

Conway's Town Meeting



A Citizen's Guide

Produced by the Town of Conway

447- 3811

February 21, 2008

Notice of Annual Town Meeting

The deliberative portion of the annual Town Meeting will be held on Wednesday, March 5, 2008, at 7:00 p.m. at the Auditorium at Kennett High School, 409 Eagles Way, Conway, New Hampshire. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss and amend if deemed appropriate, Articles 3 through 32 of the Town Warrant.

Final voting action on all Articles (1 through 31) shall take place by ballot on Tuesday, April 8, 2008, at the Conway Community Building, East Main Street, Center Conway, New Hampshire. The polls shall open for balloting at 8:00 a.m., or as soon thereafter as the Moderator calls the meeting to order, and shall close at 7:00 p.m.

Town Meeting in New Hampshire

In New Hampshire, towns have the option of two main types of annual meeting: 1) Traditional meetings or 2) ballot-vote meetings, known informally as "SB 2" or "Senate Bill 2." Each political subdivision can choose their form of meeting.

Traditional Town Meetings

Traditional Town Meetings, or Open Meetings, are held annually to choose town officers and to conduct all other town business. Discussion and voting all occur on the same evening.

Official Ballot Referendums (SB 2)

The SB 2 form of government was instituted by the state legislature in 1995 because of concerns that modern lifestyles had made it difficult for people to attend traditional town meetings. The Town of Conway has chosen to adopt the SB2 Town Meeting.

Under SB 2, a first session, called a "Deliberative Session," is held about a month prior to the town election. This session is similar in many ways to the traditional town meeting. However, unlike the town meeting, while the wording and dollar amounts of proposed ballot measures may be amended, no actual voting on the merits of the proposals takes place.

The second session, held on a set election day, is when issues such as the town's budget and other measures, known as warrant articles, are voted upon.

Material for this page was excerpted from:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Town_meeting#New_Hampshire

A Guide to Town Meeting

This guide to town meeting is offered to those who have never attended a town meeting or for those simply wishing more information on this important civic duty. It is also for those who may not know what the word "article" means, as well as to those who have attended but were reluctant to ask a question, or to raise their hand in a vote for fear of alienating their neighbor, and last but not least, to those who not only relish asking questions but are also having thoughts about helping to shape future town meetings.

What Happens At Town Meeting?

Town Meeting serves many of the same functions as the Legislature in Concord and the Congress in Washington, passing laws and adopting a budget. But Town Meeting is more than just the "legislature," it is also the "electorate," electing the selectmen and other town officials..

Unlike the Legislature and Congress, Town Meeting is not a representative body. It's just what it says it is: a meeting in which participation is the right and responsibility of every citizen. Some say Town Meeting is the "purest form of democracy," because citizens, not their representatives, participate directly in the making of their laws and the raising and spending of their taxes.

Since colonial times, the Town Meeting has been the basic form of local government in New England.

Do I Have To Know Parliamentary Procedure To Participate?

NO. That's why you elected a moderator at the opening of the meeting. The moderator is familiar with parliamentary procedure and is there to keep the meeting moving forward properly until all of the "articles" or items of business have been acted upon. Voters may not talk without being recognized by the moderator. You should direct all of your questions to the moderator. If an item of business is not on the "warrant," the name given to the list of articles, Town Meeting cannot act on it.

To Approve an Article: It is customary for the moderator to read the article aloud and ask if someone will make a motion on the article; usually someone will respond by saying "I move the article;" the moderator then asks, "is there is a second?" Someone will usually respond, "I second the motion." This formality sets the stage for the discussion that follows. The moderator then rereads the motion and calls for a vote. It is best not to make a negative motion, because people get confused when a "yes" vote means "no." The best approach, if you oppose an article, is to move the article and vote against it.

To Amend an Article: Sometimes, during the discussion, someone will propose a change. For example, in a money article, they may want to increase or decrease the amount of money recommended by the budget committee or selectmen. The amendment must be seconded; there must also be an opportunity to discuss the amendment before voting on it. If the amendment passes, then the motion, as amended, is voted on. If the amendment does not pass, and there are no further amendments, then the original motion is voted upon.

Won't I Seem Uninformed If I Ask Questions?

