

ADVISORY COMMITTEE'S RECOMMENDATION

Recommendation: FAVORABLE ACTION on Warrant Article 9, as amended below, by a vote of 19-1-2.

Executive Summary:	<p>Article 9 seeks Town Meeting approval to amend Section 2.1.13 of the General Bylaws by increasing the number of required signatures for inclusion of Petition Articles in the Warrant for Special Town Meetings from 10 registered voters of the Town to 50 registered voters of the Town.</p> <p>The Advisory Committee was divided on whether there should be any change to signature requirement. Proponents agreed with the Petitioner that the proliferation of Articles, in recent years places burdens on staff and various boards and commissions that might be alleviated if petitioners had to better develop their submissions and convince more voters of their merits prior to filing an Article. Opponents expressed doubt the change would accomplish the stated goals and cited the risk that petitioners would shift their submissions from the Fall Special Town Meeting to the Spring Annual Town Meeting where State law mandates a 10 signature limit for a Petition Article to be included in the Warrant. Another concern was limiting voter access to the democratic process.</p> <p>An amendment was proposed to change the number from 50 to 25. That was approved by the Advisory Committee as was the amended Article.</p>
Voting Yes will...	Change the number of signatures required to file a Warrant Article for a Special Town Meeting from 10 to 25. (The Advisory Committee amended Motion increases the number to 25 registered voters of the Town instead of the Petitioner's 50 Registered Voters of the Town.)
Voting No will...	Cause no change to the signature requirement for the filing of a Warrant Article for a Special Town Meeting.
Financial impact	None foreseen.
Legal implications	None known.

Introduction

Article 9, if passed as originally submitted by the Petitioner, would change Section 2.1.13 of the General By-Laws such that the signature requirement for a Warrant Article filed for a Special Town Meeting would increase from 10 to 50.

Discussion

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

There was a fair amount of agreement with many of the Petitioners comments and frustrations, particularly surrounding the issues of burden on staff and volunteer Boards and Commissions. There was also support for the assertion that many Petition Articles do not seem well thought out or written and that some petitioners expect their articles to be ‘cleaned up’ for them during the review process.

On the other hand, many committee members, while acknowledging and mostly agreeing with the petitioner’s comments, expressed skepticism the proposed By-Law change would accomplish the petitioner’s goals and could backfire. The experience of other municipalities was raised with some evidence presented of an extreme mismatch between Articles at annual Town meeting versus special town meetings where a difference in signature requirements exists.

Other issues raised included the possibility that the change would favor the well-connected in Town and disadvantage voters who have disabilities, who do not have vehicles, who do not belong to larger interest groups, who do not have much free time or who do not have a large circle of registered voters as contacts in Town.

The Advisory Committee recommended reducing the new signature requirement from 50 to 25.

Recommendation

By a vote of 19-1 with 2 abstentions, the Advisory Committee recommends FAVORABLE ACTION on the amended motion below.

VOTED: That the Town amend Section 2.1.13 of the General Bylaws, as follows (deletions in ~~strikeout~~, additions in **bold underline**):

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)~~ **twenty five (25)** or more registered voters in the Town.

ARTICLE 9 ADVISORY COMMITTEE VOTES

Article Description	Lead Petitioner
AC recommendation (Favorable Action unless indicated)	19-1-2
Ben Birnbaum	Y
Harry Bohrs	Y
Cliff Brown	Y
Patty Correa	
John Doggett	Y
Katherine Florio	A
Harry Friedman *	
David-Marc Goldstein	Y
Neil Gordon	Y
Susan Granoff	N
Kelly Hardebeck	Y
Amy Hummel	
Anita Johnson	Y
Alisa Jonas	
Janice Kahn	Y
Pam Lodish	Y
Joslin Murphy	Y
Donelle O'Neal, Sr.	Y
Linda Olson Pehlke	Y
Markus Penzel	
David Pollak	Y
Stephen Reeders	Y
Carlos Ridruejo	Y
Lee Selwyn	Y
Alok Somani	Y
Carolyn Thall	Y
Christine Westphal	A
Dennis Doughty	
* Chairperson does not vote except to break a tie	