

Subject: March 4 Special Town Meeting – Process, Procedures, and Expectations

Dear Town Meeting Members,

As we prepare for the March 4 Special Town Meeting, I want to provide an overview of how the meeting will be conducted. My goal in sharing this information is to ensure that expectations are clear and that our work together proceeds in a manner that is orderly, consistent, and fair to all Members.

The Role of Town Meeting and the Moderator

The two zoning articles before us raise important policy questions. Town Meeting Members may hold differing views. That is an expected and healthy part of Town Meeting. The responsibility for evaluating the proposals, considering amendments, and determining the outcome rests entirely with Town Meeting.

My role as Moderator is procedural. I do not take positions on the substance of articles or amendments. My responsibility is to apply the rules impartially, manage the meeting efficiently, and provide a framework that allows full and fair deliberation by the body. To support that goal, the same procedural standards will be applied consistently to all articles, amendments, and speakers.

Presentations and Speaking Opportunities

The meeting will follow Belmont's established practice for presenting Town Meeting articles:

- Each article will be introduced by its sponsor, who will make the motion.
- The Select Board, Planning Board, Warrant Committee, and any other Town committee that has taken a position will have the opportunity to report their votes.
- For each article, the Planning Board, with assistance from Town Planner Chris Ryan, will have approximately 10–15 minutes for its presentation.
- Members who have submitted amendments will be given time to present and explain their motions.

Several Members have asked whether they may have additional presentation time to present their particular viewpoints or those of groups of Town Meeting Members they are aligned with. Belmont has limited precedent for granting extended presentation rights beyond those proposing amendments or making motions. Doing so selectively could create an imbalance and require comparable time for multiple groups.

Accordingly, a single standard will apply: those making motions may present their proposals, and all other Town Meeting Members may speak within the allotted three-minutes, which is our rule, subject to Town Meeting's decision to continue debate. This approach ensures equal access to the floor and consistent treatment for all Town Meeting Members.

Scope of Amendments

As part of the Moderator's responsibility to ensure that amendments are germane to the articles under consideration, I have reviewed all submitted amendments for scope.

After consultation with Town Counsel, I have ruled two amendments relating to overnight street parking out of scope and they will not be considered.

The zoning articles under consideration do not address overnight parking. Furthermore, overnight parking requirements are established in Belmont's General Bylaws. The amendments in question would attempt to modify a General Bylaw provision through a zoning article, which is not procedurally appropriate. Changes of that nature would need to be pursued through changes to the appropriate General Bylaws.

The amendments affected are:

- McGaw Amendment under Article 2: No Overnight Parking on Streets
- McGaw Amendment under Article 3: No Overnight Parking on Streets

The full text of all submitted amendments has been previously circulated.

Order of Consideration

There are twelve remaining amendments. To promote clarity and efficiency, they will be taken up in a structured sequence. Where proposed amendments are alternatives to one another, discussion will be consolidated, with separate votes. Below is a breakdown of the remaining amendments for Articles 2 and 3 in the sequence in which those amendments will be considered by Town Meeting.

Proposed Article 2 Amendments

1. Substitute the word "Reserved" in the zoning by-laws in place of the article
2. Two parking spaces per dwelling unit (one space for units with fewer than two bedrooms)
3. One parking space per dwelling unit
(Items 2 and 3 discussed together as alternatives)
4. Limit the permitting authority's ability to reduce residential parking requirements
5. Allow shared parking agreements

Proposed Article 3 Amendments

1. Substitute the word "Reserved" in the zoning by-laws in place of the article
2. Two parking spaces per dwelling unit (one space for units with fewer than two bedrooms)
3. One parking space per dwelling unit
(Items 2 and 3 discussed together as alternatives)

4. Limit the permitting authority's ability to reduce residential parking requirements
5. Allow shared parking agreements
6. Define "guest room" and add related references
7. Clarify applicability of Section 6.15 to all hotels permitted under the zoning by-laws

This sequencing reflects standard Town Meeting practice and is intended to ensure that Town Meeting Members understand the order in which decisions will be made and the effect of each vote.

One Night or Two

Eighty-nine Town Meeting Members responded to the most recent survey involving preferences for one or two nights. Of those, 61% percent prefer that we hold the March 4th Special Town Meeting over two evenings instead of one marathon session potentially going quite late. The two evenings reserved for the Chenery School auditorium are March 4th and 5th.

Moving Forward

Town Meeting works best when the process for presenting and debating issues is clear, the rules are applied consistently, and Town Meeting Members approach the work well prepared and with respect for one another. My commitment as Moderator is to conduct the March 4th Special Town Meeting in a manner that is transparent, even-handed, and focused on helping the body deliberate effectively and reach clear decisions.

Thank you for your preparation and for your service to Belmont. Please be sure to read all of the relevant documents that have been posted for the upcoming Special Town Meeting [here](#). If you have procedural questions in advance of the meeting, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Michael Crowley
Belmont Town Moderator
(617) 752-2250
moderator@belmont-ma.gov