Guidelines and Tips for Presentations
at Carlisle Town Meetings
Wayne Davis, Moderator

Making an effective presentation requires preparation. With attention to a few details you can markedly enhance your chances of success and help your fellow citizens make more informed choices.

What follows is a compendium of advice from years of observing some very successful presentations, and some not so successful ones, along with some best practices culled from similar guidelines used in other Massachusetts towns. It is written for a first-time speaker, but even experienced presenters may find some food for thought. A few items go beyond "suggestions" and are requirements. These appear in **bold red** in the text and are also summarized at the end.

It is helpful to understand how Town Meeting is structured, especially the difference between an article and a motion.

Before the Meeting: Articles and Motions
The agenda for a Town Meeting is contained in the warrant. The warrant consists of a series of articles, each setting forth some *general* subject matter. For example:

> To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate, transfer from available funds, or borrow pursuant to any applicable statute, the sum of twenty-six thousand dollars ($26,000), or such other amount as the Town may vote, to purchase or lease a vehicle and related equipment for the Fire Department, or to take any other action thereon.

The purpose of the warrant article is to inform voters ***generally*** of the action to be considered. Note that the example article does not specify which of the three methods of raising funds will be used, whether acquisition will be by purchase or lease, nor even the specific nature of the vehicle. Although the article suggests that $26,000 is the expected amount, the article as phrased leaves room for other amounts of money to be proposed.

A motion is ***specific***. A motion that would be in order under this article is,

> I move that the sum of Twenty-Six Thousand Three Hundred and Fifty dollars ($25,250) be raised and appropriated from the FY12 tax levy for the purpose of purchasing and equipping a four-wheel drive all-purpose response vehicle for the Fire Department.

Note that the generalities have all been replaced with specifics. Of course, the motion must be within the bounds of the original article. For instance, a motion to borrow money for a new roof for the fire house would not be in order under the sample article. Borrowing is allowed, but the article limits use to a vehicle for the Fire Department. However, a motion to refer the matter to a study committee would be in order.

Typically, the text of motions proposed by Town boards or committees should be worked out in advance with the Town Administrator and/or the Moderator and reviewed by Town Counsel. The text of motions proposed by citizens should be worked out in advance with the Moderator. In no case should the words "or take any other action thereon" be part of your motion. These words are included in the article to lend generality; they are not part of a motion because they are not specific.

Preparations for the Meeting
If you are going to be the lead speaker on an article, be sure that the Moderator and Town Administrator know this well in advance. Also, your motion must be written out at least three weeks in advance, with copies given to the Moderator, Town Clerk, and Town Administrator. Specific submission deadlines will be published in advance of each Annual and Special Town Meeting.

The lead presenter or a designee MUST attend the Moderator's Preparatory Meeting approximately one month before the Annual Town Meeting (or ~two weeks before a Special Meeting.)

In readying your presentation, remember the "three P's": Prepare... Prepare... and Prepare. You probably know your reasons for supporting the motion very well. Make sure you also know and understand the strongest arguments *against* what you are proposing so that you can address them, either directly or indirectly. Rehearse your material until you are completely

at ease with it. Present it to a group of friends or neighbors and consider their suggestions. Ask your trial audience to think of tough questions. Try answering them on your feet.

If you wish to use visual aids such as a PowerPoint presentation, see the "[Use of Visuals](#)" guidelines below. You will need to submit a copy of the presentation to the Moderator <mark>two weeks</mark> in advance and will be asked to participate in a "dry run" before Town Meeting. The dry run typically occurs a few days before or the afternoon of Town Meeting. The purposes for these preparatory requirements are to help ensure clarity of the presentation, to familiarize you with the technology in use, and to avoid logistical problems on the floor of Town Meeting.

If you need to put detailed language or numbers before people, have it prepared as a handout and place it on the tables in the lobby outside the auditorium 30-45 minutes before the session starts. Mark your material plainly with the article number. You should provide a minimum of 200 copies; 400 is safer if attendance is expected to be large.

