

# Town Meeting 101

*April 11, 2022*



# Overview

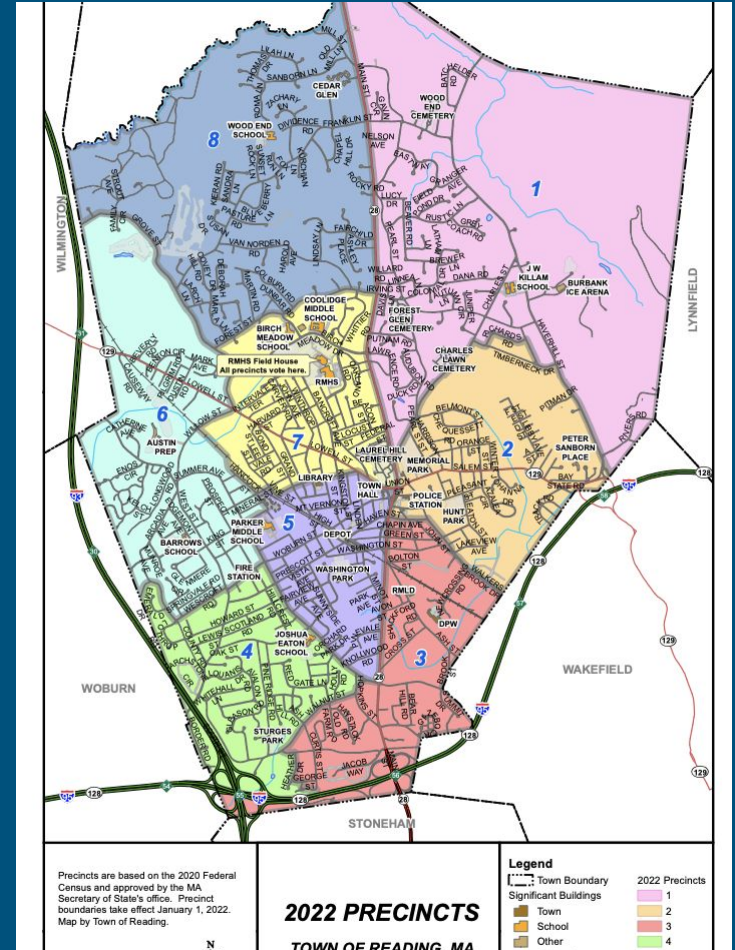
- *What is Town Meeting?*
- *When is Town Meeting?*
- *What happens BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER Town Meeting?*
- *“Voice of the People” Video*



# What Is Town Meeting?

*“Event” - Gathering of 192 Elected Representatives (24 in each of 8 precincts) to conduct public business since 1944*

*“Entity” - Legislative Body of the Town*



# When & Where does Town Meeting meet?

At the RMHS Performing Arts Center unless otherwise noted

- **Annual Town Meeting (Mon/Thurs, April)**
  - Precinct Meetings - Chair/Clerk elected, other business
  - Fiscal matters (including budget).
  - State of the Town -Chair of Select Board.
  - Financial Report -Chair of the Finance Committee.
- **Subsequent Town Meeting (Mon/Thurs, November)**
  - May have Precinct Meeting - fill vacancy
  - All Business (including bylaws).
  - State of the Schools - Chair of School Committee and Superintendent.
  - RMLD Report.
- **Special Town Meeting: (As Needed)**
  - May be called by voters (20% of or 200 registered voters file written request) or Select Board.



# When Is Town Meeting In 2022?

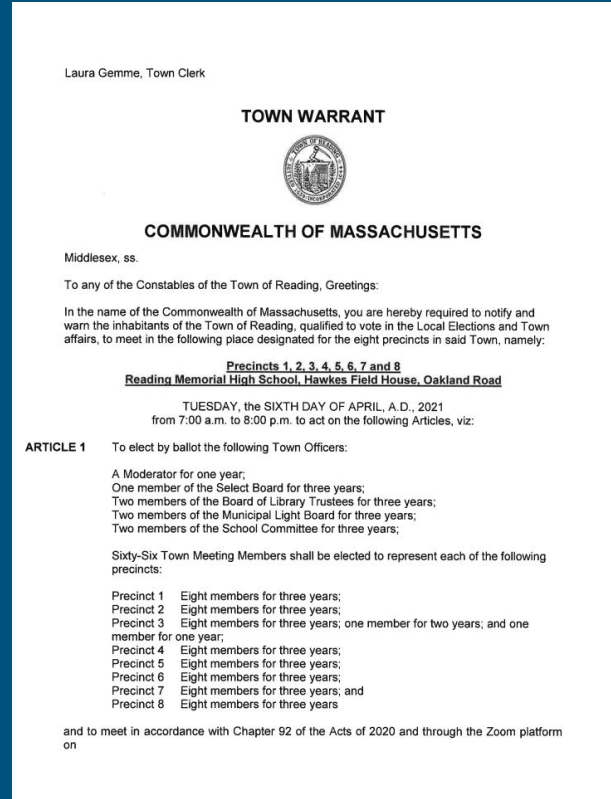
Town of Reading Election and Town Meeting Calendar for 2022								
Event	Event Date	Last Day to Close Warrant	Last Day to Post Warrant	Voter Registration Closes - 8:00 PM	Nomination Papers Available No Later Than	Last Day to Obtain Nomination Papers	Nomination Papers Due BoR - 5:00 PM	Withdraw Name - 5:00 PM
District Election	January 25			January 05				
Town Election	April 05	March 01	March 29	March 16	January 05	February 14	February 15	March 03
Annual Town Meeting	April 25 April 28 May 02 May 05	March 01	March 29					
State Primary	September 06	August 30	August 30	August 17				
State Election - Early Voting	November 08	November 01	November 01					
Subsequent Town Meeting	November 14 November 17 November 21 November 28	September 27	October 31					

