

**CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION
GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING AGENDA**

Online & 75 Maple St.
Essex Junction, VT 05452
Thursday, May 22, 2025
6:30 PM

This meeting will be in-person at Essex Junction Recreation and Parks located at 75 Maple Street and available remotely. Options to join the meeting remotely:

JOIN ONLINE: [Join the meeting now](#)

1. **WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS** [6:30 PM]
2. **ADDITIONS OR AMENDMENTS TO AGENDA**
3. **PUBLIC TO BE HEARD**
4. **REVIEW & APPROVE MINUTES FROM LAST MEETING**
5. **DISCUSS PLAN AND NEXT STEPS**

Consideration and discussion of process for examining other communities

6. **ADJOURN**

Attachments:

- Draft Meeting Minutes May 8, 2025
- Initial Thoughts/Ideas for Examining Other Communities
- Community Comparisons Chart
- South Burlington City Charter Committee Chart
- ICMA Form of Government Survey
- VT Civic Health Survey Data
- How Have Term Limits Affected the California Legislature?
- South Burlington City Charter re: Neighborhood forums
- Essex Junction Governance Model Study
- Essex Junction Governance Presentation

Members of the public are encouraged to speak during the Public to Be Heard agenda item, during a Public Hearing, or, when recognized by the Chairperson, during consideration of a specific agenda item. The public will not be permitted to participate when a motion is being discussed except when specifically requested by the Chairperson. Regarding remote participants, if individuals interrupt, they will be muted; and if they interrupt a second time they will be removed. This agenda is available in alternative formats upon request. Meetings of the Governance Committee, like all programs and activities of the City of Essex Junction, are accessible to people with disabilities. For information on accessibility or this agenda, call the Essex Junction Recreation and Parks office at 802-878-1375 TTY: 7-1-1 or (800) 253-0191.

City of Essex Junction
Governance Committee Meeting Minutes
May 8, 2025

Members present: Thomas Coen, Marlon Verasamy, Brian Shelden, Gabrielle Smith, Steve Eustis, Candace Morgan, Deb McAdoo

Members absent: Elaine Haney

Staff Present: Brad Luck

Welcome and introductions

- Meeting called to order at 6:48p.m. by Steve Eustis

Additions or amendments to agenda

- No additions or amendments to the agenda
- We thanked Marcus for his service to this committee

Public to be heard

- No public to be heard

Review and approve minutes from last meeting

- Would like to amend minutes to note that councilor compensation should include a consideration for equity and reasonable compensation for responsibility and time
- Gabrielle motioned to approved the minutes as amended; Marlon seconded the motion
- Meeting minutes with amendment were approved unanimously

Discuss governance considerations to explore: Additions based on city councilor/village trustee survey results

- Form of government:
 - Discussion on enumerating duties of city council president, including representing city as a leader. Discussing if there is a particular role here that needs to be defined.
 - Recommendation to talk to Winooski's mayor to learn about their experience as a weak mayor
 - One person disagrees that responsibilities for council president should be enumerated in the charter
- Councilor composition
 - Most surveyed like the current 5-member composition. Would like to better understand positives to increasing to 7. One point was just a challenge with subcommittees given quorum rules and existing workload for councilors.
 - Point around current system is working so doesn't make sense to be changed.
 - Also noted there are capacity constraints with staff member workload
 - Point that it's important to gather additional perspectives on this matter as well (other towns, community input, etc.)
- Councilor term lengths

- Alignment with our prior discussions on 3 years being a reasonable time frame and staggering terms
- Councilor term limits
 - Discussion on what is a best practice is here and trade-off between institutional knowledge and new ideas and where that line is.
- Election of officials (at-large / districts / hybrid)
 - Strong survey opinion to keep with at-large structure.
- Councilor compensation
 - Consideration for stipend for additional subcommittees, and different amounts for president and vice president
 - Point that compensation increases are important for increasing access opportunities
 - Point to ensure compensation reflects appreciation for all the hours that individuals put in and provides opportunities for many types of folks to serve
 - Point about ensuring this is still seen as a volunteer job
- Neighborhood assemblies
 - Point of needing to ensure there is increased community engagement and public involvement. Need to explore neighborhood assemblies further to learn more.
 - Point to create access points where community members are comfortable engaging. Not everyone wants to speak up at a city council meeting.
 - Point on understanding what problems neighborhood committees are trying to solve
 - Point on whether community engagement approach should be incorporated into the charter or just stated as a value and developed outside of the charter
 - Point on necessity of staff role here (potential capacity constraints)
- Voting date
 - Alignment with the group to move with the school board to town meeting day.
 - Can recommend as a non-charter change

Discuss plans and next steps

- Plans for examining other communities — discuss at next meeting

Gabrielle made a motion to adjourn the meeting

Deb seconded the motion

The motion passed unanimously

Meeting closed at 8:23p.m.

Initial Thoughts/Ideas For Examining Other Communities

- Examine 9 Vermont communities similar in square miles and/or population
- Break into groups of 3 committee members; each group researches 3 communities
- There are 4 weak mayors, 3 council-managers, and 2 strong mayors
- For each community, groups will:
 - Interview the chief administrative officer
 - Interview the head of the elected board
 - Survey the board members
 - Complete the info chart
- Timeline:
 - Between 5/22 - 6/12 - review & submit suggested interview & survey questions
 - 6/12 - review & finalize interview questions, survey questions, chart headings; meet with team to discuss process
 - Between 6/12 - 7/10 work with group on deliverables (no meeting 6/26)
 - 7/10 - group presentations & discussion

Average Population as a % & Square Miles % vs. City

#	Community	Form of Government	Election System	Number of Elected Officials	Leader of the Council Elected by	Term Length	Councilor Term Limits	Councilor Compensation	Neighborhood Assembly/ Other Advisory Group	Population	Square Miles	Population Per Councilor	FY26 Approved Budget	FY25 Tax Rate	Population as % of EJ	Square Miles as % of EJ	Average Population & Sq Miles %
1	Winooski	Weak Mayor	At-Large	5 (mayor+4)		Mayor (3yr), Councilors (2yr)				7,997	1.5	1,599			76%	32%	54%
2	St. Albans City	Weak Mayor	Wards (6)	7 (mayor+6)		Mayor (2yr), Councilors (3yr)				6,887	2.0	984			65%	43%	54%
3	Barre City	Weak Mayor	Wards	7 (mayor+6)		2yr				8,491	4.0	1,213			80%	84%	82%
4	City of Essex Junction	Council-Manager	At-Large	5	Council	3yr	None	\$2,500	None	10,590	4.7	2,118	\$12,419,241	0.9861	100%	100%	100%
5	Montpelier	Weak Mayor	Districts	7 (mayor+6)		2yr				8,074	10.3	1,153			76%	216%	146%
6	Rutland	Strong Mayor	At-Large	11		2yr				15,807	7.7	1,437			149%	162%	156%
7	Barre Town	Council-Manager	At-Large	5		3 (3yr), 2 (2yr)				7,923	30.7	1,585			75%	648%	361%
8	Williston	Council-Manager	At-Large	5		3 (3yr), 2 (2yr)				10,103	30.6	2,021			95%	645%	370%
9	Burlington	Strong Mayor	Districts & Wards	12		2yr				44,743	15.5	3,729			423%	327%	375%
10	Brattleboro	Council-Manager	At-Large	5		3 (3yr), 2 (1yr)				12,184	32.4	2,437			115%	684%	399%

South Burlington Charter Committee

Evaluation of Possible Governance Structures

April 12, 2023

Key Questions	Options	Pros/Advantages	Cons/Disadvantages
Chief Executive?	Strong/ Administrative Mayor (no City Manager) <i>Elected</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear leader with recognized authority who sets the City's policy vision and moves policy forward • Clear point of contact for constituent concerns • City resident elected by the City's voters • Spokesperson for the City, including representing its interests in Montpelier and with the VT Federal delegation • Ceremonial head of the City • Hires own staff, which encourages innovation • Mayoral system easy for citizens to understand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Candidates would be limited to City residents and may not have professional qualifications • City Manager position would be eliminated • Governance could be seen as partisan or overly political • Veto power could cause conflicts with council or override council's decisions • Full-time job could be a barrier to entry for potential candidates • Citywide campaign could be expensive, another barrier for candidates • Campaign donations may raise suspicion of favoritism in later policy decisions • Campaign could encourage or allow endorsement by City employees or employee groups, which could conflict with City policy • Hires own staff, which could be done for reasons other than professional ability • Could become entrenched as an incumbent, difficult to vote out
	City Manager (no Mayor) <i>Appointed</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selected based on professional qualifications, such as expertise, professional experience • Neutral, non-political decisionmaker • Provides continuity to City operations • Runs day-to-day operation of City so elected officials can focus on policy matters • Stays current on managerial and financial issues through continual education and professional development • Hires and fires professional staff and protects them from political influence • Available for citizen concerns • Council can remove manager for poor performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potentially not connected to community • Has unelected authority and may not respect Council's role as policymaker or implement the Council's policies • May use the position to try to manipulate and control the Council and may form 'favorites' with Councilors • City Manager system difficult for citizens to understand • Council's ability to remove manager could incur expense due to employment contract

South Burlington Charter Committee

Evaluation of Possible Governance Structures

April 12, 2023

Key Questions	Options	Pros/Advantages	Cons/Disadvantages
Political Leader?	"Weak"/Policy Mayor (with City Manager) <i>Elected</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear, recognizable leader of the City • Clear point of contact for constituent concerns • City resident elected by the City's voters • Spokesperson and ceremonial head for the City • Can help bring consensus to Council as active chair • Supported by a professional City Manager and can provide support and guidance to Manager • Can be a part-time position so more potential candidates may be able and willing to run • Mayoral system easy for citizens to understand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential for conflicts between Policy Mayor and Council; Council may not support Policy Mayor • Position has little statutory power • Mayor may not accept limited role and may try to act as an Administrative Mayor • Citywide campaign could be expensive, a barrier for many candidates • City Manager may have less authority to act for the City • May not always be available for citizen concerns if part-time position • Nature of position may be confusing to citizens
	Council Chair (with City Manager) <i>Elected as Councilor; chosen by fellow Councilors to be chair</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Works to build consensus, encourages collaboration, and listens to all councilors • May be more of a "team spirit" than a system with a separate mayor • City resident elected by the City's voters • Can be replaced every year by other Councilors • Provides many of the same services as a Policy Mayor • Supported by a professional City Manager and can provide support and guidance to Manager 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not elected as Chair by City residents • Unclear who is the spokesperson for the City • Less of a clear point of contact for residents than with a Mayor • Nature of the role may be confusing to voters • Chair may lack sufficient political influence in lobbying, obtaining grants, etc. • Potential for Chair conflict with Manager

South Burlington Charter Committee

Evaluation of Possible Governance Structures

April 12, 2023

Key Questions	Options	Pros/Advantages	Cons/Disadvantages
Council Composition?	5 Councilors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easier to find candidates to serve • Easier to hold more efficient meetings, have cooperation and team building • Easier to arrange meetings that all Councilors can attend • Easier communication with the City Manager and the residents • If legislative district (ward) based, voting logistics are simpler if just one Councilor per district (ward) • Less expensive for City to pay fewer stipends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May represent fewer perspectives • Too much work for each Councilor • More difficult to get a quorum • Only takes three Councilors to dismiss the city Manager
	More than 5 Councilors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More perspectives will be represented • May mean greater expertise, different skill sets in council • Spreads out the work of the council to more people and may allow for extra activities such as subcommittees • Councilors will be able to miss meetings or recuse themselves when necessary and there will still be a quorum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More difficult to reach consensus; more voices could lead to more conflict or factions • Deliberations could get bogged down with more Councilors, possibly leading to less efficient meetings • Difficult to find more candidates to run • Adding subcommittees could take up more of Councilors' time and create additional staff work • More expensive for City to pay more stipends and increase staff support and time commitment

South Burlington Charter Committee

Evaluation of Possible Governance Structures

April 12, 2023

Key Questions	Options	Pros/Advantages	Cons/Disadvantages
Geographic Representation? <i>For School Board and City Council</i>	Elected at large	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All councilors have a city-wide perspective • More people will be eligible to run for a council seat • Residents from any legislative district (ward) can reach out to any councilor for assistance • Voting logistics for at-large (city-wide) election are simpler for residents and the Clerk's office 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May be unrepresentative of the entire City due to inequitable geographic representation • Difficult for councilors to represent all residents of the City rather than just those in their legislative district (ward) • Running for city-wide office may be expensive and time-consuming
	Elected by legislative district (ward)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residents more engaged with their Councilor at a neighborhood level • Legislative districts (wards) could correspond to existing legislative districts with simpler voting logistics, if only 5 Councilors • Familiarity with localized issues • More affordable and less time consuming for candidates to campaign in their legislative district (ward) • Smaller candidate pool may encourage more candidates • Assuming the 5 legislative boundaries determine the districts (wards), it's easier to have 5 or 10 Councilors (one or two from each district). It may be less confusing for voters than a mixture of geographic representation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential to lose city-wide perspective and, to be reelected, Councilors may have to prioritize their own legislative district (ward) • May be difficult to find a candidate to run in each legislative district (ward) • Smaller candidate pool may lead to more candidates running unopposed, so possibly less voter choice • Some potential candidates (including current councilors) may not be able to serve • Confusing to voters to have one Councilor per legislative district (ward) plus more at-large, if over 5 Councilors • If legislative boundaries determine wards, the Legislature (not the City) determines the districts (wards); redistricting every 10 years could cause confusion • If the number of Councilors is between 5 and 10 it may confuse voters to have one per legislative district (ward) plus one or more at large.

