

2023

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 2023 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 14th) and at a second session (this year, Saturday March 18th). 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 11-20 are to be acted upon at the second session.



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Important Dates

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

Tuesday, March 14, Town and School Districts Elections, Ballot Voting
Polls open: 7 a.m. – 7 p.m., Stratham Memorial School (39 Gifford Farm Road)

Saturday, March 18, 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 [2023 Town Meeting page](#) (see black tab at top of Town's homepage).

- This 2023 Voter Information Guide;
- NEW: Video link to a narrative explanation of Zoning-related articles (2-10)
- NEW: Video link to explanation of business session warrant articles (11-20)
- 2023 Town Report;
- Town Warrant and NH DRA Form MS-636;
- 2023 Town of Stratham Budget Summary and line item detail; and
- 2023-2028 Capital Improvement Plan;

For more information about Warrant Articles pertaining to zoning, please consult this guide, pages 29-62 of the Town Report, or contact the Planning Department by calling (603) 772-7391 ext. 147.

Don't Forget

Voter Information Night hosted by the Wiggin Memorial Library
6:30 p.m., Tuesday March 7th at the Stratham Municipal Center.
[Visit the Library Website for More Information](#)

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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2023 Town Warrant Articles 1 through 10

These articles are to be voted on at the Town Election to be held on Tuesday, March 14th 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 Clerk – three (3) year term
- One (1) Library Trustee – three (3) year term
- One (1) Trustee of the Trust Funds – one (1) year term
- One (1) Cemetery 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 Treasurer – two (2) year term
- One (1) Stratham School District Clerk – one (1) year term

Exeter Region Cooperative School District ballot:

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

More information: See the Town Clerk's office for links to sample ballots and attend the March 7th Voter Information Night.



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ARTICLE 2: Gateway Commercial Business District front setback

To amend the Zoning Ordinance, Section 3.8.8 Gateway Commercial Business District, Table 2 to increase the minimum front setback for developments in the Gateway Commercial Business District and to clarify how building height is measured in the District. The purpose of this amendment is to require greater front setbacks along Portsmouth Avenue to ensure the provision of landscaping and pedestrian facilities and to clarify that building height is measured to the highest point of the roofline.

The Planning Board recommends this article by unanimous vote.

The Gateway District has landscaping standards that are impossible to meet with the existing 0-foot front setback. A larger setback would provide for landscaping and pedestrian facilities. Additionally, some additional setback from Portsmouth Avenue, a multi-lane arterial, is preferable for aesthetic purposes and is more consistent with existing building patterns along the corridor.

ARTICLE 3: Table of Dimensional Requirements

To amend the Zoning Ordinance, Section 4.2 Table of Dimensional Requirements to reduce the front setback for properties in the Professional/Residential District that abut residential uses from 100-feet to 20-feet. The purpose of this amendment is to make the front setback more consistent with other zones in Stratham and to allow for the redevelopment of uses on small properties where the existing setback requirement makes redevelopment unfeasible.

The Planning Board recommends this article by unanimous vote.

The purpose of this amendment is to provide for redevelopment on the small number of lots impacted by the existing 100-foot setback, the highest required in Stratham. Many existing historic properties are located close to the roadway on small lots. This amendment provides for development consistent with the historic built form of Portsmouth Avenue.

ARTICLE 4: Gateway Commercial Business District standards for sidewalks, driveways, and electric vehicle charging stations.

To amend the Zoning Ordinance, Section 3.8.8 Gateway Commercial Business District, Table 4 to establish minimum standards for sidewalks, driveways, and electric vehicle charging stations in the Gateway Commercial Business District. The purpose of this amendment is to add minimum standards for driveways and sidewalks to reduce conflict points between pedestrians and motorists and to add provisions for electric vehicle charging facilities.

The Planning Board recommends this article by unanimous vote.



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The purpose of this amendment is to establish minimum standards for sidewalks and driveways to aid the community's goal of making Portsmouth Avenue a more pedestrian-friendly environment. These amendments would include minimum sidewalk standards and to reduce conflict points between intersections of sidewalks and driveways along the corridor. This amendment also provides minimum requirements for electric vehicle charging stations, a fast-growing technology the Planning Board likes to encourage.