See [Town Meeting Calendar](#)

# What Happens Before Town Meeting?

## The Town Warrant

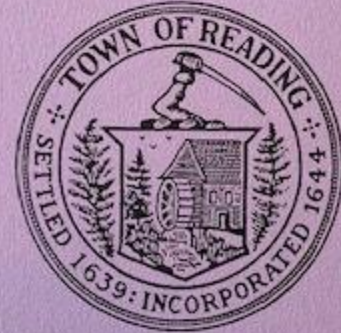
- Gives prior public “Warning” of Town Meeting *time, place, and agenda* (“Articles”) from Select Board.
- Articles are those items to be voted on.
- Available at least *7 days advance* of Town Meeting by Town Meeting Members at the Police Station or Town Clerk’s Office
- [Town Meeting Warrants | Reading, MA](#)



# Report On The Warrant

- *Provides history and background on Articles in the Warrant.*
- *Available to TMMs in advance of Town Meeting.*
- [Town Meeting Warrants | Reading, MA](#)

**Town of  
Reading  
Massachusetts**



**2021 Annual Town Meeting  
Report on the Warrant  
April 26, 2021**



# Who Determines What Is In The Warrant?

The **Select Board** (except for procedural matters)

The Select Board *shall* place on such Warrants all subjects submitted by:

- Any **two (2) or more Select Board Members**;
- Any **board or committee**;
- Any **ten (10) or more voters** for the Annual, Subsequent or Special Town Meeting as defined in Section 2.14; *or*
- Any other person or entity as may be authorized by Town Bylaw or otherwise.



# Citizen Petition Form For Warrant Items

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Requires **10 signatures** for Town Meeting

There are **deadlines** for these petitions - see Section 2.1.7 of [General Bylaw](#)

Forms: [Town Meeting | Reading, MA](#)

*Note: Be sure to use the correct form for what you are requesting, i.e. Home Rule Charter Change v. Bylaw Change.*



# Budget Process

*All meetings open to the public*

**October:** Financial Forum. *Community engagement meeting*

- Review current year and preview upcoming year, including expected revenues and cost environment.
- Finance Committee recommends budget target and free cash usage.

**December - February:**

- Town departments and Schools build budget in line with guidance and submit to Town Manager.

**March:**

- Town Manager submits balanced budget to Finance Committee.
- Finance Committee reviews and votes to recommend the budget to Town Meeting.

**April:** Town Meeting votes the budget.

Town Meeting has authority over all appropriations, including the approval of a ~\$100 million budget.

Free Cash: accumulation of revenues in excess of estimate, and unspent budgeted costs. FinCom policy targets 7% of revenue.

Proposition 2 ½ limited overall tax revenue growth to 2.5% (excluding new growth). Costs have historically risen 3-3.5% annually. An override allows for a increase >2.5% to relieve budget pressure.

