



*Town of*  
**North Attleborough**  
*Massachusetts*

# **RTM Orientation**

## **for Recently Elected or Appointed Members**

**Presented by**  
**RTM Coordinating Committee**  
**12/5/2011**



## Allowed Forms of Government in MA

- Open Town Meeting (e.g. Mansfield/Foxboro/Plainville)
  - Only form allowed for towns with less than 6,000 residents
  - Registered voters are the legislature and selectmen are the executive branch
  - North had this form of government until 1974
- **Representative Town Meeting** (e.g. North Attleboro/Seekonk/Walpole)
  - Allowed for towns with at least 6,000 residents
  - RTM members are the legislature and selectmen are the executive branch
- Town Administrator/Manager and Council (e.g. Franklin/Randolph)
  - Allowed for towns with at least 12,000 residents
  - Council constitutes both executive policy and legislature
- Mayor/Council (e.g. Attleboro/Taunton)
  - Allowed for towns with at least 12,000 residents
  - Mayor is executive and Council is legislature



# North Town Government

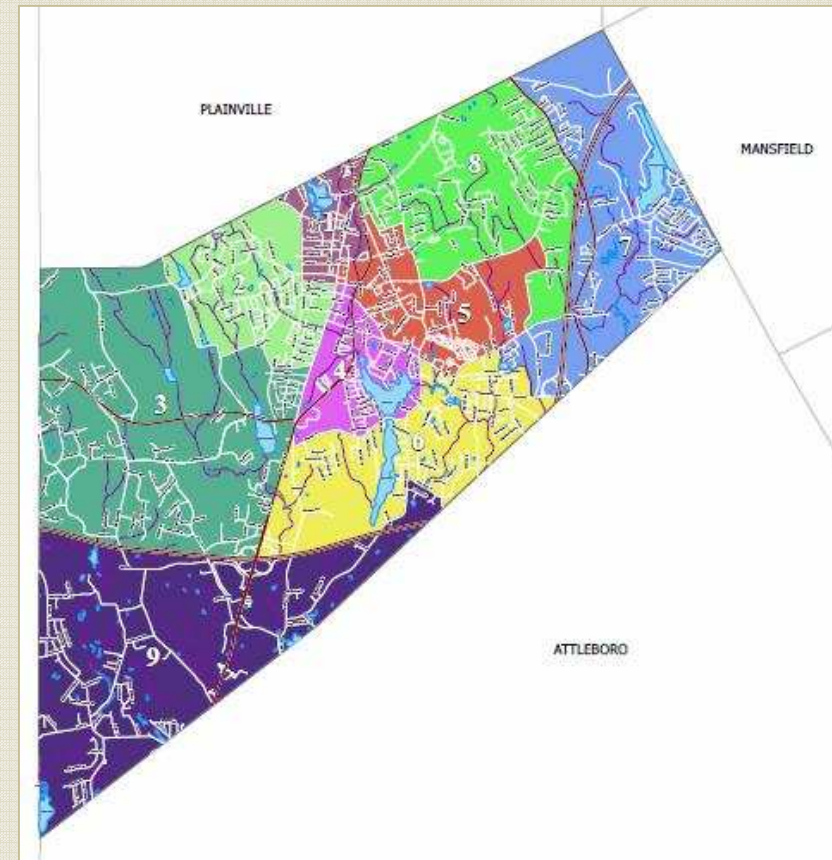
- **Legislature**
  - RTM of 135 authorized members
  - 9 Precincts with 15 members each
  - Elected by precinct for staggered 3-year terms
  - Elected Town Moderator presides at meetings and appoints Fincom
- **Executive**
  - Board of Selectmen (BoS) – governs all areas not specifically assigned elsewhere
  - 5 Selectmen elected for staggered 3-year terms
  - Town Administrator reports to BoS and executes their policies and decisions
  - Other elected officials: Town Clerk, Town Treasurer, etc.
- **Many other Executive Boards**
  - Elected boards are independent of the BoS (e.g. School Committee and DPW)
  - Appointed boards are appointed and removed by BoS (e.g. Cable Commission, Fire Commission)
- **Organizing Law**
  - Town By-laws and Mass General Laws



