

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 our elections and our Town and School District meetings. Over the course of numerous Zoom calls, the group has 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 minimizing unnecessary risks to the health and safety of our voters, officials and volunteers. 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 have been developed at the State level were acceptable to protect our voters. (See State of New Hampshire Governor's Reopening Task Force Universal Best Practices.) 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 2020?

Under current law, the polls for drive-through voting would need to remain open as many hours as regular 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. In addition, with the expiration of Executive Orders relating to alternate meeting formats, it is unlikely that drive-through voting would be permitted at this time. 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 health 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 last years' Town and School District meetings. 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. In addition to the Auditorium, Voters will be able to participate in the meetings from the Cafeteria and the Gym, both of which will have full audio and video connections 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 using a special microphone and camera in the "Multi-Purpose Room" or "Small Gym" that will link them to the Auditorium. Voters in the remote rooms will also be able to vote at a convenient ballot box.

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

Yes. On voting day, everyone will be encouraged, but not required, to wear a mask.

Similarly, all voters at the business meetings will be encouraged, but not required, to wear masks. The Auditorium will be mask-optional and the Gym will be designated solely for voters who wish to wear a mask and maintain social distancing.

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 any Article, such as a bond issue, where State law requires that voting on the Article has to be by written ballot with the ballot box kept open for an hour. Therefore, on such a warrant article, 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 such article without entering a meeting room.

8. In 2020, I did not want to go into the polling place to vote, but I was able to drop off my completed absentee ballot with someone outside. 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 during calendar year 2020 was repealed. However, existing law still permits an agent to drop off an absentee ballot for a voter, so long as statutory requirements are followed.

9. In 2020, 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 during calendar year 2020 was repealed.