

## **Town Meeting Basics**

**What is a Town Meeting?** A Town Meeting is both an event and an entity. As an event, it is a gathering of an organization's eligible voters, and is referred to as "the Town Meeting." As an entity, it is the legislative body for towns in Massachusetts, and is referred to simply as "Town Meeting." So you may say, "I went to the Town Meeting. Town Meeting approved the budget."

**What does Town Meeting decide?** Metro Town Meeting decides issues of policy that impact all constituents as warranted by the Principal.

**Who is an eligible voter?** All current Metro faculty, students, and one parent or adult advocate per currently enrolled student are eligible voting members.

**What's a moderator?** Generally, a moderator's job is to run the Town Meeting. Specifically, the moderator declares the outcome of all voice votes. Some communities have detailed by-laws governing Town Meeting procedure. Other communities leave a lot of discretion to the moderator.

**What's a warrant?** The warrant lists a meeting's time, place, and agenda. A Town Meeting's action is not valid unless the subject was listed on the warrant.

**Who makes up the warrant?** The Principal, who "issues" it. The Principal is authorized to call a Town Meeting provided that a warrant has been posted.

**What are articles?** Articles are items on the warrant. Appropriations for each school function or department may be in separate articles.

**May voters place articles on the warrant?** Yes, voters may "insert" articles in the warrant upon the approval of the Principal. These insertions must be presented at least 24 hours prior to the posted Town Meeting time.

**Who may attend?** Any member of the public may attend a Town Meeting.

**Who may speak?** All of Metro's registered voters and approved non-voters may speak in an open or representative Town Meeting.

**Who may vote?** In an open Town Meeting, only approved voters may vote.

**Is the warrant the agenda?** Yes, the warrant generally states the things to be voted on, but the moderator may interpret the articles liberally. The moderator summarizes each article or reads it entirely before starting debate.

## **Participating in Town Meetings**

**How do I vote?** Voters in open Town Meeting vote by various methods.

*Show of hands.* The moderator asks that all in favor raise their green card facing the moderator. Then the moderator asks that all opposed raise their red cards. The moderator looks at the number of color in general and decides which side prevailed, or colors are counted.

*Roll call.* Voters are called by name and answer “Yea” or “Nay.”

*Standing vote or rising vote.* All in favor are asked to stand or rise. They are counted. Next, all voters who are opposed are asked to stand. They are counted. This form of vote is also known as dividing the meeting.

*Secret ballots.* When voters vote by secret ballot is determined by a community’s by-laws. In some communities, the moderator can call for a secret ballot. In some, if a certain number of voters request it, a vote will be by secret ballot. In other places, a vote will be by secret ballot if 25 % percent of the voters present and voting ask for it.

## **How do I speak in debate?**

If you wish to speak and have already been added to the speaker’s list, stand up and wait for the moderator to acknowledge you. When the moderator acknowledges you, state your name, your relationship to Metro High School, and your position on the article. For example, “Thomas Jefferson, founder of Metro School, I oppose this article because.....”

Speak about the topic being discussed. Don’t speak about a previous topic (unless there is a motion to rescind or reconsider).

Make your comments to the moderator, not to the Town Meeting or individual Town Meeting Members. For example, do not say, “I have something to say to the Town Meeting,” or “Mr. Smith, you said something as a Town Meeting Member that I want to respond to.” Instead, say something like, “Mr. Moderator, these are my thoughts on this article.”

You may attack a previous speaker’s *argument*, but do not attack a previous *speaker*. For example, do not say, “The previous speaker is dead wrong.” Instead, say something like, “I disagree with the argument we just heard.”

Try to avoid referring to previous speakers by name. For example, try not to say, “I agree with Mr. Jefferson’s argument.” Instead, say something like, “I agree with the argument that we can afford this budget item.”

Since you make your comments to the moderator, you may not directly debate or ask questions of a previous speaker. For example, do not say, “Mr. Johnson, you say that we should make another exception to our student code of conduct. I’m asking you: When do we draw the line and stop making exceptions?” Instead, say something like, “Mr. Moderator, we have heard the argument that we should make just one more exception to the student conduct laws. But I say it’s time to stop making exceptions.”

**What do the following terms mean?**

<b>The term...</b>	<b>means...</b>
<b>dismiss an article</b>	<b>to defeat it</b>
<b>postpone an article indefinitely</b>	<b>to defeat it</b>
<b>take no action on an article</b>	<b>to defeat it</b>
<b>lay the question on the table</b>	<b>to kill or postpone (depending on the town) a measure</b>
<b>table the question</b>	<b>to kill or postpone (depending on the town) a measure</b>
<b>move the previous question</b>	<b>to cut off debate and vote on the issue at hand</b>
<b>point of clarification</b>	<b>to ask for a previously-made point to be re-stated because the point was either not heard or was misinterpreted</b>
<b>point of order</b>	<b>to request the moderator to intervene to clarify a procedure or assist in a return to order</b>