

A GUIDE TO TOWN MEETING IN WESTFORD

The League of Women Voters of Westford

The League of Women Voters

The League of Women Voters of Westford is a nonpartisan, grassroots organization of people of all genders, ages, and backgrounds. The League's goals are to encourage active and informed participation in government, increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influence public policy through education and advocacy. The League takes action on selected matters of governmental concern that its members have studied. It never supports or opposes political parties or candidates.

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 700 state and local Leagues in the United States as well as in 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.

A Guide to Town Meeting in Westford

The League of Women Voters of Westford

Printed on recycled paper

11th edition 10/26

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 to keep it current with changes to the Town's bylaws and Town Meeting's practices. This Guide has also been posted on the League's website, lwv.westford.org, and the Town's website has links to it as well.

The League thanks all those who have generously given their time, talents, and advice over the years to improve this Guide: Rachel Amato, Kathryn Clear, Lynn Cohen, Erica Davidson, Mark Davidson, Laura Dickey, Elizabeth Elliott, Lisa Garvey, Vicky Geary, Wendy Gloyd, Ellen Harde, Angela Harkness, Chris Kandianis, Marilyn Katler, Joan Keane, Erika Kohl, Shanti Maheshwari, Gloria Miller, Fran Mower, Joanna Myers, Bob Price, Kyle Randall, Kelly Ross, Beth Shaw, Mary Anne Seraphin, Linda Stronge, Kaari Mai Tari, Emily Teller, Anita Tonakarn-Nguyen, and Leslie Vieth.

Most of the Guide's Glossary is from the Westford Finance Committee's *Report and Recommendations* on the 2024 Annual Town Meeting Warrant. In preparing the first edition of this Guide, the League 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.

Table of Contents

Annual and Special Town Meetings 2
The Warrant 3
- Articles on the Warrant 4
- Notice 4

Preparing for Town Meeting 5
- Hearings and Forums 5
- Finance Committee Report and Recommendations 6

Town Meeting Participants 6
- Voters 6
- Quorum 7
- Moderator 7
- Town Clerk 7
- Select Board 7
- Town Counsel 7
- Finance Committee 8
- Other Town Boards, Committees, and Departments 8
- Tellers 8

Articles and Motions 8
- Order of Consideration 9
- The Budget 9

The Debate 10
- Addressing the Meeting 10
- Amendments 11
- Dividing a Question 12
- Laying a Motion on the Table 12
- Dismissing Articles and Withdrawing Motions 13
- Reconsideration 13
- Limits on Debate 13
- Parliamentary Questions 13
- Point of Order 14

Voting 14
- Voting Methods 14

Resolutions 15
Adjournment 15
If You Cannot Attend Town Meeting 16
Westford Town Meeting Participants 17
Glossary 20
About the League in Westford 24
Join the League of Women Voters To Make a Difference! 25

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 the bylaws.

If you are a registered voter in Westford you can, and should, attend Town Meeting. Renters as well as property owners, if registered to vote, may attend and vote at Town Meeting. Most voters must attend in person. Under the federal Americans with Disabilities Act, proxy voting may be allowed under certain limited circumstances for those with a disability that prevents them from attending in person.

The Town is committed to ensuring Town Meeting is accessible and inclusive. Free childcare services are provided at every meeting, as is free transportation to and from the meeting. See the Town website, westfordma.gov, to register for these services prior to the meeting. The meeting location has public accessibility features, and additional accommodations can be arranged as needed. To request reasonable accommodations, contact the Town at accessibility@westfordma.gov or 978-692-5501. Some of the accommodations available include hearing headsets, closed captions, physical assistance (such as wheelchairs and accessible van service), sign language interpretation, and proxy voting.

Voting proceeds either by voice (aye/nay) or by electronic vote tabulators, which are distributed at the Meeting, as determined by the Moderator to be most efficient (see Voting Methods on page 14 for exceptions). If you are not a registered voter in

Westford[1], you are welcome to attend Town Meeting as a visitor. In keeping with Town bylaws, a designated area is set aside for non-voters.

