

Town Meetings Require Public's Attendance and Cooperation

Fines were once assessed for missing meetings

Marjorie Roy
Town Administrator

Did you know that in colonial times there were mandatory weekly town meetings? When the people decided town meetings should be less frequent, they became monthly mandatory meetings. Eventually, annual town meetings were instituted, but they were still mandatory and one's absence resulted in a fine.

As town meetings evolved and colonists became more empowered by their government, it was increasingly seen as a threat to Britain. Town meetings fueled the spark that ultimately led to the American Revolution.

That was 246 years ago, and our annual Town Meeting and School District Meeting still play a critical part in our lives. Fines are no longer assessed if you are absent from a meeting, but attendance by all voters is especially important because our annual meetings determine policy and budget for the ensuing year.

Prior to our annual meetings, the Budget Committee holds a public hearing(s) on all matters to be presented at the meetings. The purpose of public hearings is to ask questions, discuss the budgets and articles that will appear on the various warrants, and form your opinions as to how you will vote.

Lots of interesting conversations and debates take place around town after public hearings and before the annual meetings, which are the business meetings of the Town and the School District and are the places to amend the budgets and warrant articles if you feel it is necessary.

2022 Town Meeting Warrant

This year there are nine articles on the Town Meeting warrant. Some are customary appropriations to expendable trust funds and capital reserve funds. New articles include raising and appropriating funds for a \$10,000 contingency fund and raising and appropriating \$400,000 to construct a Highway Department garage. These funds are to come from the unreserved fund balance.

The Town operating budget shows an increase of \$111,601 with increases in the new and improved accounting software, cemetery labor, retirement, and health insurance. There were also reductions in some lines, including the Transfer Station, Recreation Committee, zoning enforcement, and Town buildings and maintenance.

We all tend to be passionate about our visions for the town, and it is easy to get carried away and say things we never intended, but it is important to remain civil. Let's all practice civility, cooperation, and compromise and have a productive and effective Town Meeting.



Help the Moderator Run a Smooth and Civil Town Meeting

Democracy requires respect at all levels

Stuart Green, Town Moderator

Respect is one of the most essential, if understated, ingredients in democracy. We simply cannot function without it. Our civilization, our social order, and our government only work because enough citizens are interested in the greater good, believe we have a common identity, and are respectful of one another.

I had the privilege of serving 20 years in the United States Navy, where I told my sailors essentially the same thing. We had our ranks, of course, but it was deep and abiding interpersonal respect up and down the chain of command that allowed my units to function well. Before we were "Chiefs" or "Commanders" we were war fighters, we were Americans, and we had each other's backs. We were family.

I now have the privilege of serving as your Town Moderator, and I must say that it has been a unique experience to grow up here, take a multi-decade journey, and come back. I see service all around me. There are so many working to run and make this town better: the selectmen, the teachers, the town hall, the fire department, the road agents, the police officers, the administrators, volunteers, curators, transfer station operators, restaurant owners... There are too many to list. Suffice it to say I am deeply impressed.

So, as the relative newcomer, I ask

for your help in ensuring a respectful tone for our business session on Tuesday, March 8. My goal is a smooth, civil, and effective meeting where all voices from the legislative body (you) may be heard with equal regard. There are a few things worth keeping in mind to make that happen:

- Our compatriots deserve the benefit of the doubt. Nearly everyone coming to the Town Meeting is performing a civic duty. Few come for fun.

- Disagreements are natural, part of working together, and can lead to greater common solutions. Alternative views are valuable.

- Personal attacks, however, are like sand in the gears. They degrade the "machinery" of democracy and make moving forward harder – no one benefits.

- Our right to free speech is sacrosanct. We may forget that our interruptions, outbursts, and other disruptions deprive others of that same right.

- Our voices are equal.

This will be the first in-person meeting since March 2020, and I will do my absolute best to run it fairly and dispassionately for you. Everyone will get their say. Consider that I "have your back" there.

When disagreements arise – and they will – I would ask you to have my back by helping keep the tone respectful. We are a small, interdependent community, and whatever happens at the meeting, the day after we will go right back to relying on one another.



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