

# TOWN OF STOW

## Town Meeting Handbook



Please recycle this *Handbook* for use at future Town Meetings by either keeping it for your future use or by placing it in one of the discard boxes as you leave Town Meeting.

# STOW TOWN MEETING HANDBOOK

The open Town Meeting method of local self-government is deeply embedded in Stow's life as a town. The enduring principle underlying Town Meetings is that, though the minority shall be heard and absentees protected, the majority will decide. Whatever the perception of the open Town Meeting, it is difficult to see how citizens can be more perfectly represented than by each registered voter having the opportunity to participate fully and directly in making decisions to:

- Elect the Town's officers, paid and unpaid,
- Establish salaries for the town's paid positions,
- Vote to appropriate money to operate the Town,
- Vote on local statutes, called bylaws.

Many such decisions are controlled by the State, such as minimum funding for education under the Education Reform law. But within the limits allowed by State law, the open Town Meeting provides an example of democracy combined with self-responsibility. When we meet as a Town Meeting, we become the legislative body and make decisions that impact all residents of our community. It is not unusual for the vote on an article to be close, therefore a belief that your comments and vote do not count is not valid. Voter's comments during debate can impact the thinking and voting for many voters. Attend Town Meeting, listen to the presentations, participate in the debate, and vote. Our town needs your participation at Town Meeting.

As always, we are interested in your feedback on what works well and what needs improvement at Town Meetings. There will be forms available for you to record your comments as you leave the meeting.

This *Stow Town Meeting Handbook* summarizes the "rules" governing Town Meeting, most of which are found in the procedural handbook *Town Meeting Time* and in the Town's by-laws, and makes recommendations on appropriate decorum. We recommend that you make use of the *Stow Town Meeting Handbook* at this Town Meeting and then recycle it by keeping it for use at future Town Meetings. You can also recycle the Handbook by leaving it in one of the discard boxes as you leave Town Meeting. Additional hard copies are available from the Town Clerk.

This 2023 edition supersedes prior editions of the *Handbook* published in 2002 and 2011, and I thank my predecessors Edward E. Newman and David Walrath for starting the *Handbook* and for the solid procedural foundation for Stow Town Meeting.

James H. Salvie, Moderator  
March 28, 2024

## For New Town Meeting Participants

A Town Meeting is a meeting of the legislative branch of the Town of Stow. In our Open Town Meeting form of government, the town's legislators are Stow voters who come to a session of the meeting. Changes to local town laws (such as zoning bylaws), authority to spend money (usually called appropriations), accepting roads as public ways, local town acceptance of certain optional state laws, and various less common acts must be voted on by Town Meeting.

Stow has at least one Town Meeting each year in May – called the Annual Town Meeting - for voters to consider the annual town budget for the next year, related financial articles, and any other articles submitted. Sometimes additional Town Meetings are required during a year; these are called Special Town Meetings.

### The Warrant

Prior to a Town Meeting, the Select Board is in charge of assembling and publishing a "warrant" or agenda of articles to be considered at that Town Meeting. The purpose of the warrant is to "warn or notify" the town's voters of what will be discussed at a town meeting. The Select Board, other town boards, town departments, and groups of voters can submit articles for a warrant, subject to procedures and limits defined in the town bylaws, town charter, and state law.

Warrant articles submitted by citizens are called “petition articles” and have a complicated procedure associated with them, and a deadline. If you are thinking of submitting a petition article, check with the Town Clerk for the relevant rules.

The completed warrant is posted in various locations around town to alert voters of the upcoming Town Meeting and its warrant articles. While not required, the Select Board usually publishes the warrant in a local newspaper. Prior to a Town Meeting, the Finance Committee will have a public hearing to get public input on the warrant, and then make recommendations to voters on each article. Other boards, such as the Planning Board, Capital Planning Committee, and Community Preservation Committee are also required to make formal recommendations on certain warrant articles. Each of these committees will have meetings or hearings at which the warrant articles may be discussed in the weeks leading up to Town Meeting.

### **At Town Meeting**

An elected Moderator is the presiding officer during Town Meeting. A Town Meeting typically begins with the Moderator declaring the meeting open, followed by some introductory procedures and comments. The Moderator may nominate a Deputy Moderator to preside when the Moderator cannot. After these preliminary steps, the warrant articles are normally considered in the order printed in the warrant, although the order can be changed by Town Meeting. Town Meeting cannot consider articles not on the warrant.

Warrant articles are only agenda items for a Town Meeting. Each article will normally have one motion to act on that article. Motions are what voters will actually vote on, and a motion to act on an article may be somewhat different from the details printed in the warrant article. Occasionally, an article will be split into multiple motions, and multiple articles can also be combined into one motion (such as the *Consent Calendar*, described later). In Stow, traditionally a member of the Select Board reads the main motion related to articles, even if they did not sponsor the article or write the motion. Usually, the text of the actual motion will be displayed on the screen in front of Town Meeting or available in “hard copy.” Residents should pay attention to the language of the actual motion: it’s the motion that you are voting on, not the warrant article!

Voters may participate in debate on the motions related to an article by speaking for or against a motion, asking questions, or making related motions such as amendments. Some non-voters also have limited permission to address the meeting. More information on what is expected of voters who wish to participate in debate is in the *Voter Etiquette* section, and various types of motions and other details are discussed in *Town Meeting Procedures*.

