

Town Meeting Article and Motion: What's the Difference?

A town meeting warrant must be published at least one week before the annual meeting and two weeks before a special town meeting. It informs voters of the time and place of the meeting and includes a list of articles, which are intended to provide voters with a description of various topics to be placed before the meeting. Whether general or more specific, an article often does not contain all necessary details. It need not forecast the action town meeting will take. However, even if complete in every respect, an article is not a conduit to debate.

As stated in Town Meeting Time, a guide to parliamentary procedure followed by many towns, "articles are not self-starting." Before any debate, discussion or vote can be take place on the subject matter of the article, a motion that Town Meeting act in some way must be put forward and seconded. A motion need not precisely repeat the language of its associated article, but it must reflect intent, which is within the scope of the article. A motion must also contain all requisite information, some of which might have been missing from the article. For instance, an appropriation article must include an amount to be appropriated, a funding source and a purpose of the expenditure. In effect, the life of an article ends with the introduction of a motion.