

Town Government 101:

How Medway Works and How You Can Help

Presented by



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The Purpose of This Event

The Medway Democratic Town Committee is pleased and honored to host tonight's presentation on "Town Government 101: How Medway Works and How You Can Help." We thank you all for coming here tonight.

Community service and participation in Town affairs are great civic virtues. We who do the Town's work feel a sense of ownership of the Town and its various institutions, and kinship with our fellow citizens. We want to help other citizens feel that same sense of ownership and kinship.

This will be a "how-to" session intended to outline the process by which Medway citizens govern themselves. Specific Town policies or actions, or specific issues facing the Town, are not the focus of our attention.

The panelists are here tonight to share their experience in Town government, shed light on what their committees do and how they do it, and discuss how other citizens can help them in their work.

We hope you enjoy tonight's event. We particularly hope you leave tonight with a strengthened desire to take part in Medway's version of the great, ongoing American experiment in self-government.

Some definitions....

Citizen (noun), from the Old French word *cîte*, “city”

1. An inhabitant of a city or town, especially one entitled to certain rights and privileges, like the right to vote, to participate in public affairs, to serve in office.
2. A civilian as distinguished from a specialized servant of a town, state or nation.

Amateur (noun), from the Latin word *amare*, “to love”

1. A person who does something for pleasure, not for money; a nonprofessional.
2. A person who is somewhat unskillful in an art or science.

Volunteer (noun), from the Latin word *voluntarius*, “one who volunteers”

1. A person who offers himself for service by choice and free will; especially one who does so for no pay.
2. A person who renders a service while having no legal concern or interest.

Professional (noun), from the Latin word *professus*, “one who professes”

1. A person who performs or engages in an activity for pay, especially one requiring advanced training or experience.

Government (noun), from the Latin word *gubernare*, “to steer”

1. The exercise of administrative control over a town, state or nation.
2. The body of people holding executive or administrative office in a town, state or nation.

Good citizens are true amateurs, volunteering to work with other volunteers and professionals to perform the duties of government.

Town Government Overview

The **Town of Medway** is governed by its **citizens**, who are the registered voters in the town.

The citizens have the responsibility to create institutions and mechanisms of self-government. These institutions and mechanisms include boards and committees of citizens, regular meetings of the citizenry, administrative agencies and departments with hired staff, and other official bodies.

The citizens also have the right and the duty to participate in those institutions and mechanisms. They can do so by volunteering for election or appointment to unpaid office, or by gaining a paid professional staff position. They can also simply inform themselves about issues of importance, and take part in public discussion, debate and decision-making regarding those issues.

Active, voluntary participation in the affairs of the town is an old principle – timeless, in fact – that keeps us in touch with our history and traditions, deepens our bonds with each other, and helps us think coherently about times to come.

Active participation also helps teach future generations how to keep these traditions and bonds and practices alive for their own use in the future.

Town Charter

At Town Meeting in 2008, the citizens of Medway created a **Town Charter** to codify the current mechanisms of self-government.

The **Charter** states that “The inhabitants of Medway shall continue to be a body corporate and politic with perpetual succession under the name ‘town of Medway,’” and provides that all legislative powers of the town shall be exercised by a Town Meeting open to all voters. It further provides that the citizens:

- Shall hold at least two Town Meetings each year for the purpose of discussing Town operations and policies, and discussing and approving proposed bylaws, resolutions, operating budgets, and other actions as are set out in the Town Meeting Warrant;
- Shall elect a Board of Selectmen as the chief executive authority for the Town;
- Shall elect a School Committee as the chief executive authority for the School District;
- Shall elect a Town Moderator to run Town Meeting;
- Shall, through the Board of Selectmen, the School Committee, their designees, or through votes at Town Meeting, create subordinate boards, committees and functions to facilitate Town government, including:
 - A Finance Committee
 - A Town Clerk
 - A Town Administrator
 - Other committees or boards as deemed necessary

The Charter also spells out terms of elections, appointments and other aspects of Town governance and operation.

Town Meeting

The **Town Meeting** is the chief mechanism of self-government in Medway. It is an open, public meeting held at least twice a year to allow the citizens to discuss the state of the Town, and take actions to maintain and improve the Town. Town Meeting is a legislative session with an agenda (the **Warrant**) containing specific items (**Articles**) put forward by the citizens and their designees, which are the only items that may be acted on. The Town Meeting Warrant is the culmination of months of work by Town and School District **Boards, Committees** and **administrative staff**. It represents the financial and regulatory direction those boards, committees and administrators believe will enhance Town operations and benefit the Town's citizens. The Warrant is published well in advance of Town Meeting so citizens can read it and prepare for the Meeting.

