

COVID-19 Protocol for Concord Annual Town Meeting 2020 [1]

*Note: Subject to Amendment; Check for updates at www.concordma.gov
July 13, 2020*

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Concord Annual Town Meeting will look and feel different this year. Town Meeting is anticipated to take place outdoors, on the Doug White Field at Concord Carlisle Regional High School, on Sunday, September 13, 2020, at 1:00 pm (rain date: Monday, September 14, 2020 at 5:00 pm). The Moderator has developed this Protocol for the Meeting, in consultation with the Select Board and Concord's Public Health and Safety Officials, to provide as nearly as possible the participatory experience to which Concord voters are accustomed, while simultaneously protecting public health. This Protocol is published in advance of Town Meeting to allow voters to know what they should expect, and what will be expected of them. However, changes in this Protocol may be required prior to Annual Town Meeting. Please check the town website www.concordma.gov regularly for addenda to the Protocol and other information on 2020 Annual Town Meeting.

Risk Assessment

COVID-19 continues to pose a risk to the Concord community. As of July 10, 2020, Governor Baker's orders regarding social distancing and facial coverings and the Concord Board of Health's order requiring social distancing and facial coverings remain in effect. The public health ramifications of COVID-19 are evolving and being closely watched by the Moderator, Select Board, and Concord's Public Health and Safety Officials for impact on plans for Annual Town Meeting.

Schedule

In three separate Declarations (posted on www.concordma.gov), the Moderator has recessed and continued Annual Town Meeting for a total of 90 days from the Meeting's originally scheduled date of April 27, 2020, to July 29, 2020. In consultation with the Select Board and town health and safety officials, the Moderator expects to further recess and continue Annual Town Meeting to Sunday, September 13, 2020 at 1:00 pm, with a "rain date" of Monday, September 14, 2020 at 5:00 p.m. Every effort will be made to conclude Annual Town Meeting on the day it is held. If continuation of the Meeting proves necessary, the date and time for the next session will be announced at the Meeting. From June 30th until September 30th, the town will be operating on monthly interim budgets based upon the preceding fiscal year's budget, with the review and approval of the State Department of Revenue.

Additional Pre-Meeting Hearings

In view of significant changes in circumstances affecting certain Articles on the Warrant, and the length of time that has passed since the earliest our five Pre-Meeting Hearings were held, the Select Board, Planning Board, and Finance Committee will hold during the latter part of August additional Pre-Meeting Hearings on a number of Articles on Zoom, with opportunity for

public question and comment. The schedule for the Pre-Meeting Hearings on Zoom, agenda of Articles to be addressed at each Hearing, and information on logging into the Hearings will be posted on the town website www.concordma.gov.

Warrant Articles to Be Taken Up

In order to reduce the length of the Meeting and thereby reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission to Meeting attendees, the Select Board, Finance Committee, Town Administration, School Committee, School Administration, all town boards and committees sponsoring an article, and citizen petitioners have been asked to identify Articles that, without significant harm, could be postponed, to be placed on a Warrant for a Special Town Meeting to be called by the Select Board later in the year. The articles identified as appropriate for postponement will be the subject of a “Motion to Postpone Indefinitely” or, if a zoning article, a “Motion to Refer Back to the Planning Board for Further Study and Report,” on which the Meeting will be asked to vote, or may simply have No Motion. The Meeting cannot vote to postpone articles to a specific future Special Town Meeting (no Meeting may prescribe the agenda of a future Meeting), but the Select Board can make a commitment to place the postponed articles on the Warrant of a Special Town Meeting to be called later in the year. Zoning articles would be referred back to the Planning Board rather than postponed in order to avoid the bar under state law from reconsidering zoning bylaws “rejected” by Town Meeting for two years.

The motions “to Postpone Indefinitely” and “to Refer to Committee” are unfamiliar ones in Concord, where our tradition and practice has been to bring articles before the Meeting to vote them up or down, rather than postponing or delaying them. However, these motions are recognized in Town Meeting Time, Concord’s procedural guide for Town Meeting, and are frequently used by other Massachusetts open town meetings. These motions will be offered in Concord this year only due to our very unusual pandemic circumstances. In the future, we will return to Concord’s traditional practice of putting articles before the Meeting for action.

