

2024

TOWN MEETING VOTER INFORMATION GUIDE

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Town Meeting Voter Information Guide

This guide is presented to the residents of Stratham as a resource in preparing for the 2024 Town Meeting. The Town Meeting Warrant contains the articles to be voted on during Town meeting. This guide is intended to provide introductory information to the articles and explain their essence as well as inform residents where more information can be found.

Each section (where applicable) ends with where to find more information about each article.

The Town of Stratham operates under the “Traditional Town Meeting” form of government, the default form of government prescribed by law in New Hampshire Government. In this form, the legislative body is the Town Meeting and the governing body is the Select Board. The Town Meeting meets each year. In Stratham, the Town Meeting, at which the legislative body acts in two sessions. The first session is an election (this year on Tuesday, March 12th) and at a second session (this year, Saturday, March 16th). In the Town Meeting form, the residents – Stratham’s registered voters – are the legislators.

This year, Articles 1-10 (election of officers and zoning articles) are to be acted upon at the Town election (first session). Articles 11-15 are to be acted upon at the second session.



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Important Dates

Tuesday, March 5, Stratham School District Meeting¹
6:00 p.m., Stratham Memorial School

Thursday, March 7, Voter Information Night Hosted by the Wiggin Memorial Library
6:30 p.m., Stratham Town Offices (Joan M. Sewall Room – 10 Bunker Hill Avenue)

Tuesday, March 12, Town and School Districts Elections, Ballot Voting
Polls open: 7 a.m. – 7 p.m., Stratham Memorial School (39 Gifford Farm Road)

Saturday, March 16, Town Meeting
9:00 a.m., Stratham Memorial School (39 Gifford Farm Road)

Town Meeting, Voting & Election Information

Town Clerk/Tax Collector's website

<https://www.strathamnh.gov/certified-town-clerk-tax-collector>

(603) 772-7741 ext. 140

Summary of Additional Resources Listed in this Guide

You can find the following documents and information pertaining to Town Meeting at the Town's [2024 Town Meeting page](#) (see black tab at top of Town's homepage).

- This 2024 Voter Information Guide;
- Link to Voter Information Night and Candidate Information;
- Video link to a narrative explanation of zoning-related articles (2-10);
- Video link to explanation of business session warrant articles (11-16);
- 2024 Town Report (look for link on the Town Meeting 2024 page by March 1st);
- Town Warrant and NH DRA Form MS-636;
- 2024 Town of Stratham Budget Summary and line item detail; and
- 2024-2029 Capital Improvement Plan.

For more information about Warrant Articles pertaining to zoning, please consult this guide, the Town Report, or contact the Planning Department by calling (603) 772-7391 ext. 147.

¹ The Local Stratham School District is its own political subdivision and, like the Town, also operates under the Town Meeting form of government.



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2024 Town Warrant Articles 1 through 10

These articles are to be voted on at the Town Election to be held on Tuesday, March 12th from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., at the Stratham Memorial School (39 Gifford Farm Road).

ARTICLE 1: To choose all Town Officers for the year ensuing.

- One (1) Select Board Member – three (3) year term
- One (1) Town Moderator – two (2) year term
- One (1) Supervisor of the Checklist – six (6) year term
- One (1) Trustee of the Trust Funds – three (3) year term
- One (1) Cemetery Trustee – three (3) year term
- Two (2) Library Trustee – three (3) year term

The following Elected Positions will appear on the Local School District ballot and the Exeter Region Cooperative School District (ERCSD) ballots.

Stratham School District ballot:

- Two (2) Stratham School District Board Members – three (3) year term
- One (1) Stratham School District Clerk – three (3) year term

Exeter Region Cooperative School District ballot:

- One (1) Moderator – one (1) year term
- One (1) Board Member seat from Exeter – three (3) year term
- One (1) Board Member seat from Newfields – three (3) year term
- One (1) Board Member seat from Stratham – three (3) year term
- ERCSD Budget Advisory Committee (BAC) Member seats open
 - One (1) BAC Member seat from East Kingston – three (3) year term
 - One (1) BAC Member seat from Exeter – three (3) year term
 - One (1) BAC Member seat from Stratham – three (3) year term

More information: See the Town Clerk's office for links to sample ballots, the Town Meeting 2024 webpage for a link to the information night details and candidate information, and attend the March 7th Voter Information Night.



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ARTICLE 2: Definitions & Table of Uses

To amend the Zoning Ordinance, Section II *Definitions*, Section III Table 3.6 *Table of Uses*, and *Footnotes to Table 3.6* to include new definitions and property uses that are not currently defined. This is a housekeeping amendment to better define terms, building uses and associated requirements.

The Planning Board recommends this article by unanimous vote.