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 general bylaws set our Annual Town Meeting on the fourth Saturday in March. If the Select Board determines 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 is currently held at Westford Academy starting at 9:00 a.m. After a lunch break, the meeting continues until it has completed all of its business or until it decides to stop discussion and resume on another day. (See Adjournment on page 15.)

In the recent past, voters have completed all business on Saturday, though the length of the meetings has varied. One year, Town Meeting ended at 4:30 p.m.; another year, voters decided that rather than stopping in the late afternoon and resuming work on

[1] You can register and change your name, address, or party online at sec.state.ma.us/ovr/. If you are a Massachusetts citizen doing certain things at the Registry of Motor Vehicles, MassHealth, and the Commonwealth Health Connector, you will automatically become registered to vote. You can also 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 (townclerk@westfordma.gov or 978-692-5515). Completing the annual Town Census for all voters in your household is an important step in maintaining voting status and ensuring that all information is accurate and up to date.

another day, they would stay until almost 9:00 p.m. to finish their work.

If additional matters come up at another time during the year, a Special Town Meeting can be called, either by the Select Board or by citizens' petition. Westford's current practice is to hold a Select Board-called Special Town Meeting every fall, usually in October, 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 Select Board to schedule a Special Town Meeting. (Blank petitions are online here: westfordma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/3035.) The Select Board must then call a Town Meeting to be held within 45 days of receipt of the petition.

The Town's general bylaws specify that the Select Board can schedule a Special Town Meeting anytime on a Saturday or no earlier than 7:00 p.m. on any other day. For many years, Special Town Meetings have been held on Monday night, and most have lasted about two hours. As at Annual Town Meetings, if all business has not been completed, Special Town Meetings can be adjourned and deliberations continued to another time, as decided by the voters.

Voters are free to come and go during any Town Meeting; they are not required to stay from start to finish.

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 (set by the Town's general bylaws on the first Tuesday in May), and the issues, called articles, to be voted on at Town Meeting. (A recent warrant is online here: westfordma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/17662.) Warrants for Special Town Meetings contain only articles.

A warrant is 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 Select Board. Before both Annual and Special Town Meetings, the Select Board publicly sets a period during which the warrant is declared "open." During this time, anyone, including Town departments, committees and boards, and others, can ask the Select Board to include articles on the warrant. However, the Select Board decides whether to include these article requests on the warrant.

Voters can also petition to place articles on a warrant. For an Annual Town Meeting, the signatures of at least 10 registered Westford voters are required to place an article on the warrant. If the petition is presented to the Select Board by 2:00 p.m. on the fourth Tuesday in January, the Select Board must place the article on the Annual Town Meeting warrant unless the petition asks the Town to do something illegal. For a Special Town Meeting, the Select Board sets the day and time that petition articles must be filed with the Town Clerk. The signatures of at least 100 registered Westford voters are required to place an article on a Special Town Meeting warrant. Blank petitions are online here: westfordma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/3036.

In the recent past, there have been between 22 and 34 articles on Annual Town Meeting warrants. The warrants for Special Town Meetings have typically had about a dozen articles. In addition to articles to appropriate funds and amend the Town's general and zoning bylaws, Town Meetings have acted on such issues as requesting the Legislature grant the Town additional liquor licenses, renaming a school, and giving property tax exemptions to low-income senior homeowners.

Notice

The Select Board 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. In addition, the Select Board is responsible for mailing information about the warrant to every Westford household at least 10 days before all Town Meetings.

The Town's general bylaws require that, before all Annual Town Meetings, the Finance Committee produce its *Report and Recommendations* (a recent report is online here: f), which must be posted on the Town website and copies made available to the public at the Town Hall, Police Station, J. V. Fletcher Library, and Cameron Senior Center at least 14 days before the meeting. This report contains the complete warrant, the Finance Committee's recommendations on articles relating to spending money, and an abundance of background information.

Annual and Special Town Meetings warrants are also published on the Town Meeting webpage, westfordma.gov/393.

