

Welcome to Middlebury Town Meeting



The Warning

The “warning” is the agenda for Town Meeting which is approved by the Selectboard 30 days before Town Meeting Day. The warning is posted in three public places in town, including the Town Clerk’s office. Only articles on the warning (“warned articles”) can be considered at Town Meeting.

Australian Ballot

Some items on the warning might not be voted by the traditional floor vote at Town Meeting. Instead, these items are voted separately by Australian ballot which is marking in secret at a polling place. The warning provides information about when and where the polls are open. Voters can check with the Town Clerk or Town of Middlebury’s website for information on voting early. Early voting is available at least 20 days prior to Town Meeting.

Items that are voted on by Australian ballot may be discussed at Town Meeting but do not have the option of being voted on and amended as in a floor vote.

Role of the Moderator

The moderator serves as presiding officer at Town Meeting. It is the Moderator’s job to maintain order, to put motions to a vote of the assembly, and to rule on all votes and other questions of order. All motions and remarks should be addressed to the Moderator who follows the procedural rules of Robert’s Rules of Order and Vermont State Statutes.

Ensuring that only registered Middlebury voters cast ballots is another job of the Moderator. Consulting checklists at the door or when paper ballots are called also helps ensure that only voters registered in Middlebury cast votes. The Moderator may also ask for nonvoters to be isolated in a special section of the room.

If you wish to speak or ask a question at Town Meeting, just raise your hand.

Wait to be recognized by the Moderator, then stand up, speak into one of the available microphones, making sure to state your name for the record.

The Main Motion

Each warned article must be “moved” and seconded as a main motion; it is then ready to be discussed by the assembly. In discussion, citizens raise their hands and are called on by the Moderator.

Example: “I move to accept Article 6 as written.”

The Amendment

“Amending” a motion proposes a change to the main motion. Example: An article is moved and seconded; then, during discussion, someone says, “I move to amend Article 17 by reducing the dollar amount from \$10,000 to \$5,000.” After someone seconds this, debate shifts to discuss this amendment.

Once people have discussed the amendment, the Moderator puts the amendment to a vote. If the voters reject the amendment, the assembly returns to discuss the original main motion. If the voters approve the amendment, the discussion focuses on the main motion as amended.

The Vote

- If you are in favor of a motion, you will say “Aye.” If opposed, say “Nay” and the Moderator will announce the outcome of the vote.
- If a voter disagrees with the Moderator after the voice vote is announced, the voter may request a show of hands or a standing vote (sometimes called a “division of the house”). The Moderator may ask for a show of hands or division of the house if the voice vote was too close to call.
- If seven or more voters disagree with the Moderator after the vote is announced, or if they want to skip the previous forms of voting (voice, show of hands, standing), they can call for a paper ballot. The Town Clerk oversees collecting and counting a paper ballot vote.

Call the Question

Voters may feel that debate has gone on long enough on a motion or amendment, but some people are still repeating the basic arguments. In that case, a voter could move to cut off debate, sometimes referred to as “calling the question.”

If you agree that all opinions have been heard and you are ready to vote on the issue at hand, you should vote in favor of calling the question.

However, if you want to continue discussion, you should vote against calling the question. Two-thirds of the group must vote yes on calling the question to cease debate; otherwise, the discussion continues.

Point of Order/Appeal

If you don’t understand a ruling by the Moderator, you can say “Point of order” and the Moderator will explain.

If you disagree with the Moderator’s ruling, you can say you wish to appeal their decision. The Moderator is obligated to ask the assembly, “Shall the Moderator’s decision be sustained?” A majority of the group must vote “no,” for the Moderator’s ruling to be overturned.

Adjournment

Once the agenda is completed, any voter may make a motion to adjourn. A simple majority is required to pass the motion.

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www.vtinstituteforgovt.org