A **town meeting** is a form of direct democratic rule, used … principally in New England since the 17th century, in which most or all the members of a community come together to legislate policy and budgets for local government.

In New Hampshire, Traditional Town Meetings, or Open Meetings, are held annually on the second Tuesday of March to choose town officers and the transaction of all other town business. Town selectmen are also permitted to call special town meetings as warranted, although these must be approved by a judge if they involve budgetary expenditures or changes.

Wikipedia

At town meeting, RSA 40:4 requires the moderator “to preside at town meetings, regulate the business thereof, decide questions of order, and make a public declaration of every vote passed.”

RSA 40:4 also provides that the moderator “may prescribe rules of proceeding but such rules may be altered by the town.” This means that the moderator has full control over procedure used at town meetings. Actions taken, and rulings made by the moderator under the extensive powers granted by this statute may not be reversed except by vote of the meeting at which the ruling is made. Therefore, a moderator must conduct the meeting in such a way that voters who wish to do so are given an opportunity to move to overrule the moderator.

**Dunbarton Town Meeting**

**Moderator’s Rules of Procedure**

1. **Procedural**
   1. In light of health concerns related to Covid virus all participants will wear face masks and sit distanced 6 feet from other attendees. Participants who have specific difficulty with wearing a face mask will be able to participate electronically from another room in the building.
   2. In the interest of time at the beginning of the meeting before the entire Warrant is read, the Moderator will entertain a motion to waive the reading of the Warrant.
   3. The Moderator will call each Article in the order established by the Warrant to be considered individually by the assembly of voters.
   4. The Moderator will then recognize the person who originated the Article, either Selectman or Petitioner (for petitioned articles) to move the adoption of the Article.
   5. If the motion is seconded, the Moderator will recognize the mover of the Article to explain the Article.
   6. The assembled body will then debate the question. (See “Rules for Debate” below.)
   7. At the conclusion of debate, the Moderator will call for a vote. (See “Rules for Voting” below.)
   8. At the conclusion of the vote, the Moderator will announce the outcome.
   9. The Moderator’s role is to facilitate the meeting. He will remain neutral.
   10. Questions about the process are encouraged, as it may often seem confusing, but everyone should remember that debate leading to decision is the primary purpose of the meeting.
2. **Rules for Debate** 
   1. Only registered voters may speak unless a majority of the voters present decide otherwise.
   2. Those wishing to be recognized should come to the microphone. Once the Moderator recognizes you, please state your full name and address.
   3. Only one person – the one recognized by the Moderator – may speak at any one time.
   4. All speakers are expected to direct their comments or questions to the Moderator, and no comment directed to others on the floor will be allowed.
   5. All speakers must be courteous and must speak to the issues, not the individuals raising them. The Moderator will not allow personal attacks or inappropriate language.
   6. Each individual’s comments during debate should be kept to three minutes.
   7. Each speaker will speak only once until all others wishing to speak have spoken.
   8. Questions about the process are encouraged, as it may often seem confusing, but everyone should remember that debate leading to decision is the primary purpose of the meeting.
   9. Any voter may move to overrule a procedural ruling by the Moderator. A second and then a simple majority is required to overrule the Moderator. There will be no debate concerning a motion to overrule the Moderator.
3. **Voting on Article**
   1. All voters registered in Dunbarton will receive “Voters Cards” upon checking in with the Supervisors of the Check List. Please print your name on your card and keep it in your possession. When asked for your vote, you may raise your card. All voters must check in with the Supervisors of the Checklist before voting.
   2. Any voter can call for a vote by “calling the question.” Motions to “call the question” must be done from the microphone, must be seconded and require a 2/3 vote to pass. If passed, debate on a motion ends and a vote is taken. However, all those voters who are standing in line at a microphone at the time the question is called, or holding a microphone, and others that have made the Moderator aware of their interest to speak, will be allowed to speak. Additionally, the Moderator shall have the right to refuse to recognize a motion to “Call the Question”, if, in the Moderator’s opinion, the voters have not yet had an adequate opportunity to discuss an issue.
   3. The Moderator will only accept motions to “pass over” an article if more than one article on the warrant addresses the same question, and then only to clarify the articles being considered during the meeting. The motion to pass over delays consideration of a matter for a later time without indicating prejudice with respect to it. The motion to pass over is not subject to debate and requires a majority vote.
   4. Seven voters are required to question the Moderator’s ruling on the outcome of a vote. If a voice vote is questioned, we will have a show of hands and/or a division of the house. If the vote remains in question, we will have a secret ballot. This must happen before any other business occurs.
   5. Five voters may require that a vote be by secret ballot. The request for secret ballot vote must be made prior to the end of debate of the Article or question. All five voters making the request must be present and identified.
   6. Only one motion for reconsideration of an Article will be recognized. The motion to reconsider must be made immediately following the vote on the Article *and must be made by a voter on the prevailing side*.
   7. Conversely, a motion may be made to restrict reconsideration following the vote on an Article. If this passes and a subsequent motion is moved and passed to reconsider the Article, the Article cannot be reconsidered until a meeting at least seven days after the date of the original vote.
4. **Amendments** 
   1. Motions to amend an article must be in writing.
   2. The Moderator will allow consideration of no more than one amendment at a time, i.e., no motions to amend a motion to amend.
   3. Amendments which simply negate the intent of the motion – such as inserting the word “not” – will be ruled out of order as they confuse people as to which way they intend to vote. If citizens want to dispose of an article, they should simply vote the article down.

Submitted by Rene Ouellet

Dunbarton Town and School District Moderator

February 2021