

## **A Note from the Moderator, James Repetti, and Assistant Town Moderator, David Haviland, about Town Meeting Procedure:**

We conduct our Meeting according to a tradition unique to the New England Town Meeting that has evolved through a combination of custom, statute and judicial interpretation. The guide that we use is “Town Meeting Time,” a book compiled and updated by a committee of the Massachusetts Moderators Association. Copies are available in the Dover Town Library. Although somewhat similar to Robert’s Rules, this volume varies from that strict guide for parliamentary bodies. Moreover, while our tradition includes numerous “thou shalls” and “thou shall nots,” much is left to local custom and to our discretion.

Here is a brief explanation of some common Town Meeting terms and bylaws:

### **1. Main Motion**

The Warrant Articles that you receive before Town Meeting are intended to give notice of what will be considered at the Meeting. At Town Meeting, we do not actually vote on the Warrant Article, itself, but rather on a motion, referred to as the “Main Motion.” The Main Motion states the specific action to be taken with respect to the Warrant Article and is read aloud by the Warrant Committee, the Selectmen, or a citizen at the beginning of the consideration of the Warrant Article. The subject matter of the Main Motion must always be within the scope of the subject matter described in the Warrant Article. Most Main Motions require a majority vote to pass, but some will need a two thirds or four fifths vote depending on the subject matter of the Motion. We will let you know before the vote is taken what percentage is required.

### **2. Amendment to the Main Motion**

If a voter desires to amend a Motion, he or she must be recognized and deliver a written copy of the amendment to the podium at the time he or she proposes the amendment. We encourage citizens who think that they may want to amend a motion to contact the Town Clerk as far ahead of Town Meeting as possible so that we can consult with Town Counsel about the appropriate language that should be used in the amendment. A motion to amend the Main Motion, like the Main Motion itself, must be within the scope of the subject matter discussed in the Warrant Article. An amendment to the Main Motion must be seconded by another voter and is required to be discussed and voted on before we may return to the Main Motion. The motion to amend requires a majority vote to be adopted. Any amendment that will cause additional funds to be appropriated must identify the source and amount of these funds.

### **3. Move the Question**

After a period of discussion, sometimes a Town Meeting attendee will wish to terminate discussion and move the question to a vote. Anyone wishing to move the question to a vote must be recognized before making the motion. After a motion to move the question has been proposed and seconded, no further debate is permitted with respect to the Main Motion or the motion to move the question. We will vote immediately on the motion to move the question. If the motion to move the question is approved by the requisite two

thirds vote, the meeting must then move directly to the vote on the Main Motion without any further debate. If the motion to Move the Question is defeated, more debate on the main motion will be allowed.

#### **4. Motion to Reconsider**

Even after an issue has been voted on and decided by the Meeting, it is possible to re-open the issue for further discussion and voting. This is done by a Motion to Reconsider. Dover's bylaws state that if a motion to reconsider a Town Meeting vote is made within 30 minutes of such vote, only a simple majority is required to pass the motion to reconsider. A motion to reconsider not made within 30 minutes, requires a two thirds vote to pass. A lesson learned from past Town Meetings: DO NOT LEAVE THE TOWN MEETING UNTIL IT HAS ADJOURNED. YOUR FAVORITE ARTICLE IS ALWAYS AT RISK FOR RECONSIDERATION.

#### **5. Motion to Dissolve**

A motion to dissolve takes privilege over all other motions, is not debatable, and requires a majority vote. This motion ends Town Meeting.

#### **6. Voting Procedure**

We use electronic voting. All registered Town voters will receive "clickers" as you check in. Pressing "1" on your clicker registers a "yes" vote. Pressing "2" on your clicker registers a "no" vote. If you change your mind about your vote while the vote is being electronically collected, the last item you click will be the vote that is counted.

#### **7. Speaking at Town Meeting**

A person sponsoring a Warrant Article is allowed up to **eight minutes** to explain the Main Motion after the Main Motion has been seconded. If there is a group of Town voters opposed to an article, and this group has contacted the Moderator in advance of Town Meeting, the Moderator may grant such group up to **eight minutes** for a rebuttal.

All registered Town voters then have the right to comment or ask a question about the Main Motion. Each registered Town Voter should wait to be recognized by the Moderator. After being recognized, such speaker should first state her or his name and address. The speaker should avoid repeating what has previously been said by prior speakers. Instead, such speaker should focus on new perspectives or questions. All questions should be directed to the Moderator so that the question can then be posed to the appropriate respondent. In order to provide time for all persons wishing to speak, we ask that your comments or questions not exceed **two minutes**.

Consistent with the character of our great Town, all speakers should be courteous. One of the finest attributes of our Town is our ability to disagree without being disagreeable.