



HOW TO SUBMIT A CITIZEN PETITION ARTICLE FOR TOWN MEETING

Submitting an Article for Town Meeting can feel daunting. The League of Women Voters of Hingham encourages informed and active participation in government. League member Catherine Salisbury developed the following guide to assist citizens who might wish to submit an article for town meeting.

STARTING THE PROCESS

Forms for submitting a citizen petition are available in the Selectmen's Office. Complete the form and obtain the required number of signatures and street addresses from registered Hingham voters (10 for the Annual Town Meeting and 100 for a Special Town Meeting). Completed forms are due in the Selectmen's Office by January 20 for general Warrant Articles. The Selectmen will forward the signatures to the Town Clerk for verification. If the Town Clerk verifies that the required number of signatures have been obtained, the proposed citizen petition will be included in the Town Warrant.

DRAFTING A CITIZEN PETITION

The language must conform to the general standard for Warrant Articles and be legal. Articles begin with the words: "Will the Town...." and end with the words "Or act on anything related thereto?" Petition Articles list the name of the first person to sign the petition followed by "and others." Voters can seek guidance for drafting their Articles by looking at Warrants from previous years and/or contacting the Town Moderator or the Selectmen's Office for assistance. Town Counsel reviews the Warrant for consistency with Massachusetts. General Laws and Town Bylaws.

THE REVIEW PROCESS

When the Warrant is complete, the Board of Selectmen and the Advisory Committee will post schedules of dates and times when they will discuss each Article.

ADVOCATING FOR YOUR ARTICLE

Getting your Article on the Warrant means that Town Meeting will consider the Article but not necessarily that the Town Meeting will adopt it. You and other proponents need to advocate for it. Gaining the support of the Advisory Committee, Board of Selectmen, and other Town Boards or Committees whose responsibilities relate to your Article greatly improves your chances for success. You might also want to build support among other voters who will speak in favor of the Article and vote for it at Town Meeting. The following questions can help you plan how to present the Article to the boards for review and to Town Meeting voters.

1. What specific goals or ends is this Article intended to achieve? How is this Article's adoption in the "best interests of the Town"?
2. Which Town bylaws, regulations, or policies, if any, currently address this Article's subject? How would this Article's adoption change or affect them?
3. How would the proposed Article work if adopted? Which Town board or department, if any, would be responsible for its implementation? What would be the enforcement mechanism, if any?

4. How would the Article's adoption affect the Town financially or otherwise (including the quality of life, Town character, etc.)?

5. What funding mechanism is proposed, if applicable?

THE AFFIRMATIVE MOTION UNDER THE ARTICLE

The Board of Selectmen may or may not choose to take a position on an Article. The Advisory Committee, on the other hand, must make a recommendation on each and every Article in the Warrant. That recommendation is in the form of a motion, which is a proposed answer to the question raised by the Article. If the recommendation under the Article is affirmative, it becomes the Main Motion and will be voted on as recommended by the Advisory Committee. If an amendment is offered to the Main Motion, the amendment will be voted on first. If the Advisory Committee's recommendation is negative, i.e., "No Action," then you or another voter may offer an affirmative motion, which will be received as the Main Motion and be voted on first. Consequently, if the Advisory Committee recommends "No Action" and you want your Article voted upon, you should have an affirmative motion written and ready to give to the Moderator at Town Meeting. Otherwise the Town Meeting will vote on the Advisory Committee's motion of "No Action". (See The Moderator's Message at the beginning of each Warrant for more detail.)

AMENDING OR WITHDRAWING YOUR ARTICLE

If the response to your Article is positive during the review process prior to Town Meeting (February, March and early April) but the Article has procedural deficiencies, it may be possible to work with the Advisory Committee and other Town Boards to craft a motion that is acceptable to the sponsors and the Advisory Committee. Such a motion would then become the Advisory Committee's positive motion or recommendation under the Article. If, on the other hand, the Article has substantive flaws or strong opposition, the sponsors, by unanimous consent, have the option of withdrawing the Article and re-drafting and introducing it at a subsequent Town Meeting.

Information about the League of Women Voters of Hingham is at Hingham.ma.lwvnet.org