When the Moderator calls for a vote, voters will vote using their electronic voting devices (“clickers”) or by raising the colored voter identification card given to each voter at check-in. The Moderator will announce which method to use. Usually, the Moderator declares whether the vote passed or not and the vote totals (if the clickers were used). If the cards were used, and the vote was close and the Moderator’s “call” is challenged by seven or more voters, a second vote using the clickers could be required. While rare, sometimes a vote may be reconsidered later during that Town Meeting. More information on voting is described in *Town Meeting Procedures*.

A Town Meeting will continue until action has been taken on each warrant article. A single Town Meeting may have multiple sessions on different days. The last article in an Annual Town Meeting is the annual town election, discussed later in *Town Meeting Procedures*.

# TOWN MEETING PARTICIPANTS

Registered Stow voters (and sometimes non-voters) serve in a variety of roles during Town Meeting:

**TOWN MEETING MEMBERS** are registered Stow voters who attend any session of a Town Meeting and have registered with the CHECKERS. There is no designated seating for Town Meeting members, except for some town officials listed below. If it gets crowded, priority must be given to voting residents for seats in the main meeting hall. There may be additional “overflow” rooms in addition to the main meeting hall. As long as the Moderator and Town Clerk are present, there are enough voters (a quorum) present to start the meeting: see Quorum under *Town Meeting Procedures*.

**NON-VOTERS** are often present at Town Meeting for various reasons. Like voters, all non-voters must register with the CHECKERS. Members of the press and other non-voters are permitted by the moderator to attend Town Meeting provided space is available. The Minuteman and Nashoba Regional School District Superintendents and any other non-resident town department heads are always authorized to attend and address Town Meeting. Other non-voters may address Town Meeting with permission of Town Meeting Members – that is, by a vote. Otherwise, non-voters may not vote and may be required by the Moderator to sit in a designated location or section. More information for non-voters is available in a separate *Information for Nonvoters* document.

**CHECKERS** verify that those attending the Town Meeting are registered voters. For each session of a Town Meeting, when entering the Hale School voters will first register with the CHECKERS in two or more lines grouped by street address. The CHECKERS may check identification and will normally issue registered voters a clicker and a color-coded Voter Identification Card to be used during votes.

The **MODERATOR**, elected each three years, presides over the Town Meeting using *Town Meeting Time*, Third Edition, by Johnson, Trustman and Wadsworth as the parliamentary rules as provided in the town bylaws. The Moderator recognizes speakers at Town Meeting and rules whether a motion or comment is within the scope of the warrant article being discussed or is otherwise in order, among other things. The MODERATOR is located on the stage, behind the lectern. Appointments of a Deputy Moderator, an Assistant Moderator and/or a Temporary Moderator permits the Town Meeting to continue if the Moderator is unavailable or chooses to step aside during a portion of Town Meeting, and to preside at overflow locations (cafeteria or gymnasium) during a Town Meeting.

- A **DEPUTY MODERATOR** is appointed by the Moderator at the annual Town Meeting, with the approval of the Town Meeting members, for a one-year term. The Deputy Moderator presides over the meeting if the Moderator is unavailable, at the request of the Moderator, or at a location remote from the auditorium that serves as an overflow area for voters and non-voters.
- An **ASSISTANT MODERATOR(S)** may be appointed by the Moderator for the Town Meeting session to preside at a location of the meeting where the Moderator is not present (usually gymnasium or cafeteria). The ASSISTANT MODERATOR has all the powers vested by law in the Moderator to preside at and regulate the proceedings in the meeting at which she/he presides, except that she/he may not recognize any citizen desiring to address the meeting without the permission of the Moderator. Appointment of Assistant Moderators need not be ratified by Town Meeting.
- A **TEMPORARY MODERATOR** may be elected by the Town Meeting members for that Town Meeting in the absence of both the Moderator and Deputy Moderator and has all the powers vested by law in the Moderator.

The **TOWN CLERK**, appointed by the Select Board, maintains the official record of Town Meeting proceedings, posts the warrant, and prepares the meeting facility. The TOWN CLERK also coordinates the TELLERS and serves as a timekeeper. The TOWN CLERK prepares the ballot and other material for town elections, and is the town’s chief election officer. The TOWN CLERK and any assistant clerks are seated at a table behind the Moderator.

The **TELLERS**, if needed, are appointed by the Moderator and sworn by the Town Clerk, count the votes if a "teller" or "counted" vote is required. TELLERS have no special seating location. If you are interested in assisting at Town Meeting, please contact the Town Clerk about volunteering as a TELLER.

The **SELECT BOARD** is the chief executive of the town, and is a five-member board elected for three-year staggered terms. The SELECT BOARD approves the warrant and is responsible for scheduling the date, starting time and location of the Town Meeting, and carrying out the decisions of the Town Meeting. The SELECT BOARD is seated at the front of the auditorium.

The **TOWN ADMINISTRATOR**, appointed by the Select Board, is the chief administrative officer of Stow and is responsible for drafting the warrant and for preparation of the annual operating budget and a capital outlay program for Town Meeting consideration. The Town Administrator may address many questions posed at Town Meeting and will speak in particular to operational matters of the Town. The TOWN ADMINISTRATOR is seated with the Select Board.

