

Town Meeting Petitions – Frequently Asked Questions

What is the process?

1. Write your article exactly as you would like it to appear in the warrant. Keep in mind that certain words have specific legal implications and that the petition wording cannot be changed once signed by the petitioners.
2. Obtain signature papers from the town clerk's office.
3. Ask to meet with any board or committees that your petition may impact (for example, if you are creating a petition related to a playground you may want to meet with the youth commission) IMPORTANT: zoning changes MUST be brought to the planning board for a public hearing prior to a town meeting vote (MGL 40A Section 5).
4. Obtain signatures from registered voters of the town of Lee.
5. Return the papers by March 1 (or the preceding business day if March 1 is a weekend or holiday)
6. Attend town meeting to discuss and vote on your article.

Is there a deadline to submit papers?

Yes. Petitions must be submitted and received by the clerk's office no later than March 1 (or the preceding business day if March 1 is a weekend or holiday). If you do not meet this deadline a voter of the town of Lee would need to petition the select board for inclusion in the meeting warrant.

Can I submit a petition at a special town meeting?

Yes, however a special town meeting petition requires 100 signatures instead of 10 for an annual meeting.

What guarantee is there that my petition will be enacted if approved by town meeting?

There are none. Depending on what the petition is requesting and how it is written it may be subject to approval by the MA attorney general for consistency with state laws or it may require action by the state legislature. In most cases a petition is only authorizing the select board to take action/spend money not requiring them. In other cases, the proposal may not be legal, constitutional or within the town's authority to act upon.

How long will it take for my petition to be enacted?

The timeframe is based on several factors. For example, if the petition involves spending money it would likely be done by the end of the fiscal year (if the select board chooses to use the proposed authorization). If the petition involves a bylaw it would require review from the attorney general and then follow an appeal period before being enacted and codified. Other petitions may pass town meeting but only be considered "advisory" as the town may not have the authority to make such a decision (i.e.: subject of the petition is regulated by state or federal government).

What vote is required by town meeting for petitions?

Most require a majority vote, however there are exceptions. A zoning bylaw, eminent domain or borrowing of money requires a 2/3 vote. Spending from a prior fiscal year requires a 4/5 or sometimes 9/10 vote.

Can I make a presentation for my article?

All town meeting members have, by default, 5 minutes to speak. If you wish to have additional time a member would need to seek approval by a 2/3 vote of the members of town meeting. You may also want to contact the Moderator for this or any other procedural questions.

Who should I see for advice on how to write a petition?

Ultimately the writing of the citizens petition is the responsibility of the citizen. As previously mentioned it is a good idea to meet with any town board or committees that may be impacted for their input BEFORE obtaining signatures. Depending on the nature of the petition you may also want to seek independent legal counsel. Please note that the Town Counsel typically only reviews warrant articles placed by town boards (not citizens petitions).