

Advisory Committee Workflow

The Advisory Committee is established by *Article 14* of the Town's *General By-Laws* in accordance with *MGL c.39 § 16*, and its actions and operations are further governed by its own self-imposed rules. (See [Advisory Committee Rules, Policies and Procedures link](#)). The Committee's work addresses four main responsibilities:

1. Staying apprised of the activities of Town departments and other boards/committees whose actions fall within the purview of Committee responsibilities;
2. Recommending the upcoming fiscal year's budget for consideration at Annual Town Meeting;
3. Providing a Recommended Motion to Annual and Special Town Meetings for each Article in the associated Warrant; and,
4. Approving or disapproving, in concert with the Select Board, distributions (transfers) from the Reserve Fund.

1. LIAISON ACTIVITIES

Committee members are assigned to act as liaisons to Town departments, boards, and committees in order to facilitate coordination and the timely flow of information. In keeping with the Committee's role as an advisor to Town Meeting, liaisons must work to maintain a position of objective neutrality in summarizing and reporting upon issues and to ensure that they are not perceived as advocates or surrogate members of their assigned entities.

After the Committee Chair has assigned liaison subcommittee and liaison team responsibilities for the current fiscal year (usually in the July-September timeframe), the subcommittee chair or team leader should contact the head or chair of the individual department/board/committee to so inform and to request inclusion in the distribution of meeting minutes and other significant documents. Liaison subcommittees and teams are defined in the Advisory Committee's Rules, Policies and Procedures #7 and 8 ([link to this document](#))

The mission of each subcommittee/team is to maintain an awareness of the entity's initiatives which may ultimately require Town Meeting consideration. Regular liaison contact with Town department heads and/or attendance at board/committee meetings is expected.

Liaison subcommittees/teams should be prepared, at the request of the Chair, to update the full Committee on the assigned entity's current status regarding issues of consequence.

- When more than one liaison is assigned to a particular department, board, or committee, the Chair will name a chair of the liaison subcommittee or a team leader of the liaison team. Like the full Committee, liaison subcommittees are “public bodies” under the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law and, therefore, must conform to all Open Meeting Law requirements. For more information, the Massachusetts Attorney General’s *Open Meeting Law Guide* and other useful material is available at www.mass.gov/ago/openmeeting. The Committee Chair should be consulted should questions arise which are not satisfactorily addressed by published guidelines. Liaison teams are not deliberative bodies and, as such, are not governed by the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law.

2. BUDGET RESPONSIBILITIES

There are three general budget components requiring review by the Committee:

- Municipal
- Education
- Capital

The budget recommended by the Committee for consideration at Annual Town Meeting is the aggregation of these three components and is incorporated in the Warrant’s *Article 6*. Ideally, the Committee’s budget recommendation balances affordable cost with acceptable service-level and reflects a consensus among the originating department-head, any board or committee providing guidance to the department (*e.g.*, Library Board of Trustees, School Committee, Veterans’ Council, *etc.*), and the Select Board.

The Committee performs its Municipal and Education Budget oversight role through assigned budget subcommittees or budget teams, as further described below; the Committee is directly represented on the Capital Outlay Committee by its two voting members.

The Town *Financial Policy* provides guidelines for the development of annual budgets, and Committee members should review this document at the beginning of each fiscal year.

2.1 The Municipal Budget Process

The proposed operating budget for Municipal salaries and expenses is prepared jointly by the Town Administrator, Town Accountant, and the various department heads.

The Select Board reviews each line-item of the Municipal budget in open hearings and votes either to recommend it as presented or to recommend changes.

Likewise, the Committee also reviews each line item of the proposed Municipal budget, and votes to approve or to recommend changes. The Committee's review and vote occurs after the Select Board has already voted its recommendation for the same line item. If the Committee's budget recommendation differs from the Select Board, the budget would return to the Select Board for their final review and vote.

2.2 The Education Budget Process

The School Department develops an initial operating budget proposal for Education salaries and expenses and presents it for School Committee consideration in a series of public hearings.

Members of the Advisory Committee's Education Subcommittee (ACES) attend those School Committee hearings in order to learn the priorities and concerns of the School Committee, the School Department, and the citizens who attend the hearings.