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 Select Board, Finance Committee, School Committee, and Planning Board hold publicized hearings that offer voters an opportunity to prepare for Town Meeting discussion. Other boards may also hold special meetings to explain articles they sponsor. Check the agendas of the various boards and committees during the weeks leading up to Town Meetings to learn about upcoming hearings on Town Meeting issues. The meeting agendas will note if it is possible to participate remotely and, if so, how to register and log in.

WestfordCAT, which manages the local public-access cable channels, a website, and a YouTube channel, often airs these hearings and meetings live and posts recordings on its YouTube channel (youtube.com/@WestfordCAT) and its website (westfordcat.org).

WestfordCAT also airs programs leading up to Town Meetings that review and explain the warrant, including Town Meeting Previews sponsored by the League. Watch the local media, including the League's weekly Bulletin newsletter, check WestfordCAT's website and its cable channels, and follow WestfordCAT's YouTube channel for announcements and livestreams of these meetings and programs and the availability of recordings.

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. Information on most of the warrant articles is also available on the Town's Town Meeting webpage.

Don't be concerned if you don't understand all the articles and don't have time to attend or watch 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, the motions document, and additional information about some of the articles, are available at the meeting. During the meeting, presentations are made about most articles, with the aim of providing the basic information needed to understand it, and all voters can ask questions.

TOWN MEETING PARTICIPANTS

A simplified diagram of the layout of a typical Town Meeting—who usually sits where—is on page 17.

Voters

If you are a registered voter in Westford you can attend, speak, and vote at all Town Meetings. Tellers check in all voters. Visitors are welcome but cannot vote and are required to sit in a visitors' area established by the Moderator. Children under 12 may remain in the room as long as they do not interfere with the proceedings. Free childcare services are offered at every meeting. See the Town

website (westfordma.gov) to register for childcare prior to the meeting.

A person who is not a registered Westford voter may address Town Meeting only after a motion to allow them to do so passes by a two-thirds vote of the meeting.

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

At a Special Town Meeting, a quorum of 200 registered voters is required to begin the meeting. Westford's general 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 also 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.

Select Board
The Select Board, elected for staggered three-year terms, sets the warrant and has responsibility for carrying out the decisions of Town Meeting. The Select Board hires the **Town Manager**, who sits with them and may speak on the Board's behalf.

Town Counsel
Appointed by the Select Board, 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, department heads, and staff attend Town Meeting to speak to articles they have sponsored or budget items that affect their areas of responsibility.[2]

Tellers
The Tellers, appointed by the Select Board, check in the voters and assist the Town Clerk and the Moderator in the organization and efficient functioning of the meeting.

ARTICLES AND MOTIONS

Each article on the warrant describes the subject to be discussed (see Articles on the Warrant, page 4). For Town Meeting to take action on an article, its wording must be adjusted into the form of a motion, called the main motion. For example, an article to "see if the Town will vote to appropriate various sums in order to supplement operating budgets for the Police Department, Highway Department, and J. V. Fletcher Library; Or act in relation thereto," when worded as a main 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."

Traditionally in Westford, the Moderator presents the warrant articles in the form of the motion and requests a second from Town Meeting. Once the motion is seconded, the meeting can discuss, amend, and vote on it. The motions are always available at the Town Meeting, both as a handout and projected on a screen at the

[2]See the Town's website (westfordma.gov) and the *Annual Town Report* for descriptions of Town boards' and committees' duties as well as contact information and when they meet.

front of the room. (See an example at westfordma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/17708.) Sometimes the motion is identical to the article. At other times, the motion may be worded substantially differently to 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. The Moderator asks the Planning Board for its recommendation if the article is an amendment to the zoning bylaws. The recommendations of the Select Board and any other relevant boards are noted in the motions document available at the Meeting, under each article.

Before a vote can be taken, the Moderator asks if any voters have questions or comments. See The Debate, page 10, for details about the meeting's discussion of motions.

Order of Consideration

Town Meeting usually 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 13.)