Consent Calendar

As is customary in Concord, there also will be a Consent Calendar consisting of articles to be taken up as a group and voted upon by the Meeting without deliberation. The Consent Calendar will be published in the FinCom Report and posted on the town’s website. This year, to keep the Meeting shorter and the virus risk lower, there will be some modifications in the usual practice with respect to the Consent Calendar. First, the Consent Calendar will be more broadly inclusive than usual, incorporating not only “routine and non-controversial articles,” but also non-routine articles on which both the Select Board and the Finance Committee recommend affirmative action and strong community support is expected. Second, any **ten** voters will be able to remove an article from the Consent Calendar for full debate, prior to the Meeting voting on the Consent Calendar; this increase from the usual five-voter requirement is made for this Meeting only in order to solicit a slightly stronger sentiment from the Meeting that the public interest in fully debating an article outweighs the public interest in keeping the

Meeting shorter, and virus transmission risk lower, by voting on the article without full deliberation.

Venue

In view of the consensus among public health experts that COVID-19 transmission risk is substantially less outdoors than indoors, Annual Town Meeting will be held outdoors, on the Doug White Fields located at the Concord-Carlisle Regional High School. The Meeting is scheduled to begin during daylight hours, to maximize safety of attendees in walking about outdoors, and timed to minimize heat and maximize likelihood of completing the Meeting in one session. The Doug White Fields will best serve the logistical needs of the Meeting for parking, physically/socially distant seating, accessibility, restrooms, ingress/egress, and utility support. However, the artificial turf surface precludes tents secured by poles and stakes. There will be a small “pop-up” tented area(s) for rest and medical emergencies, but seating will otherwise be uncovered. Umbrellas, hats, sunscreen, insect repellent, and water are recommended. **NOTE THAT ONLY UNADULTERATED WATER IS PERMITTED TO BE CONSUMED ON THE DOUG WHITE FIELDS ARTIFICIAL TURF** – no flavored or colored drinks, no food of any kind.

Requirements of Voters

Voters will be required to wear cloth or paper facial coverings over their noses and mouths, to observe a 6-foot physical distance at all times from persons not part of their own households, and to refrain from attending the Meeting if they have a confirmed or suspected case of COVID-19, or have had a known exposure within the preceding two weeks to a person infected with COVID-19. While seated in their physically/socially distanced areas of the field, voters will be permitted to remove facial coverings briefly to drink water. Voters should bring sunscreen, hats, umbrellas, sunglasses, insect repellent, and water. **Voters should plan to arrive early this year as walking distances will be longer, and check-in likely slower, than usual.**

Public Health Precautions

A limited quantity of masks, sunscreen, water, hand sanitizer, insect repellent, and umbrellas will be available for those who do not have their own at the Meeting. Town Meeting staff will wear protective equipment, utilize procedures protective of public health, and guide the movement of voters to maintain appropriate social distance. There will also be signage and field markings to guide voters. Physical/social distancing will be maintained in restrooms by limiting occupancy. Persons who are unable to wear face coverings for medical reasons will be directed to seating in a separate section.

Accessibility Accommodations

Accessible parking will be available immediately adjacent to the Doug White Fields. Accessible seating will be reserved in the section of the field closest to the accessible parking. The parking

lot, paths, and field are accessible surfaces. Hearing assistance devices will be available. We are working to reduce the delay on the WIQH radio broadcast of the Meeting so that persons with hearing loss may use their own headphones and mobile phone or portable radio to listen to the proceedings on the simultaneous radio broadcast. Due to the daylight venue and large seating distances, closed captioning will not be possible at 2020 Annual Town Meeting.

Check-in Procedure

Voter check-in location, and appropriate physical/social distance markers while queueing, will be identifiable by clear signage, and staff will guide voters. To improve check-in flow, checkers will be using an iPad system which will not require voters to organize themselves alphabetically by name or street address. Staff will provide voters with a voting slip and a packet of meeting materials at check-in. **Again, Voters should plan to arrive early as check-in likely will be slower this year than usual.**

Seating Arrangements

Pairs of pre-sanitized folding chairs will be pre-positioned on the field at a minimum of 6' apart; members of the same household may sit together. Movement on aisles will be one-way, with direction marked.