South Burlington Charter Committee

Evaluation of Possible Governance Structures

April 12, 2023

Key Questions	Options	Pros/Advantages	Cons/Disadvantages
South Burlington Board of School Directors Composition?	5 Directors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easier to find candidates to serve • Easier to hold more efficient meetings, have cooperation and team building • Easier to arrange meetings that all Directors can attend • Easier communication with the Superintendent and the residents • If legislative district (ward) based, voting logistics are simpler if just one Director per district (ward) • Less expensive for City to pay fewer stipends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May represent fewer perspectives • Members often work on multiple committees and bargaining groups which creates a high workload • More difficult to get a quorum • Only takes three Directors to dismiss the Superintendent
	More than 5 Directors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More perspectives will be represented • May mean greater expertise, different skill sets in School Board • Spreads out the work of the Directors to more people and may allow for extra activities such as more subcommittees • Directors will be able to miss meetings or recuse themselves when necessary and there will still be a quorum • More contacts for the public and more outreach to the community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More difficult to reach consensus; more voices could lead to more conflict or factions • Deliberations could get bogged down with more Directors, possibly leading to less efficient meetings • Difficult to find more candidates to run • More subcommittees could take up more of Directors' time and create additional staff work • More expensive for School to pay more stipends and increase staff support and time commitment

The background of the entire page is a photograph of a city skyline at night. The skyline features several tall skyscrapers with illuminated windows, reflecting in a body of water in the foreground. The sky is a deep blue with some light clouds. The water in the foreground is dark, with some reflections of the city lights.

2018 Municipal Form of Government Survey

SUMMARY OF SURVEY RESULTS

July 2019

ICMA, the International City/County Management Association, advances professional local government management worldwide through leadership, management, innovation, and ethics. Through expansive partnerships with local governments, federal agencies, nonprofits, and philanthropic funders, the organization gathers information on topics such as sustainability, health care, aging communities, economic development, cybersecurity, and performance measurement and management data on a variety of local government services—all of which support related training, education, and technical assistance.

ICMA provides support, publications, data and information, peer and results-oriented assistance, and training and professional development to more than 12,000 city, town, and county experts and other individuals and organizations throughout the world.

Suggested Citation:

International City/County Management Association. 2018 Municipal Form of Government Survey – Summary of Survey Results. Washington, DC: ICMA, 2019. (Accessed Month Day, Year). <http://icma.org>.

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Table of Contents

Overview	III
Definitions	III
Methodology	IV
Section 1 – Form of Government.....	1
Section 2 – Local Government Procedures.....	4
Section 3 – Chief Elected Official.....	7
Section 4 – Council.....	10
Section 5 – Mayor/Council Compensation and Demographics	13
Survey Question Appendix.....	15

Overview

ICMA's Municipal Form of Government survey has been conducted nine times since 1974 and is the most comprehensive resource available on form of government, provisions for referenda or recall, terms of office, mayoral powers, and other data pertaining to the structure of local government in the United States.

Definitions

Municipality: Refers to cities, towns, townships, villages, and boroughs.

Council: An elected body whose members may be called council members, aldermen, selectmen, freeholders, trustees, commissioners, or a similar title.

Chief appointed official (CAO): Often referred to as a city manager, chief executive officer, city administrator, chief administrative officer, town administrator, village manager, or a similar title.

Chief elected official (CEO): The mayor, president, board chair, etc.

Mayor-Council Form of Government: Elected council or board serves as the legislative body. The chief elected official (e.g., mayor) is the head of government, with significant administrative authority, and generally elected separately from the council.

Council-Manager Form of Government: Elected council or board and chief elected official are responsible for making policy with advice of the chief appointed official (e.g., administrator/manager). A professional administrator appointed by the board or council has full responsibility for the day-to-day operations of the government.

Commission Form of Government: Members of a board of elected commissioners serve as heads of specific departments while also collectively sitting as the legislative body of the government.

Town Meeting Form of Government: Qualified voters convene and act as a legislative body that makes basic policy, votes on the budget, and chooses a board. These elected officials may carry out the policies established by town meeting or may delegate the day-to-day management of the municipality to an appointed manager/administrator.

Representative Town Meeting Form of Government: Similar to town meeting except that voters select residents to represent them at the town meeting. All residents may attend and participate in debate, but only the selected representatives may vote.

Methodology

The 2018 edition of ICMA's Municipal Form of Government Survey was distributed by mail to the clerks of all 12,761 municipal governments in ICMA's database. The survey was returned by 4,109 respondents for a 32.2% response rate.

Respondents were provided with postage-paid return envelopes for their response, but were encouraged to respond through an online survey, the direct link to which was provided on the paper survey. The identity of online respondents was confirmed by requiring respondents to enter a unique, 6-digit ID number, which was provided on the physical survey. The overall standard error is +/- 1% at a 95% confidence interval. Not all respondents answered each question and the sample size for each question is shown as "n."

In this report, questions are organized by topic rather than the order in which they originally appeared in the survey instrument. The appendix provides a sequential list of questions mapped to the page and section in which summary data can be found.

Survey Population

Survey Population	Surveyed	Responded	Response Rate
Total	12,761	4,115	32.2%
Census Population	Surveyed	Responded	Response Rate
Over 1,000,000	9	3	33.3%
500,000 - 1,000,000	26	7	26.9%
250,000 - 499,999	44	10	22.7%
100,000 - 249,999	235	81	34.5%
50,000 - 99,999	549	192	35.0%
25,000 - 49,999	1,028	377	36.7%
10,000 - 24,999	2,332	771	33.1%
5,000 - 9,999	2,750	823	29.9%
2,500 - 4,999	3,963	1,112	28.1%
Under 2,500	1,825	739	40.5%
Geographic Division	Surveyed	Responded	Response Rate
New England	982	386	39.3%
Middle Atlantic	2,425	549	22.6%
East North Central	3,705	1,024	27.6%
West North Central	1,211	498	41.1%
South Atlantic	1,349	582	43.1%
East South Central	579	160	27.6%
West South Central	1,021	364	35.7%
Mountain	547	210	38.4%
Pacific	942	336	35.7%

Section 1 – Form of Government

Survey Highlights

- Among survey respondents, the council-manager form of government remains the most popular form of government for medium to large local governments and is concentrated among municipalities in Southwest and Atlantic Coast states.
- The mayor-council form of government is the most popular form of government among responding municipalities with fewer than 5,000 residents.
- Nearly half of responding local governments established their form of government through a charter.
- Responding local governments in the South are about twice as likely to have their form of governments established by charter than local governments elsewhere.
- Massachusetts is the only state in which form of government is commonly established by by-law.
- Three in four responding local governments have a chief appointed official (CAO), including more than half of mayor-council local governments.
- The CAO position in responding council-manager governments nearly always has the authority to independently develop the budget and make budget recommendations. In non-council-manager governments, the responsibility is delegated to a variety of positions.
- Very few responding local governments attempt to modify their structure or form of government; however, attempts to do so are typically successful.

Response Summary

1. Indicate your municipality's current form of government as defined by your charter, ordinance, or state law. (n=4,020)	Percent of Respondents
Mayor-council	38.2%
Council-manager	48.2%
Commission	3.2%
Town Meeting	8.1%
Representative town meeting	2.3%

2. How is your municipality's structure or form of government established? (n=3,942)	Percent of Respondents
Charter	47.3%
State law	26.1%
Ordinance	18.9%
Resolution	1.3%
By-law	1.9%
Special election/referendum	2.5%
Other	2.1%

3. Does your municipality have the position of chief appointed official? (n=4,030)	Percent of Respondents
Yes	75.7%
No	24.3%

3a. If your municipality has the position of chief appointed official, what action established the position? (n=3,000)	Percent of Respondents
Charter	39.6%
State law	7.7%
Ordinance	30.8%
Resolution	2.5%
Chief elected official created position	1.6%
Elected council/board created/voted on position	12.4%
Referendum	0.8%
Town meeting	2.5%
Other	2.1%

3b. If your municipality has the position of chief appointed official, who appoints that position? (n=2,945)	Percent of Respondents
Appointed by chief elected official alone	3.2%
Appointed by council alone	59.5%
Appointed by combination of chief elected official & council/board	25.7%
Nominated by chief elected official; approved by council/board	9.4%
Nominated by council/board; approved by chief elected official	1.0%
Other	1.2%

5. Who has the independent authority to develop and make recommendations for the budget submitted to the council? (n=3,940)	Percent of Respondents
Chief elected official	15.0%
Chief appointed official	48.9%
Combination of CEO and CAO	10.5%
Chief financial officer	14.1%
Other	11.5%

6. Are your department heads: (n=3,817)	Percent of Respondents
Only elected	4.4%
Only appointed	79.0%
Combination; some are elected, some are appointed	16.6%

7. Please indicate how the following positions in your jurisdiction are selected.	Police Chief (n=3,290)	Fire Chief (n=2,972)	City Attorney (3,658)	City Clerk (n=3,712)
Elected	2.5%	3.0%	2.6%	18.7%
Appointed by the chief elected official (CEO)	12.1%	10.6%	8.6%	7.0%
Appointed by the chief appointed official (CAO)	26.3%	22.5%	6.8%	17.6%
Appointed by the council	22.9%	18.1%	53.1%	33.9%
Appointed by a combination of CAO & CEO	1.1%	1.0%	1.0%	1.0%
Appointed by a combination of CAO & Council	3.7%	2.9%	3.7%	3.3%
Appointed by the CAO with council's advice & consent	5.5%	4.6%	3.2%	3.5%
Appointed by a combination of CAO & CEO & council	3.0%	2.1%	3.0%	2.2%
Appointed by the CEO with council's approval	12.6%	9.5%	12.9%	9.2%
Other	10.3%	25.7%	4.9%	3.5%

12. Please indicate whether there have been any proposals to change your municipality's structure or form of government since January 1, 2011. If yes, also indicate whether the change was approved.

Type of Change	Proposed	Not Proposed	Approved	Not Approved
Change in the form of government (n=3,460)	4.8%	95.2%	63.2%	36.8%
Change from at-large to ward/district elections (n=3,397)	1.8%	98.2%	72.9%	27.1%
Change from ward/district to at-large elections (n=3,394)	0.9%	99.1%	71.4%	28.6%
Change to a mixed system with some at-large and some ward/district elections (n=3,394)	0.7%	99.3%	90.5%	9.5%
Add the position of chief appointed official (n=3,415)	4.2%	95.8%	88.8%	11.2%
Eliminate the position of chief appointed (n=3,395)	1.1%	98.9%	64.7%	35.3%
Increase in powers/authorities of the chief elected official (n=3,407)	2.0%	98.0%	88.7%	11.3%
Decrease in powers/authorities of the chief elected official (n=3,400)	1.7%	98.3%	72.5%	27.5%
Change who appoints the chief appointed official (n=3,395)	0.4%	99.6%	53.8%	46.2%
Change the mix between the number of council members elected at large and the number elected by ward/district (n=3,400)	1.1%	98.9%	81.8%	18.2%
Change the method of election of the chief elected official (n=3,394)	1.0%	99.0%	83.9%	16.1%
Increase the number of council or board members (n=3,413)	1.6%	98.4%	64.6%	35.4%
Decrease the number of council or board members (n=3,398)	1.1%	98.9%	64.5%	35.5%

12A. If a change in form of government was approved, what was the approved change?

Form of Government	From (n=68)	To (n=80)
Mayor-council	72.1%	22.9%
Council-manager	16.2%	67.5%
Commission	5.9%	3.6%
Town meeting	4.4%	6.0%
Representative town meeting	1.5%	0.0%

Section 2 – Local Government Procedures

Survey Highlights

- Most local governments do not have residency requirements for employees. Residency requirements are more common among local governments in sparsely populated areas.
- The most popular method for placing questions on the ballot for voter approval is legislative referendum.
- Approximately one-fifth of responding local governments have a provision for all three methods of placing questions on the ballot for voter approval: initiative, legislative referendum, and popular referendum.
- Whether or not a local government has provisions for recall is extremely state dependent.
- Most local governments have standing committees that consider specific policy matters.
- Nearly all cities, towns, villages, and boroughs have resident authorities, boards, or commissions. They are typically advisory in nature.