ARTICLE 5: Gateway Commercial Business District

To amend the Zoning Ordinance, Section 3.8.6 Gateway Commercial Business District Conditional Use Permit and Section 3.8.8.a Gateway Commercial Business District Permitted Uses by Zone. This is a housekeeping amendment to correct clerical errors and ensure consistency of terms and uses between this Section and Table 3.6, Table of Uses.

The Planning Board recommends this article by unanimous vote.

The purpose of this amendment is to align all uses in Sections 3.8.6 and 3.8.8.a of the Gateway Commercial Business District so they are exactly consistent with the permitted uses listed in the Table of Uses (Table 3.6).

ARTICLE 6: Places of Worship

To amend the Zoning Ordinance, Section II Definitions, Table 3.6 Table of Uses, and Footnotes to Table 3.6 to add a definition and use category for Places of Worship and to add a footnote indicating that such uses are subject to Section 3.3 of the Site Plan Regulations.

The Planning Board recommends this article by unanimous vote.

The purpose of this amendment is to incorporate changes to the Zoning Ordinance necessitated by the Legislature's passage of RSA 674:76 which limits the ability of municipalities to regulate land or structures used primarily for religious purposes through the Zoning Ordinance.

ARTICLE 7: Maximum Residential Densities

To amend the Zoning Ordinance, Section IV *Dimensional Requirements* to establish maximum residential densities in Stratham's commercial districts and to clarify that only one primary dwelling shall be permitted on lots in the Residential/Agricultural and Manufactured Housing Districts. This requirement exempts agricultural properties and housing developments approved as part of condominium or mobile home park forms of development.

The Planning Board recommends this article by unanimous vote.



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The purpose of this amendment is to provide limitations on residential density in commercial zoning districts, including the Gateway Commercial Business, Town Center, Flexible Mixed Use, Professional/Residential, Route 33 Heritage, and Special Commercial Districts. The proposed density limits are more generous than residential density requirements in residential districts, such that reasonable residential development opportunities would be provided. This amendment also clarifies existing density requirements in Stratham's residential districts.

ARTICLE 8: Sign Content

To amend the Zoning Ordinance by deleting Section VII Signs in its entirety and replacing with a revised Section VII Signs in order to incorporate legal amendments to the Town's Sign Ordinance necessitated by decisions of the United States Supreme Court which impact how municipalities may regulate sign content.

The Planning Board recommends this article by unanimous vote.

The purpose of this amendment is to incorporate amendments to the Zoning Ordinance to ensure that the Town is not regulating the content of signage. The amendments would not affect the physical location and dimensional requirements of signage.

ARTICLE 9: Sign Ordinance

To amend the Zoning Ordinance, Section VII *Signs* in order to both incorporate legal amendments to the Ordinance and to amend regulations on signage, limiting the size, height, and illumination of signage in order to control visual clutter along roadways, reduce distractions caused by signage to motorists, and to improve the aesthetics of commercial corridors in Stratham.

The Planning Board recommends this article by unanimous vote.

The purpose of this amendment is to incorporate the changes to the Ordinance proposed under Article 8 and additional regulations limiting the area, height, and illumination of signage. This amendment would reduce the permitted maximum height of signage, implement additional limits on the size of signage, and would prohibit internally illuminated signage in Stratham. This amendment would also provide for a Conditional Use Permit review process for applications that deviate from the requirements of the Ordinance.



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ARTICLE 10: Solar Energy Systems

To amend the Zoning Ordinance, Section V, Sub-section 5.13 Solar Energy Systems to clarify the requirements associated with the removal of medium- and large-scale ground-mounted solar energy systems after they are de-activated. This amendment would require landowners with solar energy systems to provide a plan for restoring a site to pre-development conditions if a solar facility is abandoned and to record a declaration committing to removing the array while eliminating a requirement to provide a financial security for the life of the solar project.

The Planning Board recommends this article by unanimous vote.

The purpose of this amendment is to establish requirements to return land to pre-development condition after the abandonment of medium or large scale ground-mounted solar energy systems. The amendment would eliminate a requirement to provide a financial security to the Town for the life of the solar project.

For more information about zoning-related articles: See pages 29-62 of 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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2023 Town Warrant Articles 11 through 20

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 18th at 9:00 a.m. at the Stratham Memorial School (39 Gifford Farm Road).

