

Abbreviated Summary of Town Meeting Procedure

A Town Meeting is based on a duly posted Warrant that contains specific Articles to be acted upon. It is NOT an information meeting, a debate, or a hearing. The meeting is confined to action on the Articles presented. Further, nothing can occur related to an Article until a motion related to it (called a Main Motion) is moved, seconded, and thereby is before the house for discussion and action. Only registered voters in the towns involved may propose action relevant to an Article or vote at any time.

General Procedure:

1. The presiding officer calls the meeting to order; confirms that the warrant containing the articles has been duly posted to the public; opens nominations from the floor for a moderator; conducts the vote for a moderator (simple majority); and swears in the moderator-- after which the moderator takes over proceedings.

NOTE: The main duties of the moderator are to keep the meeting orderly and to move it along to resolution of each Article in timely fashion. Maine Statutory Requirements state that (a.) A person may not speak before being recognized by the Moderator; (b.) A person shall be silent at the Moderator's command; (c.) When a vote declared by a moderator is questioned by at least seven voters, he or she is required to make it certain by polling the voters (i.e. if the result of a voice vote is thus challenged, a hand vote would have to be held); and (d.) A non-voter may not speak without the consent of 2/3 of the voters present.

2. (The following applies to each Article): The Moderator asks for a Motion and Second on the Article to put it before the house. Usually, this Motion is made as recommended by the sponsors.
3. The Moderator declares this Main Motion duly before the house, and opens the floor for discussion and possible Amendments. Usually, the sponsors are recognized to speak first.
4. Discussion and Amendments are limited to the specific current Main Motion before the house. Amendments (duly made through a motion and a second) are in order (one at a time), and may involve word and/or dollar changes. Each proposed Amendment may be discussed and must eventually be brought to a vote. If the Amendment fails, consideration of the original Main Motion continues. If the Amendment passes, further consideration of the new current Main Motion continues (this is the original Main Motion modified by the passed Amendment). And so it goes through each proposed Amendment -- an original Main Motion may be amended multiple times.
5. When no further Amendments are proposed, the Moderator calls for a vote on the current Main Motion, amended or not as the case may be.
6. So the meeting goes from Article to Article.
7. When all Articles have been voted upon, the Moderator asks for a Motion and Second to adjourn - vote is taken - meeting adjourned.

Prepared by: James G. Boyles (a town meeting moderator for 19 consecutive years)

Resource: Maine Municipal Association, "Town Meeting & Elections Manual", Revised January 1994.