At the conclusion of the initial hearings, the School Committee votes on a proposed budget for consideration by the Select Board and the Committee.

Following the School Committee's vote on its final Education budget recommendation, the Select Board and the Committee, respectively, vote the operating Education budget. If the Committee's budget recommendation differs from the Select Board, the budget would return to the Select Board for their final review and vote.

2.3 The Capital Budget Process

Annually, each Town department, including the School Department, may propose prioritized capital expenditures for the next five fiscal years to the Capital Outlay Committee.

The Capital Outlay Committee includes two members of the Advisory Committee, three members appointed by the Town Moderator, and the Town Accountant or Town Treasurer in an *ex officio* capacity.

The Capital Outlay Committee evaluates departmental proposals and incorporates those which it considers most necessary into a recommended *Five-Year Capital Plan* which focuses particularly on the upcoming fiscal year. However, the remaining four years of the *Plan* should also reflect the department's and the Capital Outlay Committee's current best assessment of necessary capital needs. The *Five-*

Year Capital Plan, together with an accompanying narrative report, is then presented by the Capital Outlay Committee to the Select Board and the Advisory Committee for their respective reviews and votes.

While the *Five-Year Capital Plan* includes only capital items by department, Warrant Article 6 incorporates those same proposed capital expenditures in order that both the operating and capital budgets of the various departments be presented for Town Meeting vote in Article 6's Recommended Motion.

Requests for very large capital expenditures, such as those for building projects or other expenditures which require borrowing, generally will appear in separate Warrant articles.

2.4 Budget Subcommittees

Each member of the Committee will be assigned to one or more budget subcommittees or budget teams.

The chair of each subcommittee or the team leader will organize the work, and a member of each subcommittee or team will be assigned oversight responsibility for each budget line-item in the Warrant.

The role of each budget subcommittee/team involves understanding—through direct, detailed discussion with department heads—the following key elements:

1. **Priorities:** Understand the rationale for the department's top priorities, including new initiatives proposed for action during the upcoming fiscal year. Early focus on priorities facilitates the subsequent balancing of projected departmental expenses within forecasted Town revenues.
2. **Completeness:** Be satisfied with the sufficiency of the department's budget to accommodate all anticipated expenditures, particularly those for which historical trends are available.
3. **Significant Budget Changes:** From time to time, department heads request, or are asked to consider, significant changes to their budgets from the trend of previous years. These changes may be triggered by new spending initiatives, ideas to make operations more efficient, or direction from the Town Administrator, on behalf of the Select Board, to reduce budgets based on diminished Town-revenue projections. In these circumstances, input from department heads is especially important to allow the Committee to evaluate such changes.

Suggestions for fulfilling assigned budget subcommittee and team responsibilities follow:

- Review recent departmental budgets and Reserve Fund Transfer requests to become familiar with past patterns.
- Attend the relevant budget hearing(s) held by the Select Board, if possible. The Select Board's office will have the schedule.
- Review new projects for potential impact on the department's budget (or possibly on other departmental budgets), *e.g.*, a requirement for ongoing increased maintenance or utility costs resulting from new buildings, new playing fields, *etc.* Impact assessment may involve discussions with other Committee budget subcommittees or budget teams.
- Invite department heads to attend the Committee's hearing on their respective budgets and ensure they know when the hearing is scheduled. Heads of large departments will generally attend (*e.g.*, Police, Fire, DPW, Library); heads of smaller departments may choose not to attend if there is no issue of substance to discuss. Some department heads appreciate the opportunity to update the Committee on their work even if there is little to discuss about their proposed budget. Also, questions may occasionally arise even regarding smaller departments, if the department head is not present, issue resolution may have to be postponed pending further investigation. Requesting department head attendance at the budget review is a judgment call best made by the liaison and department head jointly.
- At the time of final Committee review, be prepared as subcommittee chair or team leader (or appropriate member with responsibility, if designated by the subcommittee chair/team leader) to summarize the respective department's priorities and other budget highlights, then invite the department head to amplify points as necessary. A detailed, line-by-line budget walk-through by the full Committee should not be necessary if the subcommittee/team has done its job well. Work with the department head to address any issues raised by the Committee during the review.
- Decide upon the budget recommendation to be moved, preferably after the Select Board has made its recommendation. The subcommittee or team member recommendation will be offered as a motion to the full Committee. If the recommendation differs from that of the Select Board, be prepared to justify that position, and consider inviting the Town Administrator to the Committee's hearing to provide, on behalf of the Select Board, the opportunity to join the discussion. If the subcommittee or team member has proposed changes to an individual departmental budget, it is the subcommittee or team member responsibility to review proposed changes with the department head prior to the Committee meeting. An objective of the budget subcommittee or budget team's work is to avoid surprises during presentation to the full Committee.

