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An Overview Of The Annual Town Meeting

The Annual Town Meeting gives electors the chance to learn about Town business and interact with Town officials. But, the Town Meeting has only a few defined powers, which are in sec. 60.10 of the Wisconsin Statutes. The Town Board sets policy and manages the Town. Sometimes, the fact that the Town Meeting has limited powers surprises and frustrates electors attending the Town Meeting. In order to give some guidance to electors, the Dane County Towns Association has prepared this summary of what the town meeting can and cannot do, based on current state law.

Procedure

The Annual Town Meeting is held on the third Tuesday in April unless a different date was set by the previous annual meeting. The Annual Meeting can be adjourned to a later date not more than 30 days later. The Town Chairperson presides at the Annual Town Meeting. If the Chairperson is absent, another Supervisor chairs, and if no Supervisor is present, the meeting elects a chairperson. The Town Meeting is for the electors of the Town. Non-residents are not entitled to speak except by permission of the body, and may not vote. To prevent non-residents from voting, the Town Meeting can require the Clerk to keep a poll list with the name and address of every elector voting at the meeting.

The Direct Powers of the Town Meeting. These are the only powers which the electorate directly exercises. Those marked with a “*” can be delegated to the Town Board on an ongoing basis.

Authorize raising of money for Town expenses * In most towns, the Town Board has been authorized to raise money by setting the tax levy. In towns that have not done so, the levy is approved at a Town Meeting in the fall related to the Town Budget for next year.

Set the compensation for elective town officers.* Changes are not effective until the next term of the office involved.
Establish or abolish the office of constable; combine or separate the offices of Clerk and Treasurer; or combine Clerk and Assessor
Adopt a plan to number the seats of the Town Board. That means candidates for Town Board run against each a specific opponent instead of all candidates running against each other.
In towns with more than 2,500 residents, change from elected to appointed Clerk or Treasurer or both. [In smaller towns, the change requires a referendum].
Vote to designate the office of town supervisor as a full-time office.
Vote to nominate candidates through a primary election rather than a caucus.
Authorize acquisition or sale of cemeteries
Approve agreements with a town administrator for a term of more than 3 years.
Set the hourly wages to be paid to town employees who are also elected town officers.*
Authorize the Town Board to exercise Village Powers

Powers The Town Meeting May Delegate To The Town Board
Establishing the annual tax levy and other revenues.
Authorize issuance of general obligation bonds
Authorize the Town Board to purchase land within the Town.
Authorize the Town Board to construct buildings either along or in combination with a society or corporation located in the Town and doing business in the Town.
Authorize the Town Board to dispose of Town real property
Authorize the Town Board to adopt a Town Zoning Ordinance (which currently requires consent of the County Board in a County with a County zoning ordinance).
Authorize the Town Board to engage in watershed protection, soil conservation or water conservation programs.
Authorize the Town Board to appoint rather than elect the town assessor.
Authorize the Town Board to appropriate money for conservation of natural resources, civic functions, control of insect pests, weeds or plant or animal diseases; a road numbering system; or cemetery improvements.

Power Of The Town Meeting To Mandate Action By The Town Board
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Increase the size of the Town Board to 4 or 5

Advisory Motions

Except for the items stated above, the Annual Meeting or a Special Town Meeting cannot direct the Town or the Town Board to take any specific action, or refrain from any specific action. Town meetings have no formal power to adopt motions or resolutions stating a position on issues. Such resolutions are not binding on the Town.

<h2>About the Dane County Towns Association</h2>

<p>The Dane County Towns Association is a voluntary association of the Towns in Dane County. The DCTA works on behalf of Towns and their residents, with a great deal of emphasis on land use, environmental protection and water resource issues. The DCTA does not take a particular position on the policies of any individual Town. Rather, the DCTA fights to preserve local control so that the citizens of each Town can determine its local character for themselves. DCTA membership meetings are open to the public. Check out our website at www.danecotowns.org.</p>