It's Time for Your Article

<mark>When your article comes up, the Moderator will announce the Article and read the motion. The Moderator will then recognize you (the designated presenter) to speak.</mark>

Your Presentation

A brief, well-prepared presentation is much more effective than a rambling dissertation. Generally, presentations at Carlisle Town Meeting by proponents are limited to <mark>six (6)</mark> minutes total. If you will have more than one person from your group speak, the total time should not exceed <mark>six</mark> minutes. (Speakers from the floor are given <mark>two</mark> minutes each.) If the topic is especially complex and you feel that you will be unable to do it justice in six minutes, you may <mark>discuss this at the Moderator's Preparatory Meeting</mark> and ask that he exercise his discretion to permit more time. Be forewarned that the Moderator uses this power sparingly.

Naturally, you know more about your subject than you can possibly cover in a few minutes minutes. But you are not there to tell people everything you know. The voters can and will make up their minds on the strength of far less than that, and it can actually be counterproductive to go on at length. Your original message gets lost, and in all the detail you are providing, voters will likely find one thing or another that they don't understand or that troubles them. Don't forget, you may speak a second time after you have heard some reaction to your proposal; this will give you a chance to focus your comments and address whatever may have emerged as troublesome issues.

Some people can memorize a speech. Others write out their speech word-for-word and read it verbatim. Read verbatim notes only if you must; it is very hard to read a speech and have it sound genuine, even though you mean every single word. And whatever you do, **DO NOT READ YOUR SLIDES VERBATIM**. For most of us, the following combination works best.

> First, know exactly what you are going to say for your opening sentences, rehearse them until you can say them easily, and have them written out and handy. Begin your message positively, clearly, and emphatically.

> Next, work from an outline of key phrases. Speak conversationally and explain your ideas just as you would to a group of friends. (This, after all, is what you are doing.) Finally, know exactly the words with which you are going to wind up your speech; rehearse them, and have them available. Finish with a good summary and a friendly but clear request for support.

> Last, bring a **paper copy** of your notes. Yes, that's right. When speaking from the podium we use in the auditorium, use of a cell phone for your notes is awkward, not cool. Sometimes, the old fashioned way is the better way.

People remember most what you say first and what you say last, so be sure you get the heart of your message into your opening and your closing. When you are done, say "Thank you" and step back from the microphone to indicate that you are done.

Discussion, Questions and Answers

At meetings in a business setting, presenters typically complete their remarks, then ask if there are any questions, and proceed to call on people who wish to raise issues, comment, or ask questions. This is ***not*** how it works at our Town Meeting. The Moderator recognizes all speakers. Any questions that citizens may have will be directed to the Moderator, not to you. The Moderator will exercise his discretion whether and when to ask you to respond to a question

or questions from the floor. In general, the Moderator tries to see that factual questions that help voters understand the issue do get answered but may not ask you to answer questions that are argumentative or irrelevant. Town Meeting is not a court of law, and you are not under cross examination. If the Moderator believes the question should be answered, he will ask you to speak to it. If someone else on your team is better suited to answer the question, ask that your colleague respond. If you need more time to think, or need to consult a reference, or talk to a colleague, then do so. If you get called on anyway, simply say, "I need a moment to think about that" or words to that effect. If you don't know the answer to a question, simply respond "I don't know," with or without a brief explanation of why you don't. While some may express disappointment, saying that you don't know is far preferable to guessing.

In terms of responding to issues and arguments, the Moderator will generally only allow you to speak one more time on your own initiative until others who have not spoken on the question have spoken if they desire. Therefore, after your initial presentation, you should not count on speaking more than once. Keep track of things that you want to rebut and ask to speak again when you have a sense of how things are going and can speak to several issues at once. Conclude with another brief summary statement and request for support. Don't wait too long, though, because if a motion to close debate is made, accepted, and voted favorably, that will end all discussions even though you may not have had a chance to speak a second time.

