



Templeton Advisory Committee

Orientation and Training for New Members



Who is Advisory?

The Basics:

- 7 Town residents
- Appointed by the Town Moderator up to 30 days after Annual Town meeting
- 3 Year terms (2 members appointed each year)
- Advisory fills vacancies after 30 days after ATM and appointment is only until next ATM
- Officers nominated and voted on by Advisory at the 3th week in June after the new members are sworn in (late June or sometime in July). Officers must be a minimum of a Chair, Vice Chair and Clerk.

Role:

- Independent, neutral eyes, ears and voice of the Town
- Report to Annual Town Meeting Members on the background, information and voting recommendations on the warrant articles for Annual Town Meeting (ATM) and all Special Town Meetings (STMs).
- Advisory needs to be willing to ask the hard questions and review all the information to make its recommendations and advice to Town Meeting relevant and useful.
- Credibility and integrity of the Advisory process are of the utmost importance.



How Does Advisory do it?

Read, listen, question

- Read the materials provided by the Boards/Committees; read meeting materials for additional information on particular issues
- Listen to the presentations on budgets and other warrant articles
- Question the presenters with the hard questions that Town Meeting members would want answered.

Liaisons

- One or more Advisory member on each board/committee
- Bring big issues or budget concerns to Advisory
- Communicate questions, issues, concerns that Advisory has back to the board/committee

Select Board

- Advisory officers keep in constant communication with the Select Board on what is happening in the Town and what might come up at ATM/STM

The “Book”

- Drafting the Advisory Report to Town Meeting members for ATM and any STMs for the year at least 2 days before the meetings



Credibility and Integrity

Advisory should be impartial, representing the supportive and dissenting voices in the Town on all warrant articles.

Can I participate in other committees/votes/public campaigns?

- Members should not sign petitions or engage in any non-Advisory public vote/discussion regarding any issues coming up for ATM/STM.

When should I recuse myself from a discussion or vote?

- Conflicts of interest arise when a member or their family/friend has a financial stake in the outcome of a particular vote or issue.
- Even when no financial stake exists, members should avoid the appearance of any conflict of interest when possible.
- You are the “voice of Advisory” to anyone asking about Town issues, so avoid commenting publicly on any issue.

Can I answer questions about Advisory's discussions and votes?

- No. Whether from news outlets or on social media, decline any comment and refer questions/inquiries to the Advisory Chair.

So do I have to stifle my opinions and values?

- No! Advisory strives to have all differing opinions expressed, but the time for communicating those opinions and values is during Advisory's discussions, deliberations, and debates.

I'm a Town meeting member. Do I have to vote the way Advisory voted?

- No. You should vote at ATM/STM as you would want to vote. BUT, because you are always perceived as speaking for Advisory, you should refrain from speaking at ATM or STM unless it is in support of Advisory recommendation or minority position as a committee member.



Nuts and Bolts - Meetings

When and Where?

- The first and third Thursdays of the month at 6:30 p.m. in Town Hall or via a video conference. A quorum (a majority 4 members) must be present to conduct business and/or vote. (also the third Thursday of the month if voted by the committee)
- Public hearing called a pre-town meeting to hear comments and debate from the public on all articles on the warrant for any ATM or STM. This will be in place of a regular meeting unless the schedule demands an extra meeting.
- Additional meetings as necessary to complete discussion and votes on the warrant articles.
- Each night of ATM/STM at 5:30, in advance of the 6:00 ATM/STM start time. No Thursday meeting is held those weeks.
- From time to time, a summer meeting is necessary to approve a transfer prior to the end of the fiscal year. Advisory continue meeting through some or all of the summer.



Nuts and Bolts - Meetings

What?

The traditional agenda for the regular meetings is as follows:

- Citizens' Speak: members of the public may make a statement about any issue they choose, but the Chair can limit the time for each speaker (Citizens' Speak typically lasts 5 minutes or less). This is time for a statement only – questions but no discussion is appropriate.
- Presentations: Boards/Committees/Commissions are invited to present their proposed budget and/or warrant articles. Questions from Advisory members can be posed to the presenters at the discretion of the Chair.
- Discussion and Vote: only happens in the process, usually in the meeting that motion are made.
- Administrative Matters: reports to the Committee from Liaisons; approval of minutes; other matters the Chair wishes to discuss).



Nuts and Bolts – Meetings

How?

- Presenters will come and provide background and information for warrant articles and budgets. Advisory members can then provide comments and ask questions. To maintain an orderly discussion, only speak when recognized by the Chair.
- Speakers that are not Advisory members should sign in with their name on a sign-in sheet. For virtual meetings, each speaker should identify themselves and the Board/Committee they represent.
- Disrespect toward any person or group will not be tolerated and shall be monitored by the Chair, who has discretion to limit any speaker's time or cut off discussion.
- Don't hold back – Advisory meetings are the time to really dig deep into complex issues facing the Town. If you are confused or have questions, chances are that Town Meeting Members will have the same questions.
- Make it what you need – if you need more information, more discussion, more time, then propose Advisory continue the discussion at another meeting or any other procedure that makes sense. Ultimately, the Chair will make the final call as to the best course of action.