This article would add definitions for terms in the Zoning Ordinance, including ‘Mixed-Use Development’ and ‘Half-Story,’ that are currently not defined and specify requirements associated with these uses. This amendment would also incorporate minor changes to the definition of what constitutes a structure.

ARTICLE 3: Building Ordinance Amendment

To amend the Building Ordinance, Article III *Permits* to clarify the circumstances in which the Building Inspector may require that a plan prepared and stamped by a licensed land surveyor or certified wetland scientist is required. This amendment provides the Building Inspector discretion to require a plan prepared and stamped by the certified professional where there is a reasonable basis to question if a building permit application meets the requirements of the Zoning and Building Ordinances and/or the State Building and Fire Codes.

The Planning Board recommends this article by unanimous vote.

As noted above, this article would clarify that the Building Inspector maintains the discretion to require a plan prepared and stamped by a certified professional, including by a licensed land surveyor or certified wetland scientist, when there is a reasonable basis to question if a building permit application complies with the Zoning and Building Ordinances and/or the State Building and Fire Codes. If an applicant disagreed with a determination by the Building Inspector to require such a plan, that decision could be appealed to the Zoning Board of Adjustment as an Appeal of an Administrative Decision.



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ARTICLE 4: Home Occupations

To amend the Zoning Ordinance, Section V *Supplementary Regulations*, Sub-section 5.12 *Home Occupation* to clarify the requirements associated with home occupations. This amendment would limit the aggregate size of home occupations and clarify requirements associated with inspections and renewals of home occupations.

The Planning Board recommends this article by unanimous vote.

This article would standardize the process and requirements associated with applying for renewals of home occupations, which are currently required every three years. This article would also limit the aggregate size of home occupations to no more than 25% of the floor area of a residence or to no more than 1,000 square-feet if the residence is larger than 4,000 square-feet. Currently, the Ordinance allows for home occupations to no more than 25% of the floor area of the residence regardless of the square-footage of the residence. Finally, this article would clarify situations, including many common work-from-home arrangements, where no home occupation permit is required.

ARTICLE 5: Conditional Use Permit Criteria

To amend the Zoning Ordinance, Section III *Footnotes to Table 3.6* to consolidate the number of criteria the Planning Board considers in Conditional Use Permit applications. The purpose of this amendment is to expedite reviews of Conditional Use Permit applications while maintaining the core permit review criteria.

The Planning Board recommends this article by unanimous vote.

This article would consolidate the number of criteria associated with Conditional Use Permit applications to the Planning Board from eleven criteria to seven criteria. The purpose of this article is to more efficiently facilitate the Planning Board's review of Conditional Use Permit applications while maintaining the core review criteria associated with the applications.



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ARTICLE 6: Amendments to Residential Open Space Cluster Developments

To amend the Zoning Ordinance, Section VIII *Residential Open Space Cluster Development* to amend the requirements associated with residential cluster developments. This amendment would establish minimum lot sizes for individual lots, require that open space parcels meet additional minimum requirements, and to require that historical resources be preserved and incorporated into cluster developments whenever practicable.

The Planning Board recommends this article by unanimous vote.

This article would place additional regulations on new Open Space Cluster Developments. This article would establish minimum lot sizes for lots in Open Space Cluster Developments ranging in size from 10,000 square-feet to one-acre, depending on the amount of well and septic infrastructure sited on the property. Currently, there is no minimum lot size requirement in cluster developments. This article would place additional restrictions on vegetated buffer strips and open space parcels, required as part of cluster developments, including that the parcels not include more than 20 percent wetlands. Finally, this article would require the preservation of historical buildings or features located on a lot proposed for a cluster development when their preservation of such resources is feasible.

ARTICLE 7: Small Accessory Structures

To amend the Zoning Ordinance, Section V *Supplementary Regulations*, to create a new Sub-section 5.14 for *Small Accessory Structures*. The purpose of this amendment is to provide for reduced setbacks for small sheds or accessory structures under 120 square-feet in size provided that the structure meets a number of minimum criteria.

The Planning Board recommends this article by unanimous vote.

This article would allow for small accessory structures, including sheds no larger than 120 square-feet to meet a reduced setback of five-feet from a rear or side property boundary and 15-feet from a wetland boundary if the structure meets a number of minimum criteria, including that the structure does not contain a poured concrete foundation or slab, that the height of the structure not exceed a height of 12-feet (as measured to the roof peak), that the structure be located outside of any required vegetated buffer strip areas, and that the parcel is not subject to site plan review by the Planning Board. No more than one structure per parcel would be permitted under this section. Small accessory structures not meeting all requirements noted above would need to meet the baseline property setbacks required of the zoning district.



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ARTICLE 8: Maximum Residential Density

To amend the Zoning Ordinance, Section IV *Dimensional Regulations*, Sub-section 4.1.4 *Maximum Residential Density* to clarify that non-buildable areas cannot be incorporated into maximum residential density calculations. This amendment would also reduce the maximum residential density in the Route 33 Heritage District from three units per acre to two units per acre.

