

2024 MESSAGE FROM THE TOWN MODERATOR

Dear Neighbors:

Citizens of Marblehead have gathered to form the Legislative Body of our Town since 1649. It is a humble thought to consider that the original inhabitants of Marblehead organized 375 years ago to collectively, and democratically, manage the affairs of the Town. A tradition which began some 124 years before the American Revolution, remains as our governance structure to this day, and many refer to it as the “purest form of democracy”.

Thomas Jefferson expressed in 1813 that town meeting was “the wisest invention ever devised by the wit of man for the perfect exercise of self-government, and for its preservation.”

It is my responsibility to conduct our Town Meeting in a manner that affords the opportunity for fair and equitable participation by every citizen wishing to attend and requires that it be safe and welcoming for all. My goal is to moderate over a respectful forum in which those attending utilize the information provided, listen to the debate offered, and make the most informed judgment possible. Civility and respect for your fellow neighbor is expected, even when lively debate ensues.

I invite you and encourage your participation in our time-honored tradition of Town Meeting on Monday evening, May 6, 2024, at the Veterans Memorial Middle School, Performing Arts Center. The meeting will start promptly at 7:00 p.m. and you can expect a line when checking in.

Sincerely,
Jack Attridge
Marblehead Town Moderator

MARBLEHEAD TOWN MEETING SIMPLIFIED RULES OF PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE

The purpose of Town Meeting is to establish and update the By-laws, operational policies, budgets and land use rules that govern our Town.

Specific parliamentary rulings and conduct are governed by the Moderator, using Massachusetts General Law, the Marblehead By-Laws, and local tradition as guidelines. The passing of each Town Meeting adds to the rich history – and changes – to that practice and tradition that helps guide future Moderators and meetings. Please know that “Roberts’ Rules of Order” are not applied and have no bearing on conduct of our meeting. Many Moderators utilize “*Town Meeting Time: A Handbook of Parliamentary Law*”, published by the Massachusetts Moderators’ Association, to provide guidance, and I have elected to utilize that resource when appropriate.

Town Meetings across the Commonwealth of Massachusetts are similar - but not identical - in the way they are conducted. Local traditions can significantly affect a town’s proceedings and help define the role and latitude of the Moderator. At Marblehead Town Meetings we will endeavor to present all necessary information in an efficient and timely manner so that the most clarity can be afforded to voters, enabling them to make informed decisions. Voters, in turn, have a unique responsibility. Not only must they express, by vote, the decisions made based upon their own judgment and perspective, but also be cognizant of the consequence their vote has on all citizens of the Town.

Here are some abridged Rules of Procedure for our Town Meeting:

1. Any voter wishing to address the meeting must first gain the attention of the Moderator when next in queue at a time no other speaker has the floor. Public microphones are to be utilized, where a speaker seeking to be recognized, being courteous to others and those next in line, will call out to be heard by addressing the Moderator. Speakers will introduce themselves using their full name and street address each time speaking at a session of Town Meeting. My general rule is for comments to be no longer than 2 minutes and I will occasionally adhere strictly to that time limit. Much can be said in 2 minutes if you prepare your remarks in advance.
2. Town employees and appointed or elected officials are required to identify their position and whether they are speaking in an official capacity. Such identification shall satisfy the disclosure requirement unless there is a specific matter under discussion that does not involve their official capacity as an employee, appointed or elected official. A blanket initial identification, upon the first opportunity to speak, is acceptable for each session of the meeting unless the individual is not speaking in an official capacity. In such case, the speaker shall be compelled to make a disclosure.
3. All remarks shall be addressed to and through the Moderator, for the benefit of all attendees. Direct questioning of others is not permitted. Questions may be directed, through the Moderator, to any petitioner, speaker or official and, if determined germane by the Moderator, the person asked will have the opportunity to answer should they choose.
4. An amendment changing or limiting the main motion can be offered during debate. The Moderator may rule an amendment out of order if it is beyond the scope of the warrant article. The Moderator will redirect the discussion to consider the proposed amendment once it is properly before the meeting. Specific wording of proposed amendments must be made available in writing, if so requested, to the Moderator, before it can be considered.
5. Respectful deliberation and debate are fundamental to Town Meeting. The Moderator may seek to establish a time limit on a specific article as a guide to the meeting in order to budget time and discussion. The Moderator will discourage repetitious statements. In due course it will become apparent that sufficient information has been presented and voters are ready to make their decision and the Moderator shall so rule. Motions to move the question to a vote are in order and are not generally subject to debate. A motion to move the question requires a 2/3 vote for approval. At the Moderator's discretion, such motion may not be allowed or may be subject to debate, particularly if the motion would restrict informed consideration of the meeting or comes before an appropriate discussion has taken place on the main motion.