

Massachusetts House of Representatives Bill Summary

- Bill #:** H.3898
- Title:** An Act to amend the Town of Natick home rule charter
- Sponsor:** Rep. David Linsky
- Committee:** Municipalities and Regional Government
- Hearing Date:** 5/13/25
- Current Law:** The latest version of the Natick town charter was approved in 2023.
- Summary:** The sponsor provided the following overview of the legislation. The corresponding bill section numbers are indicated in parentheses:

(Section 1) Voter Approval Requirement

Before taking effect, the amendments must be approved by Natick voters via a ballot question at the next regular or special municipal or state election. The ballot will reference charter changes made at the 2023 Fall Annual Town Meeting, 2024 Special Town Meeting #1, and 2024 Fall Annual Town Meeting. If a majority votes “Yes,” the amendments will become law.

(Section 2) Title Change: Town Administrator → Town Manager

- The title “Town Administrator” is replaced throughout the charter with “Town Manager.”

(Section 3) Town Meeting Member Vacancy Process

- Following each town election, the town clerk shall prepare a formalized list of non-elected candidates (those who received votes but weren't elected) for each precinct to fill vacancies. The town clerk shall maintain the list until the following town election.
- The Town Moderator shall use these lists to appoint replacements in descending order of votes received.
- Tied votes are resolved by the Town Moderator appointing a town meeting member by public lottery.
- If a vacancy remains, a public caucus among current precinct members is held to fill the seat, with notice and posting requirements for transparency.

Representation & Participation in Town Meeting

- The Town Moderator may require representatives from town agencies to attend and provide information at town meeting.

- These reps may speak on matters affecting their agencies but cannot vote or make motions.
- Remote participation procedures may be established.

Citizen Article Submission

- Clarifies who may submit warrant articles:
 - Elected town officers
 - Any eligible multiple member body (by majority vote)
 - 10 or more voters for annual town meetings, 100 or more voters for special meetings
- Requires the Select Board to refer zoning bylaw amendments to the Planning Board within 14 days.

(Section 4) Select Board Powers

- Reaffirms the Select Board as the chief executive and policy-making authority.
- Members of the Select Board may not interfere in daily administrative operations.
- Appoints the Town Manager by a majority vote and other members of multiple member bodies as may be provided by town meeting vote or by vote of the Select Board for the purpose of conducting studies.
- May suspend or terminate the Town Manager by majority vote.
- Can call elected officers (except the Town Moderator and persons appointed by the Town Moderator) for coordination meetings.

(Section 5) Town Manager Role

The Town Manager is now explicitly:

- The chief administrative officer.
- Responsible for implementing policies, managing staff, preparing the budget, overseeing contracts, maintaining facilities, and enforcing laws.
- Given broad appointment and supervisory powers, subject to civil service laws and union agreements.
- Required to submit an annual capital improvement plan and attend Town Meeting and Select Board sessions.
- Can delegate duties, manage technology resources, and reorganize agencies with Finance Committee approval.
- Shall not hold any other profession during their term unless approved in advance by the Select Board.

(Section 6) Budget and Capital Planning Reforms

- School Budget must be submitted to the Town Manager early for integration.
- A preliminary town budget with a detailed message must be submitted to the Finance Committee and published publicly.
 - The Finance Committee shall file a report for the recommendations for actions on the proposed budget and must be made available for seven days prior to date that the town meeting will act on the budget.

- Any submitted preliminary budget documents must include:
 - Operating and capital expenses
 - Revenue projections
 - Free cash estimates
 - Variances and potential scenarios to close gaps
- Capital improvement plans must span 5 years and include cost/benefit details.

(Section 7) Agency Reorganization

- Town agencies can be reorganized either:
 - By-law vote by Town Meeting, or
 - Administrative code plans proposed by the Town Manager, with public hearings and Town Meeting approval (no amendments allowed).

Appointments and Oversight

- Adds new appointment powers:
 - **Select Board:** Comptroller, Police/Fire Chiefs, Director of Veterans' Services, Town Counsel.
 - **Comptroller:** May appoint assistance subject to Select Board approval.
 - **Town Manager:** Town Clerk, Treasurer-Collector, Assistant Treasurer-Collector.
 - These Town Manager appointments require Select Board approval, and timelines are set for notification and action.

Transition Provisions

- Existing provisions for certain offices (like the Comptroller and Treasurer) remain in effect until new bylaws are enacted.

(Section 8) Clarifications & Definitions

- Gender-neutral and flexible terminology (e.g., plural/singular language).
- Expands "**local newspaper**" definition to include websites, social media, and other means deemed effective by the Select Board.
- Defines "**multiple member body**" and "eligible multiple member body."

Vacancy Notice Requirements

- All town vacancies must be **publicly posted** for at least 10 days.
- Description and qualifications must be included.
- Applies to both expected and unexpected openings but excludes civil service/confidential contract roles.

Notes:

The language in this legislation was approved as Article 2 at the Special Town Meeting #1 held on April 30, 2024. This article was declared approved by a majority vote. Additional charter changes incorporated into the text of this legislation were approved during the 2023 Fall Annual Town Meeting, 2024 Special Town Meeting #1, and 2024 Fall Annual Town Meeting.