



Town of  
**Stratham**  
NEW HAMPSHIRE

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**TOWN MEETING  
VOTER INFORMATION GUIDE**



# 2020

STRATHAMNH.GOV

## Town Meeting Voter Information Guide

This guide is presented to the residents of Stratham as a resource in preparing for the 2020 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 “Town Meeting-Select Board” 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, takes place at both an election (this year, March 10<sup>th</sup>) and at a business session (this year, March 13<sup>th</sup>). In the Town Meeting form, the residents – Stratham’s registered voters – are the legislators.

This year, Articles 1-8 are to be acted upon at the Town Meeting election. Articles 9-21 are to be acted upon at the Town Meeting business session.



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## Important Dates

Friday, March 6, Stratham School District Meeting<sup>1</sup>  
7:00 p.m., Stratham Memorial School

Tuesday, March 10, Town and School Districts Elections, Ballot Voting  
Polls open: 8 a.m. – 8 p.m., Stratham Municipal Center

Friday, March 13, Town Meeting  
7:00 p.m., Stratham Memorial School

## Town Meeting, Voting & Election Information

For more information about elections, voting and Town Meeting please visit the  
Town Clerk/Tax Collector's website

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

or call

(603) 772-7741 ext. 140

## Summary of Additional Resources Listed in this Guide

- Voter Information Guide –  
<https://www.strathamnh.gov/> (notifications)
- Town Warrant and MS-636  
<https://www.strathamnh.gov/voting>
- 2020 Town of Stratham Budget Summary –  
<https://www.strathamnh.gov/select-board/pages/town-budgets>
- 2020 Capital Improvement Plan –  
<https://www.strathamnh.gov/select-board/files/cip-2020>
- TIF/Gateway Implementation - FAQ Document -  
<https://www.strathamnh.gov/select-board/pages/gateway-implementation>
- Planning Department - (603) 772-7391 ext. 180

## Don't Forget

Voter Information Night hosted by the Wiggin Memorial Library  
7:00 p.m., Tues. March 3<sup>rd</sup> at the Stratham Municipal Center

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<sup>1</sup> 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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## 2020 Town Warrant Articles 1 through 8

These articles are to be voted on at the Town Election to be held on Tuesday, March 10<sup>th</sup> from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m., at the Stratham Municipal Center, 10 Bunker Hill Avenue.

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

Select Board - 1 position, three year term  
Town Clerk/Tax Collector, 1 position, three year term  
Library Trustee - 2 positions, (one) three year term, (one) one year term.  
Trustee of the Trust Funds - 1 position, three year term  
Cemetery Trustee - 1 position, three year term  
Town Moderator - 1 position, two year term  
Supervisor of the Checklist - 1 position, 6 year term

**For more information:** Look for a sample ballot on the Town Clerk's website and come meet the candidates at the March 3<sup>rd</sup> Voter Information Night.

### **ARTICLE 2: Septic tank installation.**

This article amends the zoning ordinance definition of a 'structure' to no longer include septic tanks. This allows septic tanks to be installed in accordance with State regulation and not subject to building setbacks on a property.

*The Planning Board recommends this article by unanimous vote.*

### **ARTICLE 3: Permitting requirements for certain uses.**

This article amends the Zoning Ordinance's Table of Uses to clarify the permitting process for projects that require both a Special Exception and Site Plan Review. This change reduces the number of concurrent boards reviewing projects. The amendment also creates a permit process for accessory uses within the Industrial Zoning District.

*The Planning Board recommends this article by unanimous vote.*

### **ARTICLE 4: Industrial Zone height limit.**

This article amends the Zoning Ordinance related to the height of structures permitted within the Industrial Zone by allowing the Planning Board to review increased structure height during a comprehensive Site Plan Review process rather than requiring a separate Zoning Board of Adjustment hearing.

*The Planning Board recommends this article by unanimous vote.*



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### **ARTICLE 5: Accessory Dwelling Unit Regulations.**

This article amends the Zoning Ordinance to clarify the permit process and local rules related to permitting and operating an Accessory Dwelling Unit. The proposed changes were generated in response to situations discovered in the building permit process that were not clearly resolved in the existing zoning language.

*The Planning Board recommends this article by unanimous vote.*

### **ARTICLE 6: Freestanding Solar Structures.**

This article amends the Zoning Ordinance limitation on the allowable height of free-standing solar structures by increasing the allowable height from twenty (20) to twenty one (21) feet. The changes were proposed by the Planning Board in response to standard solar equipment installation parameters.

*The Planning Board recommends this article by unanimous vote.*

### **ARTICLE 7: Accessory Structures and Construction Activity.**

This article amends the Zoning Ordinance related to the permitting process for certain accessory structures and certain construction activities within the Wetland Conservation Overlay District. The proposed changes clarify the permitting process and provide consistency with applicable definitions.

