



Important Information for Town Meeting Members Regarding Needham's 2023 Annual Town Meeting

From the Moderator: Michael K. Fee

Greetings! I write to convey some preliminary information about our upcoming Annual Town Meeting.

President Biden and Governor Healy have announced the public health emergency with which we have lived since early 2020 will end May 11, 2023. This is welcome news. Once again, my thanks to all of you who complied with our special measures and allowed us to safely continue our 300 plus-year tradition of in-person Town Meeting.

As you plan for your return to Town Meeting next month, please be advised of the following procedures we will use, all of which I have discussed with town officials.

Video Presentations

With the onset of the public health emergency in 2020, we sought ways to streamline our Town Meeting so that we spent the least amount of time gathered while a virus infiltrated our community. One of the steps we took was to replace in-person presentations by proponents and the Finance Committee with videos posted in advance of Town Meeting. Then, at Town Meeting, we relied entirely on those videos and immediately began discussion and debate. At the time, this was necessary.

From the outset, I had concerns about the number of views these videos received. Specifically, I was concerned the number of views did not correlate with the over 254 Town Meeting Members who vote on the items in the Warrant. I watched the views closely in 2020 and 2021. Beginning with the Special Town Meeting in the fall of 2021 and continuing with the Annual and Special Town Meetings held in 2022, I moved to a hybrid format in which videos would be

Important Information for Town Meeting Members Needham's 2023 Annual Town Meeting

posted in advance but when I called an Article at Town Meeting, proponents and the Finance Committee would be permitted to deliver in-person “reminder remarks” of no more than five minutes in length. The reminder remarks were limited based on the assumption that Members had already viewed the full presentations in the videos, but if they had not, a short presentation was better than nothing. This approach was a direct outgrowth of my continuing concern that Town Meeting Members were not receiving uniform and equally accessible information from stakeholders in advance of casting their votes.

I examined the number of views of the videos for the Annual and Special Town Meetings held in 2022 using the hybrid format. I have attached two tables showing the views of the videos for these meetings. The first table is the Annual Town Meeting in May and the second is Special held in October. As you can see, “viewership” numbers are erratic, but generally quite low when compared to the total number of Town Meeting Members.

As the person vested with responsibility for ensuring that information flows evenly and meaningfully to Members, I have concluded that we can no longer rely on the videos to be an effective means of providing all Town Meeting Members with essential information, even when coupled with short reminder presentations under a hybrid format. As the data demonstrates, the reality is that the videos are loved by some but ignored by many. Indeed, the number of views for presentations often correlates to only a fraction of Town Meeting Membership. For these reasons, our reliance on video presentations has – together with the public health emergency that spawned this innovation – come to an end.

Town Meeting Presentations in 2023

Instead of posting videos, I am asking proponents and the Finance Committee to post summary materials on the town website in advance of Town Meeting. These materials can be PowerPoint slides or similar tools that will provide Town Meeting Members with a summary of the presentation they will hear live at Town Meeting. Like the videos, these summary materials will be organized by Article. The summary materials may be accompanied by supporting materials of the kind we have been posting all along. I am discouraging the last-minute distribution of materials and information at Town Meeting. Indeed, to ensure that Town Meeting Members are informed in advance of Town Meeting, I am asking that materials be posted, if possible, before we convene in the LOWVN Warrant Meetings to be held on the evening of April 24, 2023.

When we reach an Article on Town Meeting, I will call on the proponents to present to Members. I will seek your unanimous consent to allow a total of no more than **12 minutes** for presentation by the proponents and the same amount of time for the delivery of the recommendation of the Finance Committee. This is a reduction from the 15 minutes we have allowed in the past. Of course, under special circumstances, the Moderator has the discretion to extend the time. To put this change in perspective, when I assumed the office of Moderator, proponents had been allowed 25 minutes to make presentations. I have gradually reduced this

Important Information for Town Meeting Members Needham's 2023 Annual Town Meeting

time and I seek to reduce it further this year. In recent years – even before the era of pre-meeting videos – it has been rare for proponents' presentations or the delivery of the Finance Committee's recommendation to take up the entire 15 minute they had been allotted.

