

How to Write and File A Warrant Article

Brought to you by the
Brookline League of Women Voters
(Parts Taken from the Town Meeting Handbook)

Town Meeting is the legislative body of the Town. The Moderator is the elected presiding officer of Town Meeting.

The Warrant is the official public notice of the Town Meeting listing the time, place and the items on the agenda.

A Warrant Article is an item to be voted by Town Meeting.

How does the Warrant process work?

Warrant articles are developed by individuals, groups or elected officials, often in response to concepts or opportunities they identify primarily to improve Town functions. The following guidelines are intended to provide practical instructions on preparing and processing a warrant article by citizens' petition. Questions about developing a warrant article can be directed to the Moderator. In addition, Town Meeting Members with experience in developing warrant articles are excellent guides and resources for the petitioner.

The warrant process can take several months from beginning to end and involves interactions with Town Meeting colleagues throughout. This is a collaborative process and works best if petitioners seek guidance from experienced Town Meeting Members. Note that steps 1 - 5 below all take place prior to filing the article. The process following the filing of a petition includes attendance at a series of sub-committee and committee meetings of the Advisory Committee and Select Board and often at meetings of other Town committees, commissions or boards with jurisdiction over the subject matter of an article.

Timing of Warrant Petitions

Petitions must be filed by noon on the announced date for the closing of the warrant. By law, that date is 75 days before the scheduled date of the opening session of the Town Meeting. The Office of the Select Board can provide the exact date for the submission deadline.

Approximate Town Meeting Date	Approximate Filing Deadline
Late May	Early March
Late November	Late August

Steps in the Warrant Development Process

1. Develop and Clear the Concept

The petitioner(s) should begin the warrant process by discussing their idea for an article with the constituencies involved. They should review existing regulations, laws and relevant Town by-laws, and see if other towns have similar measures that may serve as models and inform their process.

If Massachusetts law covers the subject matter of the proposed article, the petitioner should consult with the Town Counsel to confirm that the article would be permissible.

There are six areas in which, under the State Constitution, a Town Meeting may not act or may only petition for action by State legislature:

- (1) Regulation of elections;
- (2) Levy, assessment and collection of taxes;
- (3) Borrowing of money or pledging of credit;
- (4) Disposition of park land;
- (5) Governance of civil relationships; and
- (6) Punishment of felonies.

Note that, in most if not all of these areas, existing general legislation provides towns with the authority to act within the limits of the authority provided in such legislation. The advice of Town Counsel is nevertheless especially pertinent to articles related to any of these subjects.

2. Prepare a Draft Article

The wording of warrant articles follows a formal and consistent style.

A Town Meeting article should begin with the words: "To see if the Town will..." and end with the words "... or act on anything relative thereto," although deviation from or the absence of these words does not present an insuperable problem.

<u>Purpose of the Warrant Article</u>	<u>Syntax, Phrasing and Guidance</u>
Proposed amendments to Town by-laws	<i>"To see if the Town will amend the Town by-laws by [general description of the amendment proposed or a marked version of the by-law provision showing the proposed changes, in each case with specific reference to the article and section numbers to be amended], or act on anything relative thereto."</i>
Proposed appropriation of funds	<i>"To see if the Town will appropriate [estimated amount], or any other sum, for [purpose of the appropriation], or act on anything relative thereto."</i>

	<p>Appropriation articles should specify the source of the appropriation, whether from the tax levy by transfer from an existing appropriation, by borrowing, or any combination of these.</p> <p>The petitioner should consult with both the Deputy Town Administrator and Town Counsel prior to submitting an appropriation article, to obtain the proper language for the source of the appropriation.</p>
Proposed penalty for failure to comply with an existing or proposed by-law	The petitioner should refer to the appropriate penalty section of the Town by-laws to make sure that the penalty is properly provided for and referenced. Here again the petitioner should consult with both the Deputy Town Administrator and Town Counsel.
Proposed adoption of a non-binding resolution	The article should contain “ <i>Whereas</i> ” clauses setting forth the background of the proposed resolution and a “ <i>Now, therefore, be it hereby Resolved</i> ” section setting forth the operative language for the resolution to be adopted.

3. Submit the Draft Article for Review

Though not a legal requirement, the Moderator strongly recommends that all citizens’ petitions be submitted to either Town Counsel or the Moderator for review prior to the remaining steps in its development. Proposed changes in the zoning by-law should be reviewed by the Director of Planning.

