Resolutions are treated like all other motions: they must be seconded, can be discussed and amended and are voted on.

ADJOURNMENT

If the hour is late and there are still articles to be acted on, the Moderator and the Board of Selectmen can confer and ask for a motion to adjourn the Town Meeting to another time to complete the warrant. A voter can also make a motion to adjourn. The time and place for resuming Town Meeting must be specified in the motion.

When all business on the warrant has been acted on, the Moderator asks for a motion to adjourn (end) the meeting, which must be seconded and put to a vote.

PARLIAMENTARY MOTIONS GUIDE

The motions below are those most often used at Westford's Town Meetings. They are listed in order of precedence. Any motion can be introduced if it is higher on the chart than the pending motion. *Town Meeting Time*, which governs the procedures of our Town Meeting, includes a complete list and thorough discussion of parliamentary motions.

YOU WANT TO:	YOU SAY:	MAY INTER-RUPT?	2 nd RE-QUIRED?	DEBAT-ABLE?	AMEND-ABLE?	VOTE?
Privileged motions						
End the meeting	I move to adjourn	No	Yes	No	No	Majority
Adjourn to another time	I move to adjourn to...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Set the time to/at which to adjourn	I move to adjourn to/at...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Raise a concern	I rise to a question of privilege	Yes	No	No	No	None
Subsidiary motions						
Lay motion aside temporarily	I move that this be laid on the table	No	Yes	No	No	2/3
Close debate	I move the previous question	No	Yes	No	No	2/3
Limit or extend debate	I move that debate be limited to...	No	Yes	No	No	2/3
Postpone motion to a certain time	I move to postpone the motion to ...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Refer motion to committee	I move to refer the motion to...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Modify wording of a motion	I move to amend (or substitute)...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Enforce rules	I rise to a point of order	Yes	No	No	No	None

YOU WANT TO:	YOU SAY:	MAY INTERRUPT?	2 nd RE-REQUIRED?	DEBAT-ABLE?	AMEND-ABLE?	VOTE?
Incidental motions – same rank as motion out of which they arise.						
Reverse a ruling of the Moderator	I appeal from the ruling of the moderator	No	Yes	Yes	No	Majority
Divide the motion	I move to divide the question	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Separate consideration	I move for separate consideration...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Fix the method of voting	I move to vote on this motion by...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Withdraw or dismiss a motion	I move to withdraw/ dismiss a motion...	No	No	No	No	Majority
Main motions – no order of precedence. Introduce only when nothing else pending.						
Make a main motion	I move...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Various
Reconsider or rescind a motion**	I move to reconsider/ rescind the vote ...	No	Yes	*	No	Majority or 2/3**
Take matter from the table	I move to take from the table ...	No	Yes	No	No	Majority
Take an article out of order	I move to take an article out of order ...	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority

Adapted from *Town Meeting Time* & www.jimslaughter.com/uploads/roberts11th.pdf

* Same rank and debatable to same extent as motion being reconsidered.

** Majority required if motion is made at same session, 2/3 required if made at an adjourned session.

GLOSSARY

The following is a glossary of terms often used at Town Meeting. Anytime someone uses a term that you don't understand, you should go to the microphone for questions and ask for an explanation. If you don't understand something, be assured that many others are puzzled as well. They just may be too shy to speak up.

Appropriation: An authorization by Town Meeting to spend money.

Assessed valuation: The value set on real property (that is, land and buildings) or personal property by the Board of Assessors as a basis for setting the tax rate.

Budget: A plan of financial operation embodying an estimate of proposed revenue and expenditures for a given period and the proposed means of financing them.

Cherry Sheet: A form from the Massachusetts Department of Revenue showing, for the following fiscal year, all the state and county charges and reimbursements to the Town for local aid and for providing specific Town services. Called the Cherry Sheet because it was originally printed on cherry-colored paper.

Community Preservation Fund: Revenue raised from a 3% surcharge on Westford's property taxes as well as earmarked funds received from the state. Town Meeting must annually appropriate, or reserve for future appropriation, at least 10% of the annual fund revenues for projects in each of three categories: open space, historic preservation, and affordable housing. In addition, Town Meeting can authorize up to 5% of the annual fund revenues for the administrative expenses of the Town's Community Preservation Committee. Any revenue remaining after Town Meeting makes these allocations is returned to the undesignated Community Preservation Fund balance. Town Meeting can allocate the undesignated funds for any combination of the allowed uses or for land for recreational use.

Town Meeting votes on spending the funds based on recommendations made by the Community Preservation Committee. Town Meeting can approve, disapprove, or reduce the amount recommended by the Committee but it cannot increase a dollar recommendation or fund an unrecommended project.

Consent agenda: A group of warrant articles that the Selectmen, in preparing the motions for Town Meeting, believe are routine and do not require explanation or discussion and thus can be voted on as a package, with one motion, no discussion and one vote. The goal of a consent agenda is to allow Town Meeting to move more efficiently through the warrant. Any voter who wishes to have Town Meeting address any of the articles individually can be recognized and ask that the article be removed from the consent agenda.

Debt exclusion: A vote by a municipality at an election to exclude debt service payments from the levy limit for a particular capital project, which allows the Town to increase its total property tax levy above the limit set by Proposition 2½. The amount of the annual debt service payment is added to the levy limit for the life of the debt only. (See **Proposition 2½**.)