The Warrant

I will be sending my annual Memorandum to Town Meeting Members with the Warrant. Please be advised that the Annual Town Meeting Warrant contains 40 Articles. There will be a Special Town Meeting held during our Annual Town Meeting. The Special Town Meeting has a Warrant with 13 Articles in it and has been noticed for Monday May 8, 2023.

Participating in Town Meeting

We will continue the use of standing microphones for remarks from the floor. These will be placed around the seating areas. Members are asked to use the closest microphone if they wish to speak. The Marshal will help direct you to a microphone and if necessary, adjust it for you.

If a member cannot walk to or stand at a microphone, they should contact the Town Manager's office in advance for an accommodation and she will let me know. The telephone number is 781-455-7500 extension 0.

Safety Precautions

In the classic movie "Casablanca," Humphrey Bogart tells Ingrid Bergman, "We'll always have Paris." Whether we have a declared public health emergency or not, it seems clear "We'll always have COVID, (or some variant)." For this reason, please use common sense when attending Town Meeting. If you wish to wear a face mask, feel free to do so. Please do not attend Annual Town Meeting if you have received a positive COVID-19 test in the five (5) days preceding Annual Town Meeting. If you tested positive for COVID between six and 10 days before Town Meeting, then you must wear a mask and have decreasing symptoms to safely attend Town Meeting. If you were exposed to COVID-19 and are not up to date with your vaccines please follow the guidance for exposure found here: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-isolation-and-quarantine-guidance-for-the-general-public>.

As always, please stay home if you are feeling unwell or have any of the following symptoms:

- Cough;
- shortness of breath;
- fever; or
- loss of taste or smell.

Important Information for Town Meeting Members
Needham's 2023 Annual Town Meeting

Conclusion

Thank you for your participation, patience and understanding. I hope to see you all at the Warrant Meetings on April 24 and at Town Meeting on May 1, 2023.

All the best,

/s/ Michael K Fee

Michael K. Fee

Needham Town Moderator

Important Information for Town Meeting Members
Needham's 2023 Annual Town Meeting

Annual Town Meeting				
Article No.	Topic	SB Views	FinCom Views	Other
3	Elec. Off. Salaries	No video	176	
4	Tax Assistance	111	17	
5	Facil. Maint.	95	23	
6	Small repairs	88	29	
7	RTS Serv. Study	149	91	
8	Parking Study.	No video	127	
9	Unpaid Bills	102	81	
10	Op. budget		97	
11	Sew. Enterprise	76	65	
12	H2O Enterprise	68	47	
13	Ch. 90	119	58	
14	Revolv. Funds	72	74	
15	CPA Fund Approp.	114	68	CPC - 88
16	CPC Supp \$	No video	63	CPC - 105
17	Pre-Dev Linden	No video	104	CPC - 105
18	NHA Prop. Survey	No video	69	
19	Comm. Farm	117	69	CPC - 96
20	H.S. Tennis	135	93	CPC - 365
21	Emery Grover	No video	96	CPC - 160
22	Hillside Heating	No video	72	
23	Gen. Fund \$ Cap.	72	73	
24	Pollard Lockers	93	66	
25	PW Infrastructure	72	64	
26	Library use study	109	64	
27	DPW complex sty.	92	72	
28	Sew. Ent. \$ Cap.	55	47	
29	Rescind Debt	66	68	
30	Comp. Absences	72	49	
31	Ath. Imp. Fund	No video	58	
32	Workers Comp.	81	44	
33	Pub. Safety Injury	74	42	
34	Snow & Ice bylaw	87	44	
35	Household Refuse	80	67	
36	Stret Acceptance	78	49	
37	NHA Term Cycle	34	No video	
38	NHA term – Tenn.	38	No video	
39	Cont. Ret. COLA	70	51	

Important Information for Town Meeting Members
Needham's 2023 Annual Town Meeting

Special Town Meeting				
Article No.	Topic	SB Views	FC Views	Other
1	CBA Custodians	128	67	
2	CBA NIPEA	86	55	
3	Amend Op. Bud.	98	89	
4	Am. Sew. Ent. \$	67	72	
5	Am. H2O Ent. Bud	65	75	
6	Transp. Fees	105	48	
7	Climate Action	137	103	Climate Com 132
8	Brew Pub Zoning	119	84	PB 190
10	E. Grover Sup. \$	119	136	
11	Property Acquis.	340	455	
12	Rescind Debt	91	59	