The Planning Board recommends this article by unanimous vote.

This article would clarify that non-buildable areas, including wetlands, land protected from development under conservation or agricultural easements, and steep slopes, shall not be counted when calculating the maximum residential density of a parcel. This article would also reduce the maximum residential density in the Route 33 Heritage District from three units per acre to two units per acre. The proposed modification to the Route 33 Heritage District would maintain a density incentive in the district relative to the surrounding Residential/Agricultural District but provides a limit that is more consistent with historical settlement patterns.

ARTICLE 9: Small Scale Solar Energy Systems

To amend the Zoning Ordinance, Section V *Supplementary Regulations*, Sub-section 5.13 *Solar Energy Systems* to allow small-scale ground-mount solar energy systems by right if the proposal meets a number of minimum criteria.

The Planning Board recommends this article by unanimous vote.

This article would allow for small ground-mounted solar energy systems, defined as those 1,750 square-feet of surface area or less, to be permitted by right if the proposal meets a number of minimum criteria. Minimum criteria include that the system is proposed for the rear-yard of a property, that the system be located not less than 35-feet from the side or rear property boundaries and comply with all wetland and shoreland setbacks, that the height of the system not exceed 12-feet, and that the installation does not include clear-cutting or removal of mature trees within 20-feet of any property line. Applications that do not meet all of the above criteria would require the issuance of a Conditional Use Permit from the Planning Board.



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ARTICLE 10: Accessory Outside Storage

To amend the Zoning Ordinance, Section V, *Supplementary Regulations* and Section II *Definitions* to enact additional regulations, including screening requirements, on storage containers, semi-trailers, and associated structures.

The Planning Board recommends this article by unanimous vote.

This article would establish additional minimum screening requirements for storage containers, semi-trailers, large dumpsters, and for campers and large recreational vehicles that are not roadworthy (defined as vehicles that do not maintain an active state registration and/or have not passed state inspection within the preceding 15 months). Structures or equipment used for agricultural purposes would be exempt from the requirements so long as the parcel is at least four acres in size. This article would also define terms associated with these requirements including those for storage containers and semi-trailers.

For more information about zoning-related articles: See the Town Report or contact the Planning Department by calling (603) 772-7391 ext. 147 or e-mailing planning@strathamnh.gov.



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2024 Town Warrant Articles 11 through 16

As noted in the introduction, the following articles will be voted upon at the second session of the Stratham Town Meeting to be held on Saturday March 16th at 9:00 a.m. at the Stratham Memorial School (39 Gifford Farm Road).

ARTICLE 11: 2024 Operating Budget

To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of Eight million four hundred eighty two thousand one hundred sixty dollars (\$8,482,160) for general municipal operations. This article does not include appropriations contained in special or individual articles addressed separately.

The Select Board recommends this Article by unanimous vote.

The Town's operating budget includes all of the expenses and revenues associated with running the Town government on an annual basis. It includes the required level of investment to meet the needs and service-level expectations of our residents and business owners and addresses other factors that influence the budgeting process. These factors include the strategies and goals in the Master Plan, contractual and debt obligations, federal and state mandates, and other operational needs.

The 2024 proposed operating budget recommended by the Select Board totals \$8,482,160, which is an increase of approximately \$270,972 or 3.3% over FY2023.

The operating budget is combined with other budgetary appropriations (Article 12 - \$678,000 in Capital Improvement Funds and Article 13 - \$250,000 in Capital Reserve Funds).

Together with revenues and credits the total amount to be raised from taxation is \$5,131,403 (\$71,165 or 1.39% increase over last year).

This results in an estimated tax rate of \$3.15 (no projected increase in the tax rate over 2023). 2024 is a revaluation year, so, the rate will be lower as it will be based on a new overall valuation. This rate is projected as if there were to be no revaluation for comparison purposes.

For more information: The Town's budget information is presented in a **2024 Town of Stratham Budget Summary** located at the 2024 Town Meeting page. The summary explains budget drivers, where the Town spends the funds, and historical information and trends.



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ARTICLE 12: Capital Improvements Program

To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of Six hundred seventy eight thousand dollars (\$678,000) to implement the Capital Improvements Program for 2024 as presented in the Town Report and recommended by the Planning Board. This is a special warrant article which will be non-lapsing until the specific items are completed or obtained but shall in no case be later than December 31, 2028 per NH RSA 32:7 (VI).

The Select Board recommends this Article by unanimous vote.

The Town’s Master Plan guides development and land use decisions for the Town. In addition, it identifies strategies, visions, and projects which often require long range capital investment. Long-term financial planning ensures the Town has the needed resources to maintain current services, replace equipment, and upgrade or rehabilitate facilities as needed. The Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) is the tool used to plan these investments, and this Article appropriates funding for the “year one” projects (2024).