The Budget

A major article on the Annual Town Meeting warrant is the Town's budget for the following fiscal year, which begins on the following July 1. The budget is prepared by the Town Manager with the guidance of the Select Board's Budget Policy Direction. Although the budget is presented as one article on the warrant, by custom Annual Town Meeting acts on it 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 sections of accounts and includes the amount of the Town Manager's recommended appropriation for each line item. 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. The Westford Public Schools' line item budget is included in the *Finance Committee Report and Recommendations* for voters' information, but as required by state law, Town Meeting votes 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, vote of Town Meeting, or the Moderator's discretion. The Parliamentary Motions Guide starting on page 18 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 or a Town Meeting mentor for help at any time before or during the meeting. (See Parliamentary Questions on page 13.)

Addressing the Meeting

Every voter has the right to speak at Town Meeting. At the beginning of every Town Meeting, the Moderator may announce a limit on the length of time voters may speak.

To speak to Town Meeting, walk to a microphone and wait to be recognized by the Moderator. Several microphones are on the Town Meeting floor for voters to address the meeting. When it's

your turn to speak and you've been recognized by the Moderator, give your name and address. Within the time limit allowed, you can speak, as long as you speak directly to the motion or question under discussion and conduct yourself appropriately.

All comments from Town Meeting floor must 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. Let's say that, in the main motion used as an example above—"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"—you want to increase the appropriation for the Police Department to $1,500. Your motion would be, "I move to amend the motion by increasing the appropriation for the Police Department to $1,500."

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. 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. Using our example again, an amendment to add an appropriation for the Fire Department would be ruled out of order because the Fire Department was not included in the original warrant article.

Not more than two amendments to any motion may be pending at one time. This means that, in our example, after you make the motion to amend the appropriation for the Police Department, another voter can make a motion to amend the appropriation for the Highway Department. But a third, separate motion to amend the appropriation for the Library would not be allowed at the same time and cannot be made until one or both of the pending motions to amend have been resolved.

You can make a motion to amend an amendment, with the same constraints and requirements as the motions to amend described above. Again using our example, after you make the motion to amend the Police Department appropriation to $1,500, but before it has been voted on, another voter can make a motion to amend the appropriation to $1,250. According to Westford's general 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." Once Town Meeting has voted on whether to appropriate $1,500, $1,250, or $1,000 for the Police Department, it votes on the resulting main motion.

Dividing a Question

At times a motion may include 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 would do for proposing an amendment; each part must make sense, grammatically and otherwise, on its own. In the case of our example main motion, the motion to divide could take the form of "I move to divide the question into three separate motions: Moved that the Town appropriate $1,000 for the Police Department; moved that the Town appropriate $1,000 for the Highway Department; and moved that the Town appropriate $1,000 for the J. V. Fletcher Library." If this motion passes, Town Meeting would then discuss and vote on each appropriation separately rather than voting on all three as one motion.

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 made a motion but sometime during the discussion have second thoughts or new information about it, you can move to "withdraw the motion." Only the person who 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 for discussion and another vote. Westford's general bylaws require a two-thirds vote to approve a motion for reconsideration.

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. However, the Moderator can decide not to accept a motion to move the question if, for example, they think voters have not had a fair chance to debate.

Parliamentary Questions
You can interrupt discussion, if necessary, to obtain information from the Moderator if you have a question about parliamentary

rules or what procedures are permissible. You need not wait in line for a turn at the microphone. 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 rise, and without going to a microphone, address the Moderator saying you want to make a "point of order." When the Moderator has acknowledged you, you then state what you feel 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

All voters receive an electronic tabulator when they check in at Town Meeting. At the beginning of the meeting the Moderator explains how the tabulators are used for voting.

Most votes are decided by a simple majority of those voting, although state laws or the Town's general 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 some zoning bylaws, approving bond issues, and a few parliamentary procedures, for example, require a two-thirds vote.

Voting Methods
For every motion, the Moderator decides on the voting method, announcing if it will be taken by voice or by tabulator. If the vote will be done by voice, the Moderator asks all in favor to say "aye," then asks all opposed to say "nay." The Moderator determines and announces the results of the vote. If the Moderator cannot determine a voice vote, voters may be directed to vote again using tabulators.

