

Roles of Town Officials, the Public, and the Moderator:

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Since our last town meeting and school district meeting several people have questioned me about the process, how we ended up where we did, and what they can do differently. My intent here is to clarify the roles of the moderator, the selectmen and school board, and the public in setting our town and school policies and budgets. I speak for myself, but anyone reading this should consult with the School Board and Selectmen to get the full picture of what they are doing.

In a nutshell:

- The moderator ensures a fair, legal, and efficient process.
- The town and school governing representatives prepare and present proposals, provide information, and enact the will of the voters.
- The public deliberates, debates, amends, and ultimately decides on the issues that shape their town.

The Moderator:

As the moderator I review the warrant, become familiar with the issues, and consult with town officials and legal counsel as needed to anticipate procedural questions or controversies.

My responsibility during the meetings is to enforce rules of order, to recognize speakers, to ensure that debate remains respectful and relevant to the motion, to prevent disruptions or personal attacks, and to certify and report the results.

Though the basis of the rules I follow may be Robert's Rules of Order, I follow an extremely simplified version, picking and choosing how we proceed. Any voter can appeal a ruling by the moderator. The moderator can either ask for consensus from the voters or may explain his ruling and move on from the appeal.

If a meeting is adjourned or continued to another date, the moderator ensures that the process resumes properly and maintains order throughout subsequent sessions.

Motions and voting

There are basically five types of motions that members of the community can make. The main motion, a subsidiary motion, a privileged motion, an incidental motion and a frivolous motion.

Some of the subsidiary motions that can be made- *postpone* indefinitely (debatable- majority vote needed), *amend* (debatable- majority vote needed), *refer* (debatable- majority vote needed), *postpone* (debatable- majority vote needed), *limit or extend limit of debate* (not debatable-2/3 vote needed), *call the question* (not debatable-2/3 vote needed), and *lay on the table* (not debatable-2/3 vote needed) have been used at our meetings. If more than one motion is on the floor then each has a ranking, meaning the order in which it must be handled, and must be dealt with accordingly.

The main motion at our School or Town meetings is the warrant article as printed and moved by the board. After the main motion is seconded, discussion can begin, and any amendments (suggested changes) to the main motion can be made. If an amendment is made and seconded it then becomes the highest-ranking motion, and discussion must be centered on it first. Sometimes during discussion of an amendment someone suggests a change to the amendment that the maker of the motion to amend agrees with. Rather than piling amendment upon amendment, which is the technical way to do it, I generally allow the maker of the original amendment accept a friendly wording change to avoid complicating the process.

If, after calling for the vote on the amendment and it fails, then the original motion is back to being the main motion. If the amendment passes, then the main motion now is the original motion *as changed by the amendment*. *Virtually any number of amendments can be made and either passed or voted down*, until consensus is reached, and the original motion with any changes is voted on. If it passes, we move on to the next warrant article.

The exceptions to moving on to the next warrant article are if someone makes a “motion to reconsider” the previous article, or, as happened at our last School District Meeting, the Moderator has the authority (suggested to me by the school attorney and confirmed by legal counsel at the Secretary of States office) to call for a new motion from the voters relative to the article. The new motion cannot change the basic intent of the article, but it can be amended. School and town budgets need to be set at some point in time. Before we move on to other business, the best time to reconsider the budget article is immediately. Postponing to a later date is possible, but costly and inefficient.

Moderators should be conscious of the community desires and should not go against the vote of the community, but *we are given a considerable amount of leeway in how we conduct the meetings*. It is always my intent to allow any legal voter the opportunity to speak and to allow as much discussion as is needed unless it gets too repetitious.

The Town Government:

The School Board and the Select Board are responsible for compiling the warrant, a formal agenda listing all matters (articles) to be discussed and voted upon at the town meeting.

State law requires the town government to provide adequate public notice about the town meeting. The warrant must be posted in designated public places and published within statutory deadlines.

The Select Board and the School Board develop and propose the annual budget.

Officials prepare annual reports on town finances, accomplishments, and plans.

Town officials or committee members introduce, explain, and advocate for the warrant articles.

After the meeting, it is the responsibility of town government to implement approved measures, manage budgets, and enforce policies or ordinances enacted by the voters.

The Public:

While elected officials are responsible for preparing the warrant for the annual meetings, the public should provide input throughout the year by being aware of actions at school board and select board meetings then offering input. Also attend the budget hearings prior to the annual meetings.

Registered voters are the legislative body and possess direct decision-making authority.

Only registered voters may participate in debate and voting (there are exceptions). Those wishing to vote must be registered with the town’s supervisors of the checklist.

Voters should attend the annual town meeting and the annual school district meeting since important decisions affecting taxes, public services, and local regulations are made only by those present (unless the town has adopted SB2 (senate bill 2), which splits the meeting into a deliberative session and ballot vote).

Voters should review the annual report, proposed budget, and warrant articles prior to the annual meetings so they can make informed decisions.

Every registered voter has the right to speak on any article, subject to rules of order. They are encouraged to ask questions, express opinions, propose amendments, and address concerns regarding the issues at hand.