Response Summary

4. Does your municipality have residency requirements for any of your employees? (n=3,925)	Percent of Respondents
Yes	41.3%
No	58.7%

4A. If yes, which employees have residency requirements? (n=1,690)	Percent of Respondents
All municipal employees	16.2%
Chief appointed official	51.7%
Public safety employees	17.6%
Other employees	38.6%

8. Does your municipality have a provision for Initiative? (n=3,827)	Percent of Respondents
Yes	45.3%
No	54.7%

8A. If yes, which of the following initiative processes does your municipality provide? (n=1,586)	Percent of Respondents
Indirect	51.2%
Direct	45.6%
Non-binding initiative	16.0%

9. Does your municipality have a provision for legislative referendum? (n=3,780)	Percent of Respondents
Yes	62.5%
No	37.5%

9a. If yes, what type of items must the council place on the ballot for voter approval? (n=2,103)	Percent of Respondents
Local bond measures	65.9%
Proposed charter amendments	48.3%
Proposed ordinances	28.6%
Proposed home rule changes	26.3%
Other	15.2%

10. Does your municipality have a provision for popular referendum? (n=3,551)	Percent of Respondents
Yes	33.7%
No	66.3%

11. Does your municipality have a provision for recall? (n=3,640)	Percent of Respondents
Yes	48.5%
No	51.5%

39. Does your municipality have standing committees (permanent bodies with set memberships and regularly scheduled meeting times) that consider specific policy matters? (3,764)	Percent of Respondents
Yes	69.4%
No	30.6%

40. Does your municipality have resident authorities, boards, or commissions? (n=3,837)	Percent of Respondents
Yes	88.3%
No	11.7%

40A. If yes, are members: (n=3,351)	Percent of Respondents
All elected	1.9%
All appointed	85.1%
Combination of elected and appointed	12.9%

40B. If yes, in what capacity do they serve? (n=3,307)	Percent of Respondents
Advisory	87.4%
Decision/policy making	43.2%
Quasi-judicial	29.7%

40C. If yes, on which areas do they focus? (n=3,334)

Area of Focus	Percent of Respondents
Growth	31.8%
Transportation	19.8%
Zoning	86.6%
Finance	24.7%
Airports	14.9%
Art	14.1%
Beautification	24.9%
Cable TV	8.1%
Civil service	13.3%
Libraries	34.6%
Housing	28.7%
Community-police relations	12.6%
Economic development	44.2%
Planning	82.9%
Environmental issues	23.7%
Historic preservation	34.6%
Architectural review	16.9%
Code enforcement	27.6%
Parks and recreation	62.6%
Ethics	9.3%
Charter review commissions	10.2%
Education/Schools	8.6%
Cemeteries	14.2%
Other (Please specify)	14.9%

41. Please provide your city's most recent bond ratings next to the name of the rating agency.	a. Moody's (n=788)	b. Standard & Poor's (n=914)	c. Fitch (n=156)
Prime	17.3%	15.3%	27.6%
High Grade	54.4%	53.4%	53.8%
Upper Medium Grade	23.7%	26.7%	13.5%
Lower Medium Grade	2.5%	2.1%	1.9%
Non-Investment and Below	1.0%	0.4%	0.6%
Other	1.0%	2.1%	2.6%

Section 3 – Chief Elected Official

Survey Highlights

- The vast majority of chief elected official positions are part-time and receive an annual salary or stipend.
- Local governments rarely place term limits on chief elected officials, but those that do most often limit those terms to two four-year terms.
- Most chief elected officials may vote on all issues during council meetings.
- Recalls of the chief elected official are rare, and successful recalls are even rarer.

Response Summary

13. Does your municipality have a: (n=3,808)	Percent of Respondents
Mayor	58.4%
Council president/board chair	24.0%
Both	17.6%

14. Is the position of chief elected official in your local government officially full-time or part-time? (n=3,691)	Percent of Respondents
Full-time	16.7%
Part-time	83.3%

15. Is the chief elected official a member of council? (n=3,786)	Percent of Respondents
Yes	72.3%
No	27.7%

17. How is your chief elected official selected? (n=3,802)	Percent of Respondents
Voters elect directly	75.6%
Council selects from among its members	21.3%
The council member receiving the most votes in the general election becomes the chief elected official	0.9%
Council members rotate into the position of chief elected official	1.6%
Other	0.7%

18. How long is the chief elected official's term of office by law? (n=3,793)	Percent of Respondents
1 year	13.5%
2 years	28.6%
3 years	6.1%
4 years	49.4%
Other	2.4%

19. Is there a legal limit on the number of terms allowed for the position of chief elected official? (n=3,800)	Percent of Respondents
Yes	8.6%
No	91.4%

19A. If yes, what is the maximum number of terms allowed by law? (n=318)	Percent of Respondents
1 term	3.8%
2 terms	51.1%
3 terms	26.2%
4 terms	11.0%
Other	7.9%

19B. If yes, what authority limits the number of terms for the position of chief elected official? (n=314)	Percent of Respondents
Ordinance	15.0%
Charter	69.0%
State law	13.4%
Other	2.6%

20. Does the chief elected official (CEO) have the authority to do any of the following? (n=3,688)	Percent of Respondents
Vote during council meetings	68.5%
Nominate the chief appointed official without council review or approval	6.9%
Appoint the chief appointed official without council review or approval	3.5%
Remove the chief appointed official without council review or approval	4.0%
Veto council-passed measures	39.4%
Assign council members to chair or serve on committees and make assignments to those committees	55.6%
Appoint residents to serve on advisory or quasi-judicial authorities, boards, or commissions	55.1%
Receive the annual budget developed by the chief appointed official and present the budget with comments and suggestions to the council for consideration	34.7%
Prepare the annual budget	21.4%
Make an annual report to the council and residents on the state of the community	39.9%

20A. Under what circumstances does the CEO have the authority to vote in council meetings? (n=3,686)	Percent of Respondents
On all issues	56.1%
Only to break a tie	31.8%
Only to make a quorum	0.6%
Never	8.7%
Other	2.9%

20B. If the CEO has the authority to veto council-passed measures, is a "super majority" vote of the council required to overturn the CEO's veto? (n=1,357)	Percent of Respondents
Yes	51.3%
No	48.7%

21. Since 2011 have any recall initiatives been filed against the chief elected official? (n=3,740)	Percent of Respondents
Yes	3.1%
No	96.9%

21A. If yes, were any successful? (n=109)	Percent of Respondents
Yes	22.9%
No	77.1%

22. How many staff work directly for the chief elected official?	a. Full-time staff (n=3,105)	b. Part-time staff (n=2,107)
Mean	7.7	2.7
Median	1.0	0.0

Section 4 – Council

Survey Highlights

- Less than one-third of local governments do not require council candidates to submit a candidate filing fee. For those that do, the average filing fee is \$76.54.
- Being a member of the council is rarely a full-time position. Over 90 percent of respondents indicated that their council member positions are all part-time.
- Term limits on council positions are rare overall but are most commonly found in communities with 100,000 residents or more.
- About half of responding local governments fill vacant council positions through an appointment by the sitting council members, but many change the method of filling vacancies depending on the length of the term remaining.
- Less than one in five responding local governments have concurrent council terms. Few local governments put all council seats up for election in the same year.

Response Summary

23. Does the political party affiliation of council candidates appear on the ballot in a local general election? (n=3,869)	Percent of Respondents
Yes	30.1%
No	69.9%

24. What is the current filing fee for running for a seat on the council? (n=3,572)	Dollars
Mean	\$22.35
Median	\$0.00
Minimum	\$0.00
Maximum	\$3,044.00
Mean non-zero	\$76.54

25. How many council positions are there on your council? Include the CEO if they sit on the council. (n=3,910)	Percent of Respondents
Four or less	12.0%
Five	39.3%
Six	12.5%
Seven	26.1%
Eight or more	10.1%

26. How are your council members selected? (n=3,855)	Percent of Respondents
All at large	68.0%
All by ward/district	18.4%
Combination of at large and by ward/district.	13.6%

26A. If you selected c above, please indicate the number of council members elected by each method:	a. At large (n=512)	b. By ward/district (n=508)
Mean	2.2	4.8
Median	2.0	4.0

27. Are council members full-time or part-time? (n=3,795)	Percent of Respondents
All full-time	5.5%
All part-time	92.1%
Combination of full-time and part-time	2.3%

28. Please indicate the length of term for council members.	2 years	3 years	4 years	6 years	Other
Council members elected at large (n=3,254)	18.6%	13.1%	63.6%	2.8%	1.9%
Council members elected by ward/district (n=1,296)	24.0%	7.6%	64.7%	2.0%	1.8%

28A. Are the terms of office for council members staggered or concurrent? (n=3,851)	Percent of Respondents
Concurrent	19.2%
Staggered	80.8%

29. Is there a legal limit on the number of terms a council member may serve? (n=3,899)	Percent of Respondents
Yes	8.7%
No	91.3%

29A. If yes, what is the maximum number of terms allowed by law? (n=313)	Terms
Mean	2.8
Median	2.0
Minimum	1.0
Maximum	12.0

29B. If yes, by what authority is the number of terms limited? (n=332)	Percent of Respondents
Ordinance	15.7%
Charter	69.5%
State law	12.4%
Other	2.4%

30. How is a council member's seat filled if it is vacated before the term has expired? (n=3,866)	Percent of Respondents
Method depends on length of term remaining	23.5%
Special election	8.0%
Appointed by council	49.4%
Appointed by chief elected official	9.4%
Position left vacant until next regular election	1.2%
Other	8.6%

31. Since 2011, have any recall initiatives been filed against council members? (n=3,871)	Percent of Respondents
Yes	4.0%
No	96.0%

31A. If yes, were any successful? (n=149)	Percent of Respondents
Yes	28.9%
No	71.1%

37. How often does the council formally meet, excluding work sessions? (n=3,832)	Percent of Respondents
More than once a week	0.2%
Once a week	3.0%
Three times a month	2.1%
Twice a month	58.7%
Once a month	34.4%
Less than once a month	0.9%
Other	0.6%

38. Does the council employ staff to work exclusively on council business? (n=3,784)	Percent of Respondents
Yes	16.4%
No	83.6%

38A. If yes, how many are:	a. Full-time staff (n=480)	b. Part-time staff (n=225)
Mean	3.8	2.3
Median	1.0	1.0

Section 5 – Mayor/Council Compensation and Demographics

Survey Highlights

- Local elected officials are nearly always paid a salary or stipend.
- Chief elected officials (mayors or the council president) are paid an average of \$16,837 per year.
- Full-time mayors are paid an average of \$61,723.
- Part-time council members are paid an average of \$5,244 per year.
- Some local governments symbolically pay their elected officials \$1 per year. This typically only happens among council-manager communities in which elected officials do not provide day-to-day administration.
- Among respondents, nearly three-quarters of council members in the U.S. were male (note that the survey was administered prior to the 2018 elections).
- More than two in five council members in the U.S. are over the age of 60.
- Council members are most commonly retirees. When not retired, they come from a variety of occupations, the most common being business executives or managers.

Response Summary

16. Does the chief elected official (CEO) receive an annual salary or stipend for any of his/her services? (n=3,800)	Percent of Respondents
Yes	86.0%
No	14.0%

16A. If yes, please indicate the approximate annual dollar amount that your CEO receives: (n=3,006)	Annual Dollars
Mean	\$16,837
Median	\$7,200
Minimum	\$1
Maximum	\$236,000

32. Are any council members (excluding the chief elected official) paid an annual salary or stipend for any of their services? (n=3,895)	Percent of Respondents
Yes	83.7%
No	16.3%

32A. If yes, please indicate the approximate annual dollar amount that your council members receive.	Full-time council member (n=200)	Part-time council member (n=2,829)
Mean	\$13,655	\$5,245
Median	\$3,000	\$3,331
Minimum	\$1	\$1
Maximum	\$115,000	\$72,000

The following statistics break down demographic information for the total amount (a) of council members reported by the number of local governments responding to each question (n).

For example, 3,878 responding local governments reported gender information on a total of 22,509 council members across the entire U.S. Overall, 72.8% were identified as male, and 27.2% were identified as female.