# What Happens *During* Town Meeting?

*Who is Present?*

*Structure of Town Meeting*

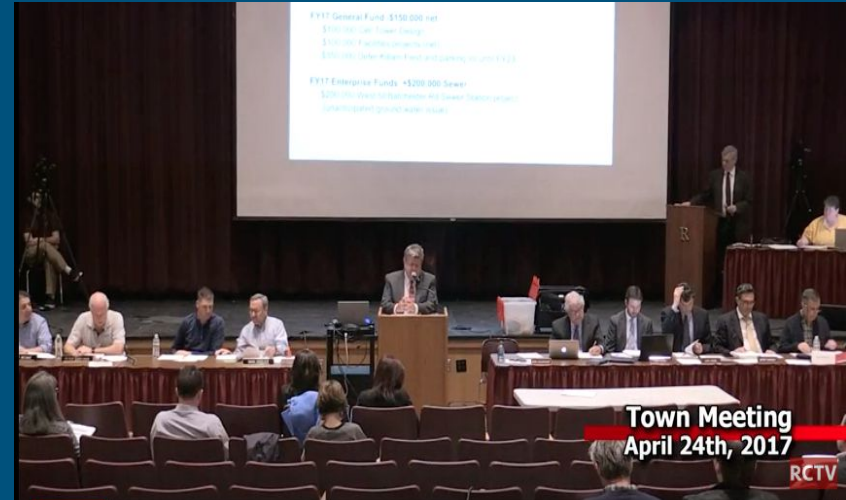
*Getting Down to Business*

*How to Speak at Town Meeting*



# Who Is Present At Town Meeting?

- **Moderator** Alan Foulds - procedural matters, declares outcome of votes
- **Town Clerk** Laura Gemme - records votes/minutes
- **Town Manager** Fidel Maltez
- **Town Counsel** Miyares and Harrington LLP
- **Committee Members** (Rule 9) - Finance Committee, Select Board, School Committee (may debate but no vote unless also elected)
- **Town Meeting Members** - need majority
- **Town Leaders** - Superintendent, Police Chief, Fire Chief
- **The Public** - May be given the opportunity to speak on the subject for a maximum of 5 minutes after Town Meeting Members speak.



# Town Meeting Structure

- Call to Order (when quorum is met)
- Pledge of Allegiance
- Invocation
- Swearing in of new members
- Warrant Articles
  - Usually, Town Meeting considers the warrant's articles in order. However, Town Meeting may change the order.
  - The Moderator introduces each article or reads it entirely before starting debate.
- Removal of non-participating members
- Adjourn

# Getting Down To Business

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## *Motions*

- A motion is made under a warrant article, telling Town Meeting exactly what we are discussing.
- The motion is seconded.
- The Moderator traditionally calls on the main proponent to discuss the motion.
- Reports from relevant advisory committees (Finance, Bylaw, etc.).
- The Moderator opens the floor to debate.

# Getting Down To Business

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## *Proposed Amendments*

- Any Town Meeting Member may propose an amendment to the proposal. Discussion then turns to the amendment. When discussion on the proposed amendment is finished, we vote on the amendment, then discussion returns to the main motion, either as amended or as it originally stood.
- Amendments can be given in writing to Moderator and/or Town Clerk in advance of Town Meeting.

## *Ending Debate*

- Called “Moving the Previous Question”.
- Requires two-thirds vote.
- Cannot be made by someone discussing the merits of the issue.
- Even if others waiting to speak, debate is ended if passes.



# Getting Down To Business

## *Voting*

- When discussion is finished, the vote is called for.
- Hand counts.
- Standing counts.
  - Used when more than a majority vote is required or a hand count is in question.
- Quantum of votes (Majority, two-thirds, other).

## *Adjournment*

- For the evening.
- Sine Die (“Without day”) - Town Meeting is closed.



# Other Points

- Point of Order
- Point of Personal Privilege
- Questioning a count
- The issue of scope
- Indefinite Postponement - “not now vote,” effectively defeating.
- Reconsideration - moved by someone on the winning side, “second thoughts not second chances”, see General Bylaws 2.2.4.

# Motions

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<b>The term. . .</b>	<b>Means. . .</b>
Postpone an article indefinitely	To defeat it
Take no action on an article	To defeat it
Lay the question on the table	To put aside temporarily, will come back to it
Table the question	To put aside temporarily
Move the previous question	To cut off debate and vote on the issue at hand

# Instructional Motion

- *Non-binding Resolution.*
- *Essentially asking someone to look into something for the next meeting.*
- *Author must give to Moderator and Town Clerk in writing before session begins.*
- *Form available on Town Website:*  
[\*Instructional Motion Form\*](#)

# Speaking at Town Meeting

**Who** (are you)?

“Mr. Smith,  
Precinct 2,  
10 ABC Road...”

**What topic?**  
(on topic)

“Mr. Moderator: I  
support this proposal  
because...”

**Speak to Moderator**  
(not other members)

“I disagree with the  
**argument we just  
heard** because...”