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## North RTM

- Structure
  - 9 precincts
  - 15 members per precinct
  - 135 total members
- Elections
  - Staggered 3-year terms
  - Election held annually in April
  - Nomination by 10 registered voters of the precinct
- Vacancies
  - May be filled by precinct caucus at Annual or Semi Annual Town Mtg
  - All seats so filled or otherwise open appear on next election ballot





## Role of RTM

- Approves operating budgets and capital expenditures
  - RTM has visibility to the major “line item” level within departments
  - Exception: by MA law, school budget is single line item
- Approves Town By-law additions and changes
- Approves zoning changes and street acceptances
- Approves union contracts (yes/no only)
  - Contract details are negotiated by the BoS
  - By MA law, Teacher/School contracts negotiated by School Committee and not subject to RTM approval



## Common Abbreviations and Acronyms

- RTM = Representative Town Meeting
- BoS or BOS = Board of Selectmen
- FinCom or FinComm= Finance Committee
- RTMCC = RTM Coordinating Committee
- IP = Indefinite Postponement
- ATM = Annual Town Meeting
- SATM = Semi-Annual Town Meeting
- STM = Special Town Meeting
- FY = Fiscal Year
- CY = Calendar Year
- MGL = Massachusetts General Laws. Standing laws passed by the legislature.
- CMR = Code of Massachusetts Regulations. Administrative laws created by the executive branch as authorized by the legislature.



## Terminology

- **Article** – an item to be voted upon at a town meeting
- **Warrant** – the list of all article to be considered at a town meeting
- **FinCom Booklets** – a compendium of all articles on a warrant along with the Fincom recommendation and some supporting documents
- **Fiscal Year** – the town’s financial budget year, which runs from July 1 to June 30. It is named according to the calendar year in which it *ends*. E.g. FY 2015 ends on June 30, 2015. Do NOT call it a “physical” year.
- **Free Cash** – funds appropriated for a prior fiscal year, but never used. The Commonwealth must audit and “certify” the amount of Free Cash before it may be reallocated in the current fiscal year. At the SATM, RTM typically appropriates some Free Cash and transfers the balance to the Stabilization Fund.
- **Stabilization Fund** – a general purpose reserve fund of the Town, sometimes referred to as the “rainy day fund” or “savings account”. Removing funds from the Stabilization Fund requires a 2/3 vote.



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## **Terminology (continued)**

- **Recognized by the Moderator** – means the same as “called on” by the Moderator
- **General Court** – official name of the state legislature in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts



## RTM Coordinating Committee

- Consists of the Chair and Vice Chair from each precinct, who are elected at the ATM caucus
- RTMCC members typically elect a Chair, Vice Chair, Treasurer, and Secretary and may appoint sub-committees
- Primary functions of the RTMCC are:
  - Recruitment
  - Orientation of new Members
  - FinCom booklet and supporting document distribution
  - Information sharing
  - Town meeting rules not otherwise specified (e.g. seating arrangement)
  - Critique of town meetings
  - See RTM Handbook pages 7 – 9 for more detail
- Chairman of the RTMCC is only RTM Member authorized to seek opinion from the Town Counsel



## Town Meetings – When?

- By town by-law RTM meets as follows:
  - Annual Town Meeting (First Monday in June)
  - Semi Annual Town Meeting (Third Monday in October)
  - Special Town Meetings (as called by the BoS or by petition of 200 registered voters)
    - BoS announces the “opening and closing dates” for submission of articles for the warrant
    - The warrant announces the time, date, and location of the meeting
- Articles may be submitted by town departments, officials, boards, committees or by petition of registered voters (10 for ATM or SATM and 100 for STM) or 36 RTM Members for STM