The **TOWN COUNSEL**, appointed by the Select Board, serves as legal counsel to town officials, boards and committees. At the request of the Moderator, TOWN COUNSEL may address Town Meeting to offer an opinion on the legality of proposed bylaw changes or whether a motion is within the scope of a warrant article, as well as other matters in the disposition of the Town's business. TOWN COUNSEL is seated with the Select Board.

The **FINANCE COMMITTEE**, a five-member board with up to five additional associate members, appointed by the Moderator, presents an overview of the financial position of the town, the financial impact of the actions being considered at the Town Meeting, and makes a recommendation on each article included in the warrant after a public hearing. The FINANCE COMMITTEE is seated at the front of the auditorium.

The **PLANNING BOARD**, a five-member elected board, makes a recommendation to the Town Meeting on all zoning articles. Zoning articles require a public hearing prior to the board voting a recommendation on zoning issues. The report of the public hearing and the vote of the PLANNING BOARD are available at Town Meeting.

The **CAPITAL PLANNING COMMITTEE**, a five-member board, with members appointed by the MODERATOR, the SELECT BOARD, and the FINANCE COMMITTEE, make a recommendation on each capital expenditure article included in the warrant.

The **COMMUNITY PRESERVATION COMMITTEE**, a nine-member board, with one member appointed by the Planning Board, Conservation Commission, Historical Commission, Housing Authority, Recreation Commission, Finance Committee, Board of Assessors, Open Space Committee, and Council on Aging. Any article using the town's Community Preservation Act funds must have a favorable recommendation from the Community Preservation Committee before Town Meeting is legally permitted to approve action under that article.

Members of town departments, committees, and school districts with articles on the warrant will normally have representatives available at Town Meetings to answer questions during debate of those articles. All questions are addressed to the Moderator, who will refer the question to an appropriate person to answer.

# **STOW TOWN MEETING TRADITION**

Most Town Meeting procedures are consistent from town to town. However, each town establishes its own local traditions for the conduct of the Moderator and voters at its Town Meetings. Some traditions can evolve into bylaws. Most traditions become routine and carry over from session to session and meeting to meeting without formalized votes or specific bylaws. Since each Town Meeting is a separate and unique opportunity for voters to assemble to conduct the affairs of the Town of Stow, the Moderator has the responsibility of incorporating and adapting these traditions, with consistency, into the conduct of the meeting. Voters have the responsibility of understanding and respecting Stow's unique traditions. Traditions will continue to evolve over time.

## **Role of the Town Meeting Moderator**

Stow voters expect the following of the Town Meeting Moderator:

1. Call Town Meeting to order at the designated location and time.
2. Request action from the floor – for example, request a motion under an article or a second for a motion.
3. Establish time limits for presentations and debate. These are normally:
  - a. Limit presentations by article sponsor to a maximum of ten (10) minutes;
  - b. Limit each voter's debate (question or comment, and a follow up) to the time limit (see below);
  - c. Limit presentation of amendments to five (5) minutes;
  - d. After each thirty (30) minutes of debate, confirm that additional time for debate is necessary by taking a motion to “Call the Question” (see page 9);
4. Warn presenters and voters when they are approaching the time limit;
5. Recognize speakers at the microphones: voters who wish to speak use microphones at the front of the auditorium, cafeteria, or gymnasium. No one will be recognized to speak who is not at a microphone.
6. Recognize approved non-voters who wish to address the meeting.
7. Permit no one to speak, even to make a clarification, without being recognized. (Except for “Point of Order”; see page 11).
8. Require speakers to maintain the appropriate level of decorum, and allow speakers to be heard without interruption;
9. Summarize the motion to be voted upon;
10. Call for the vote;
11. State the percent vote required to pass, the method of voting, and the procedure to count.
12. Declare the outcome of a vote and/or the vote results;
13. Recess, adjourn and/or dissolve Town Meeting.
14. Rule on matters of procedure, consulting with Town Counsel if necessary. Note that rulings of the Moderator regarding procedure and other matters of conduct at Town Meeting are final.
15. Be consistent and impartial in matters of procedure and rulings.
16. Gather feedback from voters on the Town Meeting process.

# Voter Etiquette

## **The Moderator expects the following from all Town Meeting attendees:**

- 1 No beverages or refreshments in the auditorium or gymnasium.
- 2 No smoking is allowed on school grounds.
- 3 Cellphones and similar devices are to be muted or turned off while in a Town Meeting session.
- 4 Applause or other verbal outbursts are not appropriate, except for formal recognition.
- 5 Taking pictures, video or other recording is only permitted within the auditorium, cafeteria or gymnasium with approval of the Moderator.
- 6 Voting: Voters remain seated during a vote and vote using their clickers or Identification Cards when a vote is called. If a paper ballot is called for, a voter is to obtain, mark and deposit the ballot as instructed.

