

**Warrant Article 9: Increase the Required Number of Signatures for Petition Articles in Special Town Meetings from 10 to 50**

The Schools Subcommittee held a public hearing on WA9 on Wednesday, March 29 at 7:00pm via Zoom. Present were subcommittee members Cliff Brown (Chair, AL 14), Ben Birnbaum (AL 9), Katherine Florio (TM 10), Stephen Reeders (AL 14), and Carolyn Thall (TM 16). Also present was the petitioner Neil Gordon (TM 1). Anthony Ishak (TM 1) was present as a member of the public.

**Recommendation:** Favorable Action by a vote of 5-0-0.

To see if the Town will amend Section 2.1.13 of the General Bylaws, as follows (deletions in ~~strikeout~~, additions in **bold underline**): 8 SECTION 2.1.13 PETITION ARTICLES The Select Board shall insert in the warrant for every special town meeting all subjects the insertion of which shall be requested of them in writing by ~~ten (10)~~ **fifty (50)** or more registered voters in the Town. Or take any other action relative thereto.

<b>Executive Summary:</b>	<p>In recent years there has been a proliferation of Warrant Articles filed for Annual and Special Town Meetings. This volume of articles places a burden on staff, the Select Board, Advisory Committee, and other Boards, Committees and Commissions involved in vetting, editing, amending, and voting on the Articles.</p> <p>The proposed change seeks to ease those burdens and also to protect the integrity of the Warrant and the review process.</p> <p>The change would apply only to Article submissions for Special Town Meetings because the Town has flexibility there. Due to State statute, the Town has no flexibility with regard to Article submissions for Annual Town Meeting.</p>
<b>Voting Yes will...</b>	Change the number of signatures required to file a Warrant Article for a Special Town Meeting from 10 to 50.
<b>Voting No will...</b>	Cause no change to the signature requirement for the filing of a Warrant Article for a Special Town Meeting.
<b>Financial impact</b>	None foreseen.
<b>Legal implications</b>	None known.

The language of the Article is:

To see if the Town will amend Section 2.1.13 of the General Bylaws, as follows (deletions in ~~strikeout~~, additions in **bold underline**): 8 SECTION 2.1.13 PETITION ARTICLES The Select Board shall insert in the warrant for every special town meeting all subjects the insertion of

which shall be requested of them in writing by ~~ten (10)~~ **fifty (50)** or more registered voters in the Town. Or take any other action relative thereto.

### **Discussion**

The petitioner, Mr. Gordon, noted that in recent years there has been a proliferation of Warrant Articles filed for Annual and Special Town Meetings, some of which are less than fully articulated or well vetted. He said the volume places a burden on staff, the Select Board, Advisory Committee and other Boards, Committees and Commissions involved in the process of reviewing, vetting editing, amending and voting on the Articles.

The proposed change seeks to ease these burdens and also to protect the integrity of the Warrant, the vetting, and the review process. Mr. Gordon asserted this change would also underscore the integrity of Town Meeting as a serious deliberative body.

The signature requirement change would apply only to Article submissions for Special Town Meetings because the Town has flexibility there. Due to State statute, the Town has no flexibility with regard to Article submissions for Annual Town Meeting.

Mr. Brown asked for comments or questions from the public. Mr. Ishak commented that 50 signatures is too high because some articles can be hard to explain, which slows down signature collection. He also noted that many people do not have the time needed to collect that many signatures. He stated that fears this would make it difficult for the public to file articles. He suggested 20- 25 signatures as the requirement. Mr. Gordon noted that he has heard feedback that this requirement would be “undemocratic.” He reiterated his point that “Town Meeting is not a suggestion box. It is a serious legislature” and that this is the basis for WA 9.

Mr. Birnbaum asked where the number 10 came from. Mr. Gordon replied state law requires 100 signatures but a Home Rule Petition allows Brookline to set a number between 10 and 100 in our Bylaw. Mr. Readers said he’s been frustrated with warrant articles that have come forward that are not mature, and he supports raising the bar. Ms. Florio asked how long it takes to get 50 signatures. Mr. Gordon asserted it is not difficult and there are easy methods to collect signatures (“It’s not hard to do but it takes some effort”). Ms. Florio asked where a newcomer can find guidance on filing WAs and Mr. Gordon replied there is information online. Ms. Thall said she agreed with previous comments that this would be an appropriate measure that would align with the seriousness of Town Meeting. Mr. Brown asked about the origin of the 10 standard and whether it was based on old population percentages. He said anything is welcome that makes people step back and take a close look at what they’re doing.

**Roll Call vote:** Yes: Birnbaum, Florio, Reeders, Thall, Brown.

**Recommendation:** The Schools Subcommittee recommends FAVORABLE ACTION on Warrant 9 by a vote of 5-0-0.

**Recording:** [https://brooklinema.zoomgov.com/rec/share/ge6gli\\_XptA94qN0-MFAhPqtRfdBsOO3vd\\_pdAxjHXUkHbPyihTXmc5kq7Dm4IMcx.0rE3SALtdhkk634q](https://brooklinema.zoomgov.com/rec/share/ge6gli_XptA94qN0-MFAhPqtRfdBsOO3vd_pdAxjHXUkHbPyihTXmc5kq7Dm4IMcx.0rE3SALtdhkk634q)

**Warrant Article 10: Identification of a Lead Petitioner in Voter Initiated Petitions at Annual and Special Town Meetings**

The Schools Subcommittee held a public hearing on WA10 on Wednesday, March 29 at 7:00pm via Zoom. Present were subcommittee members Cliff Brown (Chair, AL 14), Ben Birnbaum (AL 9), Katherine Florio (TM 10), Stephen Reeders (AL 14), and Carolyn Thall (TM 16). Also present was the petitioner Neil Gordon (TM 1). Anthony Ishak (TM 1) was present as a member of the public.

