



# Town of Webster

## Town Meeting Guide

October 21, 2024

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# Town Meeting Information

Thank you for taking an interest in the Town of Webster's Town Meeting. Town Meeting is part of a great tradition of democracy which has been taking place in Webster ever since it's townspeople came together to found Webster in 1832. Town Meeting is the legislative body of the Town, acting much like our legislative counterparts at the State and Federal level, to fund a budget and to establish bylaws. One important difference is that in Webster's Open Town Meeting form of government, every registered voter of the Town is a Legislator and has the opportunity to participate in, and vote on, every issue.

## **Procedures**

Webster's Town Meeting is governed by State law, the Town's Bylaws, tradition, and the book "Town Meeting Time: A Handbook of Parliamentary Law". Voters don't need to read these documents in order to participate in Town Meeting as your elected Town Moderator is there to guide the Town through the meeting while adhering to all applicable rules and regulations. Always remember that if you are not clear on the issue being voted on or the topic being discussed, you can always step up to the nearest microphone and ask questions.

At the front of the room you will find:

- The Moderator: Elected to preside over Town Meeting
- The Town Administrator: Webster's Chief Administrative and Financial Officer
- Town Counsel: the Town's attorney
- The Town Clerk: Officially records the votes taken at Town Meeting

Sitting at tables, also at the front of the room, are the following Boards/Committees:

- The Board of Selectmen: The Governing Body of the Town
- The School Committee: Recommends the School Department Budget
- The Finance Committee: Makes recommendations on all articles involving Town finances

## **Town Meeting Warrant**

The Board of Selectmen post a Warrant before the Town Meeting. The Warrant lists the agenda for what topics will be discussed and voted on at the Town Meeting. Each item on the agenda is called an "Article". An Article may be specific or broad. The booklet distributed at the Town Meeting includes both the Warrant that was posted by the Board of Selectmen as well as the Motions expected to be presented following the reading of each Article. Keep in mind that these may change.

## **Motions**

While a Warrant Article generally describes what topics will be discussed, a Motion is a statement of a specific action that is proposed to be taken. For example, a Motion to appropriate (designate) funds would specify the dollar amount, the source of the funds, and what purpose the funds are for. The Motions that are expected to be presented are printed in this booklet, but the actual Motion that ends up being presented may differ. It's important to realize the difference between the Warrant Article and

the Motion: the Warrant Article is the agenda item describing the subject matter to be voted on, and the Motion outlines the specific action to be voted on.

### **Amendments to Motions**

A Motion may also be made to amend the original Motion, in which case that amendment will be discussed and voted on before the original Motion. If the amendment passes, then discussion will return to the original Motion as amended. If the amendment is defeated, then discussion will return to the original Motion.

### **Motions to Pass Over**

A Motion to "Pass Over" is a proposal to take no action on the Warrant Article at the Town Meeting. The Town's practice has been to either make a "Motion to Pass Over" or a "Motion to Pass Over for More Information". The Town of Webster's General Bylaw, 253-14, prohibits an Article that received a favorable vote on a "Motion to Pass Over" from being re-considered prior to the next Annual Town Meeting. If the Motion to Pass Over is approved, then no action will be taken and the Town Meeting will move on to the next Article. If the motion is defeated, then the Town Meeting would ask for a Motion to take action as it relates to the Article being discussed.

### **Discussion**

After a Motion is presented, the topic of the Article is then open for discussion, questions, and debate by everyone participating in the Town Meeting. In order to for this to take place, residents may line up behind microphones stationed in each aisle if they have questions or would like to make comments. When recognized by the Moderator, the individual clearly states their name and address so that others in attendance know who is speaking. All comments should focus on the specific topic of the Article being discussed and not address a particular person or group other than the Moderator.

### **Ending the Discussion**

If a voter has heard sufficient discussion and wants to end further debate, they can make a Motion to end the debate which is often referred to as "moving the question". A voter cannot both comment on an Article and then "move the question" during the same turn at the microphone: he/she can only do one or the other. A motion to "move the question" is not debatable and requires a 2/3 majority vote in order to pass. If the motion to "move the question" passes, then further debate on the Article ends and Town Meeting will vote on the Motion. If the Motion to "move the question" is defeated, then the debate of the Motion continues.

