



City of Winooski

Vermont's Opportunity City

27 West Allen Street
Winooski Vermont 05404
802 655 6410
winooski.vt.gov

Memorandum

8/31/2022

From the Office of the Mayor of Winooski

Kristine Lott, Mayor
klott@winooski.vt.gov

To: Winooski City Council
Re: Just Cause Eviction Charter Change

At the August 8 Winooski City Council meeting, the Council discussed the possibility of pursuing a charter change to adopt a Just Cause Eviction policy: See [Eviction Protection Memo](#). This memo intends to provide a sense of the lift this effort would require and as we consider if this is the priority that will support housing concerns in our community.

Legal Requirements

To present a charter change to voters on the Town Meeting Day ballot would require 2 public hearings, duly warned, with the language voters would see on the ballot. The Clerk's office then must have time to have ballots translated, printed, absentee ballots mailed, for the absentee ballots to arrive in Florida, California, and overseas, AND returned on time to be counted.

- Town Meeting Day 2023: March 7
- Giving our Clerk's office only 30 days to handle the ballots means we must approve the change at our Feb. 6 meeting. Assuming this approval took place after closing the second required public hearing on that same date, the Feb. 6 meeting would need to be warned by Jan. 6.
- This means we would have to have held our first public hearing at the Jan. 2 Council meeting in order to place the 30-day warning for the second hearing.
- In order to have the first public hearing on Jan. 2, a 30-day warning would need to be posted by Dec. 2.
- This means we would have to have voted to approve language and hold a public hearing at our Nov. 21 Council meeting. We would need to have had language reviewed by our City Attorney ahead of approval.
- This timeline allows 10 weeks for outreach. This is our best possible timing.

Outreach

A charter change is a serious consideration for any community as the charter is our founding document that guides our policy. Charter changes must be approved by the State Legislature. Once presented to the Legislature, that body may make any changes they see fit, even beyond the scope of what is put forth by voters. As such, it is imperative that we ensure our community understand what they are voting on when a change to the City's charter is proposed. We can look to the [previous Charter Change Commission's outreach process](#) for a model to follow:

- Create a fact sheet that describes the proposed change, including context – why are we considering this change? What problem do we believe it will resolve? What other consequences might result?
- Create a contact form to log conversations with community members. The form can be used like a survey for individuals, and as a log for Councilors/Commissioners to document feedback from residents they speak with in person or via public meetings.

- Use the fact sheet as a jumping off point to educate voters and engage them in conversation. The contact form can be located on the fact sheet to invite feedback. The fact sheet should be distributed widely in conjunction with public meetings, planned outreach efforts, and beyond:
 - Official commission meetings.
 - Informal meetings in public spaces outside of a commission meeting schedule, advertised via City channels.
 - Live Q&A event with Town Meeting TV accessible via TV and internet and recorded for further distribution.
 - Direct outreach to community groups to meet with members.
 - The Mayor hosts a monthly meeting with housing service providers.
 - The rental registry could potentially be leveraged to target landlords and/or identify rental households.

These steps of creating a fact sheet, contact form, organizing meetings and outreach, would need to be conducted by Council or a Commission. Council could take ownership of this process, or task an existing commission. Tasking an existing commission would require them to focus on this effort and push back any other work. Staff support will also be required and will require some other work to be set aside to accommodate this new initiative. If we wanted to reconvene a charter commission, we would need to recruit new members for appointment at our next meeting, further compressing our outreach timeline.

Impact

I reached out to the State Court Administrator's office to request data on evictions filings in Chittenden County court. Unfortunately, they can't get as granular as just Winooski. The report provided showed 105 evictions were filed in all of 2021 for all of Chittenden County and 178 evictions have been filed year to date for 2022, with a projected total of 305 by year end. [2021 census data](#) shows around 74,100 housing units in Chittenden County. 305 filings would be about 0.04% of total housing units impacted by eviction in our entire county.

Legislative Considerations

In addition to Just Cause Eviction, legislation for a statewide rental registry and statewide inspection system was also passed last session and vetoed by the Governor. Both topics may return in the next session.

Another policy change elevated by housing service providers that has not had as much consideration as Just Cause Eviction or the rental registry would be expansion of [protections offered to residents of mobile home parks in Vermont](#) who are entitled to "Written notice 60 days in advance of any rent increase;" to "Dispute any lot rent increase that is more than the mediation percentage for the year (4.5% for 2022);" to "Not to be evicted without cause, such as nonpayment of rent or substantial lease violation, and only by court order;" and are offered the first right of purchase in the event a park is sold.

The City Council should consider where our advocacy efforts are best spent. The legislature should respond to the areas of highest concern from constituents and community leaders. Legislative outreach will require additional effort as newly elected official will require introduction and education. City leadership should provide testimony in committee hearings and do direct outreach to representatives and committee members. Legislative advocacy and outreach related to education funding in the last session required dozens of hours from the Mayor and school leaders.

Thank you,

Mayor Kristine Lott