33. Council member gender (n=3,878; a=22,509)	Percent of Total
Male	72.8%
Female	27.2%

34. Council member age (n=3,580; a=20,855)	Percent of Total
Under 22	0.1%
22-29	1.4%
30-39	9.5%
40-49	17.7%
50-59	29.7%
60 and over	41.5%

35. Council member race/ethnicity (n=3,677; a=21,466)	Percent of Total
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.7%
Hispanic or Latino	3.0%
Asian or Pacific Islander	0.4%
White, not of Hispanic origin	89.1%
Black or African American	6.2%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0.0%
Middle Eastern or North African	0.2%
Some other race, ethnicity, or origin	0.4%

36. Council member occupation (n=3,559; a=20,256)	Percent of Total
Legal services	4.4%
Business executives/managers	15.4%
Manufacturing	2.6%
Service and sales employees	8.9%
Finance, insurance, real estate	7.6%
Agriculture, forestry, fishing	2.2%
Construction	4.2%
Law enforcement	1.8%
Teachers or other educational personnel	6.1%
Clergy	0.8%
Other professionals (health, engineering, etc.)	9.8%
Retiree	28.5%
Other	7.7%

Survey Question Appendix

Question	Section	Page
1. Indicate your municipality's current form of government as defined by your charter, ordinance, or state law.	1	1
2. How is your municipality's structure or form of government established?	1	1
3. Does your municipality have the position of chief appointed official?	1	1
3a. If your municipality has the position of chief appointed official, what action established the position?	1	2
3b. If your municipality has the position of chief appointed official, who appoints that position?	1	2
4. Does your municipality have residency requirements for any of your employees?	2	4
4A. If yes, which employees have residency requirements?	2	4
5. Who has the independent authority to develop and make recommendations for the budget submitted to the council?	1	2
6. Are your department heads:	1	2
7. Please indicate how the following positions in your jurisdiction are selected.	1	2
8. Does your municipality have a provision for Initiative?	2	4
8A. If yes, which of the following initiative processes does your municipality provide?	2	4
9. Does your municipality have a provision for legislative referendum?	2	4
9a. If yes, what type of items must the council place on the ballot for voter approval?	2	5
10. Does your municipality have a provision for popular referendum?	2	5
11. Does your municipality have a provision for recall?	2	5
12. Please indicate whether there have been any proposals to change your municipality's structure or form of government since January 1, 2011. If yes, also indicate whether the change was approved.	1	3
12A. If a change in form of government was approved, what was the approved change?	1	3
13. Does your municipality have a: (CEO)	3	7
14. Is the position of chief elected official in your local government officially full-time or part-time?	3	7
15. Is the chief elected official a member of council?	3	7
16. Does the chief elected official (CEO) receive an annual salary or stipend for any of his/her services?	5	13
16A. If yes, please indicate the approximate annual dollar amount that your CEO receives:	5	13
17. How is your chief elected official selected?	3	7
18. How long is the chief elected official's term of office by law?	3	7
19. Is there a legal limit on the number of terms allowed for the position of chief elected official?	3	8
19A. If yes, what is the maximum number of terms allowed by law?	3	8
19B. If yes, what authority limits the number of terms for the position of chief elected official?	3	8
20. Does the chief elected official (CEO) have the authority to do any of the following?	3	8
20A. Under what circumstances does the CEO have the authority to vote in council meetings?	3	8
20B. If the CEO has the authority to veto council-passed measures, is a "super majority" vote of the council required to overturn the CEO's veto?	3	8
21. Since 2011 have any recall initiatives been filed against the chief elected official?	3	9
21A. If yes, were any successful?	3	9
22. How many staff work directly for the chief elected official?	3	9
23. Does the political party affiliation of council candidates appear on the ballot in a local general election?	4	10
24. What is the current filing fee for running for a seat on the council?	4	10
25. How many council positions are there on your council?	4	10
26. How are your council members selected?	4	10
26A. If you selected c above, please indicate the number of council members elected by each method:	4	11
27. Are council members full-time or part-time?	4	11
28. Please indicate the length of term for council members.	4	11
28A. Are the terms of office for council members staggered or concurrent?	4	11
29. Is there a legal limit on the number of terms a council member may serve?	4	11
29A. If yes, what is the maximum number of terms allowed by law	4	11
29B. If yes, by what authority is the number of terms limited?	4	11

30. How is a council member's seat filled if it is vacated before the term has expired?	4	12
31. Since 2011, have any recall initiatives been filed against council members?	4	12
31A. If yes, were any successful?	4	12
32. Are any council members (excluding the chief elected official) paid an annual salary or stipend for any of their services?	5	13
32A. If yes, please indicate the approximate annual dollar amount that your council members receive.	5	13
33. How many of your current council members are: (Council member gender)	5	14
34. What is the age breakdown of your current council members? (Council member age)	5	14
35. What is the ethnic/racial breakdown of your current council members? (Council member race/ethnicity)	5	14
36. How many current council members are in each of the following occupational categories? (Council member occupation)	5	14
37. How often does the council formally meet, excluding work sessions?	4	12
38. Does the council employ staff to work exclusively on council business?	4	12
38A. If yes, how many are: (full-time/part-time)	4	12
39. Does your municipality have standing committees (permanent bodies with set memberships and regularly scheduled meeting times) that consider specific policy matters?	2	5
40. Does your municipality have resident authorities, boards, or commissions?	2	5
40A. If yes, are members: (elected/appointed)	2	5
40B. If yes, in what capacity do they serve?	2	5
40C. If yes, on which areas do they focus?	2	6
41. Please provide your city's most recent bond ratings next to the name of the rating agency.	2	6

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Vermont Civic Health Index offers a look at the state's civic life, revealing considerable strengths as well as areas for growth across six key domains. The Index also spotlights some of the organizations that offer unique support for civic health across the state and presents original data from the Vermont Youth Civic Health Survey.

Vermonters rank high in crucial areas of civic health such as helping neighbors, attending public meetings, participating in groups, and staying well informed. Meanwhile, findings regarding Vermont's youth, people of color, and other groups offer insights about how we can broaden participation opportunities and deepen healthy engagement. A snapshot of some of our findings:

Volunteerism & Donating

Key Findings

- » Vermont ranks 5th in the country for informal helping and 13th for formal volunteerism.
- » Volunteerism increases as age, income, and educational attainment increase, except for youth (student) volunteering. Rates are highest for middle and high school students.
- » Vermont ranks 2nd in the country for donations to political organizations.

Next Steps: Vermont has a strong culture of volunteerism and mutual aid that needs to be supported. We need to continue to invest in and expand initiatives that work, and better understand barriers to volunteerism so that opportunities for engagement are equitably available across different groups.

Political Engagement

Key Findings

- » Vermonters rank 2nd in the country for attending public meetings.
- » Vermonters also rank 2nd in the U.S. for engaging with neighbors in frequent discussions about political, social, or local issues.
- » Vermont's voter registration rate has been steadily increasing, while voter turnout remains consistent over time. Vermont ranks 4th in the country for voting in the last local election.
- » Only 59.1% of Vermont youth report that they intend to register to vote when they become eligible

Next Steps: While Vermont ranks quite high in several indicators, there is still room for improvement. Investing in civic education will ensure that young people and adults alike feel prepared to participate in democratic processes, from voting and engaging with public officials to running for office. We can learn from communities with high levels of participation and successful programs to ensure that Vermont's rich history of engagement continues and accessibility expands.

Community & Social Context

Key Findings

- » Vermont ranks 2nd in the country for working with neighbors to do something positive for the neighborhood or community and for discussing political, societal, or local issues with neighbors.
- » Between 2013 and 2020, the percentage of Vermonters reporting never feeling uncomfortable or out of place in their community because of ethnicity, culture, race, skin color, language, accent, gender sexual orientation, or religion increased from 62% to 78%. While the increase is positive, 22% of Vermonters do report feeling uncomfortable and that is far too high.

Next Steps: We must prioritize creating inclusive and welcoming civic spaces. To do that effectively, we need to continue to learn about the experiences of historically marginalized populations and how to welcome their civic participation. We also need to invest in data equity across the state to ensure that future reports give a full picture of our challenges and strengths across different groups and geographic regions.



Cultural Access & Engagement

Key Findings:

- » In 2021, nearly twice as many Vermonters reported belonging to any type of group than the U.S. population overall (VT-33%, U.S.-17%).
- » The 2023 Vermont Youth Civic Health Survey found that 70% of Vermont youth reported an affiliation with a group or organization in their community or school.
- » Vermonters saw a decrease in satisfaction with access to artistic, cultural, recreational, and learning opportunities in their communities between 2017 and 2020. This is likely due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- » 93% of respondents to the 2024 Vermonter Poll agreed or strongly agreed that opportunities to view and participate in arts and culture are an important part of thriving and healthy communities. (CreateVT Action Plan)



Next Steps: Vermonters must continue supporting Vermont's creative and cultural sector as it recovers from the Covid-19 Pandemic. Libraries should be centered in community planning efforts, understanding their critical role in providing reliable information, serving as community gathering places, and in broadening access to social services and Vermont's public schools should prioritize access to a full range of arts education as a critical component of building a well-rounded citizenry capable of participating in and shaping a healthy democratic practice.

Media Trust & Access

Key Findings

- » Vermont ranks 2nd in the nation in the number of people who report they frequently read, watch or listen to news or information about political, societal or local issues. 78.9% of Vermonters report they do this frequently compared to 67.6% of the national average.
- » Vermonters seek out national and local news sources at about the same rates for issues important to them.



Next Steps: Encouraging media literacy and supporting access to reliable news sources can help strengthen trust and build civic knowledge. Programming that addresses polarization and bias can help Vermonters navigate the increasingly complex media landscape.

Government Trust & Access

Key Findings

- » Vermonter's confidence in local government is much greater than in national government.
- » Confidence in local government was increasing before the COVID pandemic and increased substantially during the height of COVID in 2020.

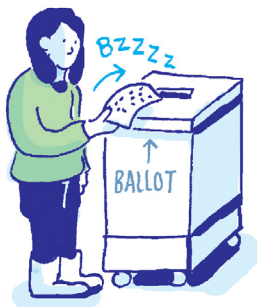
Next Steps

Supporting efforts to ensure civic spaces are accessible and welcoming is crucial. This can include physical accessibility, technology training for remote participation, and training to create spaces where everyone feels safe to share their voice. Developing a civic engagement coalition that can share resources, best practices, and troubleshoot together would also be beneficial.

This report presents a baseline and a snapshot in time, but we acknowledge that it could never fully capture every experience or factor in the dynamic systems that comprise our civic health. We hope Vermont's Civic Health Index will serve to jump-start fresh conversations about our state's civic health priorities as we engage with Vermonters across the state.



Political Engagement



- » Voting/Voter Turnout
- » Registered to vote
- » Read, watch or listen to news or information about political, societal or local issues
- » Discuss political, societal, or local issues with your neighbors
- » Attend a public meeting
- » Donate to political organization
- » Watch local municipal meetings, events and elections coverage
- » Local officials' level of concern about lack of community interest in Local Offices, Candidate Diversity, Voter Turnout, Board Volunteers, Services Volunteers.

Political engagement is defined here as activities that contribute to awareness of political issues and that intend to directly influence governance processes. These include actions like voting, discussing politics with others, reaching out to public officials about certain issues, and using purchasing power to take a stance on issues. Again, these actions may all exist on a continuum based on level of engagement. For example, the rates of voter registration are much higher than the rates of voter turnout.

Challenges to political engagement include obstacles to physical participation like lack of childcare, work schedules and access to the physical spaces where engagement takes place. There are also social challenges that include confusion or lack of knowledge about politics and political processes. Additionally, trust in political processes has been eroded in recent years, driven by increasingly divisive political discourse. This erosion of trust may be leading to lower participation in civic processes over time.

Overall, and maybe not surprisingly for a small state, Vermonters are much more likely to engage with their neighbors than other states, a testament to the strong sense of community many Vermonters feel. Vermonters also are very active in terms of donating to political organizations, accessing information and news about political, social and local issues, and are very active voters.

That said, there are areas of concern when it comes to political engagement. Vermont communities may struggle to fill local elected or appointed offices, the vast majority of which are volunteer positions. While Vermonters may be more active voters than in other parts of the country, there are still instances where voter turnout is low, especially in areas where there are uncontested races. Even in places where Vermont ranks high, the percentage of participation is still low overall and offers plenty of room for improvement.



Photo Source: Jeb Wallace-Brodeur

Vermont's National Standing

- » Vermonters tend to volunteer at a higher rate than the U.S. overall
- » Vermonters donate at a rate similar to that of the nation overall (50% and 48% respectively).
- » In 2021 Vermonters were the second most likely of any U.S. state to donate to political organizations (VT-15%, U.S.-9%).
- » In 2021 Vermonters volunteered more than the U.S. population (VT- 29%, U.S.- 23%)
- » In 2021 Vermont ranked 13th out of all states for the percentage of the population that reported having recently volunteered.



75%

of Vermonters reported registering to vote compared to **69% of the entire nation**



79%

of Vermonters reported frequently accessing information about political or social issues compared to **68% of the entire nation**



2nd

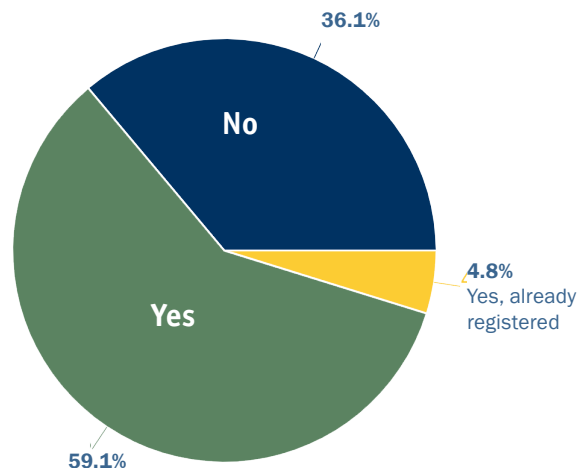
Vermonters **rank 2nd in attending public meetings** at 17%, compared to the national average of 10%

Inside Vermont Political Engagement

- » The percentage of Vermonters registered to vote is increasing over time.
- » Vermont has many laws in place to make voting as accessible as possible including automatic voter registration when applying for a Driver's License and same day voter registration.
- » Vermont is one of two states that allows incarcerated people to vote.
- » In Vermont voter turnout varies substantially across municipalities with a range of up to nearly 81% turnout in one community to as little as 26% voter turnout in another community in 2022.
- » Five of the six towns with voter turnout of 75% or more are among the smallest communities in Vermont, each with less than 500 registered voters, while lower voter turnout rates are often found in communities with larger populations.

2024 Vermont Youth Survey

When you become eligible do you intend to register to vote?