Meeting Materials

Daylight, distance, and WiFi/power logistics will prevent us from having video presentation screens this year. Instead, information on each article to be taken up will be printed in the Meeting Materials distributed to voters at check-in, and voters will be asked to consult their materials. Meeting Materials will be posted on the town website www.concordma.gov in advance of the Meeting. There will be no "handouts" distributed at the Meeting other than the Meeting Materials provided at check-in. Any board/committee, organization or citizen wishing to present a "handout" on an article may make advance request for the Moderator's approval to incorporate the handout in the Meeting Materials. A schedule for Town Meeting submissions will be posted on the town website, www.concordma.gov, under the Town Meeting tab.

No Presentations on Articles

In the interests of shortening the Meeting and reducing the risk to public health, there will be no presentations on articles at this year's Annual Town Meeting. As we reach each article, the Moderator will refer voters to the motion under the article included in the Meeting Materials, and open the floor for questions and comments. A one-page narrative on each article written by its sponsor will be included in the Meeting Materials. **In preparation to attend Annual Town Meeting, voters are urged to watch the recorded video Pre-Meeting Hearing presentations on the articles which will be available on the town website, www.concordma.gov, under the Town Meeting tab.**

Motions to Amend

Any motions to amend will be required to be presented to the Moderator in writing, by email, text, or on paper, in advance of being made. There will be further direction at the Meeting on how to present a motion to amend to the Moderator. The mover of an amendment will be allowed two minutes to speak to the amendment. Those considering a motion to amend an article are strongly urged to contact the Moderator in advance of the Meeting by email to moderator@concordma.gov. Motions to amend will be included in the Meeting Materials, if received in time for inclusion, or be read to the Meeting when made.

Speaking from the Floor

Microphones will be available for voters to speak from the floor. In light of the public health threat posed by the pandemic and the accordant advisability of limiting the length of the Meeting, speaking time from the floor will be limited to one minute per person and strictly enforced. We will return to our standard two-minute time limit when the pandemic has been resolved. The specific arrangements for microphone use are being developed by the Moderator, in consultation with town staff and the Board of Health, and will be the subject of an addendum to this Protocol.

Voting

Voting will be by raising the color paper voting slip provided at check-in. If voters are holding up umbrellas for shade, the Moderator will ask for umbrellas to be lowered during the vote. The Moderator expects that Tellers will be present to take a standing vote count in the event that the Moderator cannot visually call the vote. However, use of electronic clickers for standing counted votes is under review and may be the subject of an addendum to this Protocol. In the event that the Meeting votes to take a vote by secret ballot, the procedure for taking the vote will be announced by the Moderator at the Meeting.

Organization of Boards and Committees

The Select Board and the Finance Committee will be seated together at an appropriate physical distance in designated areas, as will the School Committee and Planning Board while their articles are being addressed by the Meeting.

Departure from the Meeting

In order to maintain physical/social distancing in the aisles, voters will be asked to remain in their seats until their row or section is dismissed.

Restrooms

The Doug White Fields are serviced by a restroom building. Voters will be asked to queue outside the restrooms at an appropriate physical/social distance and to limit occupancy of the restroom to a posted maximum number of persons. Voters are reminded to wash their hands for at least twenty seconds with soap and water or hand sanitizer (both provided).

Water

All voters should bring their own water. Limited quantities of water in individual serving containers will be available. On the advice of the Board of Health, there will be no ability at the Meeting to refill water bottles.

Medical Emergencies

There will be a tent without sides available for temporary rest and medical emergencies. There will be emergency staff on site.

Parking

In addition to the accessible parking available at the Doug White Field lot, regular parking will be available in the CCHS lots and the Beede Center lot. Overflow parking will be available at the Alcott School parking lot, with (physically/socially distant) shuttle bus transportation to CCHS available. **Voters should allow extra time to park, walk from parking to the fields, or ride the shuttle bus from overflow parking.**

Childcare

Due to the COVID-19 situation, there will be no childcare provided at Annual Town Meeting this year.

Weather/Public Health or Safety Contingency Plans

Rain, wind, heat, or a public health or safety threat could require postponement of the Meeting from September 13. The “rain date” for the Meeting is Monday, September 14, at 5:00 pm. The Moderator would make any postponement determination in consultation with the Select Board and town public health and safety officials. Notice of postponement to voters will be made by posting on the town website, www.concordma.gov, Concord News & Notices announcements to subscribers, automated telephone call to Code Red subscribers, announcements on the town’s Facebook and Twitter, and posting at the Meeting venue.