If a vote will be done by tabulator, the Moderator announces when voting begins and when it ends. Results are displayed on a screen at the front of the room as well as being announced.

Voters can also direct that votes be taken by either count or secret ballot.

To request a counted vote after a voice vote has been taken, one voter can stand and say "point of order" and, when recognized by the Moderator, ask that the vote be taken by count. If a total of seven voters rise from their seats to support the request, a counted vote will be taken using the tabulators. If the tabulators are unavailable, a counted vote will be taken using a method as instructed by the Moderator.

A similar procedure is used to request a secret ballot. Before a vote is taken, a voter can raise a "point of order" to request a secret ballot. A secret ballot will be taken if a total of 20 voters rise at their seats in support. The vote will be taken using tabulators or, if unavailable, by a method as instructed by the Moderator.

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 the Town or 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 Select Board can confer and ask for a motion

to adjourn (suspend) the Town Meeting to another time to complete the warrant. At any time during a meeting, a voter can also make a motion to adjourn. The time and place for resuming Town Meeting must be specified in the motion. Once the motion is seconded, Town Meeting then votes on whether to adjourn and to when.

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.

IF YOU CANNOT ATTEND TOWN MEETING

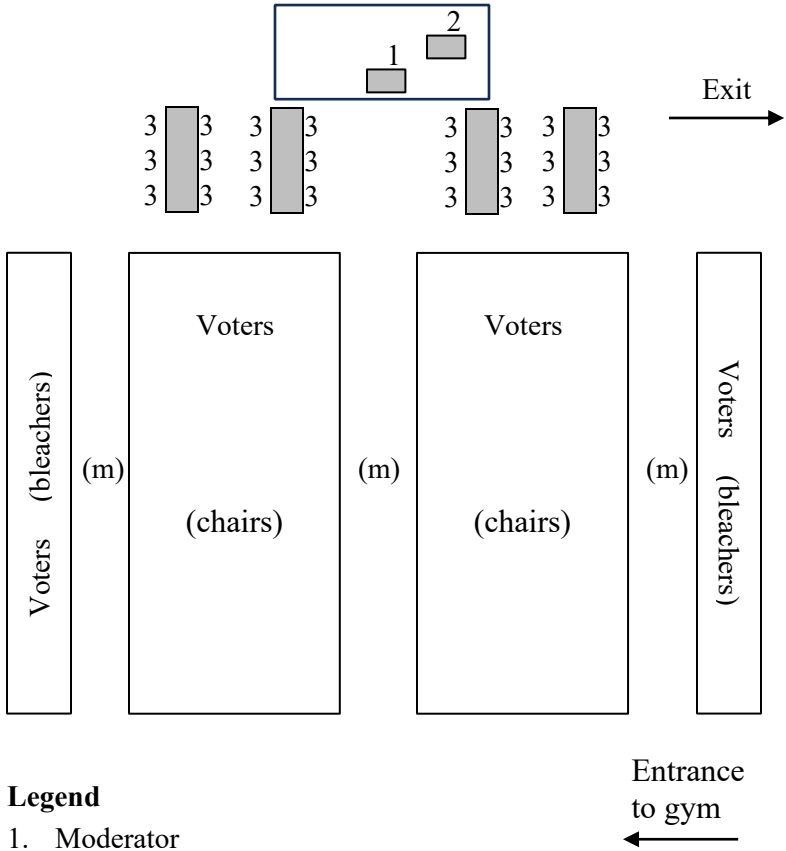
WestfordCAT broadcasts Town Meetings on its cable stations and livestreams them on its website and its YouTube channel. Recordings of Town Meetings can also be viewed on demand on its website and its YouTube channel after meetings. Town Meeting minutes, taken by the Town Clerk, are posted on the Town website by searching for them under "Town Meeting" at westfordma.gov/978.

WESTFORD TOWN MEETING PARTICIPANTS

Who Sits Where in the Westford Academy Gym

This layout— simplified and not to scale—illustrates a typical Town Meeting in the Westford Academy gym.

If more voters attend than the gym can accommodate, additional areas in WA are used and their layouts will vary.



