

BOW TOWN AND SCHOOL DISTRICT MEETING FAQs

1. Why are we holding our Town and School District meetings in March?

State law establishes the period when town and school districts may be held. In some circumstances they can be postponed, but all of the planning and budgeting the Board of Selectmen and School Board do through-out the year aim for March decision-making.

2. Why are the meetings in person?

Since June 2020, a group consisting of the Moderators, officials, and outside legal counsel has been considering how to conduct the 2020 elections and our 2021 Town and School District meetings. Over the course of 11 Zoom calls, the group considered the status of the pandemic in Bow and the constantly evolving guidance from the Legislature, the Secretary of State's office and the New Hampshire Municipal Association regarding the ways to conduct elections and meetings. We considered every permissible plan from not only a legal and practical perspective, but also from the perspective of the risks that all of us are facing in the pandemic. No plan for our meetings was as good as the traditional meetings we had before the pandemic. However, we decided that the health and safety protocols that were developed by the School District to protect our students, administrators and staff were acceptable to protect our voters. We recognize that not everyone will agree with our plan, but we hope everyone recognizes that the decisions by our Town and School District officials were made after careful and extensive consideration.

2. Why can't we do drive-through voting as the School District did last year?

Keeping to the March dates made drive-through voting unworkable under current law. Under current law, drive-through voting would need to remain open as many hours as polls would be (from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.). It is impractical to expect the many volunteer poll workers and officials it takes to carry out the elections and business meetings to work outside for 12 hours in March, especially if weather is inclement. Therefore, the Town and School District decided to stick with the traditional meeting format with appropriate public health safeguards.

3. May I still use the drive-up absentee voting option on voting day?

Yes. There will be a designated parking space on the south side of the Community Center in which voters who wish to use the drive-up absentee voting

option may park. Just press the button and someone will bring the necessary paperwork to your car.

4. What social distancing protocols will be in place for voting day and for the business meetings?

Voting day at the Community Building will be handled in much the same way that voting occurred for the September primary and the November general election: voters will be separated from one another in any waiting lines, table shields will separate voters from election workers, voters will only use every other voting booth, etc. In addition, Town staff will be present to sanitize voting booths, tables and other areas that may be in contact with multiple persons throughout the day.

At the two business meetings, the check-in procedure will mimic those used for polling day, with appropriate separation of voters from one another and workers. Within the auditorium, voters will be separated so that they are at least six feet from one another, and all voters will be required to wear masks. Once the auditorium is full, voters will be seated in one of five remote rooms that will have full audio and video interconnection with the auditorium. Assistant Moderators will be present in each of the remote rooms, and voters in the remote rooms will be able to speak to issues and to vote without leaving the room.

5. Will voters and election officials be required to wear masks?

Yes. On polling day, everyone who wishes to vote will be asked to wear a mask, and all workers will wear masks. Should a voter be unable to wear a mask or refuse to wear a mask, we will follow procedures similar to those used during the election in November.

Similarly, all voters at the business meetings will be asked to wear masks. A separate room will be designated for voters who cannot or will not wear a mask.

6. Will I be able to watch the Town and School District business meetings from my home?

Yes, the Town and School District business meetings will be livestreamed so that any member of the community can watch and listen to the proceedings from home. However, voters who are watching remotely will not be able to participate in the meeting or vote on the warrant articles.

7. If I am watching the meeting via livestream, will I be able to drive to the High School and vote on warrant articles?

Yes, a voter can always drive to the High School, check in, and participate in the votes on any articles that have not been concluded by the time of their arrival. However, since most articles are voted on relatively quickly, the likelihood of a voter having time to drive to the High School and arrive in time for a vote on a particular article is questionable.

The exception to this answer relates to voting on Article 3 on the Town warrant relative to the adoption of the SB2 form of government. By statute, voting on Article 3 has to be by written ballot with the ballot box kept open for an hour. Therefore, a voter could watch the meeting from home, and then drive to the High School, check-in and vote during the one-hour period that the ballot boxes are required to be open. To accommodate voters who may be uncomfortable entering a meeting room, a Supervisor, an Assistant Moderator and a ballot box will be available in the High School lobby so that voters may cast a ballot on this article without entering a meeting room.

8. Last Fall, I did not want to go into the polling place to vote, but I was able to drop off my completed absentee ballot. Can I still do that?

No. The statute that permitted voters to drop off their own absentee ballots at the polling place on polling day was repealed after the November election. However, the statute that permits an agent to drop off an absentee ballot for a voter still applies.

9. Last Fall, I was able to register to vote from my car on polling day. Can I still do that?

No. The statute that permitted drive-up voter registration was repealed.