- Finally, decide, in advance, who on each subcommittee or team will field questions about particular budget line-items from the floor of Town Meeting.

3. WARRANT ARTICLES

(Note that “Committee” refers to the Advisory Committee, unless otherwise specified.)

Warrant Articles can address several different types of issues, including:

- Petitions from ten (10) or more citizens for an Annual Town Meeting Article
- Petitions from 100 or more citizens for a Special Town Meeting Article
- Changes to the Town’s General By-laws
- Changes to the Town’s Zoning By-law
- Community Preservation Committee (“CPC”) Articles
- Sewer Commission Articles
- Articles involving the disposition of Town funds, for example:
 - Reserve Fund
 - Stabilization Fund
 - Building Department Revolving Fund
- Other Articles involving the business of the Town

As a general rule, Warrant Articles for Annual Town Meeting must be proposed by January 20th. Some types of Articles have earlier deadlines (e.g., Zoning By-law amendments), and some Articles may be included after January 20th by the Select Board to allow emergency or otherwise unforeseen issues to be addressed at Annual Town Meeting. Most Articles of any complexity are initially proposed and discussed well in advance of the January deadline.

There are three parts to each Article as presented in the Warrant:

1. The **Article** as it was presented to the Committee. The Committee may not make changes to the Article, it must be printed in the Warrant exactly as it was authored (or amended) by the original proponent(s).
2. The **Comment**, which briefly, but comprehensively, explains why the Committee took its position. Pros and cons, if warranted, of the issue should be presented in a concise, balanced, and impartial manner which, ultimately, should explain the rationale for the majority’s Recommended Motion. The Comment should also be used to anticipate and answer questions which might be asked from the floor, saving time at Town Meeting. Recommendation Motions for “No Action” are sometimes presented without a Comment, but a Comment is desirable in most cases in order to address anticipated questions.

Properly drafted Comments can greatly facilitate the smooth functioning of Town Meeting, so ensure that Comments are clear and factual and that they accurately reflect the thoughts of the Committee majority and, in rare instances, the Committee minority. Comments may also be examined at some future time in

order to better understand the original intent of the Committee and of Town Meeting, so thoughtful, carefully written Comments are very important.

3. The **Recommended Motion** of the Committee. This generally is the motion on the floor when the Article is considered at Town Meeting. If the Committee votes in favor of the Article as originally presented, the Recommended Motion will typically be, word for word, the same as the Article. If the Committee recommends something different, the wording will be whatever the Committee majority approved; however, the Recommended Motion must always be within the scope of the original Article.

Each Warrant Article will be assigned to one or more Committee members, who will recommend to the full Committee one of the following actions:

- Approval as originally proposed
- No Action (disapproval)
- Approval with a Recommended Motion which modifies the original Article language but is still within the scope of the original Article

A Committee member to whom a Warrant Article has been assigned (“assignees”) should proceed as follows:

- As soon as possible after receiving the assignment, speak to the proponents of the Article and learn the purpose and rationale for the proposed Article. If the Article proposes an action regarding an endeavor on which another board or committee is already engaged, such as a building project, a Zoning By-law amendment, or a CPC Article, discuss the matter with the Committee liaison and attend meetings of the relevant board/committee to gain further insight into formulating the Recommended Motion. If the Article is one of the recurring Articles (“perennials”) which must be voted at each Annual Town Meeting, talk to the Committee member assigned the previous year for insight and direction.
- If the Article involves expenditure of Town revenue, confirm the amount with the Town Accountant prior to presenting to the full Committee.
- If the Article involves a real estate transaction of any type, ensure that the parties involved have investigated (and have copies of, if appropriate) relevant documents and other legal instruments. Such items may include: the deed; wills or other estate documents; previous related Town Meeting transcripts, Warrant Articles, and outcomes; minutes of Planning Board, Conservation Commission, Select Board, or other appropriate meetings addressing the property in question; appraisals; zoning analyses; hazardous waste analyses; property-condition reports; and anything else necessary to facilitate a rational, informed decision-making process. In the usual course, this will involve discussions with Town Counsel for Real Estate Matters.

