



Town of Arlington

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April 23, 2020

Dear Town Meeting Members and Arlingtonians:

As you know our Annual Town Meeting is currently scheduled for Monday, April 27, 2020. It is certain that I will Recess and Continue Town Meeting, until May 27, 2020, pursuant to M.G.L. c. 39, Sec. 10A. Due to Governor Baker's closing of public and private schools through the remainder of the school year, it appears that the State of Emergency - stay at home advisory will still be in full or partial effect. If that is so, and the fact that our election is scheduled for June 6, 2020, in late May, I will again be postponed Town Meeting, until late June.

On April 21st I met virtually with: the Chair of the Select Board, Diane Mahon; Town Manager, Mr. Chapdelaine; Town Counsel, Attorney Heim; Chair of the Finance Committee, Alan Tosti; Director Department of Planning and Community Development, Jennifer Raitt; Deputy Town Manager, Sandy Pooler; Facilities Department Interim Director, James Feeney; and, Chair of the CPA Committee, Eric Helmuth, to plan this year's Town Meeting in these unusual times.

We all agreed that if Town Meeting is to held this Spring at all, that it would be a truncated meeting held in late June at an outdoor venue. We are still exploring the logistics and first must determine if it will be safe to do so. The full scope of the logistics, including meeting venue, seating arrangements, check-in procedures, electronic voting system, distribution of materials (or not), measures to be taken by attendees (e.g., masks, gloves, social distancing, bathrooms), signage/notices, maximum exposure time, and so on are not finalized. We will be looking to the State and our own Health and Human Services Department for guidance.

As for the Warrant itself, it is envisioned that we will only take up necessary Financial Articles, including Budgets, Capital Budgets, Bonding Articles, CPA and CDBG. These would be handled with a series of consent agenda votes. The Redevelopment Board is expected to vote at its next meeting that it will not be pursuing any of its zoning articles and the Select Board is likewise expected to vote at its next meeting to move No Action on all of its nonfinancial Articles.

I will be reaching out to those citizens who submitted the 27 Ten Registered Voter Articles to gain their consent to having their Articles also be acted upon as No Action. Both the Select Board and the Redevelopment Board are expected to vote to take the following action on these Articles at their next meetings: 1) These Articles will be placed upon the next Warrant, either a Special Town Meeting or Annual Meeting by the Select Board as a courtesy to the proponent; and, 2) The Articles will not be opposed on technical grounds. Of course, both the Select Board and the Redevelopment Board reserve their right to oppose the Articles on any and all other grounds.

As for the conduct of the Town Meeting itself, I will be issuing a full set of revised Moderator Rules for this year alone. I am currently anticipating requiring that all Board, Commission and Committee reports are to be submitted in written form and electronically distributed to the Town Meeting Members prior to the meeting for questions and comments. Questions and comments from the TMM, as well as any proposed amendments, will also be required to be submitted in advance so that written responses can be provided and distributed in advance. The goal will be to hold our Town Meeting in an efficient manner, while complying with safe social distancing recommendations.

There is currently a Bill before the Legislature that would allow for some form of "Virtual Town Meeting" (VTM), but its status and the form of the legislation is not finalized. Currently there is no provision in the law or our Bylaws that allows for VTM. The Massachusetts Moderator's Association is also exploring how one could conduct such a VTM. I am forming a Moderators Committee to explore how such a VTM could work in Arlington, including issues such as:

- 1) Managing speakers and questions from the floor.
- 2) Muting the audience to avoid interruptions while enabling points of order.
- 3) Capturing amendments in writing.
- 4) Voting on amendments.
- 5) Inclusion of Town Meeting Representatives who are challenged by technology.
- 6) Verifying TMMs identify.
- 7) Conducting and verifying the actual votes.
- 8) Staffing the meeting.

If you have experience in conducting large virtual meeting, IT security and systems and are interested in collaborating on this committee please contact me by email with your experience and CV.

I have faith in all of our Town's public officials, institutions, and our Health and Human Services Department as they continue to monitor the spread of the coronavirus and make the best decisions for the safety of all our residents. By taking all necessary precautions now we can all do our part to slow the spread of the virus, reduce the number of people infected, and avoid overwhelming our health care system.

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By Electronic Mail

2020 Resident Warrant Article Petitioners

2020 Town Committee and Commission
Warrant Article Petitioners

Town Meeting Members

Re: 2020 Town Meeting Non-Essential Non-Financial Warrant Articles

Dear Warrant Article Proponents, Committees, Commissions and Town Meeting Members:

As you know, the COVID-19 State of Emergency poses an unprecedented need for social distancing precautions and adjustments to government operations. The Town's Select Board has already postponed the Town Election until June 6, 2020. I anticipate that Town Meeting will be postponed until June 15th at the earliest, and that it is unlikely to look or work like any Town Meeting in recent memory.

Throughout the State of Emergency and this Town Meeting season, I have been in consultation with members of the Massachusetts Moderators Association on a variety of ideas for conducting Town Meetings in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis. The overwhelming opinion has been to dramatically modify standard procedures either by hosting "virtual" meetings, holding town meetings in large, outdoor spaces or not holding an Annual Town Meeting at all. Among other issues, as it currently stands our bylaws contain in-person quorum requirements that could place some of our Town Meeting Members in the difficult position of choosing between participating in important discussions about our Town's laws and governance and protecting their personal health to the maximum extent feasible. In any such scenario however, it is highly unlikely that the Town can safely and effectively debate 83 Warrant Articles.¹

After speaking with the chairs or representatives of the Select Board, ARB, Finance Committee, the Community Preservation Act Committee, the Town Manager, and the Town Counsel, as well as our public health staff, the collective recommendation is to proceed with a shortened Town Meeting, which will only address financial articles in the most condensed number of votes feasible by consent agenda. This effectively means that the Select Board and ARB will vote or re-vote "No Action" on all non-essential non-financial articles, including their own articles. In turn, I urge and fully expect them to also vote to place all resident-petitioned articles on the Warrant for the next town meeting following the end of the State of Emergency, so that resident petitioners will not be required to collect signatures again and further so that any zoning amendments are not effectively "blocked" for two years by a no action vote.

¹ For example, while the Legislature is considering a bill to allow for remote or "virtual" town meetings, a six or seven session "Zoom-style" Virtual Town Meeting with hundreds of participants reviewing town bylaw or zoning bylaw amendments presents significant challenges for proponents, members, Town staff and the Moderator.

2020 Town Meeting Non-Essential Warrant Articles

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Based upon the continuing need for public safety precautions, the Select Board, the Redevelopment Board, and the Finance Committee are expected to take these votes on the 2020 Warrant Articles at their upcoming meetings in support of conducting an abbreviated 2020 Annual Town Meeting where only the essential financial articles will be moved forward for positive action. As the Town Moderator, I write to urge your support for such a plan of action, and in turn, to request those public bodies to support the return of all other articles, resident - petitioned as well as those submitted by the several Committees and Commissions, to the next scheduled Town Meeting Warrant without prejudice, so that they can be debated and voted upon consistent with our usual practices.

Allow me to emphasize that it is not my view or any of the Town Boards and Commissions' views that non-essential articles are unimportant. To the contrary, because they are important, I support a plan to fully and equitably debate these articles in the manner to which we are accustomed rather than ask Town Meeting Members to try to navigate untested forums for discussions on this scale. I respectfully urge your support as well.

These measures are being taken to minimize the unintended spread of COVID 19 and your cooperation in keeping your fellow citizens safe is requested and appreciated. I thank you for your cooperation.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

John D. Leone
Moderator