Legend

1. Moderator
2. Town Clerk
3. Town committees, boards & department heads, often the Select Board, Town Manager, Assistant Town Managers & Town Counsel; Finance Committee & Finance Director; School Committee & Superintendent

(m) Microphones

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 Meetings, includes a complete list and thorough discussion of parliamentary motions.

YOU WANT TO:	YOU SAY:	MAY INTERRUPT?	2nd REQUIRED?	DEBATABLE?	AMENDABLE?	VOTE?
Privileged motions						
End the meeting	I move to **adjourn**	No	Yes	No	No	Majority
Set the time to (or at) which to adjourn	I move to **adjourn to/at**…	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Subsidiary motions						
Postpone discussion of motion temporarily	I move that this be **laid on the table**	No	Yes	No	No	2/3
End 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 specific 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

YOU WANT TO:	YOU SAY:	MAY INTER-RUPT?	2nd RE-QUIRED?	DEBAT-ABLE?	AMEND-ABLE?	VOTE?
Incidental motions—same rank as motion out of which they arise.						
Enforce rules	I rise to a **point of order**	Yes	No	No	No	None
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 by…**	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Specify the method of voting	I move to **vote** on this motion by…	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority
Withdraw a motion	I move to **withdraw** the motion	No	No	No	No	Majority
Dismiss a motion	I move to **dismiss** the motion	No	Yes	Yes	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	2/3
Take up a matter that had been postponed	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* & jimslaughter.com/uploads/roberts11th.pdf

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

GLOSSARY

The following is a glossary of terms often used at Town Meeting. Anytime someone uses a term that you don't understand, you can go to a microphone and ask for an explanation. Or ask a Town Meeting mentor, whom the Moderator will introduce at the start of the meeting. 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 for the Town to spend money for a specific purpose.

Assessed valuation: The value set on real (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 Moderator believes are routine and do not require explanation or discussion. Town Meeting can then take up these articles 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, below.)

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 fiscal year 2027, Ambulance, Recreation, Stormwater, and Water were Westford's 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 monies 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 from which most Town expenses are met.

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

Local receipts: Money collected by the various Town departments or agencies that are not voted by Town Meeting and are used to offset the appropriations of a specific Town department. Examples are permit fees, motor vehicle excise taxes, the local meals and hotel taxes, and investment income.

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, above.

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: Monies, usually derived from fees, that may be used by a Town or School 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 unforeseen circumstances. It requires a majority vote of Town Meeting to contribute to this fund, and a two-thirds vote of Town Meeting to take money from this fund and appropriate it for expenditure. In addition to the main stabilization fund, the Town also has stabilization funds for capital and health insurance.

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

About the League in Westford

For more than 50 years, members of the League of Women Voters of Westford have shared a common interest in empowering voters and "making democracy work." We are a nonpartisan, grassroots organization of people of all genders, ages, and backgrounds. 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. We also organize forums for candidates running for the state Legislature.

Educational Programs
We set up mock elections in the Westford schools. We created *Westford: A Sense of Community*—first as a slide/tape show, then as a book and DVD, and now available online—that illustrates Westford's rich and diverse history. In addition to this *Guide to Town Meeting,* we wrote the *Guide to Running for Local Office* and *How Westford Works*.

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 the large banners that hang over Main Street alerting residents of upcoming elections and Town Meetings, and hold Warrant Previews, cosponsored with the Town, 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 with 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 lwv.westford.org or call 978-347-5989.

The League's Mission Statement

The League of Women Voters of Westford is a nonpartisan, grassroots organization of people of all genders, ages, and backgrounds. The League's goals are to encourage active and informed participation in government, increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influence public policy through education and advocacy.

For more information about the League:

- Westford: lwv.westford.org
  facebook.com/lwvwestford
  instagram.com/westfordlwv
- Massachusetts: lwvma.org
- United States: lwv.org & vote411.org



THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®
OF WESTFORD
P.O. Box 59
Westford, MA 01886
978-347-5989
info@lwv.westford.org

lwv.westford.org

facebook.com/lwvwestford

instagram.com/westfordlwv