



# QUICK GUIDE TO TOWN MEETING

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This is not a comprehensive guide to Town Meeting Day 2023. For additional resources, please see our [town meeting webpage](#).

**Town meeting warning.** The town meeting warning and notice must be posted no more than 40 but no fewer than 30 days before town meeting. [17 V.S.A. § 2641\(a\)](#). In 2023, the earliest day that these documents may be posted is Thursday, January 26; the last day to post them is Sunday, February 5.

According to [17 V.S.A. § 2641](#):

- The warning and notice must be posted in at least two public places in the town and in or near the town clerk's office. If the town has more than one polling place and they are not in the same building, the warning and notice must be posted in at least two public places within each voting district.
- The warning and notice must be published in a newspaper of general circulation in the town at least five days before the town meeting, unless the warning is published in the town report that is distributed according to [24 V.S.A. § 1682](#).
- The warning must also be posted to the town's website, if the town actively and regularly updates its website.

The warning and notice must include the date and time of the election, the location of the polling place(s), and the nature of the meeting. The warning must, by separate articles, specifically indicate the business to be transacted, including the offices and questions to be voted on. In addition, the posted notice that accompanies the warning must include information on voter registration, early or absentee voting, and other appropriate information. [17 V.S.A. § 2642](#). The Secretary of State's Elections Division has a model Notice and Instructions to Voters online at <https://sos.vermont.gov/elections/election-info-resources/town-meeting-local-elections/reminders-warnings/>.

**Articles.** Unless specifically articulated in statute, the wording of town meeting articles is indeterminate. For that reason, MAC has developed [Model Town Meeting Articles](#). Some articles require editing by either entering your own words or picking a phrase or number or monetary amount.

**Voter-backed petitions.** State statute requires that the town meeting warning must also contain any article requested by a voter-backed petition that meets the requirements of [17 V.S.A. § 2642\(a\)\(3\)](#). However, selectboards are only obligated by law to warn a voter-backed petitioned article when it "sets forth a clear right which is within the province of the town meeting to grant or refuse through its vote." *Royalton Taxpayers' Protective Ass'n. v. Wassmansdorf*, 128 Vt. 153 (1960). Pursuant to the Vermont Supreme Court's decision in the *Robert A. Skiff, Jr. et al v. South Burlington School District* case (2019), selectboards have the discretionary authority to decide whether a non-statutory petition should be placed as an article on the town meeting warning. If a petitioned article

does not fall within the legal authority of the voters, the selectboard can decide whether to include the article as an advisory, non-binding article.

One type of binding article is a budget article, such as those related to social service appropriations, which voters may appropriate money to support. Because of the proliferation of social service agency requests, selectboards may find it helpful to adopt a policy like the one [here](#) to manage these requests instead of dealing with an influx of petitions.

Voter-backed petitions must be signed by at least five percent of the voters of the municipality and filed with the town clerk no fewer than 47 days before Town Meeting Day. [17 V.S.A. § 2642\(a\)\(3\)\(A\)](#). The last day for petitions to be submitted for town meeting 2023 is Thursday, January 19. Petitions may include one or more article and must:

- contain the petition language on each page on which signatures are collected; and
- include the printed name, signature, and street address of each voter who signed the petition.

Town clerks receiving petitions have a short timeframe in which to ascertain if they contain the required number of registered voters and otherwise conform to the requirements of [17 V.S.A. § 2642\(a\)\(3\)\(A\)](#). Clerks must return a non-conforming petition within 24 hours to the petitioners, stating in writing the reasons it cannot be accepted. Petitioners may then file supplementary petitions no later than 48 hours after the petition is returned by the clerk or the filing deadline, whichever is later. For additional assistance, please refer to our [Voter-Backed Petitions FAQs](#).

**Start early.** It is crucial to start early on drafting your town meeting warning and notice. If your town meeting will be from the floor, we recommend consulting your town moderator, who may have advice about the wording or order of articles that will promote a smooth and manageable meeting. The selectboard should thoroughly review the town meeting warning and notice before they are finalized. Corrections are much easier to fix before town meeting than after.