



Town of Reading
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Letter from Town Moderator Alan Foulds regarding Town Meeting
Process for determining a potential postponement of Annual Town Meeting

MARCH 12, 2020

Greetings Reading Neighbors:

As many of us know, state law requires that we complete our Annual Town Meeting before July 1, and we have a bylaw (Ch. 2.1.3) which mandates that it begin on the fourth Monday in April, which this year is April 27.

In light of the current public health pandemic I am posting this statement to let the town know that we are watching this situation closely, but it is a fast-moving problem. I have been in contact with the Town Manager, Town Counsel and others to decide the best course of action, so stay tuned.

The bylaw requires the Select Board to post the warrant for the ATM, but there is a statute (G.L. c. 39, Sec. 10A) that allows the Moderator and Town Clerk to "recess and continue" the meeting to a date within 30 days. That is a decision that I would make only after consulting with the Select Board and "local public safety officials," which in this case would include the Health Agent. If I do recess the meeting, I am required to announce it "as far in advance of the meeting ... as is practicable." In that case, I will post a notice in the Town Clerk's office, have the Constable post it as is done with the warrant, and the Town Manager will put it on the Town's website. But there is something of a gap in state law in this situation, because I can only postpone the meeting for up to 30 days (although I can do it more than once) and we must approve our budget and finish our Annual Town Meeting by June 30.

Other possibilities, short of a postponement, are being examined by the Town Manager. They include streamlining the meeting by replacing oral reports with written ones submitted to Town Meeting Members, making presentations available electronically before the meeting, and moving financial decisions to the beginning of the meeting to allow a quick adjournment if that becomes necessary. Articles not acted upon would then be moved to the fall.

I do not know where this is going, but rest assured that officials in the executive and legislative branches of state government are well aware of the issue and, together with representative groups such as Mass. Moderators Assoc., the Mass. Municipal Assoc., and the Mass. Municipal Lawyers Assoc., are working on a solution. Given the level of uncertainty, the best thing for us to do as a town

is to continue moving forward to the April 27 meeting, monitor the situation, and be prepared to adjust as circumstances and guidance change.

We hope to see you at town meeting.

Alan Foulds
Town Moderator
March 12, 2020

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