**Attack Arguments**  
(not people!)

~~“The previous speaker  
is wrong because...”~~

Limited to 10 minutes  
unless granted permission

# What Happens After Town Meeting?

## Referendum Petition

*No affirmative vote of Town Meeting becomes effective until 7 days following the dissolution of Town Meeting (with a few exceptions), therefore If a registered voter wishes to suspend the vote they must do so within 7 days by filing a referendum petition as outlined in the Home Rule Charter.*

*The effect is that the Article is submitted to the voters in the form of a ballot question (20% of voters must cast ballots).*

See [Reading Home Rule Charter](#)

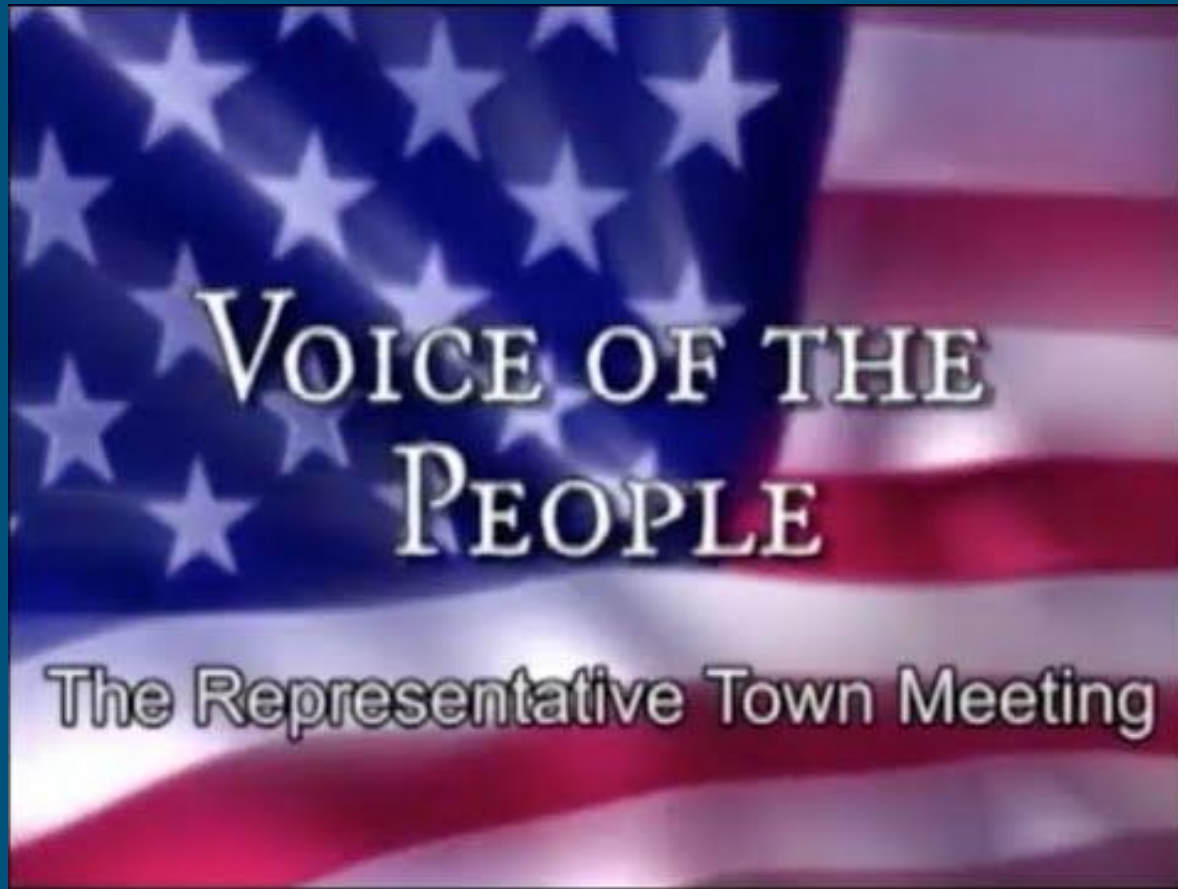
# Town Meeting Resources

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- Town Meeting Time: A Handbook of Parliamentary Law (Copy at Town Clerk's Office)
- Citizen's Guide to Town Meeting: [CIS: Citizen's Guide to Town Meetings](#)
- Town of Reading Home Rule Charter, Article 2: [Home Rule Charter](#)
- Town of Reading General ByLaws, Article 2: [General Bylaw](#)
- RCTV broadcasts town meeting live and has past meetings [RCTV](#)
- Massachusetts General Laws, chapter 39 and 43A [General Laws](#)







Video: "Voice of the People"

This presentation was a partnership between:

*The Reading Public Library*

*Town Manager Fidel Maltez*

*Town Moderator Alan Foulds*

*Town Clerk Laura Gemme*

*Former and Current Town Meeting Members:*

*Jennifer Hillery, Tom Grant, Geoffrey Coram*

Images from:

*Town of Reading website, Reading Public Schools' Website,  
RCTV website, Town of Cohasset Website, Sweet Clip Art, The  
Reading Post*