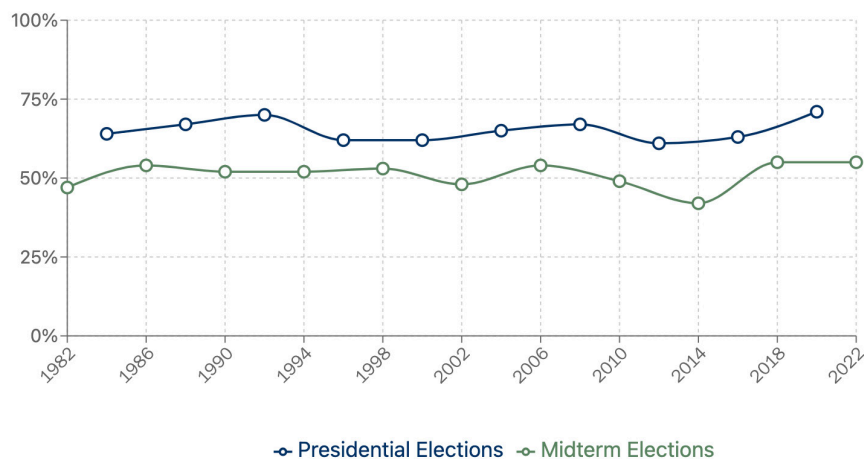


There are differences between data collected through the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey (CPS) and data from the Vermont Secretary of State's office. The CPS data is based on when respondents say they are registered, and the Secretary of State's data are actual registered voter counts. The CPS self-reported data enables analysis of how Vermont compares to other states, but is not based on actual voter counts. At the time of this report (Fall, 2024), the Vermont Secretary of State's Office reports that 522,600 Vermonters are registered. This indicates that over 90% of eligible Vermonters are currently registered to vote.



While the percentage of Vermonters registered to vote has been increasing, **voter turnout remains consistent** over time in our state.

40 Years of Vermont Voter Turnout



14%

of Vermonters report frequently discussing political, societal or local issues with neighbors

Vermonters' Local Political Engagement

Municipal official respondents to recent research conducted by the Vermont League of Cities and Towns found a majority sharing high or very high levels of concern regarding lack of community interest in all listed civic categories. (Source- VLCT Municipal Officials Survey)

- » Lack of interest in local offices – 53%
- » Lack of candidate diversity – 55%
- » Low voter turnout – 56%
- » Few board volunteers – 56%

Municipal officials' concern regarding voter turnout notwithstanding, Vermonters are in fact increasingly likely to vote in local elections, and voter turnout has remained consistent over time.

Public meeting attendance has varied over time, with 2019 being the recent high point for public attendance. The impacts of the COVID pandemic influenced this indicator in 2021.

Vermont's municipalities are overwhelmingly dependent upon the direct engagement of municipal volunteers to fill essential municipal roles such as select board members, planning commissioners, development review board members, justices of the peace, conservation board commissioners and many more. These volunteer roles, which sometimes include small stipends, represent a unique intersection between political engagement and volunteerism and bolster the strength of civic engagement in Vermont.

	2017	2019	2021
Percent of Vermonters Reporting They Voted in Last Local Election	63%	62%	69%
Percent of Vermonters Attending Public Meetings	19%	24%	17%



VERMONT POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT HIGHLIGHT

Get on Board Program

SoVT Get on Board is a local leadership development program, produced by the Southern Vermont Economy Project (SVEP), that works to strengthen Southern Vermont communities by recruiting and equipping more residents for community leadership positions. Over 3 months, SoVermont Get on Board program participants gather (mostly in person) for a series of sessions which help them gain an understanding of Vermont's local government structures and practices, learn best practices for successful volunteer-led community revitalization efforts, engage with local, regional, and state-wide resource partners, form a supportive connection with peers through the program, leave with action steps for participating in their own community, and be provided direct connections to leaders in their community for ongoing mentorship.

Some feedback from the program:

- » "I really enjoyed the program! I definitely felt more confident when speaking at town meeting and facing some questions as my organization was on the ballot in three towns."
- » "I really enjoyed the Get on Board series, it was neat to learn more about these quirky parts of how Vermont works, connect with other invested and inspiring folks, and get motivated to get into things!"
- » "There are a lot of engaged people, we just need to figure out where to put them."
- » "This class helped me learn that we can connect, we don't have to do this work alone!"



Photo Source: Jeb Wallace-Brodeur

Government Trust & Access

- » Public officials in my community pay attention to what people think
- » Confidence in your local government
- » Confidence in your national government
- » Corruption is widespread throughout the government in my community
- » Absentee Voting - voting by mail



Public trust in the integrity of governance is critical to civic health. This trust is declining in many places, especially as political polarization has been increasing in recent years. And in Vermont and across the nation, we have also seen a growing lack of respect for people in public service roles. This exacts an emotional toll on those upon whom we rely so heavily on for many local governance functions like selectboards, planning commissions and development review boards. The increasingly divisive discourse, growing lack of respect for volunteers and declining trust in governance, among other factors, are contributing to the challenges of finding and keeping community volunteers who run Vermont's local governments.

Accessibility to government is crucial to civic health. Considerations range from residents' ability to physically access government facilities and meetings to feeling welcomed and accepted to participate in governance processes.

Elements like ramps, elevators and accommodations for residents who are vision or hearing impaired are examples of enabling physical access. Governments also must consider: are people able to take time away from home and work obligations to participate in governance processes in person or remotely? Are remote options viable for thorough participation? Do these online communications meet ADA guidelines? Can all our residents access the internet, either from home or a public space? Are people able to participate at times when governance meetings take place? The timing of meetings is often kept standardized to facilitate ongoing participation but may also result in preventing some from ever participating. Are translation services needed? Do we offer childcare, transportation, and flexible participation options?

Social accessibility refers to how included and welcome people feel to participate in their communities. Governments must continuously check in to ensure they are welcoming and accessible to all by asking questions like: How welcoming are our local boards and meetings to residents of all socio-demographic backgrounds, including factors such as race, income and education level? Are the perspectives of long-time residents, newcomers, seniors and youth given equal consideration? Do we publicize engagement and leadership opportunities to invite residents of all backgrounds? Do we offer a range of participation options throughout the year—from community-wide meetings and small-group discussions to surveys and voting—to allow for a range of participation needs and preferences?

Serving on a public body or running for office can feel like too large a sacrifice for some. This can be because of logistical reasons, such as not having the time or not having the financial security to make volunteer or low-stipend public service possible. For others this can be due to fear for personal safety. Governments need to meaningfully address concerns about serving the political sphere including ensuring that service is without threat to life, safety and mental health.

Direct engagement in governance begins at the municipal level. And if those seeking to participate experience challenges with access to local governance, it becomes easier to develop distrust. Providing municipal officials with resources to make governments more physically accessible and welcoming for all residents, organizations like the Vermont League of Cities and Towns hope to play an important role in setting the foundation for high marks in Vermont's civic health.



VERMONT GOVERNMENT TRUST & ACCESS HIGHLIGHT

Vermont League of Cities and Towns

There are organizations working in Vermont to ensure greater access to, and trust in the quality of our local municipalities. The Vermont League of Cities and Towns (VLCT) is one such organization, with every single city and town in Vermont currently part of this membership organization. The VLCT provides training and resources that facilitate making community members into effective local government leaders. They train about 1,000 new selectboard members, town moderators, clerks, treasurers, planning commissioners, and more each year. And they provide legal advice to about 4,000 local officials every year. The results of these efforts lead to the development of local officials who earn the respect and trust of their neighbors.

41st

According to a report from the Coalition for Integrity, in 2020 Vermont ranked 41st among all 51 states and the District of Columbia using an index of 31 public official anti-corruption policy measures.

NOTE: Vermont historically did not have an Ethics Commission or a comprehensive ethics code for public officials. In 2017 the Vermont Legislature created the Ethics Commission, in 2022 enacted an ethics code for State public servants, and in the 2024 session created a municipal ethics code with Act 171. These anti-corruption measures hopefully will continue to build Vermonter's trust in government.

4th

The Massachusetts Institute for Technology's Elections Performance Index (composed of 18 election indicators) ranked Vermont 4th among all states and the District of Columbia for overall election performance in 2022.

Inside Vermont

- » Vermonter's confidence in local government is much higher than in national government.
- » Confidence in local government was increasing before the COVID pandemic and increased substantially during the height of COVID in 2020.
- » Public perceptions of local government corruption improved between 2013 and 2020.
- » Race and ethnicity impact perceptions of and confidence in local governance.
- » In the 2024 Legislative session the Vermont Legislature enacted Act 133, which codified changes to longstanding Open Meeting Law to incorporate lessons learned from COVID about how to expand the concepts of participation beyond a physical meeting location. The legislature has created a working group to address multiple questions about public access to government and public bodies. A report is due November 15, 2025.
- » The percentage of Vermonter's utilizing absentee voting in Vermont increased very gradually from the 1980s through the early 2000s at which point many more Vermonter's began using absentee ballots to vote. Voting by absentee ballot reached an all-time high in 2020 when universal vote-by-mail was adopted in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

	2013	2017	2020
Percent of Vermonters with “No Confidence” in National Government	30%	34%	51%
Percent of Vermonters with “No Confidence” in Local Government	9%	9%	7%
Percent of Vermonters who agree with “Corruption is widespread in throughout government in my community”	19%	23%	12%

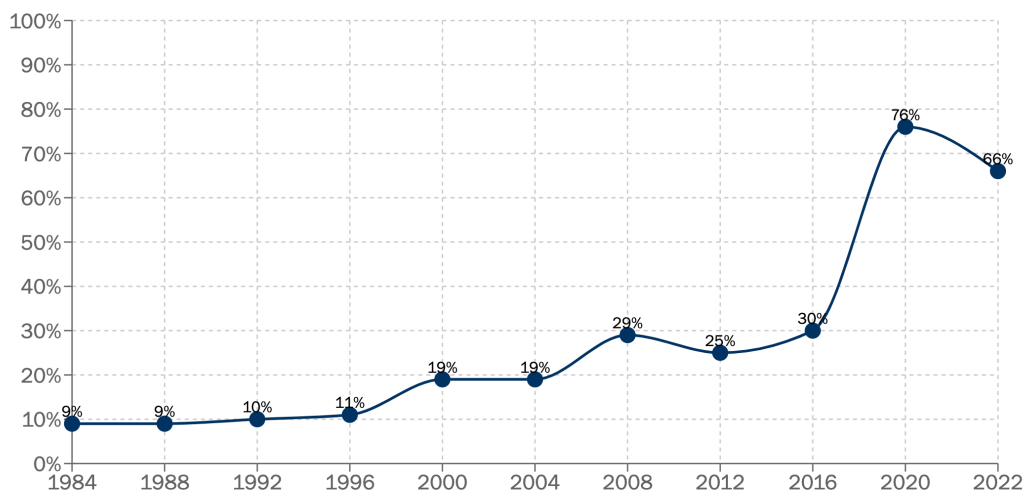
Source: Center for Rural Studies - Vermont Longitudinal Wellbeing Study

In June 2020, the beginning of the COVID pandemic, researchers conducted the Vermont Wellbeing Study to help understand the immediate impact of the pandemic on our population. Limited demographic data were collected, but the following indicators were able to be disaggregated.

Over the past three months, how much confidence have you had in your local and national government?

- » Gender did not have any appreciable impact on Vermonters’ confidence in local or national government in June 2020 during the COVID pandemic.
- » Confidence in local government increased as reported household income level increased. At the same time, no significant change in confidence in the national government was seen based on income level.
- » Confidence in local government also increased as educational attainment increased, while confidence in national government decreased as level of educational attainment increased.

40 Years of Absentee Voting Vermont (percent of Vermonters who use absentee voting)



Source: Vermont Secretary of State's Office

NEXT STEPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This baseline data development work serves as a departure point for the development of new and the continuation of ongoing efforts to engage with Vermonters and Vermont organizations to improve upon all aspects of civic health in the state. The ideas listed below were generated in part through conversations during this process and are by no means comprehensive. Continuing these conversations, holding listening sessions and creating plans to fill data gaps will contribute to additional ideas and fill in knowledge gaps about the civic health of Vermont and its residents over time.

Hold Community Conversations

- » Public engagement is a crucial component to ensuring all Vermonter's perspectives are heard and that they feel seen. Conversations about all aspects of civic health can take place across the state in civic spaces like libraries, meeting halls and auditoriums.

Develop a Civic Engagement Coalition, and Support Local Efforts

- » Statewide, the development of a coalition of organizations and individuals engaged in aspects of civic health could help align and strengthen efforts to increase Vermont's civic health. Locally, a growing number of towns have volunteer committees that support community civic health; their efforts include helping the town with outreach and communications, making local meetings more accessible by organizing facilitation, child care, refreshments, and offering other creative support for existing town committees and initiatives. These local initiatives could be offered support, and assisted to network and share ideas.

Build a Civic Resource Map

- » Nationally, there are several initiatives to create resource maps to better understand the complex network of partners working in civic spaces. The National Civic League's Healthy Democracy and the Institute for Citizens & Scholars Mapping Civic Measurement are both models and potential partners to expand on this work in Vermont.

Support Vermont's Culture of Volunteerism

- » Increase opportunities for Vermonters to be exposed to and participate in civic activities.
- » Fund volunteerism opportunities to help level the financial burden to participate in civic life.