Nuts and Bolts - Voting

When Does Advisory Vote?

- Reserve Fund transfer requests and End Of Year Transferers.
- Recommendations on Town Meeting Warrant articles and motions.
- Approval of Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes and any Financial items or Committee Policies.
- Motions to Adjourn Advisory Committee Meeting.
- Other actions involving Town Meeting votes (motion to table discussion; motion to rescind a prior vote and re-vote; etc.).

How Does Advisory Vote?

- The Chairman asks for motions on warrant articles in the following form: "I move for action on [Article #, Motion #] as proposed by [sponsoring board] for [summary of motion], as set forth in the motion and warrant for [name/date of meeting]."
- Note: Because of the length of the articles and motions, the entire text will NOT be read aloud when the motion is made for Advisory to vote on its recommendation.
- Chair will then ask for a second from a different member.
- Chair will then ask for discussion, which will continue as long as the Chair deems it appropriate. Straw votes can be taken on request.
- After the discussion period, the Chair calls for the vote, asking for yes votes, no votes, and abstentions or roll call if chair thinks it is required. The Chair is required to votes to break a tie.
- Votes during a videoconference meeting must be by roll call, such that the Chairman or some other designated member must call out each Advisory member's name and ask their vote. If the vote is not unanimous, the entire roll call should be reflected in the minutes.

When should I abstain?

- A vote to abstain is appropriate in some circumstances, such as the following:
 - If a member did not have the opportunity to participate in the discussion/deliberation which led up to the vote.
 - If a member missed the preceding meeting at which a substantial discussion of the issue took place.
 - If a member wasn't at the meeting for which minutes are being reviewed and approved.



Nuts and Bolts – Executive Session

What is Executive Session?

- The Open Meeting Law allows Town Boards and Committees to convene in an Executive Session, which is not open to the public.
- Only for the most extraordinary circumstances to protect an individual's privacy is of concern.
- Highly unlikely for Advisory to need an executive session. Used for other Boards like BOS when discussing someone's salary or other private employment information.

The process:

- During a regular meeting, a vote is taken on whether to enter Executive Session. The vote of each Advisory member must be recorded on a roll call vote (regardless of whether the meeting is in person or via videoconference) and entered into the minutes. The Chair must cite the purpose for an executive session, and must state before the executive session if Advisory will reconvene after the executive session.
- All votes taken in executive session must be recorded roll call votes and become a part of the record of the executive session.



Town Meeting Process

What is the Warrant?

- The warrant is a list of all the items to be considered by Town Meeting at Annual Town Meeting or any Special Town Meeting. This will include all budgets, appropriations, bylaw amendments, and citizens' petitions.
- The Select Board issues a Warrant to initiate a Town Meeting.
- The ATM Warrant typically opens within the first two weeks of February , which means the time period for submitting articles to be placed on the warrant begins. The Warrant closes after 1-2 months, after which time, the Select Board publishes the full warrant. Boards, Committees and Citizens' Petitions can be placed on the Warrant.
- Citizens' Petitions must be signed by 10 voters (ATM and 100 voters for STM) and include a fair description of the subject matter of the proposed article.
- Annual appropriations requests (with detailed estimates and explanations for the request) must be presented to Advisory at least 90 days before ATM.



Town Meeting Process

Motions vs Articles?

- Articles appear on the Warrant and cannot be changed once submitted and published.
- Town Meeting votes on *Motions*, not on the articles themselves. The articles put the Town on notice of the subject matters that will be taken up by Town Meeting, but any motion can be offered by the sponsor of the Article or any TMM, so long as they are within the scope of the article (the Moderator makes this determination).
- The motion contains the specific action requested of Town Meeting, and they require second to be acted upon.
- Motions can be changed up to the start of Town Meeting.
- The Town Clerk, Moderator, in conjunction with Town Counsel, collect the motions, advise Committees and Boards on revisions to Motions, and should provide the motions to Advisory.
- Advisory liaisons should encourage their Boards and Committees to provide Advisory with motion language as soon as possible, even if in draft form.



Advisory Voting Process

Advisory's Public Hearing

- About 2-3 weeks before ATM/FTM, Advisory conducts a public hearing to allow for any and all Town residents to comment on the Warrant articles.
- Often, the motions are not drafted by the time of the public hearing, so comments are typically made on the general subject matter as described in the Warrant, rather than on the specific action sought by the proponents of the article.