- It is not uncommon for Warrant Articles to have long-term cost impacts which may not be self-evident. Such impacts may include ongoing operating costs, personnel costs, capital repair and replacement costs, and/or assumptions regarding tax-revenue growth, and the like. Encourage proponents of Warrant Articles to thoroughly assess the magnitude and funding source of these total life-cycle costs before presenting their proposals to the Committee.
- Think carefully about who may be affected in any way by the Article and seek those individuals out as well. It is always best to identify all points of view as early as possible (including opposing views) in order that the Committee and Town Meeting may make the most informed decision possible. If Town departments or bodies (e.g., Planning Board, Historic Districts Commission, or the Conservation Commission) are recommending late changes to an Article, ensure that they notify everyone affected in a timely manner, in order that concerns may be addressed early. When concerns arise for the first time on the floor of Town Meeting, or at any time after the Warrant or Warrant Supplement has been published, it may be challenging to evaluate them thoroughly.
- If possible, attend the Select Board hearing/vote on the Article or watch the video of the meeting on Harbor Media (formerly HCAM).
- When writing a Comment, use the following format to ensure consistency and completeness of information.

ARTICLE (NUMBER): Proposed Warrant Article language

COMMENT: Language explaining the rationale for the Recommended Motion

RECOMMENDED: Recommended Motion of the Advisory Committee majority

- Refer to the “Warrant Article Style Guidelines” for Warrant conventions, e.g., font, capitalization, spacing. It is also the assignee’s responsibility to confirm and/or obtain the necessary language for Articles involving borrowing or zoning.
- Work with the Committee chair to schedule the hearing for an Article. It is the Committee’s goal to provide a legally posted notice of such hearing at least five days in advance of the hearing (if practicable). In any event, such notice shall be given at least 48 hours in advance. In both cases, the time frame excludes Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays, and legal holidays when Town Hall is closed. Ensure that all interested parties know when the hearing will occur. As a general rule, the Committee will not hear an Article until after the Select Board has done so. Likewise, the Committee generally will not vote on an Article until after the Select Board has voted on it. Prepare the draft Comment and Recommended Motion sufficiently in advance of the scheduled Committee hearing and email the document to Committee members so that they have an opportunity to review all relevant material prior to the hearing.

- Come to the scheduled hearing prepared to discuss the Article. It is the assignee's responsibility to move the final Recommended Motion for the Committee's vote and to present the corresponding Comment which will appear in the Warrant. During the course of the discussion, the Committee may make suggestions about the final language of the Comment and/or Recommended Motion, and the assignee should ensure that the Committee's suggestions are incorporated appropriately.
- In order for the Committee's Recommended Motion to appear in the Warrant for Annual Town Meeting, the Committee must vote the Article by early March. (The exact date will be specified each year by the Select Board's office.) Voting well in advance of this deadline, if possible, is desirable.
- When the Committee disagrees with the Select Board and/or Town department or board/committee regarding a Recommended Motion for a particular Warrant Article, a timely attempt should be made to negotiate a solution upon which all parties can agree. While this isn't always possible, it is helpful to the voters if Town leadership works collaboratively and constructively to fashion a proposal which addresses as many concerns as possible prior to Town Meeting.
- Finalize the Comment and Recommended Motion as quickly as possible. The assignee is responsible for ensuring that all questions or issues regarding the Comment and Recommended Motion are resolved. If appropriate, review the text with other Committee members who have been involved with the Article.
- Email the finalized document containing the original Warrant Article, approved Comment, and Recommended Motion to the assigned AdCom Editor who has been appointed by the Committee Chair to assist in the final preparation of the text of the Warrant.
- Format the document and email as follows:
 1. Add a document footer which reads: "Approved by AdCom_MM_DD_YYYY"
Example: "Approved by AdCom_03_05_2021"
 2. Save the document file using a filename constructed as follows:
"XX_Sample Warrant Article Title approved_MM_DD_YYYY.docx"
Where XX is the interim Article identifier and Sample Warrant Article Title is the likely title for the Article in the Warrant's table of contents. Be sure to use the "docx" file format.
Example: "E_Salaries of Town Officers approved_02_15_2021.docx"
 3. Format the Subject line of the email using the document filename above prefixed with the word "FINAL".
Example: "FINAL E_Salaries of Town Officers approved_02_15_2021.docx"

