

Winooski Charter Commission - All-Resident Voting Factsheet

Winooski Charter Commission info: winooskivt.gov/charter

Meetings: **First and third Tuesdays at 5:30 pm at City Hall
(from mid-March to mid-May)**

Email your questions & comments: charter@winooskivt.gov

Introduction

The Winooski Charter Commission is a task-oriented Commission that advises the City Council on potential changes to the Municipal Charter, the foundational governance document of the City of Winooski. Currently, the Commission is charged with examining options to present Winooski voters with a charter change that would enable all residents to vote in Winooski municipal elections, protect Winooski voter information, align the School and City charters, and consider additional governance changes identified by the Council, staff, and public. The Winooski Charter Commission needs your input during this important public outreach process and is happy to provide you with the information you need.

Purpose

All of our residents contribute in a multitude of ways. We pay our taxes, buy homes and property, open businesses, and send our kids to our schools. Together we create the advantageous diversity our community has celebrated for almost 100 years - regardless of our citizenship status. A change to our municipal charter would allow any qualified Winooski resident, who may for various reasons not have US citizenship, to vote only in municipal elections – giving a voice to our neighbors in local matters that affect them, their families, and their lives.

Winooski Population Data 2017 American Community Survey

Total (18+): 6,131

Native U.S. Citizens = 5,041 (82%)

Naturalized Citizens = 472 (8%)

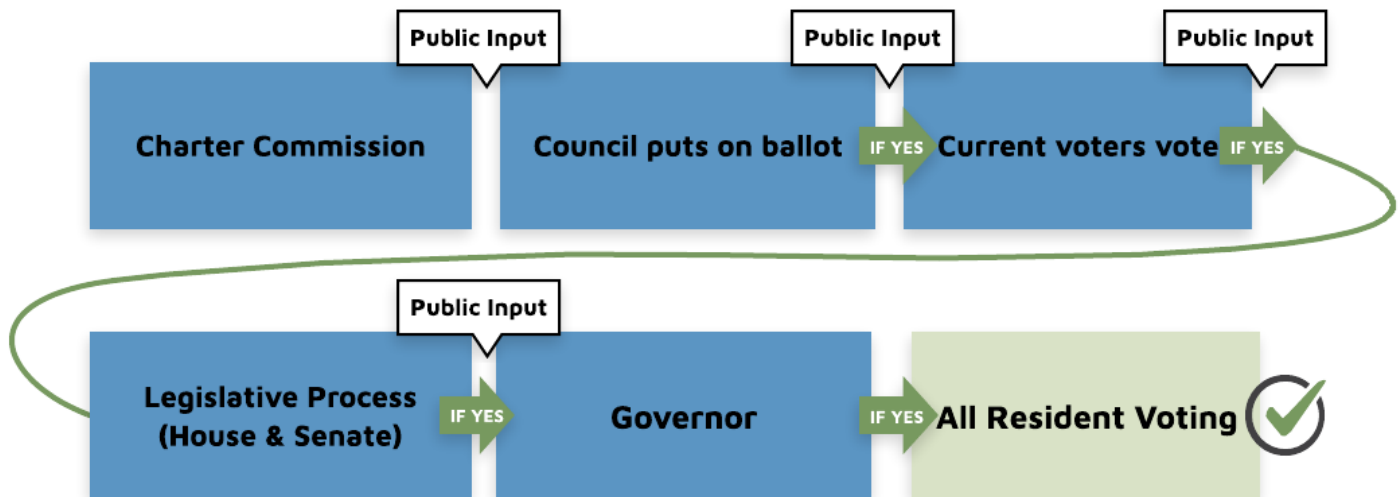
Not a U.S. Citizen = 618 (10%)

Context

All-resident voting in elections goes back to the founding of the United States. After the American Revolution, non-US citizens were allowed to vote in many states. By the 19th century, non-citizens in at least 22 US states were voting in local, state, and federal elections. But a flood of immigrants to America at the start of the 20th century fueled a rise of anti-immigrant sentiment - and by 1926, all states had abolished the practice. As of today, non-citizens are allowed to vote in some local elections in Chicago, San Francisco, and Maryland – a process that has proven successful. Other communities in Vermont are also considering this. It was approved locally in Montpelier in 2019 and is also under discussion in Burlington.

What are the steps to allow for all-resident voting?

The Supreme Court of Vermont has stated that the Legislature has the ability to change charters for towns and cities. This is a multistep process:



Questions We've Considered (FAQs): **We welcome your feedback on all of these ideas!**

- **Who would be qualified to vote?** Residents here under a federally sanctioned legal category (such as a green card or a permanent resident visa, etc.) and who will be 18 years of age or older on or by election day.
- **What does resident mean?** Someone who resides in Winooski with the intent to stay – the same as applies to citizen voters.
- **Could non-citizens run for office?** Under the current charter language, if all qualified Winooski residents are allowed to vote, all qualified Winooski residents will be able to run for local office.
- **Would the voter registration lists be public?** Yes. The City would maintain (1) a state and federal voter registration list and (2) a municipal voter registration list of all qualified Winooski voters. Both would be available upon request.
- **How would non-citizens register?** The same way all voters register: come to City Hall or the polling place and swear that they are who they say they are and are a resident of Winooski.
- **Why don't people just become citizens?** It's complicated. There are lots of barriers to gaining citizenship. These could include:
 - Time. You often have to have lived here for at a minimum 3 to 5 years before you can apply.
 - Eligibility or long waiting lists. Depending on where you are from, only a small number of people are allowed access to citizenship every year.
 - Future access to homeland. Some don't want to give up the right to travel home or move home in the future and US citizenship could eliminate that possibility.
 - Cost. The application itself is \$725 plus classes and lawyers if needed.
- **I'm not a US citizen. If I register to vote, is my information public?** Yes. Your standard voter information is on the list. Your citizenship status is not.
- **Will this prohibit me from applying for citizenship status?** To date, this has not inhibited citizenship applications.
- **When is the vote?** If approved by the City Council and after three public hearings, current voters would be asked to vote on a Charter change in November 2020.
- **How can I provide more feedback?** Email us at charter@winooskivt.gov.