*The Planning Board recommends this article by unanimous vote.*

### **ARTICLE 8: Demolition Review Committee Process.**

This article amends the Zoning Ordinance to clarify the process to be followed during the Town's consideration of Demolition Permits. The proposed change clarifies that when there is a change of ownership or upon expiration of a demolition permit, the Demolition Review Committee process starts over.

*The Planning Board recommends this article by unanimous vote.*

**For more information:** about these articles, please visit the Planning Department website or contact the Planning Department by calling 772-7391 ext. 180.



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## 2020 Town Warrant Articles 9 through 21

As discussed in the introduction, these articles to be voted upon at the Town of Stratham Town Meeting (business session) to be held on Friday March 13<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 p.m. at the Stratham Memorial School, 39 Gifford Farm Road.

### **ARTICLE 9: 2020 Operating Budget**

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.

In FY2020, the proposed General Fund operating budget totals \$7,867,126, which represents an increase of \$416,742 or 5.6% over FY2019. Increases in revenues, including new value in the tax list and adjustments in fees, contribute to an overall net operating budget increase of 2.8%. The estimated tax rate for funding this Operating Budget article and other appropriations articles on the Warrant is \$3.16, a decrease of \$0.14 over last year's rate.

This year, the Town's budget information is presented in a 2020 Town of Stratham Budget Summary document. The summary explains factors affecting this year's budget, budget drivers, a description of where the Town spends the funds, and historical information and trends are presented in a document.

**For more information:** Please see the *2020 Town of Stratham Budget Summary* by visiting the Select Board's portion of the Town website.

*The Select Board recommends this article by unanimous vote.*

### **ARTICLE 10: Capital Improvements Program**

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,



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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 (2020).

This year, the Select Board, Town Staff, and Planning Board created a new CIP document for the Town. The Plan 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.

**For more information:** Please see the *2020-2025 Capital Improvement Plan*, <https://www.strathamnh.gov/select-board/files/cip-2020> on the Select Board’s portion of the Town’s website.

A summary of the projects is included on page 56 and 57 of the Town Report.

*The Select Board recommends this Article by unanimous vote.*

### **ARTICLE 11: Appropriate Funds to Several Capital Reserve Funds**

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.

More information about each of these Reserve Funds can be found on pages 41-46 of the *2020-2025 Capital Improvement Plan*.

**For more information:** Please see the 2020 Capital Improvement Plan, <https://www.strathamnh.gov/select-board/files/cip-2020> on the Select Board’s portion of the Town’s website.

*The Select Board recommends this Article by unanimous vote.*

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### **ARTICLE 12: Raise and Appropriate from the EMS Special Revenue Fund**

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 Towns 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 used to pay Exeter Advanced Life Services (ALS) who provides EMS services on an as needed basis. Since, Medicare/Medicaid only permit the transporting agency (Stratham FD) 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.

*The Select Board recommends this Article by unanimous vote.*

### **ARTICLE 13: Replacement of Jaws of Life for Fire Department**

This article is the second of two articles appropriating funds from the Fire Department EMS Fund (see explanation in Article 12). The Fire Department’s front-line Jaws-of-Life are over 20 years old and in need of replacement. Cars have changed significantly over the past 20 years and new Jaws-of-Life have a much higher working force. Also, updated cutters on these tools are designed to work with the newer vehicle designs as opposed to the older post style designs.

*The Select Board recommends this Article by unanimous vote.*

### **ARTICLE 14: Adopt Legislation Authorizing Tax Increment Finance (TIF) Districts**

The State RSA establishing Economic Development and Revitalization Districts (RSA 162-K) requires a town’s legislative body (in Stratham, this is the Town Meeting) to adopt the law before establishing a tax increment financing district. If this article does not pass, the next article (establishing a specific district) is moot as the Town must pass this “authority” first. This article would allow the Town to move forward with a Tax Increment Finance District, a financial tool used across the state and nation to catalyze desired investment (economic development or revitalization) in order to increase a town’s assessed value and/or introduce new uses, amenities, or employment, usually commercial development.

*The Select Board recommends this Article by unanimous vote.*

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## **ARTICLE 15: Route 108 Corridor Tax Increment Finance (TIF) District**

Through this Article, the Town's Select Board is recommending the establishment of the Route 108 Corridor Tax Increment Financing District (See February 20, 2020, "TIF" Plan on the Town's Gateway Implementation website).

The Town's 2019 Master Plan reaffirmed the long-held visions for a strategic redevelopment of the 108 Corridor to benefit the Town's quality-of-life and financial stability for the long term. Recent outreach, surveys, study, and the Master Plan discussions confirm this direction and the Select Board is recommending the adoption of a TIF District and Plan to advance the Town's wishes.

The development and redevelopment envisioned for this Corridor are not possible to construct without water and sewer infrastructure. As a result, the Town's desire to "enhance the economic vitality, business diversity, accessibility, and visual appeal of Stratham's Gateway Commercial Business District" cannot be realized nor will higher-value mixed-use (residential and commercial) development help offset the property tax burden on residents in the future. In the absence of a growing commercial tax base (combined with limited remaining land to build new homes), the cost to fund town, county and school budgets in the future will increasingly be borne by the existing residential tax base as opposed to shared with a more robust commercial base.

