

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" meetings

**Conway operates under the SB 2
form of town meeting.**

SB 2 Town Meeting

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.

- 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.
- Town business in the form of ballot measures (warrant articles) is discussed . However, unlike the town meeting, while the wording and dollar amounts of proposed warrant articles may be amended, no actual voting on the warrant articles takes place. Rather, the voters at the deliberative session approve a ballot containing the warrant articles that will be voted on at the second session or "election day". Issues such as the town's budget, capital spending, and policy questions appear on the ballot as warrant articles.
- Residents vote in an SB 2 election at a polling place throughout the day. They may also vote by absentee ballot.

HOW DOES THE DELIBERATIVE MEETING WORK?

The meeting is conducted under the authority of the Town Moderator.

Town Moderators are elected and their duties include presiding over town meetings, regulating the business thereof, deciding questions of order, making public declarations of each vote passed, and prescribing rules of proceeding which may be altered by the town as need.

The moderator also has the authority to postpone and reschedule the deliberative session or voting day of the meeting to another reasonable date, place, and time certain in the case of a weather emergency in which the moderator reasonably believes the roads to be hazardous or unsafe.

WHAT HAPPENS AT THE DELIBERATIVE MEETING?

- ▣ The meeting serves many of the same functions as the Legislature in Manchester 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. In fact, under state law, the only thing required of the annual town meeting is the election of the municipal 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.

WHY SHOULD I PARTICIPATE IN TOWN MEETING?

- ▣ To put it bluntly:
- ▣ You should attend because important decisions affecting your community and your pocket book will be made.
- ▣ If you are not there to take part, someone else will make the decisions for you.

DO I HAVE TO KNOW PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE TO PARTICIPATE?

No. 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.

- General Rules:
 - 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.

Taking Action

- ▣ To Approve an Article:
 - ▣ Usually, the moderator will 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 for a second, "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.

- ▣ To Amend an Article:
 - ▣ Sometimes, during the discussion, someone will propose a change to an article or proposal. For example, 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 LIKE AN "IDIOT" IF I ASK QUESTIONS?

- ▣ No! Some articles can be complicated because they have to be written according to legal requirements.
- ▣ If you need more information before you vote, 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, others will feel more comfortable asking their questions.
- ▣ Some tips for asking questions: Keep questions short and to the point. Ask one question at a time. Direct questions to the moderator and try not to interrupt the person answering your question.

HOW CAN I PREPARE FOR TOWN MEETING?

- ▣ The Town of Conway publishes a Voter's Guide which is available prior to the deliberative meeting. This guide includes all of the items to be acted on at the meeting including the proposed budget.
- ▣ The Town also publishes the Annual Report prior to Election Day.
- ▣ These are available on line and at local post offices. Read these before the meetings and you will be more prepared.
- ▣ If you have questions, feel free to ask the town manager or selectmen before the meeting.

Much of the information in this slide show was excerpted and modified from:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Town_meeting#New_Hampshire
[Maine Townsman](#), February 1998.

Other sources for information:

- [N.H. Center for Public Policy Studies report on SB2:](#)
<http://www.nhpolicy.org/reports/sb2at5.pdf>
- NH RSA CHAPTER 39 TIME FOR HOLDING TOWN MEETINGS AND WARNING THEREOF:
<http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/rsa/html/III/39/39-mrg.htm>