



Belmont Town Meeting: Simplified Procedures Guide

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How Town Meeting Works is Governed by the Following

- Massachusetts General Laws
- Belmont's General Bylaws
- Belmont's Representative Town Meeting Act of 1926, as amended
- Town Meeting Time, a Handbook of Parliamentary Law
- Traditional Practices

Articles vs. Motions

- **Articles:** Topics listed in the meeting notice (Warrant). They are general to give the reader an idea what to expect will be voted upon, and **can't be changed**.
- **Motions:** Specific proposals to take action on an article. **Can be changed** by vote.

Do All Motions Need a Second?

- **Main motions under warrant articles:** No second needed.
- **Most other motions:** Do need a second, but **not "point of privilege" or "point of order"**.

Written Motions and Amendments

- **Amendments:** **Must be submitted in writing to the Town Clerk** (see deadline below), unless it is a simple correction or changing of a number as Moderator allows.
- **All other motions:** Should be in writing unless very short and clear.

Submit Motions/Amendments Early

- Submit major motions/amendments to the **Town Clerk** (email townclerk@belmont-ma.gov) before close of business **by the 3rd business day** before the session the article will be taken up.
- This allows review and sharing with relevant staff and committees, and sharing with members.
- The Moderator can allow exceptions for simple motions.

Who Speaks First?

- Normally, the person making the main motion speaks first; then any amendments are taken, voted upon before action on the original main motion, as proposed or as amended.
- For money matters or Bylaw changes, the Moderator calls on the Select Board and then the relevant committees to report their votes first:

Topic	Report
Money Items	Warrant Committee, then School Committee (for school-related items)
Capital Improvements	Warrant Committee, then Comprehensive Capital Budget Committee
Community Preservation Act	Warrant Committee, Comprehensive Capital Budget Committee, then Community Preservation Committee
General Bylaws	Bylaw Review Committee
Zoning By-laws	Planning Board

Speaking Rules – All Comments and Questions Go Through the Moderator

- Only once recognized by the Moderator, speak from a microphone, or for remote attendees from a microphone on your phone or computer.
- First state your **name and precinct**.
- Speaking on a motion: **3 minutes max, except for those presenting on the main motion**. Presentations by those making main motions and their affiliates (e.g., relevant town staff or designated co-presenters) may be given additional time by the Moderator.
- Unless Town Meeting consents, you may speak **twice total** (unless it's a correction or clarification).
- Second speeches only allowed **after everyone who wants to speak has spoken once**.
- Non-members may speak **only if the Moderator allows** (preferably requested in advance).

Debate & Questions

- Stay on topic. **Comments must be relevant** to the motion being discussed.
- **Speak to the Moderator**, not to other Town Meeting Members, staff, or committee members.
- You may ask **1 question and 1 follow-up**.
- **To make a motion:**
 1. State the motion
 2. Wait for a Second (if needed)
 3. Speak to the motion when recognized.
- **Don't make a motion at the end of a speech** (like calling the question). The motion won't be allowed.

Financial Conflicts

- If you or your family will gain financially from an article, **say so before speaking**.
- Same rule applies if you're working as an attorney or consultant on the topic.

How Voting Works

- Most votes are by **electronic roll call**. Exceptions: routine or non-binding motions.
- Only Town Meeting Members may vote on any motion before Town Meeting.

Reconsidering a Vote

- Can only reconsider a motion if you announce it **during the meeting** where the vote happened, or you notify the Town Clerk in writing by **12 noon the next business day**.
- Only someone who **voted with the winning side** can ask to reconsider (for roll call votes).
- Motion to Reconsider needs a **2/3 vote** to pass.
- A vote **can't be reconsidered more than once per our Bylaws**.
- Final budget decisions happen only after **all budget motions** under the operating or capital budget article are dealt with. Reconsideration rules don't apply until then.

Key Motions to Know

- **Point of Privilege:** Speak up if something's affecting your ability to participate (e.g., can't hear) (no 2nd needed, not debatable, no vote).
- **Main Motion:** The primary proposal to act on an article (needs 2nd, debatable, vote required varies).
- **Lay on the Table:** Ends discussion and puts the motion aside (needs 2nd, not debatable, 2/3 vote).
- **Take from the Table:** Brings a tabled motion back for discussion (needs 2nd, not debatable, majority vote).
- **Amend/Substitute:** Changes the wording or details of a motion (needs 2nd, debatable, majority vote).
- **Call the Question/Terminate Debate:** Ends debate & calls for a vote (no 2nd needed, not debatable, 2/3 vote).
- **Postpone Indefinitely/Dismiss:** Ends discussion and action on a motion (needs 2nd, debatable, majority vote).
- **Point of Order:** Ask about a rule or process issue (no 2nd needed, no vote).