



***Town of Dennis***  
**Town Clerk's Office**

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## **HOW TO BRING A CITIZEN PETITION ARTICLE TO TOWN MEETING**

### **What is a Petition Article?**

A Petition Article is a proposal brought to Town Meeting by a citizen or group of citizens. The petition can be on any topic that is relevant to action by Dennis Town government. In the past there have been petition articles dealing with zoning, expenditures, environment and social justice issues.

### **Before Bringing a Petition Article to Town Meeting**

Be aware that a petition article is a lot of work for you and may create work for Boards. It should be used judiciously. Consider if there are other means to the end you seek. Try to work with the appropriate board or committee and be ready to compromise before embarking on a petition article. Gaining support for a 'minority' position beyond the scope of the board or committee's planned work may be difficult but it can still be important to bring a proposal before Town Meeting for discussion and action. Even if defeated, it can lay the groundwork and influence future decisions.

### **Before Obtaining Signatures**

Please follow the check-list below:

- Draft your Petition Article.
- Meet with the proper Board or Committee that has jurisdiction over the subject matter in order to seek feedback, advice and support. The board or committee may agree that the issue needs to be addressed and may decide to undertake the process of proposing and supporting it. This outcome will make a petition unnecessary. If the board will not propose the idea itself, submitting a petition is an option still available. However, it is important that this process be started early enough to leave sufficient time for review and modifications before the article is submitted.
- Bring your draft to the Select Board's Office or Town Clerk's Office for proper formatting
- \*\*Once signatures are obtained, bring your petition to the Town Clerk's Office no later than 4:00 pm 7 weeks prior to an Annual or Special Town Meeting. Town By-Law, ch 40-8.

### **\*\* Obtaining the Necessary Signatures**

The number of valid signatures needed is significantly different depending on the type of Town Meeting to which you bring the article.

- Annual (spring) Town Meetings require only 10 signatures.
- Special Town Meetings held in the fall, or any other Special Town Meeting, require 100 signatures to submit a petition article.

- To call a Special Town Meeting or a Special Town Meeting within a previously scheduled Town Meeting, 200 signatures are required or 20% of the total number of registered voters, whichever is less. The Special Town Meeting must be held no later than 45 days after the Select Board received the request
- Please proof your petitions before submittal to the Town Clerk. The petition now has statutory requirements that cannot be changed. Once a petition has been submitted, it cannot be withdrawn, and must be presented at Town Meeting.

### **Getting a Petition Article on the Town Meeting Warrant**

- 1.) Deadlines for petition articles are set by the Select Board (508-760-6148).

Note: Deadlines for the Zoning Board of Appeals and the Planning Board have a different process and time line. Please contact the Planning Department at (508) 760-6119.

- 2.) Request Petition article forms from the Town Clerk's office on the first floor of Town Hall.
- 3.) Prepare a petition with a clear statement of intent of the petitioners, specifically, the exact wording for which you seek approval at Town Meeting. The wording cannot be changed once signatures are obtained. Print or type your proposed article in the space provided on the form. If you have multiple pages for petition signatures, each petition paper must have the same wording for the article. If wording varies between petitions, they may need to be presented as separate articles at Town Meeting. Sample articles and motions can be found in the Dennis Annual Town Reports for any previous year.
- 4.) Attach the petition to a clipboard along with a pen. If others are helping you get signatures you will want to prepare several. The information on the forms must be readable, complete and correct to facilitate validation of the petition. Seek signatures from Dennis registered voters only. Sometimes people will mistakenly say they are registered to vote within town, so it is wise to get more signatures than the minimum amount required. Addresses must be filled in legibly for each signer. Each voter signature & address will be verified by the Board of Registrars.
- 5.) When sufficient signatures are collected, turn them in to the Town Clerk's Office where the name of the person delivering the petition will be attached to the Article. If the petition is from a citizen group it may be identified with the article but the Select Board's Office can choose to use the name of the person delivering the petition. This person does not have to be the one presenting the article at the Warrant Review or Town Meeting, but the presenter must be a Dennis Registered Voter. The Moderator should be kept informed of any change.

### **Informing Town Meeting Members About the Article**

- 1.) Talk to people as you seek signatures, knock on doors and make phone calls to potential supporters.
- 2.) Should you put together a flyer, you must get Moderator approval before handing out at the entrance of Town Meeting.
- 3.) The Select Board will review petition articles and may take a position whether or not to support them. Petitioners are expected to attend these meetings to explain their article.

### **Presenting the Article at Town Meeting**

Petitioners will be expected to attend Town Meeting to present a motion to their article. The Select Board will need to be informed ahead of time of the following:

- Who will present the article
- Who will make the motion (must be a Dennis Registered Voter)
- The wording of the motion. **The exact wording of the motion should be given to the Town Clerk prior to the Town Meeting.**

While it is not possible to change the wording of the article once signatures have been obtained, it is possible to adjust the motion, (consult the Moderator ahead of time), as long as it is 'within the scope of the original'. Once the article is presented, the Moderator will ask for the motion and a second. Then he will ask if there is any discussion. You will then have time to discuss the article. Should you need visual technology, you will need to inform the Moderator as well.

For more information please visit: <http://www.sec.state.ma.us/cis/cistwn/twnidx.htm>