

Carlisle Town Meeting

QUICK START GUIDE

Prepared by
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Each qualified inhabitant of the town has an indisputable right to vote upon every question presented, as well as to discuss it, or there is no Town Meeting. This is universally understood as the vital feature of the town system of government as practiced from a long time before the Declaration of Independence until the present.

Opinion of the Justices (Supreme Judicial Court), 229 Mass. 601 (1918)

Town Meeting is a gathering of all people in the town who are eligible to vote, acting as the legislative branch of our local Town government. Almost uniquely in modern American public life, Town Meeting embodies direct – not representative – democracy. Welcome to Carlisle’s Town Meeting.

This “Quick Start Guide” provides essential information to know in advance of the meeting, along with guidelines at the meeting itself. For further details, see “Carlisle Town Meeting Introduction and Procedures” available at the Town Meeting page at the Town website: www.carlislema.gov.

BEFORE THE MEETING – FAQs

What is the Warrant?

The agenda for the meeting is established in the Warrant, published beforehand. Each specific item in the Warrant is described in an “article” which provides notice of the matters to be taken up. As each article is taken up, the Moderator will ask someone to make a motion, which is a more precise statement of the action to be taken by Town Meeting. Be sure to pick up a copy of the Motions handout on your way into the meeting.

Can I bring my kids to Town Meeting?

Yes, of course. If they can be reasonably quiet and well behaved, they may sit with you. We particularly welcome middle and high school students who may be interested in witnessing democratic government in action. Please make sure they do NOT join in on voice votes!

What If I Need Special Accommodation to Be Able to Participate?

Carlisle welcomes the participation of all citizens at Town Meeting. We will do our best to help by, for example, providing special areas for wheelchairs and headsets for audio enhancement. If possible, please contact the Town Clerk in advance to discuss any special needs. Advance notice increases the likelihood of satisfactory accommodation.

AT THE MEETING GUIDELINES

The following guidelines exist to facilitate an orderly, dignified, respectful and fair discussion of issues leading to informed votes and good decisions. We all deserve the respect and courtesy of our neighbors, and we owe them the same. The Moderator will politely, but firmly enforce these guidelines for the benefit of all. This “Quick Start Guide” is just a summary.

Addressing the Meeting

- Wait to be recognized (given the floor) by the Moderator. *Exception:* You may rise from your seat and loudly call “Point of Order” if you wish immediately to challenge the appropriateness of the procedure then being followed.
- ***The usual time limit for comments from the floor is three (3) minutes, but your neighbors will appreciate it if you limit yourself to two minutes*** (and you’ll likely be more persuasive too).
- Begin by stating your name and address (and the board/committee you represent if speaking in an official capacity).
- Speak only to the motion before the Meeting at the time.
- Address your remarks to the Moderator. No personal speech--you may reference or respond to a prior speaker’s comments, but do not engage in personal commentary, *e.g.*, about the person, his or her character, *etc.*
- Rude or disrespectful speech will not be tolerated.
- While anyone may speak on a motion more than once, no one may speak a second time until everyone who so wishes has spoken once. Repetitive or redundant comments should be avoided.

Questions

Speakers may ask a question of another person in the hall (typically, a prior speaker or Town official), but that question must be addressed through the Moderator. For example, “Mr. Moderator, I have a question for the Finance Committee Chairman.” The Moderator will determine whether and when to have the question answered. Dialogue between two persons is not allowed.

Moving/Calling the Question (Ending Debate)

A speaker may not participate in debate and then finish their comments with a motion to move/call the question. Such a motion must be the only thing the speaker says on that trip to the microphone. The Moderator may exercise his discretion not to entertain such motions if, in his judgement, the motion is premature.

Amendments

Simple amendments to a motion that change only a few words or numbers can be moved verbally. All other amendments must be presented to the Moderator in writing. All amendments must be “within the scope” of the article under consideration, *i.e.*, broadly consistent with the issue as described in the article.

Voting – **NEW INFORMATION FOR 2023**

The Moderator will generally call for a voice vote. When a count is required, we will use an electronic voting system using hand-held devices. Separate instructions for how to use these devices will be provided.

After voting by any method, the Moderator will declare the outcome. Any seven (7) voters may challenge the Moderator’s call of the vote and demand a formal count (or re-count). Such a challenge must be made immediately after the Moderator declares the outcome. The challenger should immediately call out, “I question the vote!” and then the Moderator will ask whether six additional voters also wish to challenge the declared outcome.

Point of Order

You may rise and call out loudly “Point of Order” to either question the appropriateness of the procedures or to challenge any of the Moderator’s rulings.

For further information see the Town Meeting page at www.carlislema.gov/160/Town-Meeting or you may contact the Moderator at Moderator@carlislema.gov.