

"SB 2" Form of Town Meeting

In 1995 the NH State Legislature enacted two bills to allow towns that appropriate their budgets through an annual meeting of voters to act on any or all warrant articles by means of the official ballot referendum system. The "standardized" official ballot referendum option, still referred to colloquially as "SB 2" is found at RSA 40:13. Belmont Voters adopted SB 2 in 2008 for the Town Budget. The Shaker School District Meeting remains under the Traditional Form of Annual Meeting where all action occurs at one meeting.

Under SB 2 the Town Meeting now consists of two sessions; the first session, referred to as the "deliberative session" and the second session to elect officers and vote on all articles in their final amended form.

The first session is held like an open business meeting, complete with the authority to discuss and amend all warrant articles, except those whose wording is prescribed by law and those required by statute to be voted on by official ballot (such as amendments to a zoning ordinance). The role of the first session, in addition to information and debate, is to decide the final form of ballot questions. However, there are limits to the first session's ability to amend articles. An article may be amended to change the dollar amount, including reducing it all the way to zero, but it may not be amended to eliminate the subject matter.

The second session consists of the election of officers and final voting on all articles in their amended form. It is run just like an election by official ballot, with no further opportunity for discussion or amendment.

If the operating budget, which is defined as total appropriations minus special warrant articles and other appropriations voted separately, is rejected by ballot, then the prior year's operating budget with certain adjustments (the "default budget") takes effect, unless the selectmen decide to call a special meeting for another try at adopting a revised operating budget.