### **Reconsideration**

If substantial new information becomes available that could alter the outcome of a vote after it has already been taken, a voter can make a "Motion to Reconsider" that earlier vote. The Moderator will not entertain a "Motion to Reconsider" on the basis of having different voters present in the room or because some voters are unhappy with the outcome of the original vote. If the "Motion to Reconsider" is accepted by the Moderator, it will be discussed by the Town Meeting. If the majority of the Town Meeting vote in favor of Reconsideration, then the original Motion that was previously voted upon will again be read to the voters. A "Motion to Reconsider" can only be made by an individual who earlier

voted on the prevailing side. The Town of Webster General Bylaw 253-13 requires a 2/3 majority vote in order to Reconsider.

### **Voting**

Rather than a voice vote or raising hands, each voter will be assigned an electronic voting device when they register at the door. Voters simply need to press a designated button, as instructed by the Moderator, for their vote to be recorded. Not only will this system be more accurate, but it also allows each vote to remain confidential. Additionally, the use of the electronic voting system will eliminate the need for any ballot votes, thus potentially reducing the length of Town Meeting. The electronic voting system will be tested prior to the Town Meeting to ensure that all votes will be accurate.

# ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

Moderator's Motions to begin the meeting:

1. The Moderator moves the Town votes to dispense with the reading of the warrant.
2. The Moderator moves that the Moderator may extend the floor to Town Management and staff and other non-voters provided that they must be recognized by the Moderator.

## ARTICLE 1. GENERAL FUND PRIOR YEAR BILLS

To see if the Town will vote to appropriate and transfer from any available funds in the Treasury, a sum sufficient to the Town Administrator Unpaid Bills account for the purpose of funding the payment of prior years' unpaid invoices; or take any other action thereon.

**Sponsored by the Board of Selectmen**

**Recommendation:** The Board of Selectmen and Finance Committee recommend favorable action on this article.

**Recommended Motion:** I move that the Town vote to transfer from the authorizations listed below totaling \$3,514.03 to the Town Administrator Unpaid Bills account (0112352-579000) for the purpose of funding the payment of prior years' unpaid invoices.

Amount	Vendor	Account #	Account Description
\$3,056.63	Sitkowski School Apartments	0119252-521003-541	Other Charges & Expenses
\$1.98	Staples	0212052-545000	Office Supplies
\$427.44	Staples	0121052-545000	Office Supplies
\$27.98	Staples	0121052-545000	Office Supplies
<b>\$ 3,514.03</b>	<b>Total</b>		

**Background:** In accordance with MGL Chapter 44, Section 64 Town Meeting may appropriate funds to pay bills of a previous year's appropriation. If there were sufficient monies in the appropriation at that time, but the bill was presented too late by the vendor, lost, etc. So that appropriation has been closed out, then a majority vote is sufficient. As is the case with the prior year bills presented.

## ARTICLE 2: ADDITIONAL FUNDING FOR POLICE VEHICLES

To see if the Town will vote to appropriate and transfer \$33,000 to cover projected deficits for police vehicle appropriations and to fund said appropriation transfer from FY25 budget (0121058-585017) \$18,000 and Town Capital Projects pursuant to the 5/13/24 Special Town Meeting Article 11 (510224-580001) \$15,000; or take any other action thereon.

**Sponsored by the Chief of Police**

**Recommendation:** The Board of Selectmen and Finance Committee recommend favorable action on this article.

**Recommended Motion:** I move that the Town vote to transfer from Free Cash the amount of \$33,000 for purposes of this article.

**Background:** Pricing of police vehicles increased more than expected since initial fall 2023 estimates. Due to the unexpected increase additional funding is required to purchase 3 vehicles and maintain fleet vehicles are rotated as planned.

### **ARTICLE 3: NATIONAL GRID EASEMENT – BARTLETT HIGH SCHOOL**

To see if the Town will vote to authorize the Board of Selectmen to grant to Massachusetts Electric Company, also known as National Grid, a permanent utility easement on a portion or portions of the Town-owned property located at 52 Lake Parkway, Bartlett High School and described in an Order of Taking dated March 15, 1977, recorded with the Worcester South Registry of Deeds in Book 6141, Page 307, which portion or portions are approximately shown on the sketch plan entitled "Easement," dated June 13, 2023, on file with the Town Clerk, on such terms and conditions as the Board of Selectmen deems appropriate; or take any action thereon.

#### **Sponsored by the School Superintendent**

**Recommendation:** The Board of Selectmen and Finance Committee recommend favorable action on this article.

**Recommended Motion:** I move that the Town vote to approve the article as presented.

**Background:** As is typical whenever National Grid brings lines either overhead or underground onto a property they request an easement. This is simply to provide authority to National Grid to come onto the site to repair or service the lines in support of the infrastructure for the Bartlett Renovation project.