Improve Access to Vermont's Civic Spaces

- » Advance efforts to ensure civic gathering spaces from town halls to public theaters continue to increase physical accessibility through infrastructure improvements like ramps and other ADA improvements.
- » Ensure that all communities can embrace new technologies to support remote participation including training on how to run remote or hybrid meetings. Increase access to language translation, flexible meeting times, and other measures to reduce barriers to participation. .
- » Support and improve training for municipal government to ensure that spaces are welcoming to diverse voices.

Expand Civics Education

- » Increase civic education opportunities and exposure for all Vermonters including youth in and out of school and adults.
- » Develop opportunities for municipal officials to further develop skills, infrastructure, and processes to facilitate participation.
- » Recognize and award Vermonters across sectors for their civic contributions.
- » Consider launching a civics seal for Vermont high school to encourage increased focus on civic education.

Invest in Arts and Culture

- » Vermonters and Vermont's governmental agencies should step up to support Vermont's creative and cultural sector as it continues to recover from the Covid-19 Pandemic and as outlined in the CreateVT Action Plan, with the understanding that the sector is a critical part of Vermont's civic and economic infrastructure.
- » Municipal and public libraries should be centered in community planning efforts, understanding their critical role in providing reliable information, serving as community gathering places, and in broadening access to social services like assistance with job hunting, accessing health care, and building civic engagement.
- » Vermont's public schools should prioritize access to a full range of arts education including music, theater, literature, and the visual arts as a critical component of building a well-rounded citizenry capable of participating in and shaping a healthy democratic practice.

Develop Additional Data

- » There are several places where data do not exist or are not robust enough to help us track and develop conclusions about aspects of Vermont's civic health. The following are a few examples of data gaps highlighted through this work.
 - » Data disaggregation by socio-demographic groups.
 - » Vermonters' willingness and ability to serve as civic volunteers or public servants.
 - » Municipal vacancies
 - » Uncontested political races (acknowledging this metric presents challenges for Vermont's small population communities)
 - » Municipal officials' socio-demographics
 - » Physical and social accessibility impacts on civic engagement

CLOSING THOUGHTS

Strengthening Vermont's civic health means finding alignment between multiple values that are often in tension. Vermont's state motto, "Freedom and Unity," is a prime example of this. It encourages us to embrace both individual freedom and collective responsibility. Self-reliance and respect for individual differences are key aspects of Vermont's cultural landscape while lending a hand to a neighbor or participating in mutual aid actions are also deeply rooted Vermont traditions. The interplay between individual freedom and collective responsibility is an essential element of a healthy democracy.

This same balance between individual and collective responsibility is reflected in election policy, where accessibility and security must be integrated. Vermont has made significant strides in making voting easier and more accessible for all eligible residents, whether through mail-in voting, early voting, or same-day registration. Vermont's decentralized voting system makes our elections both highly secure and accessible. Across the state, 247 town and city clerks manage elections in their districts, bringing an invaluable level of intimate knowledge and attention to detail to the process. Achieving election security and accessibility is not a zero-sum game; a balance of both is critical to preserving public trust and encouraging civic participation.

When it comes to participation, another challenge is navigating the ever-present, healthy dynamic between two competing values: democratic quantity and democratic quality. How can we reduce barriers to engagement (time, complexity, technology) while also ensuring participation is informed and meaningful? What are inclusive decision-making systems that also offer opportunities to understand neighbors' viewpoints, weigh trade-offs, and co-create solutions? What policy changes are needed to ensure that we build on Vermont's strong local democracy institutions while incorporating 21st century engagement tools?

As we continue to shape Vermont's civic landscape, considering these hard questions, holding space for competing, but equally important values, and embracing diverse experiences and backgrounds are crucial steps to improving our civic health. It is through this balancing act that we can build Vermont communities that are not only more engaged and informed but also more equitable and resilient.

How Have Term Limits Affected the California Legislature?

Passed in 1990, Proposition 140 changed Sacramento by setting term limits for legislators, but exactly how has it affected the Legislature, and what can the institution do to respond? In *Adapting to Term Limits: Recent Experiences and New Directions*, Bruce E. Cain and Thad Kousser measure the effects of term limits and identify ways to adapt to them. Guided by the testimony of informed observers, the report offers quantitative analyses using bill contents and histories, voting behavior, budget figures, and other archival records to explore how term limits have shaped the way the Legislature deals with major issues. The authors find that term limits, which remain popular with voters, have eroded legislative capacities in unhelpful ways. They also offer recommendations for restoring some of those capacities while maintaining the legislative turnover mandated by Proposition 140.

The Effects of Term Limits on Legislators, Committees, and Bills

The authors find that term limits altered—but did not revolutionize—the type of legislator who comes to Sacramento. Specifically, Proposition 140 accelerated trends of increasing female and minority representation that were already under way in California. Rather than representing a new breed of “citizen legislator,” however, new members after term limits behave a great deal like their precursors. Many have local government experience and run for another office—for an Assembly or a Senate seat—when their terms expire. Careerism remains a constant in California politics.

The effects on Sacramento’s policymaking processes have been more profound. In both houses, committees now screen out fewer bills assigned to them and are more likely to see their work rewritten at later stages. The practice of “hijacking” Assembly bills—gutting their contents and amending them thoroughly in the Senate—has increased sharply. As a body, the Legislature is less likely to alter the Governor’s Budget, and its own budget process neither

encourages fiscal discipline nor links legislators’ requests to overall spending goals. In addition, legislative oversight of the executive branch has declined significantly. The authors’ interviews with members and their staff revealed a widespread sense in Sacramento that something needs to be done soon to provide more stability and expertise to the Legislature’s policymaking process. Yet there are continuities in the Legislature’s internal operations as well. For example, leaders remain central to the process, and term limits cannot be blamed for Sacramento’s intensifying partisan polarization.

Term limits have had a mixed effect on the Legislature’s policy products. The authors find no effect on the breadth and complexity of bills passed into law, although this continuity may be the result of the Senate’s increased propensity to amend Assembly bills. Using simple measures of legislative performance, they also find that recently instituted programs to train members and staff do not appear to improve a legislator’s “batting average”—that is, his or her chances of passing a bill or seeing it signed into law—although legislators who receive that training tend to write shorter bills that change more code sections.

The Effects on Legislative Leadership and Oversight

In addition to presenting quantitative results, the report points to more general patterns emerging from the authors’ interviews. These patterns suggest that legislators are learning more quickly than their precursors, but that frequent changes in the membership and leadership of legislative committees, especially in the Assembly, diminish their expertise in many important policy areas. Many committees lack the experience to weed out bad bills and to ensure that agencies are acting efficiently and in accordance with legislative intent. A case study of the Quackenbush insurance investigation suggests that its success depended on the skills

of specific legislators, not all of which will necessarily be preserved in a less experienced Legislature.

Another major problem area is legislative leadership. With only six years in the Assembly before a lifetime ban goes into effect, Speakers have less than two years to leave their mark, and lame duck leaders face serious obstacles. Special interest money still flows in roughly the same proportions to Senate and Assembly leaders and in ever-rising amounts; term limits have not eased the burden of fundraising in any way. However, the authors find no evidence that term limits have contributed to rising legislative partisanship. Rather, the longer members are in the Legislature, the more partisan they become.

Policy Recommendations

Few of the most fervent hopes of Proposition 140's backers—or the worst fears of its opponents—have materialized. Even so, term limits have dramatically changed California's Legislature. Many veteran legislators and staff members regret Proposition 140's effects, which include a decline in the Legislature's research capacity. (The Legislative Analyst's Office, for example, lost a large portion of its staff, with the sharpest drop coming immediately in the wake of Proposition 140.) Even the measure's major proponent, former Los Angeles County Supervisor Pete Schabarum, recently voiced his discontent with the results. Coping with term limits will mean compensating for the problems that have arisen while recognizing the value of increased turnover and legislative diversity.

With this thought in mind, the authors make several recommendations about training, the budget process, and modifying term limits. As relatively inexperienced legislators take on greater responsibilities, training for new members and legislative staff plays a more critical role than ever. In particular, increased training in legislative oversight could improve the Legislature's performance in this area.

The authors also conclude that the Legislature could ensure more stability and responsibility in the budget process by:

- Holding more joint Senate-Assembly subcommittee hearings to work out agreements in specific funding areas.
- Giving these subcommittees specific funding targets to work within.
- Reporting proposals from each house's subcommittees under closed rules so that they are not easily changed in the budget conference committee. This former practice of "locking" budget items on which both houses agreed should be reinstated to make subcommittee hearings more consequential.
- Strengthening the Legislative Analyst's Office, giving it a larger role, and staffing it at previous levels.
- Making chairs of the budget subcommittees members of the final budget conference committee to ensure that agreements made early on are adhered to more closely in the final stages.

Finally, the authors suggest amending but not ending term limits. Instead of allowing legislators six years in the Assembly and eight in the Senate, a new provision could limit members to 14 years of total legislative service. This alteration would do little to erode the gains brought by Proposition 140 and would allow legislators who stay in one house to learn more about particular policy areas and committees. Experience levels for Assembly chairs and consultants, which have dropped to very low levels, would rebound. Assembly committees could also perform their gatekeeping function more proficiently. Crucially, Assembly leaders who chose not to run for the Senate would have more time to obtain expertise and lead their caucuses effectively, and the Legislature as a whole could be strengthened in its budget negotiations and oversight action. This change, the authors maintain, would make the houses more equal in experience and the branches more equal in power even as it ensured the turnover required by Proposition 140.

*This research brief summarizes a report by Bruce E. Cain and Thad Kousser, *Adapting to Term Limits: Recent Experiences and New Directions* (2004, 126 pp., \$12.00, ISBN 1-58213-101-5). The report may be ordered by phone at (800) 232-5343 [U.S. mainland] or (415) 291-4400 [Canada, Hawaii, overseas]. A copy of the full text is also available on the Internet (www.ppic.org). The Public Policy Institute of California is a private, nonprofit organization dedicated to independent, objective, nonpartisan research on economic, social, and political issues affecting California.*

FROM THE SOUTH BURLINGTON CITY CHARTER

(8)

Neighborhood forums.

(A)

Whenever the City Council or the School Board (either individually being the convening Board) shall determine that there has been a sufficient showing of interest or need to suggest that a public forum should be conducted in a neighborhood or neighborhoods within the City on a matter of public interest or concern, the convening Board may, in its discretion, issue a call for a neighborhood forum. The convening Board may make such a determination on the request of an interested citizen or citizens or on its own motion.

(B)

Promptly upon such a determination, the convening Board shall describe the neighborhood or neighborhoods having a community interest in the issue at hand; specify a date, time, and place for a neighborhood forum; describe the issues to be considered; appoint any suitable person as a temporary chair to convene the meeting; and issue a public warning of the meeting. The convening Board shall further specify the objective or objectives of the meeting, such as to: (1) share information with the residents of the specified community; (2) solicit information or opinions; (3) permit the residents to make recommendations relating to the issues; or (4) serve some other appropriate objective. The temporary chair shall begin the meeting as warned and shall assist the meeting in the election of a meeting chair.

To: Regina Mahoney, Essex Junction City Manager

From: Governance Team, Walter Logan, Joe Pittard, Margot Smithson

Re: Potential governance structures for the new City of Essex Junction, Vermont

Date: April 24, 2023

Assignment:

- a. Literature review on municipal governance models
- b. Review of governance models in northeastern United States municipalities with similar population
- c. Logistical, unique, and/or special considerations with each model

This document has been prepared to assist the governance committee of the city of Essex Junction, Vermont with deciding a future governance model. After a literature review on municipal governance models and case studies other northeastern United States municipalities of similar demographics, the following analysis provides several recommendations.

The literature reviews and case studies of similar municipalities carried common themes. Governance structures often had an executive component responsible for setting agendas and carrying out decisions, an administrative/managerial component that conducted the work of the city, and a representative body put forth to represent the interests of bounded areas within the community.

Executive Structures:

Mayor

The mayor is a well-established part of the political system of the United States, however, there are only eight mayors in Vermont (Marcel, 2017). Two of the mayors would be considered as strong mayors in the mayor-council form of governance. These belong to the cities of Burlington and Rutland. Cities do not yield much political power in the current constitutional system in the United States (Schragger, 2006). They are typically subservient to the counties and states, but a strong mayor provides accountability and transparency for their constituency. A strength of the mayor-council is one of accountability. A mayor is directly accountable to the public whereas the manager is accountable to the city council (Hayes & Chang, 1990). A mayor can provide strong leadership in municipal affairs.

Larger cities in America tend to favor the strong mayor form of the mayor-council form, and smaller cities tend toward the council-manager form (Wattenberg et al., 2017). In a strong mayor system, the mayor can have veto powers and ability to control appointments. In some cases, the mayor may have power over certain municipal institutions such as the school system or police department. They may also be able to appoint or dismiss other city officials (Schragger, 2006).

Representative Body:

Councilor(s)

As an alternative to a single executive form of government, city or town councils are made up of representative individuals elected by the community. The community is sectioned into wards or districts which then vote on a council member, (sometimes called an alderman). The council member serves a set term, which is usually staggered from other wards to minimize the impact of election transitions. These councils will hire a professional city manager in the Council-Manager form of governance. This professionally trained individual in this position is analogous to a private business corporation. It removes the politics of daily decisions and activities within a municipality.