**Recommendation:** The Subcommittee approved an amended version that was ruled out of scope by the Moderator. The Subcommittee has not, as of this writing, held another meeting to further discuss the article.

<b>Executive Summary:</b>	
<b>Voting Yes will...</b>	Amend the Bylaws to require voter initiated petition articles to identify a Lead Petitioner and their contact information. Such Lead Petitioner shall be a registered voter of the Town of Brookline.
<b>Voting No will...</b>	Cause no change to the Bylaws.
<b>Financial impact</b>	None foreseen.
<b>Legal implications</b>	None known.

The language of the Article is:

To see if the Town will amend Section 2.1.13 of the General Bylaws, as follows (deletions in ~~strikeout~~, additions in **bold underline**):

SECTION 2.1.13 PETITION ARTICLES

**(a) Definitions: Voter Initiated Petition – The petition of voters in the Town requesting insertion of a subject in the warrant for an annual town meeting pursuant to M.G.L. c. 39, s. 10, or special town meeting. Lead Petitioner – The registered voter of the Town identified as such on a Voter Initiated Petition.**

**(b) Insertion in the warrant of Voter Initiated Petitions:** The Select Board shall insert in the warrant for every special town meeting all subjects the insertion of which shall be requested of them in writing by ten (10) or more registered voters in the Town.

**(c) For administrative purposes, each Voter Initiated Petition shall identify a single Lead Petitioner, and shall include such Lead Petitioner’s relevant contact information.**

**(d) Failure to comply with the provisions of subsection (c) shall not relieve the Select Board from inserting in the warrant a subject otherwise meeting the criteria for such insertion.**

Or take any other action relative thereto.

## Discussion

The petitioner, Neil Gordon, noted a “cultural change going on in Town Meeting” with a growing number of Warrant Articles being filed by multiple petitioners. At last Town meeting, five articles had five petitioners and one had eleven. This practice of listing co-petitioners without a designated lead places a burden on Boards, Committees and Commissions, and Town staff with respect to scheduling and conducting hearings and meetings. When there are multiple petitioners it is often unclear who has authority, which creates confusion and adds to scheduling complexities and delays. These delays can push the reports of Advisory and relevant bodies into the supplemental reports, reducing the time TMMs have to review relevant material and potentially compromising their ability to prepare for Town Meeting. The public may be equally confused. WA 10 proposes the identification of a single point of contact to simplify the ministerial processes described above and to ease the burden on staff. It does not prevent collaboration or identification of co-sponsors or co-petitioners.

Mr. Brown asked for comments or questions from the public. Anthony Ishak (TM 1) commented that he agrees it would streamline the process to identify a lead point of contact. He also commented that anyone should be allowed to be a petitioner, not only a registered voter or adult.

Katherine Florio commented that she has experienced frustration and delays being on the hearing end of an articles with multiple petitioners due to difficulties with scheduling. Mr. Ishak asserted the delays had more to do with the complexity of the article in question, not the number of petitioners.

Mr. Birnbaum asked if there would be a method for identifying a lead petitioner and Mr. Gordon said they would be self-identified. Ms. Florio asked whether the lead petitioner would be required to attend every hearing, and Mr. Gordon replied No; that this would be a burden shift and a way to streamline communication and give authority to one person. Mr. Brown asked if the lead petitioner would have to be registered voter, an adult, or just a resident. Mr. Gordon said he would support “resident of legal voting age” but it could not be a minor. He also noted that a Warrant Article does not have to have a lead petitioner as long as it has the requisite number of signatures.

A motion was made that included amended language changing section (a) from “The registered voter of the Town identified as such on a Voter Initiated Petition” to “Lead Petitioner-Any resident of the Town of legal voting age identified as such on a Voter Initiated Petition.” The motion was approved but the amended language was subsequently ruled out of scope by the Moderator.

**Roll Call vote:** Yes: Birnbaum, Florio, Reeders, Thall, Brown.

**Recommendation:** The Subcommittee approved an amended version that was ruled out of scope by the Moderator. The Subcommittee has not, as of this writing, held another meeting to further discuss the article.

**Recording:** [https://brooklinema.zoomgov.com/rec/share/ge6gli\\_XptA94qN0-MFAhPqtRfdBsOO3vdpdAxjHXUkHbPyihTXmc5kq7Dm4IMcx.0rE3SALtdhkk634q](https://brooklinema.zoomgov.com/rec/share/ge6gli_XptA94qN0-MFAhPqtRfdBsOO3vdpdAxjHXUkHbPyihTXmc5kq7Dm4IMcx.0rE3SALtdhkk634q)