Use of Visuals

Visuals can enhance a presentation greatly or detract from it if overdone or done poorly. **Do not feel compelled to use PowerPoint or a similar presentation program.** Only use visuals if they will truly enhance your message. A picture can replace a thousand words, and a summary of your key points can focus the audience's attention, but a slide filled with a hundred words is just a hundred words for the audience to read while tuning out what you are saying.

If you do choose to present slides, you **must**:

1. **Submit your draft presentation to the Moderator no later than two weeks prior to Town Meeting.** The Moderator will review your presentation for technical compatibility and legibility. They will return comments to you as quickly as possible, and generally within 48 to 72 hours.

2. **Name your file as follows:**
   [Article #] [Brief Topic Identifier]   (Your Name)
   Examples:
   > 10 Budget (Clark)
   > 25 SitePlanReview (Jones)
   Where there are multiple motions under a single article, such as for Community Preservation Committee:
   > 19-1 CPC-Main (Smith)
   > 19-3 CPC-CranberryBog (Wilson)

3. **Use Microsoft PowerPoint (preferable), Keynote, or Adobe Acrobat.**

4. **Submit your final presentation to the Moderator (and, if requested a Town Hall designated employee) by the final deadline: 9 am the morning of an evening Town Meeting *or* 5 pm the day before an afternoon meeting.**

5. **Attend a dry run the day of or a few days before Town Meeting.** The schedule for this will be announced at the Moderator's Prep Meeting.

6. **Be prepared to speak without your visuals.** Technical glitches do happen. If problems occur, the Moderator may ask you to proceed without relying on your audio-visual assistance, so you should be ready to do so.

Here are suggestions to make a slide presentation more effective. Please also see the Sample Presentation Template available on the Town web site for further information.

A. Bullets and Information
   - ✓ Keep text short and concise
   - ✓ Limit to:
      - o 5 bullets per slide

- o 8 lines of text
- o One level of sub-bullets
- ✗ Don't cram too much text onto the slide. Unlike a document (such as this one) that you read on your own, a slide is accompanied by you, the speaker, to fill in the detail. The preceding bullets were good examples. This bullet is a bad example. It's too wordy. And I just told you something you had already figured out. Is this what you want to subject your audience to?
- ✓ Use a picture, graph, map or table instead of text whenever possible.

B. Slide Ratio. <mark>Choose either traditional (4:3) ratio or widescreen (16:9), whichever best suits your content.</mark>

C. Font Size
- ✓ Make it big – generally as below

✓ Titles at 36 Point
✓ Text at 28 Point

D. Font Selection
- ✓ Serif fonts (such as this) are great for documents, but **not** for presentations
- ✓ Use a sans-serif font:
  - o Arial is often a default in presentation software but looks very heavy and is difficult to read. Avoid it.
  - o Verdana, Aptos, Calibri, and other modern sans-serif fonts are easier to read on-screen and from a distance.
- ✓ Choose a font and stick with it.

E. Colors
- ✓ Use high contrast, such as in the [Sample Presentation Template](#) black letters on a light tan background (Hex: #FFE699). That slightly off-white background avoids glare from the stage lights yet looks white when projected.
- ✗ Do **not** use red letters on blue backgrounds, or vice versa. It's hard to read for everyone, especially so for those with red-blue color blindness.

F. Emphasis Do's and Don'ts
- ✓ **Do** make limited use of **bold**, *italics*, ***bold italics***
- ✗ Don't underline. Underlining slows reading and hinders comprehension.
- ✗ DON'T USE ALL CAPS. IT'S DIFFICULT TO READ AND COMES ACROSS AS SHOUTING.