The 2024-2029 Capital Improvement Plan document located at the Town Meeting 2024 website includes information about the Town’s current and future capital needs to support its rolling stock, buildings, recreational facilities, and information technology over a six-year time horizon.

A summary of the projects is included in the Town Report.

For more information: Please see the **2024-2029 Capital Improvement Plan** at the 2024 Town Meeting page.

ARTICLE 13: Appropriate Funds to Several Capital Reserve Funds

To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of Two hundred and fifty thousand dollars (\$250,000) to be added to the following capital reserve funds previously established with One hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$150,000) to come from the unassigned fund balance and One hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000) to be raised through general taxation.

Fire Department Capital Reserve Fund	\$125,000
Highway Vehicle/Equipment Capital Reserve Fund	\$125,000
Total	\$250,000

The Select Board recommends this Article by unanimous vote.



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The Town has a number of financial tools used to plan for large purchases. These tools represent a “best practice” in municipal finance. If funded appropriately, these tools can ensure the Town can fund large purchases for capital items when they are needed and avoid “spikes” in a tax rate in any given year.

For example, the Town projects future costs for replacing ambulances and fire trucks as well as heavy equipment and trucks in the Public Works department. These projections are based on replacement schedules informed by life cycle expectations and condition of the assets. Annual funding is set aside through this article in order to meet the needs of future replacements. Generally, money is set aside each year even if expenditures are not required in that year. These funds are also used to establish repositories to be used to respond to opportunities for conservation and historic preservation projects.

This year a medium duty truck is scheduled for replacement in public works. In 2024, we will be reassessing the current equipment list and replacement schedule. No purchases are planned in the Fire Department for 2024. The forestry squad vehicle is planned for replacement in 2024. The next engine is scheduled for 2028. The 2024 allocation to the Fire Department CRF has been increased by \$15,000 to account for increased costs and to ensure the funds preparedness for the 2028 purchase.

For more information: Please see the reserve fund descriptions and more in the **2024-2029 Capital Improvement Plan** at the 2024 Town Meeting page.



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ARTICLE 14: Raise and Appropriate from EMS Special Revenue Fund

To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of Thirty six thousand five hundred dollars (\$36,500) for the following purposes:

2024 EMS Supplies	\$16,500
2024 EMS/EMT/First Responder Training	\$10,000
2024 ALS Services Contract	\$10,000

and to further authorize the withdrawal of Thirty six thousand five hundred dollars (\$36,500) from the Stratham Fire Department EMS Special Revenue Fund created for these purposes during the March 17, 2000 Annual Town Meeting and as amended during the March 11, 2005 Town Meeting. No additional funds from general taxation are to be used.

The Select Board recommends this Article by unanimous vote.

RSA 31:95-c authorizes towns to create nonlapsing funds into which they will place the revenue from fee-generating activities. These funds are not exempt from the budget appropriation process. Special revenue funds, while exempt from lapse, cannot be spent without an appropriation. They can only be spent after a town meeting vote and only for a purpose connected with the activity generating the fees. The Stratham Fire Department EMS Special Revenue Fund was established as Article 14 states for the purposes of supporting EMS ongoing operational activities.

Included in the article this year are appropriations that we have made in prior years: \$10,000 for ongoing EMS training and \$10,000 to cover the contracted cost of Exeter Hospital Advanced Life Support ambulance service, an advanced level of emergency response to Town residents used on an as-needed basis. Since, Medicare/Medicaid only permit the transporting agency (the Stratham Fire Department) to bill patients, the Town collects all EMS payments and in turn pays Exeter ALS for its services. Because of the “pass-through” nature of this transaction, it is “net neutral” to the fund.

New this year is an additional appropriation of \$16,500 for EMS supplies used in the course of daily operations. This appropriation allows the cost for these supplies to be funded from revenue developed as a result of offering the service rather than through taxation as was done previously.



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ARTICLE 15: Shall votes be counted by paper ballot and hand counted only?

Shall the following provisions pertaining to elections be adopted? All voting shall be by paper ballot and all ballots shall be hand counted only, rather than by use of optical scanning or any other types of programmable electronic counting devices. This shall constitute a return to hand counting ballots and the immediate discontinuance of all electronic voting machines and electronic devices authorized for use by trial in RSA 656:40. Should this article be passed, it should be enacted by the Town of Stratham immediately.

Submitted by petition. Non-monetary.

This item was submitted by petition. The Wiggin Memorial Library intends to recognize a petitioner representative to speak to this article at the March 7th Voter Information Night at 6:30 p.m.

ARTICLE 16: To transact any other business that may legally come before this meeting.

This Article allows for other business that may be legally be acted upon by the Town meeting to be done so.