



April 14, 2015

To: Town Meeting Members,

As Town Moderator since 2008 I have made a concerted effort with others to improve our Town Meeting, balancing the importance of a full discussion of complex issues with the desire not to get bogged down in trivial details. We have definitely made considerable progress but I -- and many Town Meeting Members who have talked to me -- have become increasingly concerned by those occasions in which a few Members choose to ask a long series of questions, often in a manner more resembling a courtroom than a Town Meeting, many of which could be answered beforehand. Because it limits the time others may use to speak, this practice can be disrespectful to the vast majority of Town Meeting Members.

In order to enhance the quality and pace of Town Meeting discussions while providing an opportunity to hear as many Members as possible, I will be implementing the following changes at the upcoming Annual Town Meeting:

- Establish an informal five-minute limit on speeches by Town Meeting Members. This will allow more Members to speak and cut down on repetition by requiring speakers to focus their remarks.
- Limit each speaker to an initial question and one follow-up question to enable the meeting to move more smoothly. Materials are sent to Town Meeting Members in advance, giving them ample time to get most questions answered before coming to Town Meeting. Town Meeting Members with questions may email them before the meeting to: selectmen@belmont-ma.gov. The Town Administrator's office will forward the questions to the appropriate Town official for response.
- Honor the current rule requiring that all Member questions be asked through the Moderator, a common Massachusetts Town Meeting guideline. While I have reminded Members of this rule, I have sometimes refrained from strict enforcement. However, this procedure is important to ensure civil discourse. Henceforth, if Town Meeting Members have a question, I will request that they always address the question to me and I will direct it to the appropriate person.

Like you, I respect our democratic processes and work hard to make our Town Meeting as effective as possible. In implementing these changes, I am always open to making adjustments as needed.

Thank you for your understanding and your cooperation.

Mike

Michael J. Widmer
Moderator