## **If you wish to take part in debate, the Moderator expects the following:**

- 1 Voters should stand in line at the microphone(s) for their comments or questions, and await recognition by the Moderator. No one may address Town Meeting without recognition from the Moderator. Exceptions are “Point of Order” (See page 11) and handicapped voters.
- 2 Usually voters may stand at any of the microphones designated for voter use. The Moderator may sometimes inform voters that certain microphones are designated for IN FAVOR or OPPOSED. If a voter is undecided and has a question or neutral comment he/she may stand in either line. The Moderator will attempt to alternate recognizing voters from each of the two lines.
- 3 Generally, only the sponsors of warrant articles or the majority report of a town board will be heard from the microphone in the front of the room. All others, including community “groups” in support of or opposed to articles, or “minority reports” from members of a town board, will be heard from the microphones in the audience, and presentations will not be allowed. The Moderator may vary this rule if circumstances warrant, e.g. he or she believes that allowing a “group” to speak from the front will obviate the need for a significant number of other speakers, or a town board responding to a citizens petition article.
- 4 Give priority to voters in line at the microphones who have not yet spoken on the current motion.
- 5 Clearly state your name and address when recognized by the Moderator.
- 6 Address comments and questions only to the Moderator, not to other people. (e.g. “Mr. Moderator, I want to say . . .”)
- 7 Each time at the microphone, you should do only one thing:
  - Speak in favor or against the motion
  - Ask a question about the motion
  - Make an amendment or some other motion related to the current motion
  - Provide other useful information about the motion to help voters make a decisionIf you wish to do multiple things, you must wait in line separately for each.
- 8 Keep within the time limit for questions or comments, which is two minutes for a question or comment and a one minute follow up after receiving a reply. Repeated questioning until you receive an answer you think is satisfactory is not allowed; if you receive an answer to your question that you do not think is responsive, you can use your follow up to indicate that.
- 9 Limit comments, amendments, questions and debate to the current motion under discussion.

- 10 Discuss new information – do not be repetitive.
- 11 Discuss issues, not personalities. It is usually not appropriate to reference other voters by name. If you must refer to someone, use “the previous speaker” or “a prior speaker” when referring to another speaker.
- 12 Provide any proposed amendment to a motion in writing to Town Counsel and to the Moderator and Town Clerk as far in advance of making such motion as possible ,but in no event later than when you approach the microphone, so the Moderator can decide whether it is within the scope of the warrant article. The Moderator may rule any such Motion not so submitted to be out of order.

**Additional suggestions for voters participating in debate:**

- You may have limited opportunities at the microphone. If you want to do multiple things (ask questions, amend the motion, comments) be prepared and prioritize what you want to do.
- Since you will be limited to one follow up question, you will not be able to “press” a town official for an answer that you deem satisfactory. If you receive an answer that you deem to be unresponsive, use your follow up to either (1) ask the question again, perhaps more specifically; or (2) point out to your fellow residents that your question was not answered by stating politely “I don’t think that answered my question, but thank you.”
- If you have a personal interest in an article that you are speaking on – for example, you are an abutter to a parcel being discussed - it is considered polite (but it is not required) to mention that interest.
- If you are the sponsor of an article and want to give a presentation, attend the Stow Town Officials Working Session (STOWS) meeting convened by the Moderator before Town Meeting.



# STOW TOWN MEETING PROCEDURES

The official procedures for Town Meeting are contained in the Massachusetts General Laws (MGL), the Town Charter, the General Bylaws of the Town, and the rules of parliamentary law contained in *Town Meeting Time* by Johnson, Trustman & Wadsworth. Tradition also informs our procedures. A copy of *Town Meeting Time* is available at the Randall Library. Following is a summary of some common motions and other procedures:

<p><b>Adjourn</b></p>	<p>At the conclusion of business at a session of a Town Meeting, the Moderator may say, "A MOTION for ADJOURNMENT is in order." The motion, a second and the affirmative vote will ADJOURN that Town Meeting to a specified future date, time and place. A Town Meeting is adjourned between the sessions until action on all articles has been taken, including the annual town ELECTIONS in the annual Town Meeting. When complete, a Town Meeting is not adjourned, it is DISSOLVED.</p> <p>An annual Town Meeting may be adjourned to a date and time following the annual town elections if all articles of the Town Meeting warrant have not been acted upon before the election date.</p>
<p><b>Amendment</b></p>	<p>A MOTION to AMEND the current motion under discussion may be made by any voter. It must be submitted in writing for review by the Town Counsel and then the Moderator and Clerk prior to or at the time the motion to amend is made. An AMENDMENT requires a SECOND, and is passed by a simple majority regardless of the vote required to carry the main motion. Only one amendment to a main motion can be discussed at any one time. The amendment must be voted upon before additional amendments can be considered, or before debate of the main motion is again taken up.</p> <p>The Moderator may refuse to accept an amendment for several reasons. For example, if it is not immediately available in writing or is outside of the scope (called the FOUR CORNERS) of the article, a proposed amendment is likely to be ruled out of order and not permitted. For example, an amendment to an appropriation that significantly increases or decreases the appropriation compared to what was expressed in the warrant may be ruled out of order because it exceeds what residents could reasonably have anticipated would be done at town meeting.</p>
<p><b>Article</b></p>	<p>The purpose of each ARTICLE in the WARRANT is to apprise or to "warn" the voters of the subject matter to be discussed at the meeting. The wording of the article is not required to provide all details of the precise action that the meeting will be asked to take. The Moderator may interpret articles in a liberal manner and permit various modifications between the article and the actual MOTION.</p> <p>However, motions must relate to the original intent and purpose of the article printed in the warrant, often referred to as the FOUR CORNERS of the article. As noted above, motions or amendments cannot exceed what residents could reasonably have anticipated would be done at town meeting based on a fair reading of the article.</p>
<p><b>Call the Question</b> or <b>Move the Question</b></p>	<p>To CALL or MOVE THE QUESTION is a motion to end debate on the current motion. The motion requires a second, is not debatable, and requires a two-thirds vote to pass. The voter making this motion may not interrupt another speaker. As with other motions, in some cases the Moderator may refuse to accept this motion for certain reasons. If the motion passes, the most recent motion under discussion is immediately put to a vote. If the motion to Call the Question fails, debate continues.</p> <p>After 30 minutes of debate on a motion, even if additional voters are waiting to speak, the Moderator will usually pause debate and note that a Motion to end debate will now be accepted, thus inviting one if a resident cares to make it.</p> <p>The formal motion to end debate is to "Move the Previous Question". That wording is rarely used in</p>