Advisory Discussion and Vote

- After the Public Hearing, Advisory then meets to discuss and vote on the motions prior to drafting the Report to Town Meeting.
- If the final motions are not completed, then Advisory can postpone their vote on those articles.
- Advisory will rely on the background presentations, motions, and other materials provided by the Boards and Committees in order to discuss the various aspects of each Motion.
- When voting, it is not necessary for the Chairman to read the entire Motion, as some may contain lengthy pages of bylaw changes, etc. As long as the motion for favorable action references the motion and warrant article, Advisory can properly vote.
- If any motion voted on by Advisory is changed before Town Meeting, the Chair will determine whether the changes are significant enough to require a new vote. If, for example, an appropriations request is changed by only a small fraction of the original motion, or is reduced after a favorable recommendation, Advisory may not need to re-vote.



Advisory Voting Process

The Budget

- The Omnibus budget is often the last motion to be finalized.
- Prior to the Public Hearing, Advisory should get the Town-Wide Financial Plan and the Five Year Capital Plan for review.
- Advisory makes a recommendation and vote on the Omnibus budget, which includes the majority of the individual Board and Committee budgets for the Town.
- No later than December, the Select Board chooses a guideline for an increase in the Town budget over the prior FY, usually between 0 to 2.5-3.5%.
- For each department's budget, Advisory takes a separate vote, expressing its support (or lack of support) for each department's budget. Advisory only recommends action on each department in the Omnibus Budget.



Advisory Voting Process

Quirky Motions for Advisory

- Can Advisory amend/correct Warrant article motions?
 - Yes Advisory has authority to amend the language of any motion that will be presented to Town Meeting. However, Advisory can suggest, through its discussion and questions, that the proponents of the article revise their motion(s).
- Vote to rescind prior vote
 - If, after Advisory has voted on its recommendations, new information is provided that might impact the vote, Advisory can vote to rescind the prior vote and then discuss and vote on the motion with the new information.
 - A vote to rescind would also be proper if the proponents amended their motion after Advisory's initial discussion and vote.
- Motion to Table
 - If, during Advisory's discussion of a particular motion (after the motion has been made but before voting), additional information might be useful or questions need to be answered, an Advisory member can move to table the discussion to a future meeting to allow for more information to be gathered.
- Motion to [almost anything that is needed]
 - During the voting process or during any regular meeting, a member can bring a motion for almost anything that they deem necessary.



Advisory Voting Process

Motions to Amend

- On the floor of Town Meeting, any Town Meeting Member can move to amend the motion that has been presented on the floor during discussion.
- Non-substantive amendments may be accepted by the proponent as a Friendly Amendment, which would not require any discussion or vote by Advisory.
- Substantive Amendments require Advisory to have a discussion and vote on the Amendment so that Advisory can provide a recommendation to Town Meeting.
 - During in-person ATM/STMs, Advisory gathers at the front of the room to discuss the Amendment and vote. Immediately after, the Chair provides Advisory's considerations and recommendation.
 - During virtual ATM/STMs, Advisory connects on a conference call to discuss the Amendment and vote.



The Book

Report to Town Meeting

- In January or February before ATM, the process to get the Book together begins in earnest.
- Typically, the Advisory Chairman and Advisory's Administrator work together to coordinate drafting the Book with the various liaisons.
- Liaisons should work with their Board(s)/Committee(s) to draft a background section for their warrant article(s). The Board/Committee should be primarily responsible for drafting, with input from the liaison.
- Liaisons are responsible for drafting Advisory's considerations, which include any and all discussion points that Advisory brought up at any time about the subject of a particular warrant. The considerations do not need to be limited to the discussion that occurs during the meeting where we vote. Although it is permissible for your Board/Committee to review the considerations, the Liaison should make sure the considerations accurately and completely reflect Advisory's discussion.



The Book

Report to Town Meeting

- The Book must be delivered to TMMs at least 2 days before ATM/STM.
- Printing take at least a 2 day.
- Final draft typically submitted at least 2 days before ATM/STM.
- Advisory's Secretary and Admin are responsible for managing edits and putting the final version together, with the assistance of the Chair, and any other Advisory members that the Secretary enlists for help.
- There are no rules on what to include in the Book, other than to report the numerical vote.
- TMMs often rely solely on the Book for their voting decisions, so Advisory should endeavor to provide as much information as possible, including the questions, controversies and debates that Advisory engaged in or identified during the presentations, public hearing, discussions and votes.



More Information

Resources:

- ATFC Advisory Handbook
- Advisory Committee Policies
- The Budget website
(<https://www.templetonma.gov/home/pages/annual-town-meeting-may-12-2021>)
- Town Bylaws (<https://ecode360.com/TE3586/laws/LF1347074.pdf>)
- Past Town Meeting Material (current and archives, including links to the Advisory Reports and Budget Books)