

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Ridgefield, CT, Oct. 11, 2023; -- **UNDERSTANDING RIDGEFIELD’S CHARTER REVISION QUESTIONS ON THE NOVEMBER 7, 2023 BALLOT**

When you go to the polls on November 7, you will have the chance to vote on nine questions for changing the Town Charter. The Charter questions will be on page three of this year’s ballot, making it unusually long. So, understanding the Charter questions in advance will save you time when you enter the voting booth.

Ridgefield’s Charter is its governing document. As such it affects every resident. Every four years or so, a group of citizens is appointed by the Board of Selectmen to review the Charter, gather input from Town leaders and the public, and recommend changes. You can find all the details on the Charter Revision page of the Town website (ridgefieldct.gov). This is simply an overview.

CHARTER BALLOT QUESTIONS AND EXPLANATIONS

Q 1. Shall the Town Charter be amended to make certain technical and administrative changes as recommended by the Charter Revision Commission?

This one question groups changes that are technical in nature, such as clarifying wording to improve readability, or updating references to State statutes.

Q 2: Shall the Town Charter be amended to provide that the position of Town Treasurer be changed from an elected position to that of a hired Town employee?

Q 3: Shall the Town Charter be amended to provide that the position of Town Clerk be changed from an elected position to that of a hired Town employee?

Q 4: Shall the Town Charter be amended to provide that the position of Tax Collector be changed from an elected position to that of a hired Town employee?

Currently, these three positions are elected. In fact, you will be voting for individuals running for these positions this year. But if passed, four years from now these three positions will become ‘hired as Town employees’ by the Board of Selectmen. Designating these three administrative roles as ‘hired’ would allow the Board of Selectmen to require credentials in training, education, and /or experience when hiring. The Board would have a wider geographic area to draw from as residency would not be required as it is for elected positions. Not requiring people to run in elections might also increase the applicant pool. Hiring, rather than electing, would also result in more accountability from the hired employee. *Note that if any of these three questions pass, it will take effect AFTER the four-year terms of those elected this year end in 2028.*

Q 5. Shall the Town Charter be amended to change the titles of the First Selectman, Board of Selectmen, and Selectman, to First Selectperson, Board of Selectpersons, and Selectperson?

Although this change would not affect our form of government, it would change how we refer to our leaders in day-to-day conversation, documentation, and reporting. The current terms have long histories and usage throughout New England but those titles were coined back when only men had the right to vote, let alone hold office.

Q 6. Shall Section 3-2 of the Town Charter be amended to provide that individuals who are not residents of the Town, but who own property in Town solely in their capacity as a trustee, are not entitled to vote at Town Meetings or at referenda?

Generally, non-residents who own property in town can vote at Town Meetings or in a Town Referendum, given that they pay property taxes in Town. This change would clarify that a non-resident would not be eligible to vote if they were only a trustee of a property, and not the direct owner.

Q 7. Shall the Town Charter be amended to make the following changes to the membership and terms of office of certain commissions:

- (a.) amend Sections 5-1 and 5-3 to change the name of the Commission on the Aging to the Commission on Aging, and to change the term of appointment from three-year to two-year terms;**
- (b.) amend Section 5-8 to increase the size of the Economic and Community Development Commission from 7 members to 9 members, and to extend the term of office from 1 year to 2 years;**
- (c.) amend Section 5-14 to add two alternate members, both serving four-year terms, to the Water Pollution Control Authority; and**
- (d.) amend Section 5-15 to decrease the size of the Youth Commission from 16 members to 12 members and to add 2 alternate members to the commission?**

These changes clarify the terms of service on several boards, as suggested by members of the affected boards.

Q 8. Shall the Town Charter be amended to make the following changes to the Town's appropriation process:

(a.) amend Section 10-1(c) to eliminate the ability of the Town Meeting to decrease or delete any line item in the budget;

(a.) The Town budget is the product of months of work and public hearings by Town departments and various boards, culminating in the annual budget referendum where the recommended budget is presented to all voters for approval. This change would remove the ability at the annual Town budget meeting for someone to propose reducing the budget before it goes to the voters in the annual budget referendum.

(b.) amend Section 10-2(b) to require that any appropriation requested by residents at a petitioned town meeting in excess of \$3,000,000 be submitted to referendum;

(b.) This change would clarify that any special referendum requesting an increase in the approved Town budget of more than \$3 million would require approval by a full Town budget referendum, not just a Town Meeting vote.

(c.) amend Section 3-5(b) to provide that the required signatures for any petitions involving expenditures of \$250,000 or more be increased from 5% to 7% of electors?

(c.) The changes in this ballot question would increase the number of voter signatures required to initiate a special referendum to increase the approved Town budget by more than \$250,000.

Q 9. Shall the Standards of Conduct set forth in Article 11 of the Town Charter and the authority of the Ethics Commission set forth in Section 5-9 of the Town Charter be modified as recommend by the Charter Revision Commission?

This reworking of the Charter's existing Standards of Conduct makes them stronger and clearer without becoming onerous. The goal is to have clear ethical guidelines that are up to date with current practices, without discouraging people from volunteering on Town boards.

PLEASE VOTE ON NOVEMBER 7!