	Stow; a motion to close debate or end debate is also acceptable.
<b>Consent Calendar</b>	The CONSENT CALENDAR groups a number of articles which past experience suggest will be routine, non-controversial and predictable. These articles are acted upon as a group and without questions or debate. Voters may remove an article from the Consent Calendar and have it returned to its original position in the warrant. See CONSENT CALENDAR PROCEDURES on page 16.
<b>Debate</b>	<p>DEBATE is limited to the current MOTION made under an article or line item within an article.</p> <p>The Moderator may specify a time limit for debate. The Moderator expects voters to avoid repetition, to keep remarks brief, and to limit discussion to the current motion. Voters may be recognized by the Moderator alternatively by microphone location or by position (in favor/opposed) to provide a balance of viewpoints during the debate. The moderator will try to recognize voters who have not spoken on a motion ahead of any who have already had a chance to speak on the current motion.</p> <p>Voters should state their name and address when addressing the meeting and address all remarks to the Moderator.</p>
<b>Disorderly Conduct</b>	No person may address the meeting without authorization from the Moderator. This authorization is called being “recognized” by the Moderator. If any person, after warning from the Moderator, persists in that or other DISORDERLY CONDUCT, the Moderator may order the person to withdraw. If the person does not withdraw, the Moderator may order the person to be removed from the building.
<b>Dissolve</b>	DISSOLUTION is the final action of any Town Meeting. A motion to dissolve the meeting concludes the business of the meeting. The next Town Meeting must be called by a new warrant.
<b>Elections</b>	ELECTIONS are the final article of the annual Town Meeting warrant. Elections may take place before, after or during the business meeting, depending on a determination by the Select Board, and in accordance with law. The local Stow polling place is listed in the warrant article. Some budget motions may be conditional on a proposition 2½ override ballot vote at the town election.
<b>Four Corners</b>	<p>The FOUR CORNERS is a term used to describe the permitted scope of an article that a main motion or amendment for an article must fit into at Town Meeting.</p> <p>The FOUR CORNERS will depend on the type of article, wording of the article, size of any changes from the article to the motion, and other factors. Main MOTIONS and any AMENDMENTS must be germane to the subject matter described in the article printed in the warrant. A MOTION calling for action which is more restrictive or specific than the action contemplated by the warrant article is usually acceptable (e.g. reducing an appropriation, or reducing the area affected by a zoning change). A MOTION increasing the action called for by the warrant article to a more general or expansive action is usually not acceptable (e.g. increasing an appropriation significantly, or expanding the area affected by a zoning change).</p> <p>Because of the laws governing them, the FOUR CORNERS of Zoning articles and Community Preservation Act articles may be more restrictive than other articles.</p> <p>With the advice of Town Counsel, it is the duty of the Moderator to determine if any motion or amendment is accepted and is within the FOUR CORNERS of the article as printed in the warrant.</p>

<b>Motion</b>	<p>Each ARTICLE in the WARRANT will have one or more MOTIONS to act on that article at Town Meeting. The motion initially made to act on an article is sometimes called the “main” motion. A member of the Select Board usually reads the main motion related to an article regardless of the article’s actual sponsor.</p> <p>To be in order, the main motion and amendments must fit within the FOUR CORNERS of the article. Besides the main motions for each article, there are also other kinds of motions. Some common motions are listed in this section of the Handbook. <i>Town Meeting Time</i> describes other less common motions. Note that Stow’s Charter, Bylaws and traditions modify the parliamentary procedures in <i>Town Meeting Time</i> related to some motions. For example, in Stow, a by-law requires a 2/3 majority for motions for reconsideration, and allows only one such motion for any matter.</p>
<b>Point of Order</b>	<p>A voter may interrupt the proceedings and raise a POINT OF ORDER if that voter questions the legality or propriety of the proceedings. The speaker should still go to a microphone. If the voter is recognized and if the objection is reasonable, the Moderator will take immediate steps to rectify the matter. Like other issues of Stow Town Meeting procedure, a ruling by the Moderator on any Point of Order is final.</p> <p>Requesting clarification or disagreeing with something that was said is not a Point of Order.</p> <p>Pointing out that the moderator called for a vote on an amendment, but then forgot to take the vote on the main motion and started other business is an example of a useful Point of Order.</p>
<b>Presiding Officer (Moderator)</b>	<p>The Town Moderator, or the Deputy or Temporary Moderator in the absence of or at the request of the Town Moderator, is the presiding officer at Town Meeting. Page 6 lists many of the moderator’s duties, but the underlying role of the Moderator is to move forward the Town's business in an orderly manner and in such a way that the will of the assembled Town Meeting members is clearly expressed for each of the articles printed in the warrant.</p> <p>The Moderator has authority over matters of procedure and decorum, including the power to direct that an offending Town Meeting member or other person, after warning, be removed from the building. Rulings of the Moderator regarding procedure and other matters of conduct of Town Meeting are final.</p>
<b>Quorum</b>	<p>Stow’s bylaws require zero QUORUM at all Town Meetings. As long as the Moderator and Town Clerk are present, the warrant has been properly generated and notice given to voters, a Town Meeting can be called into session regardless of the number of voters in attendance. This enables Town Meeting sessions to always begin at the scheduled time.</p>
<b>Recess</b>	<p>A RECESS means the Town Meeting has not adjourned or dissolved but is taking a break and will continue on the same day.</p>
<b>Reconsideration</b>	<p>A MOTION to RECONSIDER a prior motion that was already voted on is governed by town bylaw: “No vote on a main motion made under any article in the warrant shall be again taken into consideration after having been disposed of unless ordered by a vote of two-thirds of the voters present and voting, and no vote on such action shall be taken into reconsideration in any event after the lapse of two hours from the time of the disposition of the vote, time to be measured only while the Town Meeting is in session, unless announcement of intent to reconsider at a fixed place within the warrant, or at a fixed time, is made within the same two-hour period. Once reconsideration of a vote on a main motion under an article has been moved and voted upon, the vote may not again be reconsidered within the same meeting.”</p>