- From the assigned AdCom editor, the document is sent to the Chair and Vice Chair. Once final reviews take place, the document is will be emailed to the Office of the Town Administrator with the assigned AdCom member receiving a copy. The assignee will send the document to the Article originator and/or involved Town department head and/or committee chair.

If the Committee is unable to vote a Recommended Motion before the deadline for printing the bound Warrant, the Recommended Motion, together with its related Comment, must be printed in a “Supplementary Report of the Advisory Committee” which is distributed on the night of Town Meeting. Such an outcome is not desirable because voters need sufficient time for thoughtful review. Nevertheless, a Supplementary Report containing one or more Articles may be necessary due to issues that are still unresolved when the Warrant goes to press.

The final order of Articles in the Warrant and their respective numbering is at the discretion of the Chair of the Select Board.

At Town Meeting, Committee members will be responsible for presenting (if necessary) background information regarding a particular Article and/or responding to questions from the floor. The assignee for each Article should notify the Committee Chair as to who will speak on behalf of or against the Article. The Chair will share this information with the Moderator. Presentations and/or responses to questions should be factual and should reflect only the positions publicly discussed by the Committee as it considered the Article. In deference to the expeditious conduct of Town Meeting, Committee members should only actually present pre-prepared material if it is determined that Town Meeting requires additional information in order to vote the Recommended Motion; the Committee Chair should be consulted when in doubt.

4 TOWN MEETING PROCESS SCHEDULE: ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

Approximate Date	Event
October 1	Annual Town Meeting (ATM) street-acceptance Warrant articles due
December 2	ATM zoning Warrant articles due
January 20	All other ATM Warrant articles due
Mid March	Advisory Committee own Budget vote
Mid March	Warrant Comments & Recommended Motions finalized

Approximate Date	Event
March 19	ATM ballot questions due
Generally 3 rd week of March	ATM Warrant to printer
Early April	Warrant in citizens' mail
Generally, 4 th Monday in April	Annual Town Meeting
Generally 1 st Saturday in May	Annual Town Election

5. RESERVE FUND TRANSFERS

The Reserve Fund is authorized by Town Meeting in Warrant *Article 6* and managed by the Committee. This Fund is intended to meet unforeseen expenses which could not be anticipated during the annual budget-preparation process. An expenditure from the Reserve Fund follows a process that begins with a Reserve Fund Transfer request from a department head. Such requests are generally prepared late in the fiscal year when Town departments now foresee previously unanticipated expenses. Reserve Fund Transfer requests should be infrequent and utilized only for exceptional circumstances.

The Committee votes on RFT's after the Select Board has voted.

6. THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE INFORMATION ON TOWN WEBSITE

The Committee maintains a home page on the Town web site in order to facilitate communication with the Town's citizenry, departments, and other Town boards and committees. Members may find it helpful to subscribe to Town emails detailing weekly meeting schedules by selecting the "Notify Me" option on the Town's home page.

Telephone messages left on the Committee's published voicemail phone number (781-804-2388) and/or emails sent to the published email address (AdvisoryCommittee@hingham-ma.gov) are fielded by the Town Administrator's office and sent to the Committee Chair for distribution to the full Committee by email, and distributed to the full Committee

The Committee's web pages also include the current Committee membership roster, budget and liaison subcommittee assignments. Agendas and approved meeting minutes are posted on the Town's Website at <https://www.hingham-ma.gov/agendacenter> Links are also available for several of the governing documents as well as for selected Committee presentations.

Voted by Advisory Committee – 12/19/24