

# The Town of Shutesbury's Annual Town Meeting

The **Town Moderator** presides over Town Meeting and uses the Massachusetts Moderators Association's *Town Meeting Time* as the guide for parliamentary procedures. After opening remarks, the meeting begins with introductions (Select Board, Town Administrator, Town Clerk, Finance Committee, Town Officials) and announcements:

**The Warrant** is the Agenda for the Town Meeting. It is prepared by the Select Board, posted, and mailed to all residents. It consists of **Articles** on which town meeting members vote. While warrant articles are usually generated by the Select Board, Finance Committee, or other town Committees/Boards, citizens may submit a petition, signed by 10 registered voters, to have an article put on the Warrant. Any such petition should be submitted to the Select Board at least 45 days before the Town Meeting date.

The **Finance Committee** prepares the annual budget for consideration by the voters. The **Budget** consists of a number of individual line items that reflect how town revenue will be allocated among the various Town departments and other expenditures. The Finance Committee also provides recommendations on all warrant articles that involve an appropriation of Town funds.

There are three general categories of financial articles:

- **The Budget.** During the year, the Finance Committee meets with all Departments/Committees/Boards, reviews requests for funds, and makes recommendations based on a review of anticipated sources of revenue.
- **Capital Planning.** The Capital Planning Committee reviews the need for items such as police cruisers, trucks, building projects, etc. It studies the Town's current debt and develops a long-term Plan to fund projected capital needs.
- **Routine Items.** These include: adjustments to revolving accounts, authorization for the Treasurer to conduct business, acceptance of funds from the State, and other similar actions.

Each Article is introduced, usually by a Select Board member, who makes a **Motion** ("I move that the Town appropriate..."). The Moderator calls for a **second** to the motion ("I second the motion") and then it is "on the floor." The Moderator will often call for a sponsor to speak to the article. The length of the presentations will vary depending on the complexity of the matter at hand. The floor will then be open for questions and comments. Residents will raise their hands, be recognized by the Moderator, and a microphone will be made available so they may speak in the order in which they were recognized.

**Amendments** can be made to alter the motion ("I move to add, delete, alter the motion as follows..."). Any amendment must be seconded and will require a majority of votes to pass. If the amendment is passed, discussion returns to the main motion as amended.

**A motion to "move the question"** (i.e., end debate and move to a vote) can be made by any recognized voter, except that it cannot be made at the end of his/her comments on the article. The motion cannot be debated and calls for an immediate vote. It requires a 2/3 majority to pass. The Moderator will usually accept such a motion *unless* it is very clearly premature and both sides of the argument have yet to be heard. In such a case, the Moderator will not accept the motion, using his/her discretion to allow more debate on the Article on the floor.

**Passing a Motion** will require either a simple majority or a 2/3 vote (depending on the nature of the article). The Moderator will call for a voice vote. If it is a close vote, the Moderator will then call for either a standing vote or a show of hands/cards, and duly appointed "tellers" will make the count. On some matters, a paper ballot will be announced in advance. A motion to have a paper ballot can be made (and duly voted on and approved by a majority of voters) by any town meeting member if a paper ballot has not already been called for.