

Bylaw Review Committee
Westford MA 01886

**General Guidelines for Citizens Proposing Amendments or New Bylaws to
Westford's General Bylaws**

These guidelines, written by the Bylaw Review Committee, are intended to help citizens draft and submit Town Meeting warrant articles that propose changes to the Town's general non-zoning bylaws.

Duties of the Bylaw Review Committee

The Bylaw Review Committee will help with any proposed new or amended general, bylaw. The committee's duties are restricted as set forth in Chapter 10: Bylaw Review Committee of the General Bylaws of the Town of Westford. Therefore the committee's official recommendations on any bylaw will deal with the form and consistency of the bylaw amendment in relation to existing Westford General Bylaws and the Town Charter.

Please contact the Bylaw Review Committee through the Town Clerk's office with any questions or comments: 978-692-5515 or townclerk@westfordma.gov.

How to Propose New or Amended Bylaws to Town Meeting

All amendments or additions to the Town bylaws require a Town Meeting vote. For Town Meeting to vote on a bylaw amendment, it must be on the warrant. The warrant is the agenda for a Town Meeting and is developed under the direction of the Board of Selectmen.

There are three ways to propose a new or amended bylaw to Town Meeting.

1. You may ask the Board of Selectmen to sponsor your bylaw.
 - Present your idea at a Selectmen's meeting.
 - Be prepared to justify your bylaw at the meeting. If the Selectmen agree to sponsor your bylaw, they take responsibility for the rest of the process.
2. You may ask a town department, board or committee to sponsor your bylaw.
 - Be prepared to justify your idea to the department head, board or committee.
 - If the department head, board or committee agrees to sponsor your bylaw, they take responsibility for the rest of the process.
3. You can submit the amendment for inclusion on a Town Meeting warrant by petition. Be sure to see the Town Clerk for assistance and the necessary paperwork as you begin this process.

You will need some voter support.

- For an Annual Town Meeting, the Selectmen must put your amendment on the warrant if at least 10 registered voters sign the

petition and you submit the petition to the Selectmen by the first Tuesday in March.

- For a Special Town Meeting, the Selectmen must put your amendment on the warrant if at least 100 registered voters sign the petition and you submit the petition to the Selectmen by the date they set to “close” the warrant, which is the deadline for accepting warrant articles.

Be prepared to present your petition article at the Town Meeting.

Check with the Town Clerk for the deadlines associated with each of these methods. Be sure to allow yourself plenty of time.

Suggestions for Submitting Bylaws

Before writing a new or amended bylaw:

- Make certain you fully understand what the proposed bylaw is intended to accomplish and that a bylaw is the appropriate vehicle to achieve your goals.
- Consult with the town department, committee or board that deals with the proposed subject.
- Check to see if similar bylaws have been adopted in other towns.
- Contact known experts for guidance if appropriate.
- Refine your idea based on feedback and research and consider if a new or amended bylaw is necessary.
- Allow enough time to go through the process.

Writing the bylaw:

A bylaw must be written with precision in order to reduce the amount of confusion, unintentional violations and unfairness that can result from a poorly worded bylaw. A well-drafted bylaw should be clear, concise and readable so that the intent of the bylaw can be understood by the average person.

Some specific considerations:

- Use plain English and simple wording. Avoid vague words.
- Define all terms in the proposed bylaw. Are they consistent with their use in other areas of the General Bylaws?
- Keep proposed bylaw format consistent with existing bylaws.
- Avoid using acronyms or abbreviations.
- Is the scope of the proposed bylaw too broad or too narrow?
- Is the proposed bylaw clear in its intent? Grammatically correct?
- Does the bylaw contradict any existing bylaw or local codes, the Town Charter, or Massachusetts General Laws?

Meeting with the Bylaw Review Committee:

Once the proposed bylaw is written, it is strongly recommended that you contact the Bylaw Review Committee and meet with them before submitting it to the Selectmen. The committee will discuss the form and consistency (not the content) of the bylaw amendment with you.

Submitting your petition article:

- Submit the proposed bylaw and any related information to the Westford Town Clerk.

Include in the submittal:

1. Name of person or board submitting bylaw
2. Contact name
3. Contact information
4. The bylaw
5. Statement of reason, clarification and history of proposed bylaw
6. Statement of where you believe the bylaw should be included within the General Bylaws
 - For a bylaw amendment: Clearly state the bylaw being modified and where the proposed changes should be located
 - For a new bylaw: State the title, section and any other information needed to identify where to place the new bylaw within the existing General Bylaws.

After Submitting Your Petition Article

The Selectmen will forward your petition to the Bylaw Review Committee. The committee will review the proposed bylaw in a public meeting for its form and consistency with existing General Bylaws of the Town of Westford. It is strongly recommended that you attend the committee meeting.

The committee will not make any recommendations with regard to the content of the bylaw.

The committee will inform you of its decision and recommendations and will forward the decision and recommendations to the Board of Selectmen.

Definitions

Articles: The agenda items for a Town Meeting. Articles can either be very general or very detailed.

Petition: By legal definition a written application from a person or persons to some governing body or public official asking that some authority be exercised to grant relief, favors or privileges. For bylaw purposes, a citizens' bylaw proposal signed by the required number of certified voters.

Warrant: The agenda for a Town Meeting. A warrant is literally a warning to ensure that voters are alerted to when and where a Town Meeting will take place and what issues will be addressed.

Additional Resources

For more detailed suggestions for drafting bylaws, see “Tips on Drafting,” Robert W. Ritchie. Citizens Planner Training Collaborative, www.umass.edu/masscptc/tips_on_drafting.html

For a complete explanation of the Town Meeting process, see the League of Women Voters’ *A Guide to Town Meeting in Westford*, available from the Town Clerk’s office and online at www.westford.com/lwv.

Bylaw Committee Members

Amber Brown

David Chandler

Lynn Cohen, chair

Kaari Mai Tari, Town Clerk, ex officio

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