Town Meeting is run by an elected **Moderator**. A **quorum** of at least 100 voting citizens must be present at the start of the Meeting in order for it, and any decisions made during it, to be legal and binding. During the Meeting, the articles in the Warrant are presented for consideration through **motions** made by the **Finance Committee** or other citizens. The citizens discuss the Articles and motions, amend them if needed, and vote on whether to approve them. Approved Warrant articles become binding decisions for the Town and its citizens. Articles not approved may be brought for reconsideration at subsequent Town Meetings.

Citizens can be most effective at Town Meeting when they pay attention to or participate in the development of the Warrant, inform themselves about the Articles, and are prepared to debate and vote on them.

School and Municipal Operations

Town operations are generally thought of as either **School** or **Municipal** activities.

The Board of Selectmen is the **chief executive** of the Town.

School activities are under the purview of the School Committee and relate to the operation of the Medway **School District** to educate the Town's children. Specific **duties** of the School Committee include:

- Having the power to select and to terminate the **superintendent of schools**
- Reviewing and approving **budgets** for public education in the district
- Establishing **educational goals and policies** for the schools in the district consistent with the requirements of law and statewide goals and standards established by the board of education.

Municipal activities are under the purview of the Board of Selectmen, and relate to all other aspects of Town governance and operations. Specific **duties** of the Board of Selectmen include:

- Appointing a **Town Administrator** with responsibility for staffing and operating Town departments
- Creating **boards, committees** and **other bodies** as directed by voters at Town Meeting
- Working with the School Committee, Finance Committee and other bodies to oversee Town functions
- Creating all Town Meeting Warrants
- Developing the annual Town **budget** and submitting it for Town Meeting approval
- Exercising other authority as given to it by voters at Town Meeting.

Town Government: Boards

Town Boards are staffed by citizen volunteers either through **election** by their fellow citizens or through **appointment** by an elected official. Boards generally **create policies, regulations or by-laws** governing activities in the Town, and may **provide oversight** of Town operations. They have been created through the Charter, or by acts of Town Meeting, to address specific needs. Among these boards are:

Elected Boards

- **Board of Selectmen:** chief executive authority of the Town; responsible for overall Town government
- **School Committee:** chief executive authority for the School District
- **Planning and Economic Development Board:** regulates zoning and building activity; proposes by-laws for Town Meeting approval; reviews private development proposals for by-law and regulatory compliance
- **Board of Health:** sets policies and regulations for public health; oversees implementation by Town Health Agent
- **Board of Library Trustees:** has custody and management of the Town Library and its property
- **Housing Authority:** studies Town housing needs and develops plans for affordable housing
- **Park and Recreation Commission:** conducts and promotes Town recreation activities and programs
- **Water and Sewer Commission:** sets policies for the provision of water and sewer services; oversees implementation by the Department of Public Services

Appointed Boards

- **Board of Assessors:** sets policies for the assessment of property for taxation; oversees Town Assessor
- **Conservation Commission:** protects wetlands and other sensitive environments, manage conservation lands
- **Historical Commission:** evaluates historical significance of properties; maintains archives
- **Redevelopment Authority:** sets policies for property redevelopment; reviews projects for compliance
- **Affordable Housing Board:** advocates for and sets policies regarding the development of affordable housing
- **Zoning Board of Appeals:** reviews real estate development plans for compliance with zoning laws

Town Government: Committees

Town **Committees** are generally staffed by citizen volunteers **appointed** by the Board of Selectmen to carry out mandates from Town Meeting or the Board of Selectmen. Committees can create **processes**, perform **evaluations**, propose **actions**, **collaborate** with regional or state entities, **oversee initiatives** or do other work on behalf of the Town. Each committee has its own appointment method. Among the Town committees are:

- **Finance Committee:** Mandated by the Charter; oversees Town financial activity; participates in annual Municipal and School budget development; holds hearings on all Town Meeting Warrant articles and endorses or opposes them; proposes action on warrant articles at Town Meeting
- **Capital Improvement Planning Committee:** assesses the condition of Town capital assets; develops proposals for future investment in Town capital assets
- **Community Preservation Committee:** studies local preservation needs for open space and recreation, historic preservation, and affordable housing; recommends allocations and expenditures related to those needs; is steward of Community Preservation Fund used to pay for those expenditures
- **Design Review Committee:** sets policies, develops regulations, provides oversight related to building design
- **Economic Development Committee:** promotes and facilitates business and economic growth
- **Energy Committee:** advises on energy policy; oversees implementation of Town's Green Communities status
- **Evaluation of Parks, Fields and Recreational Areas Committee:** helps develop park improvement plans
- **Agricultural Committee:** promote and oversee agricultural activity in Town
- **Cultural Council:** promotes and cultivates the arts, humanities and interpretive sciences
- **Open Space Committee:** preserves the Town's rural character; protects undeveloped land, wetlands and surface water bodies, agricultural lands and uses, scenic viewscapes, historic sites and recreation land.
- **Pride Day Committee:** supports and promotes Medway Pride Day

Town Administration

The Medway Town Charter creates a **Town Administrator**, who is the chief administrative officer of the Town with extensive authority and autonomy in managing Municipal departments. The Town Administrator is:

- A full-time salaried professional who meets the qualifications set forth by the Board of Selectmen;
- Is not required to be a citizen of Medway; and
- Is appointed by and reports to the Board of Selectmen.

