

Our town would like to hold a budget meeting this fall to discuss a number of monetary issues. Are there any special warning requirements for such a meeting?

No. Under Vermont law, there are two basic types of meetings: meetings of local government boards and commissions, and special and town meetings. Assuming that your budget meeting will be convened by the selectboard, notice requirements for it are found in the Open Meeting Law, which covers, generally, government meetings in Vermont. 1 V.S.A., § 310.

The Open Meeting Law requires that the selectboard clearly designate the time and place of its **regular meetings**. Most local boards vote on the time and date of their regularly scheduled meetings (e.g. the second and fourth Tuesday of each month) and post notice of these regular meetings in the local newspaper. 1 V.S.A., § 312(c)(1). These actions satisfy the warning requirements for regular meetings contained in the Open Meeting Law. The law also includes warning requirements for special board meetings (meetings that are not regularly scheduled) and emergency board meetings. 1 V.S.A., § 312(c)(2) and(3). Under Vermont law, **special board meetings** require posting notices in or near the town clerk's office and at least two other places in town at least 24 hours before the meeting. **Emergency meetings** may be held without notice. For emergency meetings notice must be provided "as soon as possible." To qualify as an emergency meeting a town must establish that the meeting is "necessary to respond to an unforeseen occurrence or condition requiring immediate attention."

The requirements for special and annual town meetings are found in 17 V.S.A. § 2641, which requires a town to warn and post notice of the meeting "in at least two public places in the town, and in or near the town clerk's office, not less than 30 nor more than 40 days before the meeting." These meetings are subject to more stringent warning requirements because they are the setting for citizens to vote on the important matters of the town.

(Please note, too, that other meetings and hearings, with their own particular warning requirements, are found scattered throughout the Vermont Statutes. For instance, public meetings to consider zoning changes are covered in 24 V.S.A. § 4403 and 4404.)

In the case of your budget meeting, it is probably just an advisory one - a discussion where the selectboard invites town residents to air their views on how town monies should be spent, and the board discusses ways to spend or save money. As noted above, our advice is to follow the requirements for warning a selectboard meeting that are found in Vermont's Open Meeting Law. 1V.S.A. §§ 310 et seq.

That said, it would be a good idea to give residents more notice than is required by statute, as the point of a budget meeting is to receive public input on important financial decisions – before town meeting - and to foster a more open atmosphere in town government. Finally, remember that actual expenditures *must* be approved by the town at town meeting.

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