

Town Meeting Petitions *Citizen's Petitions FAQ's*

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 blank petitions/signature papers from the Town Clerk's office.
3. Ask to meet with any board or committee that your petition may impact (for example, if you are creating a petition related to a historic monument you may want to meet with the Historical 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 Deerfield (10 for an annual, 100 for a special).
5. Return the papers to the Clerk's office a recommended 60 days prior to the annual town meeting
6. Attend town meeting to discuss and vote on your article.

Is there a deadline to submit papers?

Petitions should be submitted and received by the Town Clerk's office no later than 60 days prior to the Annual Town Meeting. This allows the Clerk to certify signatures and ensure the petition can be properly inserted into the warrant (agenda) for the next meeting.

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 a local bylaw change, for consistency with state laws, or it may require action by the state legislature. In some cases a petition is only authorizing the Select Board to take action. 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 time-frame is based on several factors. For example, if the petition involves a bylaw it would require review from the attorney general and then follow an appeal period and posting 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.

Can I make a presentation for my article?

Town meeting is executed by the Moderator and they should be consulted regarding any procedural changes or additions.

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 committee 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).