Administrative Structures:

Administrator/Manager

While the mayor and city council are often largely responsible to set the agenda for city government priorities and engage in decision-making on behalf of the citizens, the administrative or managerial staff are responsible for implementing city policy and initiatives. These individuals are often appointed or hired by the town government officials and are not subject to the election cycle. The council-appointed manager in the council-manager form of governance is typically a professionally trained individual with authority over other city employees (Hayes & Chang, 1990). Manager-led cities are typically nonpartisan in how they are run. Managers are also less likely to outsource services like trash pick-up. This could largely be due to career motivations where managers want to prove their capabilities can match or exceed those of a private service (Wei, 2022).

The weak mayor operates within the city manager/council form of governance. They do not have the same resources available to them as the strong mayor, but they can still offer leadership. They are typically selected by members of the council or directly by voters. It functions more as a ceremonial role as they have no veto capabilities against council actions. The former mayor of St. Albans, Liz Gamache, compared her role as mayor to that of a Chief Executive Officer and the role of the manager to that of the Chief Operations Officer similar to that of a civilian corporation.

Local Case Studies:

With a 2022 population of 10,748 residents, Essex Junction is the fourth largest city in Vermont, behind Burlington, (44,703), South Burlington, (20,042), and Rutland City, (15,934). The governance structures of those comparable cities are below, with links to their government websites:

Burlington- Strong mayor, (8) Wards, (4) Regional representatives, (north, south, east west)

In 1865, the city of Burlington officially split from its town, which became South Burlington. This was due to substantial population growth post-Civil War. With the participatory format for town meetings in Vermont, the additional residents would have a significant say in the democratic process (Zimmerman, 1999). There was considerable concern from the Christian Protestant citizens that the immigrants would

cause them to lose control of their town meetings and political power. Additional concerns about overcrowding and public health problems led to the split (Taylor, 1992). Town meetings stopped upon municipal incorporation of the city. For their governance, the city decided on the mayor-council form.

The strong mayor format seems to be well received in Burlington despite its xenophobic origins. The current Mayor, Miro Weinberger, is well into his fourth term as the 42nd mayor of Burlington. While the position of mayor can tend to cause political divisions (Schragger, 2006), he is able to bring the different parties together despite their differences (Elletson, 2021). Police departments are one of the most visible municipal agencies and their performance often impacts support for or against a mayor (Go, 2022). Weinberger became involved in some scandal with the police chief during his previous term, which may be partially the cause of his narrow win margin for this election, but he is also seen as unifier, and someone trusted to lead the city (Elletson, 2021). That is the type of leadership a strong mayor can provide.

Rutland City- Mayor, Board of (11) Alderman

The other strong mayor municipality is Rutland city. Like Burlington, the Town of Rutland saw a spike in their population in the post-Civil War era due to the railroad and boom in the marble business (Rutland City History, n.d.). Many of the new residents were Irish immigrants working for the railroad (Keays, 2005). Due to the timing, a reasonable assumption is the city separated from the town for similar situations encountered in Burlington. They became a separate city in 1892 and adopted a mayor-council plan (History of Rutland, n.d.). As the third largest city in Vermont with a population of nearly 16,000, also like Burlington, this was a logical choice.

Rutland operates with eleven alderman and a mayor. Each of the alderman are responsible for aldermanic committees that work with community members to accomplish the work of the city, like a select board.

South Burlington- City Council (5) with a Chair

The city of South Burlington was incorporated as a city in 1971 and operates with a five-person council led by a council chair. This is a similar governance model to the transitional governance model in the City of Essex Junction. The South Burlington council is supported by a city manager and deputy city manager who help carry out the work of the city. The election cycle for each council member alternates between every two and three years.

Winooski Weak mayor, City Council

The city of Winooski was established in 1922 after splitting from the Town of Colchester. Winooski, Vermont has identified itself as a council-manager form of government however acts more as a mayor-council system. In practice their election practices mirror Burlington and Rutland. The governing body meets as a council led by the mayor who leads proceedings. The council is made up of the mayor, the deputy mayor, and 3 city councilors. Councilors hold office for 2-year limits and the mayor has a 3-year term limit (24 App. V.S.A. Ch. 19, § 303).

St Albans City

St. Albans City split from the Town of St. Albans in 1902 (About St. Albans, n.d.). The idea then was to provide police, fire, water, and sewer services just to the city residents without taxing the town population (Carapezza, 2011). While the mayor is not a full-time job for St. Albans, but it does fill a specific role. The mayor works with the city council to set priorities and agenda for the city manager and their staff (Marcel, 2017). The St. Albans mayor is also part of a group called the Vermont Mayors Coalition which is composed of all eight mayors in Vermont. This group seeks to address issues such as opioid addiction, reforming police training, and working on public safety. With a population of nearly 7,000, it is slightly on the lower end for cities with weak mayor, council-manager forms of governance.

Reviewing these case studies reveals a possible explanation behind the reasons for governance choice. The two mayor-council cities, Burlington, and Rutland, both formed out of a consolidation of power. They split from their towns to reduce the amount of influence from the growing immigrant populations. They chose a mayor to focus this consolidation within their political sphere. The other cities, South Burlington and St. Albans split from their towns as a matter of resource management. Their chosen form of governance kept a considerable amount of influence still within the general population.

Wards in Vermont

A minority of municipalities have implemented a ward system in Vermont. The governance systems which do include wards are Burlington, Rutland, and St Albans, VT. In each of these municipalities, the wards allow constituents an ability to vote for a representative of their geographically outlined subcommunity. As reflected by the reviewed literature, the ward system provides its members with more direct representation (City of Bayswater, n.d.). In practice, a ward system amplifies multiple experiences within a community which may be unheard in larger conversations.

One difficulty which has faced other Vermont communities has been the impact of economic equity within the political process. For South Burlington, their consideration of a ward system has stemmed from a desire to give residents a better opportunity to be represented by someone who can relate to their lived experiences within the city (The Other Paper, 2023). The proposal of wards may solve the issue of most elected officials having the most economic security. But the economic costs of wards have been called into question. Given a smaller community, there is a potential for councilors to attempt to invest more money into capital projects which are more visible rather than more necessary (Dalenberg & Duffy-Deno, 1991). To better ensure their chances of reelection, the study indicates that the elected official is more motivated to remain in office by presenting term successes rather than working on long-term necessary goals.

The ward system makes elected officials partial to their electorates rather than the larger community. While advocating for a ward can be necessary for areas where people have felt historically underrepresented, it can be more difficult to determine the interests of the overall community. These opposing views suggest a further reflection into the cultural and communal needs of Essex Junction. With the support of a united Essex Junction community, inclusiveness of community opinion, and a meticulously researched analysis of residential area density; it is possible to Essex Junction to make an informed decision regarding the adoption of a ward system.

Key Considerations:

Establishing Representation Arrangement

In the pursuit of identifying sustainable development models for small cities, Van Buren and Heuvelhof (2005) reviewed two municipalities in the Netherlands. Both cities utilized a spatial contour arrangement to delineate rural from urban areas, with the intention of protecting the rural landscape and environment, and to define urban centers for infrastructure development. A secondary intention for this design was to change the dominating governance construct with future sustainability in mind. Ultimately, the Van Buren and Heuvelhof 2005 study documented the spatial contour arrangement defined by geographic characteristics did not necessarily lead to stakeholder satisfaction. They postulated this was due to the challenges of change in established governance systems, and that the externally defined spatial contour agreement failed to appease the locational nuances important to stakeholders.

“The basic idea was that governance arrangements were more likely to be successful when they were tuned to the environment, with its multiple actors and institutions, in which they were supposed to have effect. From the 1989 National Environmental Policy Plan (Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning, and the Environment, 1999) onwards, governance arrangements were therefore formulated in close cooperation with stakeholders, and institutional factors played a vital role in governance design,” (Van Buren and Heuvelhof, 2005).

Ultimately, with reference to Teisman 1995, the authors articulate one of the most key factors for lasting policy change and successful governance structures is how satisfied the stakeholders are with policy direction and outcomes. This is especially important for network management where the governance team needs to engage with stakeholders across boundaries and organizations. With limited size and resources, small scale governance structures can focus on delivering policy agendas when enjoying broad-based community support. This support is more probable when the community and stakeholders are deeply engaged in the development of the governance structures.

While spatial contours arrangement is not wholly relevant for Essex due to the relatively homogenous suburban demographics and small size, the concept of defining key geographic considerations and developing governance models to support and enhance those spatial considerations is important to encourage stakeholder engagement, and, satisfaction in governance model. The election cycle should not incentivize elected officials to appeal first to politics and second to the duty to the city. The terms should be long enough for the elected officials to do the work and deliver on the needs of the city without reelection distraction. However, there should be mechanisms for the public to remove an elected official who commits egregious errors or malfeasance. This builds resilience in the governance structure, especially when there is shared leadership via a council, so the city can function during leadership changes.

Leverage Networks and Partnerships to Maximize Impact

In the modern age small cities are increasingly becoming more intragovernmental, needing to collaborate across networks to meet planning, financial, and economic development needs. One case study in the 2003 Agranoff and McGuire book, *Collaborative Public Management; New Strategies for Local Governments*, reviewed small city governance structures in Salem, Indiana, a small city with a population of 6,600 centrally located within the state. To anchor its economic development activities in a collective impact approach, the municipality collaborated with the local chamber of commerce,

economic development office, local and county governments, and private sector firms to establish the Washington County Economic Growth Partnership, WCEGP, (Agranoff and McGuire, 2003). The executive director of this network organization helps extend the reach of the small city by meeting with regional governance officials at the state and federal level, representing Salem as otherwise the work of the mayor's office would have limited contact at that regional level. To expand its grant writing capacities, Salem is one of thirteen small cities that coalesced into a volunteer network called Administrative Resource Associates, which pool writing and management support, (Agranoff and McGuire, 2003). Because Salem Indiana utilized these two networks, it "acted big" according to the authors and successfully accessed outsized development funds, (Agranoff and McGuire, 2003). Salem aggressively utilized taxation strategies such as tax abatement, tax increment financing, and state-sponsored loans and the Administrative Resource Associates helped Salem access federal discretionary development dollars.

Together, the two approaches that Salem implemented improved efficiency of its small city governance by utilizing networks and partnerships. A collaborative management approach is recommended for the town of Essex Junction to leverage its proximity to the social, political, and human capital of Burlington and the surrounding region. Due to the relatively small geographic and population size of Vermont, it is possible that a state-wide collaborative management option exists or could exist to leverage grant writing expertise that would benefit the state as a whole.

Transition & recommendations

It will be important for the transitional and new government of Essex Junction to maintain communication and transparency throughout this process. This is already happening with the current transitional governance, as evidenced by the comprehensive, current, and easy to navigate website and annual reports. The Newsletters and meeting notes are current and accessible. There are some links on the website that redirect to Essex Town, but those might be because the Essex Junction City services are not yet live. Overall, the current team is doing an excellent job. One recommendation is to include a governance and accountability graphic once the governance roles and positions are finalized, as a way to visually represent the structure to increase accessibility to the public. Another idea is to include a search bar on the website for "where do I go for" or "who do I speak to about..."

It takes time and resources to maintain this level of high-quality communications and outreach. A critical question in designing the new governance model is whether or not the administrative duties are adequately staffed or are they burdensome to the staff responsible for producing the work. It will be important to maintain administrative and executive balance in the next iteration of governance in Essex Junction.

This team's recommendation is to continue with a council or representative model while the new city continues to be established. This puts citizen representation and consultation at the forefront, which should lead to greater governance satisfaction. Diverse opinions and input will hopefully help avoid pitfalls and ensure that the areas of vulnerability in the community are included and accounted for. Councilors/alderman require less compensation, which gives the governance flexibility, something important to ensure a balanced budget as the new city adjusts to the tax revenues and expenditures without the town.

In time, we recommend a weak mayor or increasing the capacity of the city council president to represent the City of Essex Junction at a broader, regional level as to capitalize on the benefits of collective impact and networked governance models. Leveraging regional assets in Essex Junction should increase the grant writing competitiveness and allow the city to access greater public funding resources.

Diverse representation and the prioritization of community engagement will give the new governance structure a strong foundation.

