

# Warrant Committee Vision July 2025



# Vision for Warrant Committee This Year

- ❖ Role of the Warrant Committee
- ❖ Time Commitment
- ❖ Role of the Chair
- ❖ Subject Matter Experts
- ❖ Summit in September
- ❖ Financial Policies
- ❖ Warrant Committee Policies

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# Role of Warrant Committee

Trusted Advisor  
to Town Meeting

Finance  
Committee

Non –  
Political

- ❖ Adults in the room  
Do the background work TM can't
- ❖ It's not what we recommend, it's why we  
recommend it  
Clear and convincing reasons to TM
- ❖ Professionalism – same as your job

# Role of Warrant Committee

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- ❖ Receive budget proposal from Town Administrator and propose the budget to Town Meeting
  - ❖ Long term view and guidance
- ❖ Examine/establish town Financial Policies (see below)

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"The warrant committee must be willing to step back to focus on more global issues rather than on the minutia of working with individual department budgets.

They should function in a higher-level capacity by reviewing major spending priorities, use of free cash and other reserves, and the development of fiscal policies, while the town administrator would assume responsibility for the orchestrating the annual budget process.“ MA DOR 2013

# Role of Warrant Committee

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to Town Meeting

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- ❖ We may be able to make decisions that elected boards and town employees can't

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# “How much time will the Warrant Committee take?”

- Front load budget work
- Research outside of meetings on assigned topics
  - See below “Subject Matter Experts”
- Focus conversations
  - Stay on the topic of the decision in front of us and compelling reasoning to explain decisions
  - We all love hearing the Fire Chief describe fire trucks, but that may not be relevant to the budget decision
  - The committee should set policies early in the year to help guide this

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# The role of the Chair

- Keep us on task
  - Keep discussions focused, while allowing some room to explore
- Chair is 1/15<sup>th</sup> of the committee, no more, no less
  - I will continue to make presentations
  - My view is no more valid than yours
- Abstain from most votes unless to break or create a tie

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# Subject Matter Experts not Subcommittees

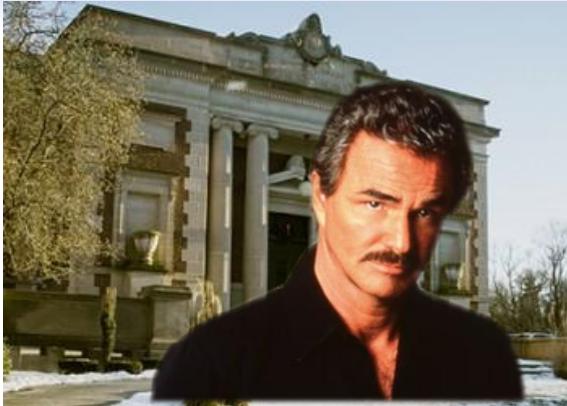


Subcommittees require 3 day notice before a discussion or meeting

- ❖ One Subject Matter Expert for each Warrant Article that comes up annually and other issues
- ❖ Report findings to the rest of the committee

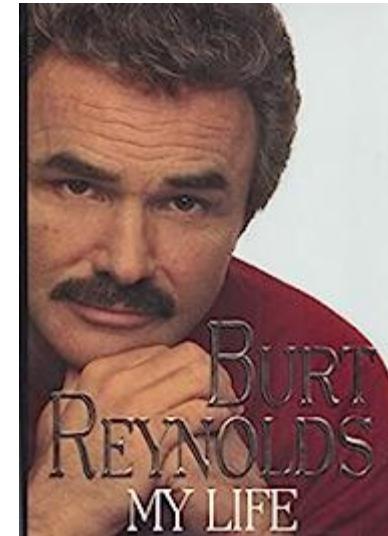
*Survey of 135 Mass finance committees:  
Only 36 have subcommittees*

# Experts



- Burt is Subject Matter Expert for the library
- Burt talks to the library in the fall to learn what their budget issues have been and what they expect

- Late fall / early winter, Warrant Committee hears from multiple Subject Matter Experts, including Burt discussing the Library
  - Major Articles: Presentation
  - Minor Articles: Written summary
- December: Library submits budget request to Mr. Milano, Burt reviews to make sure no surprises. Inform WC if anything unexpected.



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# **Warrant Committee Summit**

## **Modeled After Select Board and School Committee Retreats**

- Meeting soon after summer
- Saturday Meeting or two evenings
- Food provided

## **Agenda**

- Training
  - WC role and process, Town Meeting, Warrant structure
- Financial policies
- Warrant Committee policies for this year

## **Special Guests**

- Select Board Chair
- School Committee Chair
- Finance Director, Treasurer
- Guest from Mass Municipal Association
  - Discuss best practices

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# Financial Policies

Coming out of a successful override, we can take a look at the financial picture and set policies

For example:  
How do we use the various stabilization funds?  
What should our debt level be?

These policies must be made before the budget process, otherwise you are setting a policy to justify your decisions

We can take input from town staff and the Select Board, but we do not need their approval or permission

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# Warrant Committee Internal Policies

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## Scope of Budget Discussions

- ❖ What is in scope when we discuss the town budget or individual departments?
  - ❖ A balancing act
    - ❖ We do not manage the departments, but looking into the departments activities helps confirm the appropriate budget level
- ❖ What questions should each Subject Matter Expert ask and be prepared to present to Warrant Committee?
- ❖ What is the best way to modify the budget?
  - ❖ Present to Select Board and Town Administrator before the TA budget is set to influence TA budget?
  - ❖ Present to SB and TA after TA presents budget, ask for agreement
  - ❖ Change unilaterally, present our case to Town Meeting

# Non-Political Committee

*What does this mean?*

*My view:*

- ❖ Judging the sense of the town is not our job
  - ❖ Articles are sent to us by elected boards
  - ❖ Town Meeting makes the ultimate decision
    - ❖ There are ~280 members of Town Meeting and only 15 members of our committee
    - ❖ Town Meeting is where the will of the town is expressed, not the Warrant Committee
  - ❖ **We should not make decisions based on our opinions or preferences**, should be based on facts and the status of the town
  - ❖ Formulate and **lay out our reasoning to the Town** in a clear and understandable way
  - ❖ WC chair should be the main one speaking to major articles at Town Meeting
- ❖ **Warrant Committee can resist the pressure of voters in a way elected board can't**