The Town Administrator is responsible for **staffing and managing** all Municipal departments, **developing** the municipal operating **budget**, and **collaborating** with the Board of Selectmen to develop and implement **long-term Town goals** and strategies. The TA may also be given additional duties by the Board of Selectmen.

The Municipal departments are:

- Public Safety, including police, fire, an emergency medical services;
- Public Services, including water, sewer, solid waste, and highway services;
- Finance, including assessor, treasurer/collector, and accounting services;
- Inspectional Services
- Veterans' Services
- Animal Control
- Council on Aging
- Community and Economic Development
- Communications
- Human Resources (supports both Municipal and School; Reports to Town Administrator)
- Information Technology Management (supports both Municipal and School; Reports to Town Administrator)

School Administration

The Medway Town Charter creates the **School Committee** as the chief executive authority for educational matters.

The School Committee is empowered to hire a **Superintendent of Schools**, who is the chief administrative officer of the School District with extensive authority and autonomy in managing School departments. The Superintendent of Schools is:

- A full-time salaried professional who meets the qualifications set forth by the School Committee;
- Is not required to be a citizen of Medway; and
- Is appointed by and reports to the School Committee.

The School Superintendent is responsible for **staffing and managing** all School departments, **developing** the annual School District operating **budget**, and **collaborating** with the School Committee to develop and implement **long-term educational goals** and strategies.

Town Clerk and Town Moderator

The post of Medway **Town Clerk** is mandated in the Charter. The Town Clerk is an elected professional employee of the Town whose salary is set by a vote of Town Meeting.

The Clerk's responsibilities include:

- Keeping all vital statistics (e.g., births, deaths, marriages) for the Town
- Keeping the Town Seal and sealing Town documents as needed
- Posting notices of public meetings of Town boards and committees in compliance with the Open Meeting Law and other laws
- Administering the oath of office to all Town officeholders
- Granting marriage and other licenses and permits as empowered by Town Meeting or state by-laws
- Supervising and managing all elections and election-related matters (e.g. voter registrations)
- Acting as Clerk of Town Meeting and keeping Town Meeting records
- Performing other duties as set forth in state or Town by-laws

The post of Medway **Town Moderator** is mandated in the Charter, and by statute. The Town Moderator is a citizen volunteer who is elected to preside at Town Meetings.

The Moderator's responsibilities include:

- Regulating the proceedings of Town Meetings
- Deciding questions of order during the Meetings
- Ensuring that proper and accurate records of Town Meeting are kept
- Participating in the appointment of members of some committees
- Performing other duties as assigned by the Charter, Town Meeting, or Town or state by-laws

**So how do these pieces of Town
Government fit together?**

How Boards and Committees Work

Nearly all Town Boards and Committees work in the same way:

- They **abide by** the state **Open Meeting Law** and other laws
- They **develop meeting agendas** based on their committee goals and timetables
- They **hold public meetings** at specified times, at publicly-accessible places, with an agenda that is **posted at Town Hall** and on the Town website a specific number of business days ahead of the meeting
- They must have a majority of their members (**quorum**) present at a meeting in order to take official action
- They must **allow members of the public to attend**, subject to seating availability at the meeting venue
- They may invite **guests** to provide information or other material needed for their discussions
- They may go into **Executive Session**, excluding the general public, to discuss confidential matters
- They discuss the matters on the agenda and may change the agenda as needed
- They **deliberate** on proposed actions related to agenda items, then **vote** to put those actions into effect
- They **keep minutes** of their meetings, vote make the minutes an official record of the meeting, then post the minutes in a publicly-accessible place (e.g., the Town website); they may also broadcast their meetings or record their meetings for later broadcast or review
- They **report** on their work from time to time, to other boards or to the citizens directly
- **They do not** take bribes or favors; conduct committee business in unlawful ways; take official actions without a quorum; meet at a place and time not publicized; convene via e-mail or other means not open to the public; bar people from their meetings without due cause; fail to keep and post meeting minutes; or otherwise violate the Open Meeting Law and other laws

Citizens can be most effective by attending board and committee meetings, informing themselves about the issues under discussion, making thoughtful questions and comments during Public Comment sections of meetings – and volunteering to join the group when a position opens.

