

Welcome to Town Meeting!

Explanation of Some Common Phrases You Will Hear

Welcome! *This flyer is provided as background to help all Vermont town meeting voters participate fully. The Moderator is trained to make sure all voters are heard and their questions answered. If you have any questions, just raise your hand and ask.*

The Warning

The "warning" is the agenda for the meeting. Only articles on the warning ("warned articles") can be considered at Town Meeting. The warning for the meeting appears in the Town Annual Report.

Australian Ballot

Some items that appear on the warning may not be voted on at the traditional face to-face Town Meeting, but are voted on in the voting booths on pre-printed, paper "Australian ballots." Items that are voted on by Australian ballot may be discussed at Town Meeting but can not be amended.

Robert's Rules of Order

According to state law, Town Meetings in Vermont are governed by a set of parliamentary rules called "Robert's Rules of Order." The Town Moderator is trained in using Robert's Rules, and will refer to

them when necessary. A few of the more commonly used elements are included here.

 **Remember,**
if you have a
question, just
raise your hand
and ask.

The Main Motion

Example: "I move to accept Article 6 as written." Each article on the warning must be "moved" and seconded; it is then ready to be discussed by the group. In discussion, citizens raise their hands and are called on by the Moderator. When you are called on, stand up, state your name, then speak your mind.

The Amendment

"Amending" a motion proposes a change to the main motion. Example: An article is moved and seconded; then, during discussion, someone says, "I move to amend Article 17 by reducing the dollar amount from \$10,000 to \$5,000." After someone seconds this, debate shifts to discussing this amendment. Once people have discussed the amendment, the Moderator puts the amendment to a vote. If the voters reject the amendment, the group now returns to discussing the original main motion. If the voters approve the amendment, the discussion focuses on the main motion *as amended*.

(More → →)

Town Meeting Evaluation Form: *Your Ideas Wanted!*

→ The most effective / useful elements of our Town Meeting were:

→ What I would change about our Town Meeting:

→ Additional comments or suggestions (more room on other side):

Please return this form in the drop-box by the door. The results will be given to the Selectboard and used to improve our Town Meeting. Thank you!

The Vote

Once the Moderator determines that all points of view have been heard, s/he will call for a vote. If you are in favor of the motion, you will say "Aye." If opposed, say "No" or "Nay." Other forms of voting that you may expect to see at Town Meeting are:

- A show of hands or a standing vote (sometimes called a "division"): May be asked for at any time. It is useful if a voter disagrees with the Moderator after the results of a voice vote is announced.
- Paper ballot: Any voter may move that a vote be taken via paper ballot; if seven voters support this motion, pieces of paper will be distributed and you will write your vote and pass it in. It will be counted immediately.

Point of Order

If you don't understand a ruling of the Moderator, speak up, saying "Point of order, Mr./Ms. Moderator." After you are recognized by the Moderator, ask your question.

Call the Question

If debate has gone on long enough—voters have made up their minds but some people are still repeating the same basic arguments—a voter can move to cut off debate or "call the question." If

you agree that all voices have been heard and you are ready to vote on the issue at hand, you should vote in favor of calling the question. However, if you want to continue discussion, you should vote against calling the question. Two-thirds of the group must vote yes on calling the question in order

to cease debate; otherwise, discussion continues.

In most cases, "calling the question" is not necessary. The Moderator will call for a vote when s/he feels that all points of view have been heard, and this avoids having to vote on calling the question.

Pass Over

Sometimes it becomes clear to the voters that they aren't ready to make a vote yes or no, and the preference is to not vote on the article at all. At this point, someone may move to "pass over" an article. (An article may also be passed over because it will be handled by Australian ballot.)

☛ If you'd like to speak, just raise your hand.
When recognized by the Moderator, stand up, say your name, and speak up so all can hear you.



☛ Created by the Vermont Institute for Government (VIG). For more information and resources on Vermont town meeting and town government, please see the VIG website: www.vtinstituteforgovt.org

Town Meeting Evaluation Form—*more room for your comments.*