	<p>To be in order, the motion maker must explain to the Moderator's satisfaction that there is new information that was not discussed in the original debate which makes reconsideration worthwhile. The Moderator will probably not take a motion for reconsideration made right after a matter passes. It is not necessary that the person making the motion be on the "winning" side of the prior vote and, with clickers, it is often impossible to tell.</p> <p>A motion for reconsideration requires a second and is debatable. It requires a 2/3 majority to pass.</p>
<b>Resolutions</b>	<p>The Town Meeting may wish to thank a person or group for service to the Town or offer other courtesies. Such expressions may be made through a RESOLUTION. The resolution may be recorded in the minutes of the meeting for history. The RESOLUTION is put to the voters and a vote is taken as a non-binding sense of the meeting. A count of the vote is not taken, since a RESOLUTION cannot be legally binding on the town. No article is needed on the warrant; whether or not resolutions are permitted is at the discretion of the Moderator.</p>
<b>Second</b>	<p>Each motion requires the support of a second voter (a SECOND) prior to any action on the motion. While any voter may second a motion, a member of the Select Board usually seconds the main motions for articles.</p>
<b>Sense of the Meeting</b>	<p>Occasionally the Moderator will ask voters to provide an opinion or recommendation on a topic related to the business contained in the warrant., e.g. whether to continue with the meeting or adjourn for the night. The question is put to the voters, and the vote is taken as a non-binding SENSE OF THE MEETING. This vote is for information purposes only. Therefore, the vote is neither counted nor is the Town Clerk required to record it in the minutes of the meeting.</p>
<b>Take Any Action Relative Thereto</b>	<p>The words "or take any action relative thereto," or a similar phrase in a warrant article, will usually allow a more liberal interpretation of permitted differences between the article in the warrant and the final motion at Town Meeting (that is, a larger scope or FOUR CORNERS of the article), but should not be relied upon to justify any action that is not reasonably relevant. The words generally allow voters to act on the motion, amend the motion, take no action, etc.</p>
<b>Take No Action</b>	<p>All articles appearing in the warrant must be acted upon before the Town Meeting can be dissolved. The sponsor of an article, however, may make a motion to TAKE NO ACTION, if a change in circumstance makes it unwise or unnecessary to consider the article. This motion requires a majority vote, is debatable, and is considered a negative vote.</p>
<b>Terminate Debate</b>	<p>Debate may end because no voter wishes to be recognized, possibly after a reminder by the Moderator that the discussion is becoming repetitious. Also see "CALL" or "MOVE THE QUESTION."</p>
<b>Test Vote</b>	<p>Whenever a motion requires a four-fifths or nine-tenths vote to pass, the Moderator may so indicate this and may first call for an unofficial TEST VOTE. The purpose of the test vote is to allow the meeting to sense the climate for passage. For these 4/5 and 9/10 votes, the Moderator must declare the vote unanimous or call for an official count. If it is clear that an overwhelming majority favor the motion, abstention by the dissenters when the final vote is taken can provide a unanimous vote and avoid the need for a time-consuming count by the Tellers. For these reasons, the Moderator will usually have votes taken using the clickers for such "supermajorities." The Moderator is permitted to declare a majority or 2/3s vote without an exact count being taken by the Tellers.</p>

