

Resolution:
Advanced Registration &
Organization of Town Meeting
Speakers

Article 82

To see if the Town will vote to support the development of a practice by the Town Meeting Procedures Committee for prompting proponents and opponents of Town Meeting Warrant Articles to register in advance of the beginning of the first night of Town Meeting to allow for the equal presentation of perspectives, and or take any other action relative thereto.

Notes:

It is anticipated that this procedure will only be expected for complicated and/or contentious issues that are known in advance to the Town Manager and relevant Dept. heads. It is expected that the Town Manager would alert the Moderator in advance to suggest the use of this procedure when advisable. This is not intended to limit the prerogatives of the Moderator, but rather clarify and make more transparent the presentation of Town Meeting articles that may be contentious, giving equal time to each side. It will also formalize the process for signing up to speak. Such a process should make the management of speakers easier for the Moderator, the range of perspectives more coherent for the TM members and the preparation process more transparent for the proponents and opponents of a given article.

Following is a sample procedure drawn from the Moderator's handbook in a comparable community in the greater Boston region.

Procedure:

Any Town Meeting Member wishing to speak on any Article should contact the Moderator and the Town Clerk by email with the following information (to the extent applicable): a. Name and telephone number of the caller; b. Article number or subject matter; c. Whether in support or opposition; d. Whether representing any specific group or organization; and e. A description of any proposed visual presentations.

If (and only if) this information cannot be so communicated to the Moderator, a request to speak may be made through the Town Clerk. Subject to applicable time limitations, preferences to Town Meeting Members and the exercise of the Moderator's discretion in these matters, speakers will be recognized in substantially the order in which their requests are received.

The need or desire to speak cannot always be anticipated, and may grow out of specific action or discussion at the meeting. Town Meeting Members who have not arranged in advance to speak may proceed at any time during the debate to one of the microphones in the auditorium and will be recognized by the Moderator from time to time

The Debate:

After a motion has been made and seconded, the debate begins. The Moderator usually calls first on the Finance Committee and the Select Board. If neither is championing the motion, the Moderator may call first on the principal proponent. In case of a citizen petition Article, the first speaker will usually be the principal petitioner or his or her representative, whether or not the Finance Committee or Select Board is in favor of the petitioner's position. Thereafter, to the extent feasible, the Moderator will usually alternate between proponents and opponents of the motion. Because debate may be curtailed, the process described above may result in limiting participation in the debate principally to Town Meeting Members.