ARTICLE 11: 2023 Operating Budget

To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of Eight million two hundred eleven thousand one hundred eighty eight dollars (\$8,211,188) 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 Select Board recommended FY 2023 General Fund operating budget totals \$8,211,188, which represents an increase of approximately \$161,065 or 2.00% over FY 2022.

For the second year in a row, this year's budget reflects Select Board guidance that emphasized minimizing budget increases during a time of economic uncertainty for all and maintaining competitiveness in the employment market. Progress in managing our health insurance costs and improved cost estimating and budget efficiencies are both contributing factors to the limited annual increase.

This operating budget appropriation (along with the proposed capital and capital reserve appropriations) result in an estimated Town tax rate of \$3.18 (an 11 cent or 3.5% increase over last year).

For more information: The Town's budget information is presented in a **2023 Town of Stratham Budget Summary** located at the 2023 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 sixty three thousand dollars (\$663,000) to implement the Capital Improvements Program for 2023 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 (2023).

The 2023-2028 Capital Improvement Plan document located at the Town Meeting 2023 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 on page 75 and 76 of the Town Report.

For more information: Please see the **2023-2028 Capital Improvement Plan** at the 2023 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 eighty five thousand dollars (\$285,000) 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 and thirty five thousand dollars (\$135,000) to be raised through general taxation.

Fire Department Capital Reserve Fund	\$110,000
Heritage Preservation Capital Reserve Fund	\$50,000
Highway Vehicle/Equipment Capital Reserve Fund	\$125,000
Total	\$285,000

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 there are no large expenditures planned from the Highway Capital Reserve Fund. However, in a later article, Engine #1 in the Fire Department is set to be replaced. Despite the high cost associated with this vehicle (up to \$950,000), there will be no direct impact on this year’s tax rate or spike in what is need to be raised. The contribution to the Fire Department Capital Reserve fund in this article of \$110,000 is the same as it has been in several recent past years.

For more information: Please see the reserve fund descriptions and more in the **2023-2028 Capital Improvement Plan** at the 2023 Town Meeting page.



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ARTICLE 14: First Responder Training & ALS Service Contract

To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of Twenty thousand dollars (\$20,000) for the following purposes:

2023 EMS/EMT/First Responder Training	\$10,000
2023 ALS Services Contract	\$10,000

and to further authorize the withdrawal of Twenty thousand dollars (\$20,000) 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.

The NH Municipal Budget Act requires the Town's legislative body (in Stratham, this is the Town Meeting) to appropriate from Special Revenue Funds. Special Revenue Funds are repositories for dedicated funding sources; in this case, Town's Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Special Revenue Fund funded from proceeds stemming from the Town's ambulance billing. In turn, these funds are available to support the needs of the Fire Department including the Town's EMS service function. This year, as for several years past, the Town has voted to appropriate funds for EMS Training (\$10,000).

This fund is also used to pay Exeter Advanced Life Services (ALS) which provides EMS services 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 (\$10,000). Because of the "pass-through" nature of this transaction, it is "net neutral" to the fund.



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ARTICLE 15: Fire Engine #1 Replacement

To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum not to exceed Nine hundred and fifty thousand dollars (\$950,000) for the replacement of Fire Engine #1 and to further authorize the withdrawal of Two hundred and fifty thousand (\$250,000) from the Stratham Fire Department EMS Special Revenue Fund, created March 17, 2000 and amended March 11, 2005 to include the purpose of purchasing Fire Department vehicles and equipment. The balance will be raised from the SVFD Fair Trust Fund (\$80,000) and the remaining balance not to exceed (\$620,000) from the Fire Department Capital Reserve Fund. This special warrant article will be non-lapsing per RSA 32:7, VI and will not lapse until the purchase has been completed, or December 31 2028, whichever is sooner. No additional funds from general taxation are to be used.

The Select Board recommends this Article by unanimous vote.

This article is the second of two articles appropriating funds from the Fire Department EMS Fund (see explanation in Article 14). This equipment purchase is for the replacement of our current Engine #1. This vehicle will be 25 years old at the time the Town would take delivery of a new Engine, which is 2025. We are fortunate that the leadership and dedicated members of the Stratham Volunteer Fire Department have carefully stewarded this vehicle and ensured its ongoing maintenance requirements in order to prolong the life of this Fire Engine beyond the 20-year expected life cycle.