No! Most articles in the warrant are less than brief and are written to comply with legal requirements. Which is to say, many articles are not self-explanatory. If you need more information before you vote, you have a duty to ask for it. Voting for something you do not understand, is worse than not voting at all. Most likely your neighbor has the same questions you do. Once you break the ice with your question, others will feel more comfortable asking their questions.

Some tips for asking questions: Keep your questions short and to the point. Ask one question at a time. Direct your questions to the moderator. Don't interrupt the person who is trying to answer your question. Don't get personal.

Suppose I Don't Want People To Know My Vote?

There are several methods of voting used at town meeting including:

- Voice Vote (yeas and nays)
- Show of Hands (when a voice vote is questioned)

Some are uncomfortable when asked to raise their hand to vote at town meeting; they don't want their neighbors to know how they are voting on certain issues. If that is the case, there is another method of voting that takes care of that:

Written Ballot

Any voter can move that any other article be voted on by written ballot, at any time before the article is voted upon. The motion must be seconded, and no discussion is allowed before voting on the motion to vote by written ballot.

How Can I Prepare For Town Meeting?

Conway publishes a "Voters Guide" for the deliberative portion of town meeting. Get a copy before the meeting and read it. If you have questions, you may wish to ask them of the town manager or selectmen before the meeting.

But some of the answers may be found in the Voters Guide that indicates in detail the various spending accounts and how much was spent in the previous year; compare it with what is being requested this year.

How Can I Get More Involved?

There are several ways. First you can become a candidate for a position on the Budget Committee, Board of Selectmen, or Planning Board. Or, you can apply for an appointed position on the Conservation Commission of Zoning board of Adjustment. You can also propose an Article for the Warrant. If you feel there is something you would like Town Meeting to consider, such as the creation of a budget committee or the hiring of an administrative assistant or the hiring of a professional tax assessor, you can approach the selectmen with your idea and ask them to put it on the warrant. They may agree to do so or they may ask you to indicate support for the idea by circulating a petition to have the particular (stated) article in the warrant. According to state law, the petition should be signed by 25 voters.

What Do The Following Words Mean?

Amendment. This is technically a secondary motion and must be acted on before the main motion is voted upon. It must be seconded and allow for discussion before it is voted upon.

Annual Report. The annual report must be available at least three days before the annual meeting or the annual budget (business) meeting. It must contain the following: a record of all financial transactions during the past fiscal year, a statement of assets and liabilities, including a list of all delinquent taxpayers and the amount due from each, and portions of the audit.

Audit. An examination of the financial statements of a municipality by a public accountant to see if they fairly reflect the financial conditions of the municipality. State law requires that audits be conducted annually.

Revenues and Expenditures. Revenue is incoming monies; most of the money spent by town meeting comes from property taxes; other monies come from excise taxes on vehicles, and from the state in the form of revenue sharing and road assistance. Expenditures are outgoing monies or on what the money is spent; most of the money is spent on solid waste disposal, roads, and schools.

Surplus. Also known as "undesignated" or "unappropriated fund balance." It often results from not spending monies that were approved; it also results from getting more revenues than you expected. There is always a tendency to "raid surplus" instead of raising taxes. But surplus is not a savings account; it is an "operating cushion" to be used only in times of emergency, say some. The rule of thumb is to make sure surplus contains at least eight percent of the total operating budget for the town; or an amount equal to one month's operating expenses. The optimum is ten percent. If you do dip into it one year, make sure you build it up again the next year. Only the Town Meeting can authorize the spending of surplus.

Tax Anticipation Note (TAN). Often referred to as "hired money," it is money borrowed from a bank to run the town while waiting for taxes to be collected. Towns that collect taxes only once a year are the greatest users of this; towns that have two tax collections a year and therefore an earlier flow of cash into the town coffers, usually do not have to rely on hired money. No Town Meeting vote is required in order to authorize the selectmen to take out a TAN.

Tax Rate. The tax rate determines how much you pay in property taxes. It is stated in "so many dollars per thousand dollars of valuation." For example, in a town with a tax rate of \$14 per thousand dollars, the owner of a house valued at \$200,000 would pay \$2800 ($\$14 \times 200$) in taxes.

Warrant. The written notice, signed by at least a majority of the selectmen, which calls a town meeting and lists all the articles or items of business which will be voted on at the meeting. It must be posted in at least one public and conspicuous place in the town at least seven days before the town meeting.

For more information on any town issue or question, please contact 447-3811.

Information used in this report was graciously provided by the Maine Municipal Association.