

## Moderator's Simplified Rules of Parliamentary Procedure

### **Section 5 Moderator**

**2-5-1** A moderator, elected in accordance with the provisions of chapter 6, shall preside at all sessions of the town meeting.

### **Section 6 Simplified Rules of Procedure**

**2-6-1** Rules of parliamentary procedure in simplified form shall be prepared by the moderator and shall annually be included in the Finance Committee report.

**2-6-2** The Town Clerk shall make copies of the simplified rules available for distribution to those requesting them, to new voters at the time of registration, and to those in attendance at all sessions of the town meeting.

North Andover Home Rule Charter

The following pages of the Finance Committee Report are the Moderator's simplified rules of parliamentary procedure and an explanation of various aspects of our North Andover Town Meeting.

## TOWN MEETING RULES OF PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE

### (Simplified Form)

The rules of North Andover's open Town Meeting are based upon the traditions established by the citizenry of New England communities, acting as legislators of their local governments. More than 250 Massachusetts towns conduct "open town meeting", wherein each registered voter in attendance has an equal voice in the decision making process. Specific parliamentary rulings within our meetings are made by the Moderator, using Massachusetts General Laws, the North Andover Charter, North Andover By-Laws, and local tradition as the basis for these decisions. Although not formally adopted for North Andover's meetings, the book "*Town Meeting Time, A Handbook of Parliamentary Law*", published by the *Massachusetts Moderators' Association*, often provides guidance for unusual situations. Roberts' Rules, more suited to regularly recurring meetings of an established board, are not applied. Town Meetings of Massachusetts towns are similar, but not identical; local traditions can significantly affect local proceedings. North Andover's meeting procedures are intended to present questions clearly to the voters, with minimal confusion, for their decision.

At any North Andover Town Meeting:

1. The first action required after the announcement of any **Article** on the Meeting's **Warrant** is that a **Main Motion** be proposed, before discussion and debate can begin. The sponsors of an article, or town boards with recommendations, are likely sources of a main motion.
2. Anyone wishing to address the meeting should seek the attention of the moderator when no other speaker has the floor. Public microphones are available, where a speaker seeking to be recognized will call out "Mr. Moderator..."
3. Once recognized by the moderator, a speaker is normally limited to five (5) minutes to address the meeting on the current article. Exceptions (for extended time) can be granted by a vote of the meeting, or by prior arrangement with the moderator, particularly if visual displays will be used (See 'A Special Note on Visual Presentations', below). Questions are welcome, as well as statements endorsing a position.
4. Each speaker should introduce him/herself, using name and street address the first time speaking at any session of Town Meeting. If acting as attorney or paid agent for another, that should be disclosed at the start of any remarks.
5. All remarks should be addressed to the moderator (although obviously all are listening). Direct interrogation of previous speakers is not permitted.
6. An **amendment** (changing the main motion) can be offered during the course of debate, and will change the discussion to consider the proposed amendment (only). Specific wording of any proposed amendment should be made available to the moderator and town clerk.
7. While deliberation and debate are fundamental to Town Meeting, in due course it will become apparent that voters have received essential information, and are ready to act. There has been

no established parliamentary method of suppressing debate; voter reaction and the moderator's guidance tend to discourage repetitious statements.

8. Votes are taken by various methods – voice (Ayes and Nays), a “show of hands”, or a counted vote. For other than a counted vote, seven (7) voters may doubt the announced vote by rising and standing in place; such doubt will cause a counted vote to be taken.
9. Most issues will be decided by a simple majority of those voting; issues requiring a two-third (2/3), four-fifth (4/5), or other majority will be clearly identified to the meeting.

### **A Glossary of Town Meeting Terms:**

- Town Meeting -** A duly-called meeting in which all registered voters are eligible to participate. It is the Town's legislature, where fiscal issues, zoning changes, by-law amendments, and other matters affecting the Town are decided. A regular (**Annual**) Meeting is held each May to decide issues for the fiscal year starting in July. A (**Special**) Town Meeting may be called at other times, to deal with issues that cannot wait for the next Annual Meeting; a Special Town Meeting is called by the Selectmen; a petition of two hundred (200) voters will cause one to be called.
- Warrant -** Public notice of business to be considered at Town Meeting. It is publicly posted throughout the Town, sets a time and place for the meeting, and contains one or more articles. The warrant is opened by the Selectmen for article submission prior to the meeting, and closed well in advance of the meeting.
- Article -** Definition of an issue to be decided at the meeting. Individual matters are described in articles so that all voters are warned of potential action to be taken. The **scope** of each article sets the bounds of actions that may be taken. Articles are submitted by Town agencies, or citizen petitions of ten (10) at annual meetings, or one hundred (100) at special meetings.
- Main Motion -** Required under the article (and within its scope) for the meeting to act. It may be as simple as “To adopt the article, as printed in the warrant” or a more complex action, as long as the article's scope is not exceeded. A main motion should be made and seconded for discussion to proceed; a favorable recommendation from the **Finance Committee** will be taken as a main motion, made and seconded. Whenever possible, affirmative (rather than negative) main motions are preferred to avoid confusion.
- Amendments -** May be offered to a main motion, debated and accepted or rejected. Complex amendments should be submitted to the Moderator in writing. Individual amendments will be considered in turn; amendments to amendments are discouraged. The resultant (possibly amended) main motion will ultimately be voted upon.