This appropriation from the Special Revenue Fund will be matched with funding from the Capital Reserve Fund as well as a donation from the Stratham Volunteer Fire Department Fair Trust Fund (\$80,000). We are fortunate as a Town that the volunteer energy within and around the Fire Department is able to meaningfully contribute funding to offset costs which would otherwise be borne by general taxation.

ARTICLE 16: Optional Veterans' Tax Credit (72:28, II)

To see if the Town will readopt the optional Veterans' Tax Credit in accordance with RSA 72:28, II for an annual tax credit on residential property of \$600.

The Select Board recommends this Article by unanimous vote.

In 2022, the State of New Hampshire changed the definition of Veteran through a legislative act. Added to the definition is "and continues to serve", making currently serving members of the armed forces eligible for a credit. As a result of this change, expanding eligibility of the tax credit, the NH Department of Revenue Administration (DRA) has required all municipalities to



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readopt their Veterans Credit selections. If this article did not pass, the Town will only be able to offer the Standard Veterans' Credit of \$50 rather than the Optional Credit that the town elected to set at \$600 at Town Meeting in 2020.

ARTICLE 17: All Veterans' Tax Credit (72:28-b)

To see if the Town will readopt the All Veterans' Tax Credit in accordance with RSA 72:28-b, for an annual tax credit on residential property which shall be equal to the same amount as the standard or optional veterans' tax credit voted by the Town under RSA 72:28.

The Select Board recommends this Article by unanimous vote.

In accordance with guidance from the NH Department of Revenue Administration, the Town has been advised to readopt this article for the same reason provided in the explanation for Article 16 (above).

ARTICLE 18: Motor Vehicle Registration Fee and Capital Reserve

To see if the Town will vote to collect an additional motor vehicle registration fee of \$5.00 per vehicle for the purpose of supporting a Municipal Transportation Improvement Fund as set forth in RSA 261:153 VI, and further, to vote to establish said fund as a capital reserve fund governed by RSA 35 and to appoint the Select Board as agents to expend from this capital reserve fund for the purposes for which it was established. Proceeds from the Municipal Transportation Improvement Fund are to be used to support eligible local transportation projects as permitted under RSA 261:153 such as public transportation, roadway improvements, signal upgrades, and development of new bicycle and pedestrian paths. The additional fee shall be collected from all vehicles, both passenger and commercial, with the exception of all-terrain vehicles as defined in RSA 215-A:1, I-b and antique motor vehicles or motorcycles as defined in RSA 259:4.

(Ballot Vote Required)

The Select Board recommends this Article by unanimous vote.

The State of New Hampshire has enabled Towns to raise additional funds through Motor Vehicle registrations for the purpose of supporting transportation related projects. While Towns in our regions have previously adopted this additional fee, including Greenland, Exeter, and North Hampton; Stratham has not. This article proposes an additional fee of \$5.00 (the maximum allowed in the statute) to be added to motor vehicle registrations (except all-terrain vehicles as defined in RSA 215-A:1, I-b and antique motor vehicles or motorcycles)



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The additional funds raised, estimated to be \$50,000 per year would be deposited in a new Capital Reserve Fund also established by the article with the Select Board members designated as agents to expend. There are a variety of transportation related projects that could benefit from this funding in Stratham including implementation of recommendations for bike and pedestrian connections resulting from the Open Space and Connectivity Plan study, other transportation infrastructure-related expenses, or other initiatives supporting transportation solutions for our residents that would otherwise need to be funded through the property tax or some other source of funding if at all.

ARTICLE 19: Establishment of Fees

To see if the Town will vote to adopt RSA 41:9-a, to allow the Select Board to establish or amend fees following a public hearing process. Fees authorized under the section include fees related to regulatory programs adopted by the Town and fees for the use of revenue producing facilities.

The Select Board recommends this Article by unanimous vote.

This article gives the Select Board greater flexibility to adopt fees to respond to changes in the cost of providing services, such as at the Transfer Station facility. The public would still be involved through a public hearing process, which is required as part of the article.

ARTICLE 20: 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.