

**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)