### **ARTICLE 4: AUTHORIZE TRANSFER OF BARTLETT HIGH SCHOOL FEASABILITY STUDY FUNDS**

To see if the Town will vote to transfer the \$62,921.40 remaining balance from the Bartlett High School Feasibility Study appropriation, to supplement the \$101,417,044 appropriation for the Bartlett High School Renovation Project, for a total appropriation of \$101,479,965.40, or take any other action thereon.

#### **Sponsored by the Town Administrator**

**Recommendation:** The Board of Selectmen and Finance Committee recommend favorable action on this article.

**Recommended Motion:** I move that the Town vote to approve the article as presented.

**Background:** When the BHS feasibility study was completed, a project balance of \$62,921.40 remained. Since the remaining funds are from bond proceeds (excluded from prop 2 ½), MA General Laws and the Department of Revenue place certain requirements for re-appropriating those funds. It is common practice for the Town to re-appropriate remaining project balances and

this vote completes the formal process of transferring the feasibility study balance to the BHS renovation.

## **ARTICLE 5: WASTEWATER TREATMENT FACILITY BIOSOLIDS DEWATERING PROJECT DESIGN**

To see if the Town will vote to appropriate \$500,000 for the purpose of a Biosolids Dewatering Project Design at the Wastewater Treatment Facility and all related incidental costs, and that to meet said appropriation the Treasurer, with the approval of the Board of Selectmen, be authorized to borrow said sum under M.G.L. Chapter 44, Sections 7 and 8 and/or any other enabling authority and to issue bonds and notes therefor; or take any action thereon.

### **Sponsored by the Water Sewer Commission**

**Recommendation:** The Board of Selectmen and Finance Committee recommend favorable action on this article.

**Recommended Motion:** I move that the Town vote to transfer from Sewer Retained Earnings the amount of \$500,000 for purposes of this article.

**Background:** The Town is currently contracted with Synagro to haul and dispose of its thickened liquid sludge from the Webster WWTF to the Woonsocket, RI, biosolids incinerator. Over the past year, Synagro has experienced operational challenges at their Woonsocket facility, which has led to periodic shutdowns of the Woonsocket facility. During these events, Synagro significantly limits the amount of sludge they accept from the Webster WWTF, which puts pressure on the Webster WWTF's staff to deal with excess sludge, by limiting septage acceptance, utilizing offline tankage for temporary sludge storage, and operating at higher sludge inventories in their online processes. More recently, the City of Woonsocket RI has passed a resolution that moves the City away from receiving and processing merchant sludge due to issues associated with excess truck traffic, odors, and the recent operational and maintenance issues with the incinerator faced by Synagro. Synagro has issued a letter to the Town indicating that as a result of the resolution, they will not renew the Contract to haul and process the Town's sludge at the conclusion of the existing contract term which based on our understanding is set to expire in October 2027. Since the situation is still relatively new and fluid, it is possible that the sludge hauling contract may be terminated before the Contract term ends. The news of Synagro and Woonsocket's pending shutdown of liquid sludge acceptance, creates lots of uncertainty for how the Town will dispose of its biosolids. Complicating the issue further is the environmental concerns about PFAS in wastewater biosolids, especially in New England, which may further limit disposal options and likely will increase costs as disposal options are located further away or require additional levels of treatment. These market impacts may lead the Town to consider moving towards dewatering technologies instead of continuing to thicken only to allow them more flexibility in their disposal options and minimize costs. The goal of the evaluation is to help the Town understand the alternative disposal options and plan for potential upgrades that are in the best interest of the Town.

## **ARTICLE 6: APPROVAL TO LEASE TOWN HALL AUDITORIUM**

To see if the town will vote allow the leasing of the Town Hall Auditorium for renovation and restoration by a private party, or take any other action relative thereto.

### **Sponsored by Board of Selectmen**

**Recommendation:** The Board of Selectmen recommend approval and Finance Committee refer to sponsor.

**Recommended Motion:** I move that the Town vote to approve the article as presented.

**Background:** The town has been approached by a private citizen to restore the facility to be used for its original purpose including plays, musical performances and social events. Successful completion of this project will serve the residents of Webster, and make Webster a destination for non-residents and various institutions. Successful completion will also have a positive impact on both our downtown and general business community