While it is up to the petitioner(s) to prepare the initial draft of an article, these officials can assist in the proper wording of an article, conforming proposed amendments of existing zoning or general by-laws to the current wording of the by-laws and, in certain cases, addressing legal issues that might be raised by the proposed article.

4. Prepare an Explanation

An explanation of the purposes and intent of an article is required as a component of the development process. This explanation will appear in the Combined Reports and is the petitioner’s first opportunity to inform Town Meeting Members of the purpose of the petition article. The petitioner should write a clear and concise explanation of what the warrant article aims to accomplish and why it is needed.

5. Prepare a Petition and Obtain Signatures

Each citizen’s petition must include signatures of at least ten registered Brookline voters, with their voting addresses. The petition form may be obtained from the Town Clerk. As with seeking signatures as a Town Meeting candidate, it is a good practice to obtain at least five additional signatures in case some are deemed invalid.

The primary sponsors of an article should be identified in the petition form as the principal petitioners. The Office of the Select Board will notify the principal petitioners when the article is scheduled to be discussed by the Select Board, and the Executive Assistant of the Advisory Committee will also provide such notification when the article is to be heard by the full Advisory Committee or one of its subcommittees, as more fully discussed below. The principal petitioners should include their telephone numbers and e-mail addresses in the petition, so that they can be contacted easily.

6. File the Petition with the Select Board's Office

To be included in a warrant, the petitioner must file the petition, with the form of the article accompanied by at least ten valid signatures and the petitioner's explanation of the article, with the Office of the Select Board, located on the sixth floor of the Town Hall.

The filing deadline is always at noon on the date that has been announced for the closing of the warrant. By law that date is 75 days before the scheduled date of the opening session of the Town Meeting. If in doubt, the petitioner should check with the Office of the Select Board for the submission deadline.

7. Post-Filing Process

The principal petitioner(s) will be notified of various meetings at which they are invited to present their article, but it is the responsibility of the petitioners to attend these meetings. This is a relatively time-consuming process for most petitioners.

Advisory Committee

A subcommittee of the Advisory Committee will be assigned to review the article based on the relevance to that subcommittee. The subcommittee will schedule at least one public hearing to consider the article and receive comments for the public. The principal petitioner will be invited to attend and answer questions at all meetings of the subcommittee at which the petitioner's article will be considered. The subcommittee will then vote to make a recommendation on the article to the full Advisory Committee.

Following the subcommittee review, the article will be discussed before the full Advisory Committee and the petitioner(s) will again be asked to attend and present their position. The Advisory Committee will vote on its recommendation to Town Meeting on the article.

For articles with no budgetary implications or effect, the Advisory Committee may decide not to make a recommendation to Town Meeting in accordance with its procedures regarding such a situation. These procedures will still require at least a public hearing by either a subcommittee or the full Advisory Committee, and a vote of the full Advisory Committee.

Select Board and other Town Bodies

The Select Board will invite the principal petitioner(s) to present the article and will vote to make a recommendation on the article. The petitioner(s) may also be invited to appear before various Town committees that hold meetings to discuss warrant articles in advance of scheduled Town Meetings.

Building Support for a Warrant Article

Petitioners may organize a campaign among Town Meeting Members and other town residents to support the article. The petitioners may also wish to prepare a mailing to Town Meeting Members or use social media to obtain broad support for a warrant article.

Presenting at Town Meeting

Eventually the article will come before Town Meeting, at which point the principal petitioner or a designee, who is typically, but not necessarily, a Town Meeting Member, delivers a presentation in support of the article. [The Participating in Debate at Town Meeting](#) section of the Town Meeting Handbook provides a detailed description of the presentation process.

Key Contacts

MA Sec. of State Citizens Guide to Town Meeting Link

[**Citizens' Guide to Town Meeting**](#)

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Sample Signature Page is below.

SAMPLE Warrant Article Signatures

Signatures of ten registered voters are required. It is recommended that at least 15 or more be collected. Each signature needs:

- to be signed in ink (wet)
- signers name also printed
- signers voting address.

We, the undersigned registered voters of the Town of Brookline, support the attached Warrant Article seeking...(Add brief explanation)

SIGNATURE

PRINTED NAME

VOTING ADDRESS

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

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10