Debt service: The cost of payment of interest and principal to holders of the Town's bonds and notes.

Encumbrance: Obligations in the form of purchase orders or contract or salary commitments that are chargeable to an appropriation and for which a part of the appropriation is reserved.

Enterprise Funds: An accounting mechanism allowing a community to show the portion of total costs of a service that is recovered through user charges and the portion that is subsidized by the tax levy. In 2016, Ambulance, Recreation, and Water are Westford's only enterprise funds.

Expenditure: The spending of money by the Town for programs within its approved operating budget.

Fiscal year: Westford's fiscal year runs from July 1 through June 30. The moneys appropriated at the Annual Town Meeting in the spring are for the fiscal year starting the following July 1.

Foundation budget: The target set by the state for each school district establishing the spending level necessary to provide an adequate education, as defined by the state, for all students. The foundation budget comprises both local funding and state aid.

Free cash: A dollar value, certified by the state usually in late summer, that represents unspent and unencumbered income and receivables from the previous fiscal year. Town Meeting can spend this money once free cash is certified.

General Fund: The major Town fund created with Town receipts and tax revenues that is available for expenditure after appropriation by Town Meeting.

Indirect costs: Costs of a service not reflected in the service's operating budget. Health insurance costs for employees is an example of an indirect cost of providing Town services.

Local receipts: Town revenues other than property tax and enterprise fund revenues. Examples are fees, motor vehicle excise taxes, the local meals and hotel taxes, investment income, and fees.

Majority: More than half of the votes cast.

New growth: Under Proposition 2½, the taxing capacity added by new construction and other increases in the property tax base. New growth is calculated by multiplying the value associated with new construction by the tax rate of the previous fiscal year.

Operating budget: The plan of proposed spending for the upcoming fiscal year. It is Town Meeting's "best guess" on what it will cost to operate Town government.

Overlay account: An amount raised annually by the Assessors in taxes to be used for potential property tax abatements, exemptions and uncollected taxes. Also called Overlay Reserve.

Overlay surplus: Any balance in the overlay account of a given fiscal year in excess of the amount remaining to be collected or abated can be transferred into this account. Overlay surplus may be appropriated by Town Meeting for any lawful purpose.

Override: A vote by a municipality in an election to permanently increase the levy limit. (See **Proposition 2½**.)

Proposition 2½: An initiative law approved by Massachusetts voters in 1980. Prop. 2½ sets a limit on the amount of real and personal property taxes a community can levy as well as a limit on the annual increase in the tax levy.

The *levy limit* is a restriction on the amount of property tax a community may levy. Under Prop. 2½, a community may not increase taxes more than 2½% over the previous year's levy (plus the value of any new growth that has occurred in the Town) and may not levy more than 2½% of the total full and fair cash value of all taxable real and personal property in the community (the *levy ceiling*).

Prop. 2½ allows cities and towns to vote in an election to exclude certain costs as well as to increase its annual levy limit. See **Debt exclusion** and **Override**.

Reserve Fund: An amount set aside annually within the Town's budget to provide a funding source for "extraordinary and unforeseen" expenditures. The Finance Committee authorizes transfers from this fund.

Revolving Fund: Moneys, usually derived from fees, that may be used by a Town department for special use without Town Meeting appropriation.

Stabilization Fund: Essentially a "rainy day" fund. It is a special reserve account created primarily to provide for capital improvements and unforeseen circumstances. It requires a two-thirds vote of Town Meeting to take money from this fund and appropriate it for expenditure.

Warrant: A list of items to be acted on by Town Meeting.

About the League in Westford

For almost 50 years the League of Women Voters of Westford, a committed group of women and men, has shared a common interest in “making democracy work.” Our involvement in the community has been far-reaching.

Your membership or donation helps the League fund these programs, among many others:

Candidate Events

We have organized annual local candidates’ nights since 1970 and we publish the annual voters’ guide in the *Westford Eagle* and on our website. We also organize forums for candidates running for the state Legislature.

Educational Programs

We set up mock elections in the Westford schools. We created a book and DVD – *Westford: A Sense of Community* – that illustrates Westford’s rich and diverse history. We wrote the *Guide to Running for Local Office*.

Advocacy for Quality of Life Issues

We have studied a wide range of educational issues so that we can advocate for and spark improvements in our schools. We have advocated for affordable housing in Westford since our founding. Through active research and citizen education the League was instrumental in stopping the potential placement of a hazardous waste facility in Westford.

Voter and Public Service

We plan and host forums on important issues that are also often broadcast on WestfordCAT. We post vote signs for all elections, bought and arrange for the display of the large banners over Main Street alerting residents of upcoming elections and town meetings, and hold warrant reviews before all town meetings.



Join the League of Women Voters to Make a Difference!

There's never been a better time to join the League of Women Voters! Become a member today to make a difference in our community.

Your membership in the League will:

- Provide you information about government, voting events and issues that matter
- Add your voice to advocacy for positive change
- Support the work of the League on the local, state and national levels
- Give you experience in leadership, organizing, lobbying, researching, presenting and facilitating

To join, go to www.lwv.westford.org or call 978-347-5989.

The League's Mission Statement

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

For more information about the League

- Westford: www.lwv.westford.org
- Massachusetts: www.lwvma.org
- United States: www.lwv.org & www.vote411.org



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