<b>Town Meeting Presentation Guide</b>	The Stow Town Meeting Presentation Guide and Presentation Template were developed for the benefit of any town official or voter who prepares materials for presentation at Town Meetings. More information on the Presentation Guide and Template is available from the Town Clerk or the Town Administrator.
<b>Voter Identification Card</b>	Checkers may issue a color-coded Voter Identification Card to voters when they register for each session of Town Meeting. Voters must display the VOTER IDENTIFICATION CARD to gain access to the auditorium, to address the Town Meeting, and to cast their vote when clickers are not used.
<b>Voter Information Table</b>	<p>Documents related to articles discussed at a session of Town Meeting may be made available to voters at the VOTER INFORMATION TABLE which is normally set up near the CHECKERS. All documents provided at the table shall have the article number printed in the upper left-hand corner and the sponsor's name, address and telephone number printed in the upper right-hand corner.</p> <p>The sponsor is responsible for making sufficient copies of the document available for the voters, and to provide a copy to both the Moderator and Town Clerk. Only documents related to the articles for the current Town Meeting are permitted on the VOTER INFORMATION TABLE.</p>
<b>Voting</b>	<p>Most articles are decided by a majority VOTE unless otherwise specified by statute or bylaw. A two-thirds VOTE is required for changes to zoning bylaws, for bonding and Proposition 2½ overrides, appropriations to and from the Stabilization Fund, taking of land by eminent domain, and some other votes. There are rare motions when a four-fifths or nine-tenths vote is required.</p> <p>The Moderator will usually call for a vote using the clickers on matters that require a supermajority or that could be close. The Moderator will instruct voters on how to vote using the clickers. But for some matters, he or she may call for a hand vote. When that occurs, if Town Meeting members have been issued a color-coded Voter Identification Card by the Checkers, voters raise their hand, displaying the card. If the outcome is in doubt, if seven or more voters immediately question a hand VOTE, the Moderator must verify with a Teller VOTE or a vote using the clickers.</p> <p>If clickers are unavailable, a vote may also be taken by paper ballot. If there is a motion, a second, and a majority vote in favor of a paper ballot, or if the moderator chooses to require it, each voter will be supplied with a paper ballot to mark and deposit as instructed.</p>
<b>Warrant</b>	<p>A Town Meeting is called by the posting of a WARRANT at least seven (7) days prior to the annual meeting, and fourteen (14) days prior to a special Town Meeting. At the discretion of the Select Board, every household may receive a copy of the WARRANT or it may be printed in a local newspaper. Of course, the warrant will be available prior to Town Meeting on the Town's website. The WARRANT lists the Town Meeting's starting time, place(s) and agenda (called ARTICLES) to be acted upon by the voters. The warrant for the annual Town Meeting includes, among other business, the budget for the coming fiscal year (July 1st through June 30th).</p> <p>The Select Board is responsible for preparing the warrant. Articles may be placed on the WARRANT by the Select Board, town departments or committees, or by a petition signed by any ten (10) or more voters for an annual Town Meeting or by one hundred (100) or more voters for a Special Town Meeting, except when some other number is required by the Mass. General Laws. The only matters that may be considered by a Town Meeting are those articles that appear in the WARRANT. Articles are generally taken up in the order in which they appear in the WARRANT, although there are exceptions (for example, see Consent Calendar), and Town Meeting may by vote alter the order.</p>

## TOWN MEETING PRESENTATIONS

PowerPoint in aid of a presentation will generally be allowed. Town officials, voters, and other individuals planning to make a PowerPoint presentation by computer should review Stow's Town Meeting PowerPoint Presentation Guide, available on [www-stow-ma.gov](http://www-stow-ma.gov) under Town Meeting and Elections; also available from the Town Clerk or the Town Administrator. The guide makes useful suggestions to make your presentation more readable to voters when displayed. All computer presentations must be submitted to the Town Administrator prior to Town Meeting by the date established.

Generally, video will not be allowed in a presentation or in lieu of an in-person presentation, since the point of presentations at Town Meeting is persuasion and argument, not sales and public relations. The Moderator may allow video in limited circumstances where the information cannot be conveyed adequately in a verbal presentation augmented by PowerPoint, e.g. drone footage of a parcel of land proposed for acquisition, or footage of a building proposed for renovation or demolition.

The person making a presentation must expect to answer questions. All presentation materials must be available for review by the Moderator before Town Meeting. No material that is irrelevant to any warrant article, commercial in nature, or otherwise would be deemed out of order if presented during debate will be allowed.

If you have suggestions to improve this Presentation Guide or sample presentations please contact the Moderator at [stowmoderator@stow-ma.gov](mailto:stowmoderator@stow-ma.gov).

Also, if you anticipate making a presentation, attend the STOWS meeting convened by the Moderator before Town Meeting to discuss logistics, including how much time you will have to present (generally, 10 minutes).

*I served with General Washington in the Legislature of Virginia before the Revolution and, during it, with Dr. Franklin in Congress. I never heard either of them speak ten minutes at a time, nor to any but the main point which was to decide the question. They laid their shoulders to the great points, knowing that the little ones would follow of themselves.*  
– Thomas Jefferson

# GLOSSARY OF FINANCIAL TERMS

**APPROPRIATION:** An authority granted by a legislative body (such as Town Meeting), to make expenditures for specific purposes, that is, to spend money. See *Raise and Appropriate* and *Appropriate and Transfer*.

**APPROPRIATE AND TRANSFER:** Earmarks funding for a specific purpose by transferring a specified amount from an existing account to another account, and authorizing spending that amount.

**EXCESS LEVY:** The difference between the LEVY and the MAXIMUM ALLOWABLE LEVY.

**FREE CASH - AVAILABLE FUNDS:** The amount of Surplus Revenue on July 1st, which is over and above any uncollected taxes from previous years, plus any unexpended free cash from the prior year. Once certified by the State Director of Accounts (usually in the fall), Free Cash is available for use by the Town Meeting.

**LEVY:** The total dollar amount of property taxes that are assessed to all property owners in the town during each fiscal year. The LEVY is calculated at the beginning of each fiscal year by the Assessors by taking into consideration any and all receipts, spending appropriations from the annual and special Town Meetings, actions approved by voters at the polls, and the State assessments charged to the Town. The LEVY may equal but cannot exceed the sum of the LEVY LIMIT plus debt and capital expenditure exclusions (MAXIMUM ALLOWABLE LEVY).