## Town Meetings – FinCom Role

- FinCom reviews all articles on the warrant
  - Holds open meetings where article sponsors may advocate, explain, and defend their article
  - Votes on the recommendation for every article
    - Affirmative recommendations may modify/reduce the request of the sponsor
    - Negative recommendations are called indefinite postponement or “IP”. Indefinite postponement may sound indeterminate or innocuous, but actually means the same thing as “permanently defeat”.
  - Publishes their recommendations at least 14 days before the town meeting
- FinCom members
  - Appointed by the Town Moderator for 3-year terms
  - May not hold any other position in town except RTM



## Town Meetings – Night of Meeting

- Town Clerk notifies each RTM Member by postal mail of date, time, and location of meeting. Typically:
  - Meetings are held at Middle School Cafetorium
  - Start at 7:00 PM on a Monday night
    - 6:30 PM for ATM and any meeting where precincts will be required to caucus to appoint Members or elect Chair/Vice Chair
  - Be sure to sign in and wear your badge. Sign-ins needed to confirm quorum and badges required to vote.
- Sit with your precinct – this is a by-law!
- Moderator calls the meeting to order at 7:00 PM or later if the Town Clerk has not yet declared a quorum is present
- Meetings require a vote of RTM to go past 10:00 PM and seldom do
- Meetings that continue over to another night continue on Wednesday/Monday/W/M, etc. until all articles have been considered and voted



## Town Meetings – Order of Business

- Call to order
- Pledge of allegiance/Moment of silence
- Reading of Warrant notification
- Preliminary motions
  - Bourne Amendment
  - Super-Majority Vote Procedural Rule
- Consideration of Articles
  - In numerical order unless voted otherwise
- Recess (sometimes)
- Adjourn:
  - Sine Die (Latin for “without [another] day”)
  - To Fixed Time and Place (e.g. to Wednesday 7PM at NAMS Cafetorium)



## Town Meetings – Speaking

- Strictly optional. Watch replays on North TV to find your style.
- Speakers must be recognized by the moderator:
  - Preference given to RTM Members
  - Town officials with information
  - Town residents at the discretion of the Moderator
- **INTRODUCE YOURSELF EVERY TIME WITH NAME & PRECINCT**
- Speakers limited to 10 minutes per recognition
  - Speakers limited to once per article if other Members have not had a chance to speak
  - Any speaker recognized by the Moderator may cede the to a constituent who wishes to speak
- Speaker should address their comment & questions to the Moderator. E.g. “Madam Moderator, I believe that ...” or “Madam Moderator, can anyone tell me ....?”
- Personal attacks at named individuals are out of order
- Address other by title rather than by name. E.g. “I disagree with my colleague from Precinct X” , “as the Town Administrator has stated ...”



## Town Meetings – Motion Mechanics

- FinCom Chairman makes motion for affirmative action or IP on each article. FinCom motions are automatically seconded
- If the FinCom recommends an “IP”, the IP must be overturned before any affirmative action from the floor may be considered
- Different types of votes require different majorities to pass and vote recording methods (majority vs. 2/3, show of hands vs. roll call) as governed by MGL
- See RTM Handbook pages 12 – 18 for more details
- The parliamentary conduct of town meeting is governed by “Town Meeting Time” and not “Roberts Rules of Order”



## RTM Duties

- Good attendance at Town Meetings
  - If you do not intend to fulfill your term, consider resigning by 12/31 so that your seat may be open at the annual April election
- Vote at meetings to represent the interests of your precinct
- Prepare using a combination of sources:
  - Review “Warrant Articles” in advance
  - View information sessions on North TV
    - Town meeting preview
    - Fincom meetings
  - Talk to friends and colleagues on RTM
- Be open to constituent input
- RTM members are invited to optional information sessions regarding town affairs
- Stay informed via the *Sun Chronicle*, *Free Press*, and North TV