How Boards and Committees Work with Town and School Administration

Several boards and committees, like the Board of Selectmen, School Committee, and Board of Health, oversee part or all of Town and School administration. In order to perform that oversight, some or all of the committee members may meet with the relevant professional staff either in public meeting, Executive Session, or during the normal course of the staff work day.

Some boards and committees collaborate with professional staff, rather than oversee them. These boards may invite professional staff to their committee meetings, or may visit administrative offices, to work on particular tasks, gather and share information, and so forth.

Some boards and committees seldom or never interact with administrative staff.

In any case where boards or committees meet with administrative staff or other boards, they must abide by the Open Meeting Law and all other relevant laws and regulations related to posting and recording meetings, allowing public participation, and so forth.

How Citizens Can Participate

Citizens can work most effectively with all parts of Town government by:

- **Taking the responsibility** to participate in Town affairs and government
- **Being curious** about what is going on in the Town
- **Thinking** about the future
- **Informing themselves** about specific issues, opportunities and actions being considered by the various boards and committees
- **Having ideas** about those issues, opportunities and actions
- **Engaging with each other** in discussing those issues, opportunities, and actions
- **Being an effective partner** with other citizens and with those in office
- **Attending** board and committee meetings
- **Communicating** with board and committee members, and professional staff
- **Listening to and learning from** the board and committee members, professional staff, and other advisors
- **Having an open mind** about proposed solutions; **weighing** the pros and cons
- **Advocating** in a civil way, with reasoned arguments, for their points of view
- **Working** for beneficial compromises and consensus
- **Volunteering** to serve, through election or appointment, in Town government
- **Being polite, patient and persistent** – Committees need time to do good work, and must follow their processes to ensure their actions are valid and legal

A Case Study in Cooperation: The Town Budget

How does the Town pay for its activities?

The Town of Medway works on a **fiscal year** that runs from July 1 through June 30. The Town develops a financial plan, or **budget**, during the year prior to the fiscal year covered; that is, during Fiscal Year 2017 (July 2016 – June 2017) the Town developed and approved its Fiscal Year 2018 budget.

The Town budget includes **spending plans** for:

- All **school and municipal departments**
- **Capital investment** in Town roads, buildings and equipment
- Funding **stabilization accounts**
- **Interest payments** on bonds Town has issued
- Payments to **state and regional agencies**
- **Pensions and health care** for municipal and school retirees.

The Town budget also includes **revenue plans** and expectations, including:

- Local **property tax levy** (total amount raised)
- Local **excise taxes, sales taxes, and fees**
- **State aid** for education and roads
- Revenues for Town-provided water, sewer, solid waste, and emergency medical services
- **Grants, interest** and other miscellaneous revenues

By law, **the Town budget must balance**; that is, the total amount spent on all Town functions and requirements must equal the total revenue raised by the Town during the fiscal year.

How does the Town develop its budget?

All Town Municipal and School departments, and many boards and committees, participate in developing the annual budget. The Board of Selectmen leads the budget process by setting overall budget policies and parameters, including assumptions and expectations regarding revenue sources and amounts and regarding spending opportunities and limits for Town departments.

After those policies and expectations are set, the Town Administrator and the municipal department heads, along with related committees and boards, develop the municipal spending plans, and the School Committee and the School Superintendent develop the educational spending plans. The Finance Committee is tasked with reviewing all revenue and spending plans, and publishing an Annual Report which includes a detailed budget breakdown to aid citizens in understanding and adopting the budget during the Spring Annual Town Meeting.

The budget development process is intended to be both transparent and efficient. To that end, the budgets are developed by the school and municipal professional staffs in their general daily work, and by the School Committee, Board of Selectmen and Finance Committee in public meetings, where citizens can audit the committees' work, ask questions and make suggestions.

Citizens can be most effective by attending board and committee meetings early in the budget cycle. Waiting until the budget is presented at Town Meeting to voice objections or suggest changes is too late!

When does the Town develop its budget?

The budget development process starts during the first quarter of Town's Fiscal Year, and continues through budget approval in the fourth quarter of the Fiscal Year.

August-September:	Revenue projection development starts
October:	Budget policies are finalized Revenue and spending expectations are set
November:	Fall Town Meeting is held Municipal and School budgeting starts Capital Improvement Planning Committee begins work
December-February:	Detailed School and Municipal budgets developed Various Committees hold open meetings
March:	Finance Committee starts budget reviews and hearings School Committee finalizes education budget Town Administrator finalizes municipal budget Capital Investment Planning Committee finalizes proposals
April:	Board of Selectmen finalizes overall budget Finance Committee completes budget reviews Finance Committee publishes Annual Report
May:	Annual Spring Town Meeting is held Budget for next fiscal year is adopted