In summary, there is significant opportunity cost to the Town in maintaining an underperforming commercial district, both financially and in terms of achieving the Town's vision for a vital, accessible, and improved business district for the community.

**For more information** about the Gateway Implementation and proposed TIF District, please access the following available on the Town's website:

- Route 108 TIF Plan (dated February 20, 2020)
- Frequently Asked Questions – Route 108 Corridor TIF District
- Presentations from Outreach Sessions and Public Hearing
- Route 108 Study Committee Final Report (May 2019)
- Engineering and Financial Analysis Reports

*The Select Board recommends this Article by unanimous vote.*



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### **ARTICLE 16: 79-E Community Revitalization Tax Relief Incentive**

The 2019 Master Plan identifies several goals related to the preservation of the Town's historic buildings, landscapes and features. The Town has a number of architecturally significant properties and the Plan calls for providing options and incentives to restore, rehabilitate,

and utilize existing building stock. This article asks the Town to adopt a historic preservation tool that has recently been expanded at the State level in an effort to preserve more properties.

RSA 79-E is a NH State law that allows communities to extend property tax relief for work on historic structures within designated districts. In 2014, Stratham voters adopted 79-E in the Town Center and Professional/Office zones. With this preservation tool, the Select Board has the option of granting property tax relief on the value of the improvements to historic buildings for a limited time. A relatively new amendment to the state law allows this tool to be used in any structure within Town that is listed or eligible for listing on the National or State Registers of Historic Places; not only those in the previous two zoning districts identified in 2014. Along with the Select Board recommendation below, the Heritage Commission also recommends this article.

*The Select Board recommends this Article by unanimous vote.*

### **ARTICLE 17: Modifications of Elderly Exemption from Property Tax**

The State of New Hampshire permits towns to offer property tax exemption for "elderly" residents meeting certain requirements. Stratham has adjusted its exemption levels and asset limits periodically. To ensure the exemption levels in Stratham keep pace with increased valuations, an adjustment is recommended this year. An increase in the Elderly Exemption will lessen the tax obligation for residents who receive the exemption.

*The Select Board recommends this Article by unanimous vote.*



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### **ARTICLE 18: Modification to Veterans Tax Credit**

Effective April 1, 2018, RSA 72:28 was changed to allow Towns to vote to adopt or modify an increase in the Veterans Tax Credit. Previously the range of the credit was \$51 - \$500 per year. In Stratham, the current credit is \$500 as voted by Town Meeting. The law increased the range to \$750 per year; via this article the Select

Board recommends increasing the limit to \$600 in 2020. Stratham currently has 362 Veterans accessing this credit.

*The Select Board recommends this Article by unanimous vote.*

### **ARTICLE 19: Multi-Sport Park Construction**

This petitioned article is submitted by residents of Stratham. For this guide, the petition content/warrant article language is included as the explanation. Representatives of this petition have been invited to the March 3<sup>rd</sup> Library Information night and will also be recognized at Town Meeting (business section on March 13<sup>th</sup>).

To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of Three Hundred Thousand Dollars and no cents (\$300,000.00) for the purpose of constructing a concrete recreational facility (Multi-Sport Park) on the southerly portion of the Municipal Center parcel at 10 Bunker Hill Avenue and to authorize the Select Board to accept \$10,200 in donations already raised towards this project (a total of \$289,800 to come from general taxation). This special warrant article will be a non-lapsing appropriation per NH RSA 32:7 and will not lapse until the stated purpose is completed or obtained, but shall in no case be later than five (5) years from this appropriation per NH RSA 32:7 (VI).

*The Select Board vote to recommend this article was two in favor and one against.*



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### **ARTICLE 20: New Hampshire Resolution for Fair Redistricting**

This petitioned article is submitted by residents of Stratham. For this guide, the petition content/warrant article language is included as the explanation. Representatives of this petition have been invited to the March 3<sup>rd</sup> Library Information night and will also be recognized at Town Meeting (business section on March 13<sup>th</sup>).

By petition of 25 or more eligible voters of the Town of Stratham to see if the Town will urge that the New Hampshire General Court, which is obligated to redraw the maps of political districts within the state following the 2020 census, will do so in a manner that ensures fair and effective representation of New Hampshire voters. That in order to fulfill this obligation of the New Hampshire General Court shall appoint an independent redistricting commission that draws the new district maps in a way that does not rely on partisan data such as election results or party registration or favor particular political parties or candidates.

The record of the vote approving this article shall be transmitted by written notice from the Select Board to the Town of Stratham's state legislators and to the Governor of New Hampshire informing them of the instructions from their constituents within 30 days of the vote.

*The Select Board recommends this Article by unanimous vote.*