



## Goshen Town Meeting Guide

This handout provides information about Town Meeting participation. The information was compiled by Town Moderator Keith Wright from the book *Town Meeting Time: A Handbook of Parliamentary Law*, and from the Town Moderator's website written by former Town Moderator Bob Labrie.

### Town Meeting Roles:

- **The Moderator:** The Moderator is responsible for presiding and regulating the town meeting, deciding questions of order, and making public all votes. The Moderator must acknowledge a speaker before the speaker can speak.
- **The Town Clerk:** The Town Clerk is responsible for recording all votes for the public record.
- **Town Meeting Voters:** Voters who are registered in the Town of Goshen.

### Basic Procedure for Town Meeting

**Moving the Article:** The moderator will read each Article from the Warrant and ask if someone would like to make a motion and second it. To accomplish this a voter would say "So moved", and another would say "Second" without waiting for acknowledgement from the Moderator. This allows for discussion of the Article.

**Discussing the Article:** To ask a question, or speak for or against a motion, a voter raises his or her hand and waits for the moderator to acknowledge the request. The moderator may ask a department, board, commission, committee or elected official to speak to the issue at the outset of discussion.

**Voting on the Article:** When the moderator feels that enough time has been give to the Article, as evidenced by no one desiring to speak or share new information, he or she will ask for a vote. Voting in favor of the article, against the article, or abstaining is accomplished by saying "aye", "nay" or "abstain" at the appropriate time. If the voting outcome required for passage of the article is difficult to ascertain based, the moderator may ask for a show of yellow cards.

**Limiting Debate:** A motion to end debate and vote on the Article being discussed requires a two-thirds vote and is not debatable or amendable. When acknowledged by the Moderator, a person can state "I move the previous question." If someone else seconds the motion, a vote to end debate is held immediately and requires a  $\frac{2}{3}$  vote for passage. Acceptance of this motion is in the sole discretion of the Moderator who can refuse to accept a motion to move the question or cut off debate when made by a speaker after said speaker has made any remarks concerning the merits of the question then pending or if the Moderator deems the motion to be premature.

**The Budget (Article 4):** The Chair of the Finance Committee will give a brief overview of the Budget. The Moderator will then read each budget category and pause. If a voter has a question

about a Department's budget, he or she may simply say "Hold" without waiting for acknowledgement from the Moderator, which will set aside the item for discussion.

**Motions to Reconsider:** A motion to reconsider any article on the Warrant that was already voted on may be made only once and must be made within two articles and at the same session on which the article was voted.

### **Rules and Norms for Town Meeting**

**Who may speak at Town Meeting?** All of the town's registered voters, residents and taxpayers may speak on any article in the warrant. Persons who are not voters, residents or taxpayers of the town may address the Town Meeting only with the consent of a majority of those present. If you wish to speak, raise your hand and wait for the moderator to acknowledge you. When the Moderator acknowledges you, state your name and address. Speak about the topic being discussed. Don't speak about a previous topic (unless there is a motion to rescind or reconsider). Make your comments through the moderator, not directly to the Town Meeting.

**Conduct of Speakers:** Every person when about to speak shall rise, respectfully address the Moderator and wait until recognized by the Moderator, and in speaking shall address all comments to the Moderator, shall confine him/herself to the question under consideration and avoid personal attacks, inappropriate language, or uncivil conduct of any type. The Moderator may cut off any speaker who fails to adhere to this code of conduct. No person shall address the meeting without first being recognized by the Moderator and all persons shall, at the request of the Moderator, be silent.

**Equal Opportunity for Debate:** Unless otherwise approved by the Moderator, no person shall speak more than twice on any motion except to correct a mistake or misstatement, or to answer a question, or to raise a Point of Order (unless the maker of the motion is answering relevant questions). No person shall speak more than five minutes the first time they speak on any article and no person may yield their speaking time to another person. Except to answer a question or to raise a Point of Order, no person shall speak for a second time on any motion until all persons wishing to speak for a first time on that motion have been recognized. Any persons who desire to make lengthy presentations or use audio-visual aids are required to disclose such intentions to the Moderator not less than one week prior to the Town Meeting.