**LEVY LIMIT:** The total Levy allowed by Proposition 2½ is 2½% of the full and fair assessed market value of the entire town, or a maximum tax rate of \$25 per thousand dollars of assessed value. Each year, the LEVY LIMIT is calculated by the Assessors using the summation of the following items:

1. The LEVY LIMIT from the previous year,
2. 2½% of the previous year's LEVY LIMIT,
3. 2½% of the assessed value of new construction during the previous year, and
4. Overrides approved by the voters at Town Meetings *and* at the polls.

**MAXIMUM ALLOWABLE LEVY:** The sum of the Levy Limit plus debt and capital expenditure exclusion(s) approved by the voters at Town Meetings and the polls.

**OVERLAY RESERVE:** Property Taxes raised by the Assessors in excess of appropriations and other obligations to cover tax abatements and exemptions granted locally or by appeal. This cannot exceed an amount deemed reasonable by the state Commissioner of Revenue.

**OVERLAY SURPLUS:** Unused Overlay Reserve that reverts to "free cash" at the end of the fiscal year, if so voted by the Board of Assessors

**PROPOSITION 2½:** A Mass. General Law from 1980 that requires municipalities to limit total property taxes (also called the levy) to a maximum of 2½% of the full and fair market value of the entire town, and to limit the annual increase of the levy limit to 2½% plus the value of new construction ("new growth increase"), unless a majority of the voters approve via ballot one or more of the following:

1. **OVERRIDE**, which allows increasing the levy base above the limits imposed by Proposition 2½ and establishes a new permanent base for the levy; or
2. **DEBT EXCLUSION**, which allows a temporary increase above the limits imposed by Proposition 2½ (including both principal and interest payments) which expire after the debt is paid; or
3. **CAPITAL EXCLUSION**, which allows a temporary increase above the limits imposed by Proposition 2½ for one-year capital expenditures.

**RAISE AND APPROPRIATE:** Authority to raise a specified amount via taxes and to earmark those funds for a specific purpose, and to expend said monies.

**RESERVE FUND:** Money set aside by Town Meeting to be allocated under the control of the Finance Committee to fund departmental expenses during the fiscal year, which are extraordinary or unforeseen. The Finance Committee acts as an agent for the Town Meeting, as the town would otherwise need to convene a Town Meeting to vote on the additional funding requests.

## **GLOSSARY OF FINANCIAL TERMS (cont)**

**REVOLVING FUND:** A mechanism to allow the Town to receive revenues from a specific service and to use those revenues to support that service without Town Meeting appropriation. Massachusetts General Laws impose specific limits on how much and for what purposes such monies may be expended. Certain funds require annual reauthorization of the revolving fund by Town Meeting.

**STABILIZATION FUND:** A “savings” account to store town funds. Adding funds to or appropriating from the fund requires a  $\frac{2}{3}$  Town Meeting vote. Traditionally the Stabilization Fund is used for capital projects or unforeseen expenses, but funds can be appropriated for any valid purpose.

**SURPLUS REVENUE:** Cash, accounts receivable, and other assets, minus liabilities and reserves. Also known as Unreserved Fund Balance.

## **CONSENT CALENDAR PROCEDURE**

As part of an effort to make our Town Meeting time more productive, and save time for discussion of more controversial issues, the Select Board and Moderator have implemented the "Consent Calendar".

Each year there are a number of warrant articles which past experience suggests **will be routine, predictable and non-controversial**. At an annual Town Meeting these articles will be selected for inclusion in the Consent Calendar. A new, “never before seen” article may also be added if the Select Board, Moderator and Town Administrator have reason to believe it will not be controversial (but if experience shows otherwise it might be dropped from the Consent Calendar). Unless “held,” the articles in the Consent Calendar will be voted on as a group, without debate, with a single vote. The use of the Consent Calendar speeds the passage of those warrant articles which the Select Board and Moderator, in consultation with Town Administrator and the Finance Committee, believe should generate no controversy and can be reasonably voted on without debate.

The language and any amount of money specified in the articles included in the Consent Calendar as printed in the warrant are subject to change. The motion made at Town Meeting will include any changes.

At the motion for the Consent Calendar, the Moderator will call out the number of each of the articles, one by one. If any voter has doubt about passing any individual article, wishes an explanation of any article included in the Consent Calendar, or has a question, the voter should say the word "hold" in a loud voice when the article number is called by the Moderator. The article will then be dropped from the Consent Calendar and restored to its original place in the warrant to be brought up, debated and voted on in the usual way. It is hoped that voters will only remove articles from the Consent Calendar in cases of genuine concern.

After calling the individual articles on the Consent Calendar, the Moderator will ask that all articles not “held” be **PASSED AS A UNIT** by a single vote and without debate after a brief affirmative main motion is made including all the articles, and the printed motions thereunder, remaining on the Consent Calendar.

### **THE CONSENT CALENDAR IS TAKEN UP AS ONE OF THE FIRST ORDERS OF BUSINESS AT THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING**

Please carefully review the proposed articles for the Consent Calendar and the related comments that are printed in the warrant. If you have any questions about the articles included in the Consent Calendar, motions or procedure you are encouraged to call the Town Administrator (978-897-2927), or any other appropriate town board or official **before** Town Meeting.