- Reconsideration -** Of action under an article may be proposed only once. The option is useful when inter-dependent decisions are to be made under separate articles; it is dangerous when introduced after a hard-fought decision has been made, and there has been a change in the audience. Introducing a motion to reconsider immediately after a hard-fought decision, with the expectation of its defeat, will effectively lock out future reconsideration.
- Adjournment -** To another date and place certain may be proposed and voted to recess the meeting to a future session.
- Dissolution -** Is the final act of a meeting. All issues will have concluded, and future discussion will require another warrant for another meeting.

**The Players:**

- Voters -** The ultimate decision makers. Voted decisions are binding on the entire Town, including its elected officials.
- Moderator -** Elected, responsible for the conduct of the meeting. Parliamentary rulings, conducting of the debate, and voting are vested solely in the Moderator.
- Town Clerk -** Appointed by the Town Manager, responsible for distributing notice of any Town Meeting, keeping all public records associated with meetings, and producing the final recorded minutes of actions voted. The Town Clerk's minutes are the only tangible result of much thoughtful debate, and voting; they are used in formal enactment of local laws.
- Selectmen -** Elected, responsible for calling the meeting and ordering the warrant. This executive board is often authorized by the meeting to act in the Town's behalf between Town Meetings.
- Finance Committee -** Appointed by the Moderator, responsible for recommending on financial and often other articles. This cross-section of citizens has the opportunity to investigate articles proposed to the meeting and make independent recommendations.
- Planning Board -** Appointed by the Town Manager, responsible for administering the Town's Zoning By-law. This board is required to hold hearings and make recommendations on articles which effect zoning or environmental issues.
- Town Counsel -** The Town's Attorney, appointed by the Selectmen. Counsel will make legal ruling, and advise the meeting, as needed.

**Other Players:** The following participants have strong interest in assuring the meeting's success. They will propose issues and supply information to the voters:

School Committee,  
Town Manager,  
Superintendent of Schools,  
Town Accountant,  
Department Heads, and  
Town Committees.

**Supporting Casts:** The following staff supply the necessary support to conduct a meeting of this size:

Registrars of Voters,  
Voter Check-in Clerks,  
Counters,  
Public Safety Officer, and  
Facilities Manager of the building used.

**Courtesy Issues:**

- \* Address the meeting with new information, to persuade undecided voters. Re-iterating old information as a show of support takes time and does little to affect the outcome of a vote.
- \* Please refrain from applause or negative jeers during discussion.
- \* Brevity in remarks shows respect for the value of your neighbor's time. The most persuasive statements at Town meeting are often the most succinctly stated, retaining the audience's full attention.

Participation at Town Meeting is an American tradition, one which differentiates New England towns from other regions and from larger cities. Decisions made by these meetings are somehow more satisfying than those delegated to elected boards or paid staff. Help maintain this tradition by joining with neighbors to discuss the issues. We will respect the value of your time and participation.

**Charles A. Salisbury,  
Town Moderator**

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## **A Special Note on Visual Presentations:**

Prior to the 2003 Annual Town Meeting, any speaker at Town Meeting was allowed up to fifteen (15) minutes to present material, if a visual presentation was involved. Because of an increasing number of such presentations, together with decreasing patience of many Town Meeting attendees, it is planned that different rules will apply this year. If more than the nominal five (5) minutes is required:

- Visual presentations by Town agencies, with similar recommendations on an article, will be consolidated into a single presentation. That presentation, coordinated with the moderator at least one week prior to a town meeting, may exceed 15 minutes, but will reduce the time needed for multiple presentations.
  - Visual presentations by citizens or citizen groups must also be coordinated with the moderator at least one week prior to a town meeting. The moderator will encourage consolidation of presentation material, to benefit the attending voters, and to achieve balance during the debate.
  - “One picture is worth one thousand words.” – should be the guiding principle of visual presentations. Any information that is unable to be conveyed easily in verbal form (maps, images, graphs) is a good candidate for visual display, improving the deliberations.
  - Any visual display must be able to be easily viewed by all attendees at Town Meeting. (If a display cannot be seen beyond the first few rows of the audience, it is not acceptable for use.) Technical assistance and arrangements for display equipment can be coordinated with the Town Clerk or Moderator, preferably at least one week before the meeting. Computer, projectors and screens are available; use of an overhead projector is discouraged.
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### **Town Bylaws Affecting Town Meeting**

59-1. Adjournment. When a Town Meeting shall be adjourned to a time certain that is more than fourteen (14) days from the time of adjournment, the Town Clerk shall cause notice of the time and place of such adjourned meeting to be duly posted in three (3) or more public places in each precinct in the Town two (2) days at least before the time of holding said adjourned meeting, which notice shall also briefly state the business to come before such meeting.

59.2. Quorum. There is no quorum requirement for Annual or Special Town Meetings.

59.3. Reconsideration Vote. Unless the Moderator shall otherwise rule, for reasons which he shall state to the meeting, no second motion for reconsideration of any action taken by any Town Meeting shall be entertained during that meeting or any adjourned session thereof.

59.4. Secret Ballots. Upon motion duly made and seconded, at any Annual or Special Town Meeting, and upon the affirmative vote of at least twenty-five percent (25%) of the voters present at said Annual or Special Town Meeting shall be voted upon by Australian (Secret) Ballot.

**Notes**