

How to run for Town Meeting

Town Meeting Members are elected during the annual Town election in March. Lexington is divided into nine electoral precincts, each represented by 21 Town Meeting Members for a total of 189 elected representatives. Members serve staggered three year terms, with seven positions re-opening annually in each precinct. In addition, there may be one- and two- year openings in each precinct to finish out the terms of any members who have left.

Town Meeting Members must be registered Lexington voters. This is the only legal qualification.

People run for Town Meeting for a variety of reasons such as interest in school, zoning, environmental or affordable housing issues. Some members focus on their own neighborhoods, others on how land is used in all parts of town. Members may be interested in public policy concerns, or simply want to be more connected with our town's decision-making process.

Before you run for Town Meeting, it's helpful to attend a Town Meeting in person, or visit <http://www.lexmedia.org/ondemand.html> where several years of Town Meeting video are archived. This will give you a feel for the pace and procedures that are followed. If you have no patience for parliamentary procedure, you may not enjoy being a Town Meeting Member. It's also a good idea to talk with a current Town Meeting Member to gain an understanding of the time commitments.

The Election Calendar

- The Town Clerk publishes an Election Calendar at the beginning of December. Access the calendar via the Town Clerk's page on the Town website.
<Http://lexingtonma.gov/townclerk/nominationpapers.cfm>
- The calendar establishes the key dates and deadlines for the next town election, including when nomination papers are available, when they are due back, and when the election will be held. (usually the first Monday in March)
- If you miss the deadline for returning your nomination papers, you won't be listed on the ballot. It is, however, still possible to be elected via write-in votes.

Procedure for becoming a candidate:

- Obtain nomination papers from the Town Clerk (usually in mid-December). Note that simply taking out nomination papers becomes a matter of public record.
- Submit signatures from ten registered voters in your precinct per the nomination form. It is advisable, however, to gather at least 15 to 20 since signatures can be disqualified for a variety of reasons.
- Return your completed nomination papers to the Town Clerk before the deadline (usually early January).

Campaigning

Once you are on the ballot, you have about two months to campaign. Each Lexington precinct currently contains about 2000 potential voters. Town elections are usually held on Mondays, and rarely on the same day as State or Federal elections. So unless there is a spirited Selectman or School Committee race that year, turnout can be quite low, and just a few votes very often make the difference between getting elected or not.

Candidates can send out flyers, postcards and emails, or write letters to the Lexington Minuteman and other local news sources to announce their candidacy and outline their experience and views on current issues. Sometimes candidates join together for combined campaigning efforts.

The Town Clerk does not maintain a record of voter email addresses, but can provide a list of mailing addresses for registered voters.

Candidates often stand near their precinct polling location on Election Day holding a sign for themselves. This must be done at least 150 feet away from the polling entrance.

Results

Results are announced after 8 pm at each polling location when the machines are opened by election officials and the results are compiled. You can request permission at the polling place to observe that process, and must be inside the location before 8 PM. That is the fastest way to obtain results for your precinct. The Town Clerk will post results by precinct on the Town website, but it can often take several hours to appear there. Results can also be obtained by waiting at the Town Clerk's office for the numbers to arrive from each precinct. There may also be election parties sponsored by Selectmen or School Committee candidates where results are announced.

If you are interested in how things work in Lexington government, and you are a registered Lexington voter, then you are perfectly qualified and very welcome to run for Town Meeting. We encourage you to join us.