

Town Meeting: An overview for the citizens of Clinton

<http://www.clintonmass.com/townmeeting.shtml>

General information

Open Town Meeting is the form of municipal government for Clinton. In the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, this is the basic form of governance for most small municipalities. In the Open Town Meeting form of government, any registered voter may attend, speak, and vote on the issues being discussed. Attendance must be in person, and attendees who are not registered voters will not be allowed into the auditorium. State law requires the town to hold at least one Town Meeting each year in the early Spring. This is the Annual Town Meeting, whose main purpose is to appropriate money to fund the Town's expenses for the following fiscal year. The Annual Town Meeting allows for action on other subjects also. If additional matters come up at a later time, they may become the subject of a Special Town Meeting which may be called by the Board of Selectmen or by citizen's petition.

The Warrant

The Warrant is the notice to the voters of matters to be considered and acted on at an Annual or Special Town Meeting. Sometimes the articles in the Warrant are quite general, and sometimes they are very detailed and specific. Citizens may also petition to place articles on an "Annual Town Meeting" Warrant. Warrants for Town Meeting are published in *The Item* and *The Times Courier* at least seven days before the date of the Meeting. The Warrant is also available for download from this website. Printed copies of the Warrant shall be furnished the voters at all town meetings. Articles in the Warrant shall be acted upon in the order in which they stand, except that the Moderator may, upon request and for reasons stated, entertain a motion to take up an article out of its regular order.

Annual Town Meeting

The Annual Town Meeting shall be held on the last Monday of April at 7pm inside Fallon Memorial Auditorium at Clinton Town Hall, 242 Church Street. The annual election of Town Officers shall be held on the first Monday in May each year. The polls are open from 7am to 8pm.

Special Town Meeting

Special Town Meetings shall be called on any day not earlier than 7pm except that on Saturday they may not be called earlier than 9am.

Rules and procedures of Town Meeting

Clinton's Town Meeting follows the rules established in the book *Town Meeting Time*, a handbook of parliamentary law prepared by the Massachusetts Moderators Association.

Quorum

There must be at least 250 registered voters in attendance in order for an Annual Town Meeting to proceed. A Special Town Meeting requires a quorum of 200 registered voters.

The Moderator

Town Meeting is conducted by the Moderator, an elected position with a term of three years. The Moderator serves as the presiding officer, regulating the proceedings, deciding all questions of order and making public declaration of all votes. The Moderator's goal is to conduct the Town Meeting in a fair, yet expeditious manner, allowing all points of view a fair hearing while still keeping the process moving.

Town Meeting Agenda

The Warrant is the official agenda for the Annual Town Meeting, and contains all the articles for consideration, together with such recommendations to the Town as were available from the Finance Committee and the Selectmen. Articles are usually considered in the order in which they appear in the Warrant, which the he Selectmen determine. Articles dealing with similar subject matter are usually grouped together: financial, school, planning and zoning, etc. Citizen's petitions are generally placed at the end of the Warrant. The Meeting has the power to change the order if necessary.

Articles and Motions

An article (as printed in the Warrant and Finance Committee Report) describes the subject under discussion, while a motion made under the article describes the specific action to take on the article. Motions must be seconded before discussion may begin or a vote is taken.

Speaking on a Motion

When speaking on a motion, a voter should go to one of the microphones located at the front of the auditorium and clearly give their name and address and committee association (if applicable). All remarks and questions should be addressed to the Moderator. Not everyone who wishes to speak will be heard. When the Meeting decides that it has heard enough discussion and is ready to vote, a motion may be made from the floor to "move the question". Such a motion means that debate will be ended and voted on immediately. No person shall speak more than twice upon any question, except to answer an inquiry or give information requested.

Voting on a Motion

All votes on motions shall be taken in the first instance by a show of hands. If the Moderator be in doubt he may call for a second show of hands. If the Moderator be still in doubt, or if the vote as declared by the Moderator be immediately questioned by seven or more of the voters, the vote shall then be taken by a "yes" or "no" ballot.

Amendments

If a voter wishes to change a motion in some fashion, the procedure is to amend the motion. All motions to amend must be in writing and must state exactly how the voter wishes to change the motion. A voter who wishes to amend a main motion must have the amendment in writing. An amendment may consist of adding, deleting, or substituting words in the motion currently on the floor. A motion to amend requires only a majority vote, even though the motion to be amended may require two-thirds or more for final passage.

Comments from Moderator John Hogan

(The following information has been republished with permission.)

"The Clinton Town Meeting is run by way of the Clinton By-Laws of 1914, as amended over the years. It is a very short written statement and only has general guidelines on how to conduct the meetings. The last sentence sums it up by saying that the Moderator should conduct the meeting in a manner he feels is fair, should something come up not covered by the by-law (not much is)."

"I, and most Moderators, use a book called Town Meeting Time as a back-up. It is more comprehensive, but still leaves many issues up to local custom. What is done in one community may be done differently in another."

"The meeting is run by the voters, not the selectmen. The selectmen traditionally move a question to get it started, but any citizen present can do it. Selectmen can speak or try to sway voters just like anyone else, but their vote counts no more or less than anyone else in the hall."