G Photos and Other High-Resolution Graphics
- • Although computers have gotten faster, it can still take a long time to load slides crammed with too many pictures. Seconds can feel like minutes, both for you as presenter and for the audience.
- ✓ Limit yourself to one high-resolution graphic per slide.
- ✓ If using multiple images on a slide, reduce the resolution so the slide can load quickly.
- • Location maps should be simple and clear.
- • Survey maps and architectural plans often have too much information, most of it irrelevant to Town Meeting, and labels that are too small. If you are working with outside professionals, give them clear marching orders to simplify and use big labels. (See the examples at pp 6-7 in [Sample Presentation Template](#) available on the [Town web site](#)) If you don't have that luxury, find someone with the requisite computer skills to clean up the image. It's not too difficult just using PowerPoint.

G. Graphs, Tables, and Spreadsheets
- ✓ Graphs and tables are great if you can keep them simple.
- ✓ See the [Sample Presentation Template](#) for a good example.
- ✗ Spreadsheets make terrible PowerPoint slides. If you need to present a spreadsheet, have it available as a handout to be given to voters as they enter the auditorium.

- ✓ Re-read the section on font size. While you can go slightly smaller for labeling graphics, keep the size large enough to be legible from the back of the auditorium.
- ✓ Some tips to improve legibility on graphs:
  - o Instead of labeling every tick line on the graph's axes, label every second or third value so you can use a larger font size.
  - o For line graphs, increase the line weight to 2 or 3 points (rather than the defaults in Excel).
  - o Remember to use high-contrast colors and choose varying line styles to differentiate your data points.

H. Animation and Special Effects
- ✓ Animation that allows you to reveal a portion of the slide at each mouse click can be useful to keep the audience's attention. They can read faster than you can speak.
- ✓ Be judicious however: 3 reveals per slide can work; doing a lot more than that can distract you with too much mouse clicking and can make the audience feel like you're spoon-feeding them.
- ✓ Keep the reveals simple and consistent. Having each line of text fly in from a different angle with a different gee-whiz effect distracts from your content.

I. Videos. Brief videos embedded in presentations can heighten interest and convey useful information – IF they work. Unfortunately, the technology gremlins seem to love to strike when you've got several hundred people waiting. Therefore, it's best to avoid them. **If you still wish to use a video, you must discuss this with the Moderator well in advance and receive permission.**

J. Timing
- • Remember, you have only *six* minutes. Lincoln took just three minutes for the Gettysburg Address.
- • A good rule of thumb is one minute per slide. But practice, practice, practice to figure out what will work for you.
- • If your content exceeds 8-10 slides, move the slides with additional detail or less important information to the back, *after* your closing slide. You may be able to use them if needed to respond to a question from the floor.

K. The Final Slide
- • Your final slide should sum up your case and ask the voters for your support.

M. After-Final Slides
- • If you wish, you can plan a slide to be left up during the debate.
- • Please also include *after* your final slide an extra slide with the text of your motion. The Moderator may ask for this to be displayed before the vote.
- • Also, you can include some extra slides that provide factual information that may be too detailed for the main presentation, but that might be useful to share in response to a question from the audience.

Summary of Requirements

1. <mark>The lead presenter or a designee MUST attend the Moderator's Preparatory Meeting approximately one month before the Annual Town Meeting (or ~two weeks before a Special Meeting.)</mark>

2. Typically, the text of motions proposed by Town boards or committees should be worked out in advance with the Town Administrator and/or the Moderator and reviewed by Town Counsel. The text of motions proposed by citizens should be worked out in advance with the Moderator. In no case should the words "or take any other action thereon" be part of your motion.

3. If you are going to be the lead speaker on an article, be sure that the Moderator knows this well in advance.

4. For presentations with visuals:
   a. Submit a copy of the presentation to the Moderator <mark>two</mark> weeks in advance.
   b. Use Microsoft PowerPoint (preferable), Keynote, or Adobe Acrobat.
   c. Submit your final presentation by the specified deadline.
   d. Attend a practice session the day of or a few days before Town Meeting.

If you have any questions, you may contact the Moderator, Wayne Davis at moderator@carlislema.gov.