



# City of Winooski

Vermont's Opportunity City

27 West Allen Street  
Winooski Vermont 05404  
802 655 6410  
[winooski.vt.gov](http://winooski.vt.gov)

## Factsheet: Proposed Charter Change – Just Cause Eviction

Summary: Voters have petitioned for the city to change its charter to allow its City Council to adopt a 'Just Cause Eviction' ordinance. The vote for this charter change will be held on March 7, 2023. This fact sheet states when and where to get more information from city officials about this vote, what happens after the vote if it passes, what the effects on city operations and costs might be, what the city currently does for rental housing now, and some rental housing data.

Full details about the charter change proposal: [winooski.vt.gov/justcause](http://winooski.vt.gov/justcause)

Questions or comments? Contact the City at: 802 655 6410 / [justcause@winooski.vt.gov](mailto:justcause@winooski.vt.gov)

Public Hearings where you may provide City Council with your input:

Thursday, January 26, 2023, 6 PM at Winooski City Hall (27 W. Allen St.)

- Attend online: [us06web.zoom.us/j/84364849328](https://us06web.zoom.us/j/84364849328)
- Attend by phone: 1 646 558 8656
- Webinar ID: 843 6484 9328

Saturday, February 4, 2023, 11 AM at the O'Brien Community Center (33 Malletts Bay Ave.)

- In-person attendance only

### Introduction to charter changes

A city's charter does for the city what the constitution does for the United States: it sets the rules for how the government is organized and how it can act. Vermont state law allows city voters to propose changes to city charters. If 5 percent of registered voters sign a petition for a proposed charter change, cities are required to place that proposed charter change on its next ballot.

Winooski received a petition signed by 5 percent of its voters for a charter change that would give Winooski City Council the power to provide, by ordinance, protections for residential tenants from evictions without 'just cause.' The proposal is attached.

### Process and Timeline for this Charter Change



**Any "no" vote and Just Cause Eviction would not be in place in Winooski for now**

## Effects of Just Cause Eviction on City Operations and Costs

Likely but not limited to:

**Priority shifting:** If the proposed charter change was approved by the state, and City Council decided to develop an ordinance, city staff would need to pause other priority activities to work on the Just Cause Eviction ordinance. Staff involved would be the Housing Initiative Director (position currently vacant), the Fire Chief who also oversees the housing safety and quality program, the Planning and Zoning Manager, the Communications Director to manage public input, and the City Manager.

At least five cities in other states have adopted ordinances with provisions that meet the proposed Winooski charter change language conditions, so city staff could start with those models. However, consulting the public, making sure the ordinance details are appropriate for Winooski and don't violate Vermont laws, and considering unintended consequences would still take a significant amount of time.

**Enforcement:** If city staff are to enforce the ordinance, that would require a significant amount of time to develop good procedures and to train staff in the procedures. Either a) new staff positions would need to be added, increasing the budget to pay for staff, or b) current services, such as building and rental unit inspections and enforcement for safety and health, would need to be reduced.

If city staff are not to enforce the ordinance, and enforcement would be handled through civil courts, city staff are still likely to be asked questions about the ordinance.

**Legal fees:** A lawyer would be needed to write and finalize a good ordinance, and good enforcement procedures (if staff would be enforcing the ordinance). Some communities that have adopted Just Cause Eviction ordinances have been sued by landlord groups. If that happened in Winooski, the city would have to pay legal fees to defend itself.

## What the City is Doing for Rental Housing Now

### Policies

- Strengthening housing quality ordinances and enforcement
- Amended zoning regulations to increase supply of new housing and incentivize affordable housing, which could include rentals.
- Considering new ordinances such as requiring rental deposits be held in interest-bearing accounts and limiting security deposits.
- In 2022, City Council and the Housing Commission considered a Just Cause Eviction charter change. Because current staff would need to pause work on current priorities, it was decided to wait until the Housing Initiative Director position was filled. That position is still vacant.

### Programs

- Minimum Housing Complaint Form on website that can be used by anyone to report poor living conditions of a rental unit; a building inspector will respond and follow up until any landlord-responsibility issues are resolved. Located at [winooskivt.gov/housing](http://winooskivt.gov/housing).
- All rental units inspected every four years for compliance with 70+ safety and health codes.
- Housing Trust Fund that includes loan program to help construction and rehabilitation of rental properties for low-and moderate-income households.

### Rental Housing Data

Number of landlords in Winooski as of Jan 5, 2023 = ~450

Number of rental units in Winooski as of Jan 5, 2023 = ~2,300

Number of evictions filed in Chittenden County court<sup>1</sup>:

In 2022: 288. In 2021<sup>2</sup>: 219. In 2020<sup>2</sup>: 168. In 2019: 413. In 2018: 349.

<sup>1</sup>From Vermont Judiciary. Winooski-only data not available. In 2019, 7.9% of Chittenden County's rental units were in Winooski according to the Vermont Housing Finance Agency.

<sup>2</sup>Eviction moratoriums were in place March 2020-September[?] 2021