

Very Brief Description of the Town Government in Wayland, MA

Prepared by Clifford Lewis (October, 2025)

Governments in the U.S. generally have three distinct branches: the legislative branch that makes the laws; the executive branch that carries out the laws; and the judicial branch that judges the laws. In Wayland we have just two of those branches.

Town Meeting is Wayland's legislative branch and dates back to the 17th century when the New England colonies were founded. Any and all registered voters are invited and welcome to attend and vote on the annual budget, proposed local rules known as by-laws, zoning changes, and specific initiatives. The ultimate authority for the budget and by-laws rests with your votes at Town Meeting.

The executive branch is run by Wayland residents whom you elect by going to the polls and casting your vote at the annual Town election. Wayland has ten elected boards and each one has its own distinct responsibilities that are assigned to it by laws made at the state level.¹

All elected boards exercise some degree of autonomy from each other, depending on the particular State law that established that Board. The Schools, in particular have a great degree of autonomy from other boards, but fundamentally, all of the elected boards are not responsible to any other board but they report to "the People" which is you.

The Select Board has overall the broadest set of powers. It is the chief executive body of the Town with overall responsibility for the general administrative operations of town government and it is authorized to enter into contracts on behalf of the Town. The Select Board also determines what matters will be allowed to be presented at Town Meeting for a vote.

In addition to elected boards, we also have more than twenty-five appointed Boards and Committees whose members are appointed by the Select Board. Unlike elected boards that derive their authority from laws enacted at the State level, most appointed boards can be created and terminated as needed by the Select Board.

So, the government in Wayland is what you make it. Building the community the way you want it to be is what local government is really all about.

¹ Unlike most other States, in Massachusetts, any power that can be exercised at the local level is because that power has been specifically granted by the State.