Source	Notes	Recommendations <i>Points of Consideration</i>
Collaborative Governance		
Neighborhood Councils and City Agencies	Collaborative Governance-Neighborhood Councils <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses the concept of coproduction to examine the joint efforts by public agencies and community advisors • Connects to the expertise council members may bring to a city council position • The councils had some preexisting relationships to ease the transition from council to coproducers • Coproduction has been challenged for its cost effectiveness, but it has demonstrated an increase in service effectiveness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relating to wards: a deepened connection with citizens is recognized through citizen engagement in current issues. • Further representation through wards (and potentially advisory councils) has demonstrated success in service effectiveness
11 Core Principles for Sharing Cities	Outlining Sharing Cities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritizes a community-centered and technologically advanced city • More focus on who is a part of the community, what forms of collaboration are necessary • Focus on strengthening social and environmental resilience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider: A council system allows for multiple minds with different understanding of the community • Consider: the connectedness of technology, markets, and public policy • Invest in politicians and representatives who can strengthen bonds with community members and small businesses

Case 2: Governance at the grassroots level	<p>Citizen participation in local governance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bhutan study concludes that empowering local community members has increased buy-in in sustainable development and long-term motivations • Increased development of accountability and social benefits between members of different sub-national level communities 	<p>Local leaders and residents in positions of power yield a government accountability advantage. For Essex Junction, this means:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Question: what opportunities do city residents have to be involved in decision-making beyond elections? • How can smaller councils or outlets for civic discussion improve accountability?
Vermont Governance		
City of Winooski Presentation City of Winooski Policy Priorities and Strategies 2022-2023	<p>Winooski Vermont</p> <p>Governance Goals and Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mayor and Councilor system (mayor is a part of the council) • Mayor has the authority to speak on behalf of the council • Oversee the big picture • Will refer to org chart for analysis and further suggestions • Highlights the importance of commissions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Size and population analysis highlights the importance of knowing your city and opportunities for short-term and long-term accomplishment <p>Analyze Essex Junction's ethical and governance principles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who in the community is an experienced neighbor? • Who can use this knowledge for communal gain over personal/financial benefit?
The Role of Wards		
At-Large versus Ward Elections: Implications for Public Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ward elected councilors have presented with a capital bias, an interest in larger capital projects over public needs projects. • Ward elected councilors may be more incentivized towards highly visible projects to improve chance of reelection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider the role of elections and potential budgeting limits
South Burlington city council looks at expansion, wards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A year long discussion has produced many pros and cons to the introduction of wards or increase in city councilors • 4 out of 5 councilors in South Burlington reside in the same affluent community, a 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wards offer a further distribution of power and opinion which may benefit economically disadvantaged populations • Determine what potential wealth disparities are within the city.

	<p>ward system potentially redistributes citizen representation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concerns that a ward system may cause allegiance to a ward rather than the overall constituent interests 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How might the governing body further represent the Essex Junction community? Consider: the potential of a residency requirement- incentivizing leaders to serve in the ward that they reside
St Albans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> St Albans has 6 wards which represent their 6 city council seats Organized based on block count data from the 2020 US Census 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider US Census data to support a ward system that accounts for geographic density of an area
Weighing the benefits, drawbacks of electing councillors by wards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consultants of the Canadian city of Guelph encouraged the city council to remain within a ward system Cited the benefits for a ward system within a city and growing community Warns that a ward system could lead to elected officials who are only able to focus on smaller local issues without an overall perspective 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider how to provide all officials with information into each ward to ensure local and city investment are considered A ward system allows each councilor to represent key issues of their constituents, it is the purpose of the council to best support the overall wellbeing of Essex Junction
City of Bayswater	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A large city with 4 wards Outlines pros & cons of a ward system Officials can have a more personal stake in their constituents Heightened focus on the ward may lose sight of the needs of the overall community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider the capacity of representatives: would a smaller constituent base support more effective representation? Is it important to reduce potential cost barriers for someone running for office? How will you reinforce Essex Junction community culture?

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ESSEX JUNCTION GOVERNANCE

Margaret Smithson
Walter Logan
Joseph Pittard



Photo: Glenn Russel/VTDigger

Topic Objectives

Governance structures presented common themes:

- Executive component responsible for setting agendas and carrying out decisions,

- Administrative/managerial component that conducted the work of the city,

- A representative body put forth to represent the interests of bounded areas within the community.

Governance Structures

- Mayor/Council Form

- Council/Manager Form

- Weak Mayor

Case Studies

Wards



Mayor-Council Form

- Established political system in the U.S.
- Typical form of governance for large cities
- Centralized power
- Provides greater accountability and transparency than other form
- More political partisanship
- Two examples in Vermont
 - Burlington
 - Rutland



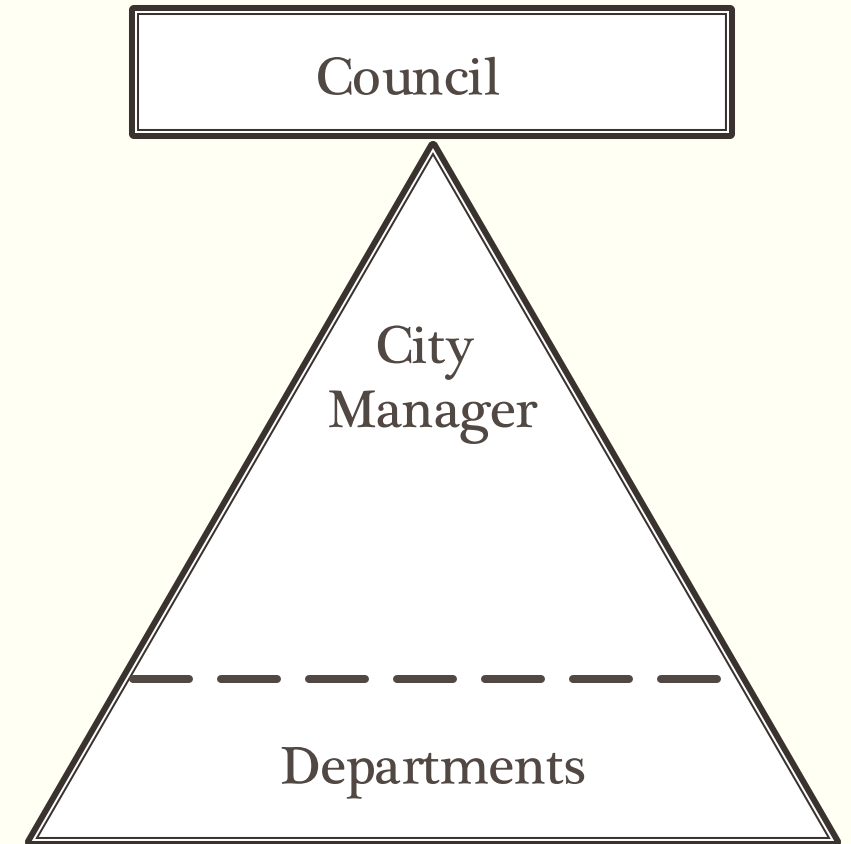
Burlington

- Split from town in 1865 and chose Mayor-Council form of Governance
- Largest city in Vermont, and one of two cities with Mayor-Council
- Elected 42 mayors since split
- Current mayor on 4th term and seen as unifier for the different political parties



Council-Manager

- Typical form of governance for small cities
- Professionally trained manager with authority over other city employees
- Answers to the council and not directly to the citizens
- Less politicized leadership in day-to-day functions of city government
- More likely to use local resources than outsourcing



Weak Mayor

- Part of the Council-Manager form of Governance
- Mostly ceremonial duties
- No formal authority outside of city council
- Typically unable to veto Council actions
- Exercises power through influence



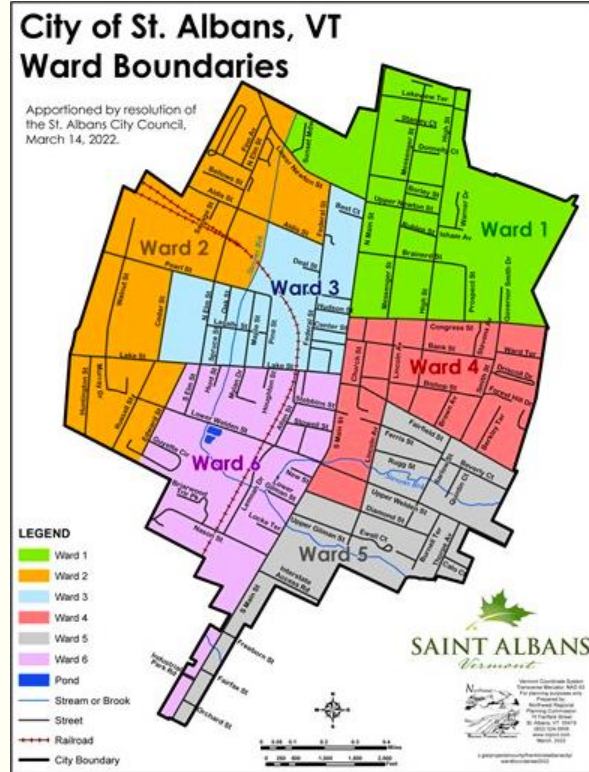
Former St Albans Mayor Liz Gamache Photo by Randolph Holhut.

St. Albans, VT

- Council-Manager Governance with Weak Mayor
- Smaller municipality than Burlington (pop. 7,000 vs 44,000)
- Split from town in 1902 over division of municipal services
- Part of Vermont Mayors Coalition
- Mayor not a full-time job
- Compares Manager to COO with Mayor as CEO



Wards



St. Albans: 6 Wards

- 6 Council Members



Burlington: 8 Wards

- 12 Council Members
- 4 Representatives



Rutland: 4 wards

- Council of Alderman
- 11 alderman
- Compensated \$2,500/yr

Wards

South Burlington city council looks at expansion, wards

By **The Other Paper**
Mar 19 2023

Cited reasons include:

- **Reducing economic disparity in politics**
- **Fair representation for subcommunities**

Ward systems...

Good ways to make sure residents become representatives

Remove economic barriers for candidates

Allow room for change and development in communities with the potential to grow

Divide resources/attention for subcommunity benefits

Skew the incentives of representatives (officials struggle to see the big picture)

Only offers voters to determine their ward and not the overall council

Drawing the map

Does this still make sense?

- Spatial contours arrangement
 - Using ecological/landscape features to design boundaries
- Netherlands case study
 - Deliberately broke up political pockets
 - Not successful
- Nuances of local influence in addition to demographic, landscape features
- Stakeholder engagement leads to increased satisfaction in governance model

Town of Essex and City of Essex Junction Voting Districts

Chittenden 23

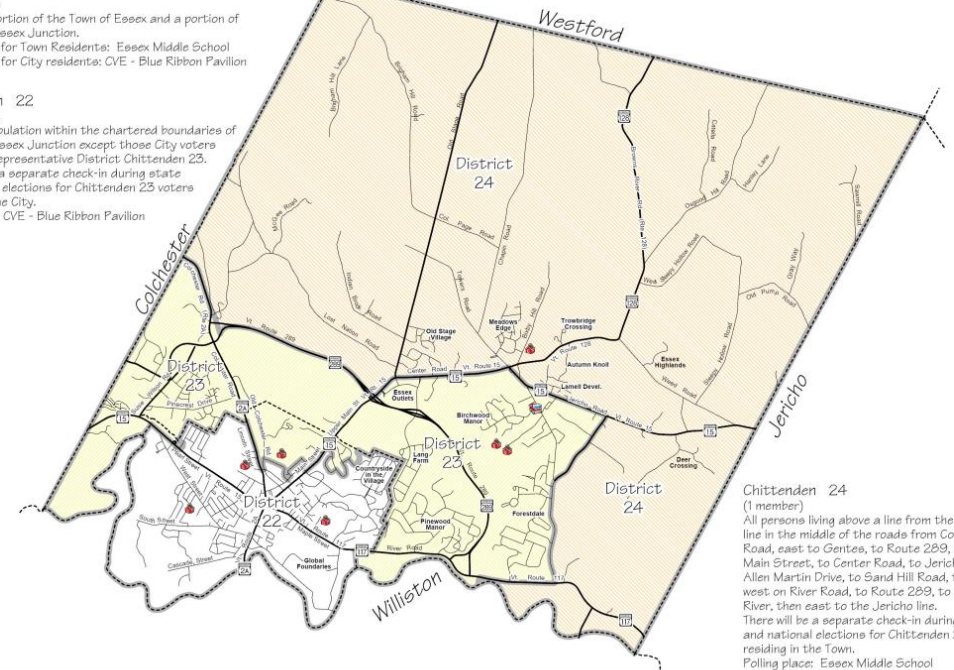
(2 members)

Includes a portion of the Town of Essex and a portion of the City of Essex Junction.
Polling place for Town Residents: Essex Middle School
Polling place for City residents: CVE - Blue Ribbon Pavilion

Chittenden 22

(2 members)

All of the population within the chartered boundaries of the City of Essex Junction except those City voters residing in Representative District Chittenden 23.
There will be a separate check-in during state and national elections for Chittenden 23 voters residing in the City.
Polling place: CVE - Blue Ribbon Pavilion



Chittenden 24

(1 member)

All persons living above a line from the Colchester line in the middle of the road from Colchester Road, east to Gentes, to Route 289, east to Upper Main Street, to Center Road, to Jericho Road, to Allen Martin Drive, to Sand Hill Road, to River Road, west on River Road, to Route 289, to the Winoski River, then east to the Jericho line.
There will be a separate check-in during state and national elections for Chittenden 24 voters residing in the Town.
Polling place: Essex Middle School
(Town of Essex residents only)

Essex City Residents Voting Districts



What can Essex Junction afford?

- Depending on the available budget, mayors are significantly more expensive than council members.
- Miro Wienberger- \$124,767, (up from \$91,000 in 2013).
- Burlington council members make a max \$5000 per year
- Rutland alderman make \$2,500 per year
- [City of Burlington Annual Financial Report](#)

City	Annual Salary
Essex Junction	\$86,489
Winooski	\$85,189
South Burlington	\$81,589
Burlington	\$80,528
Montpelier	\$79,529
Barre	\$78,783
Bellows Falls	\$76,741
Newport	\$76,677
St. Albans	\$76,381
Rutland	\$74,810

<https://www.ziprecruiter.com/Salaries/Mayor-Salary--in-Vermont>

Collaborative Governance

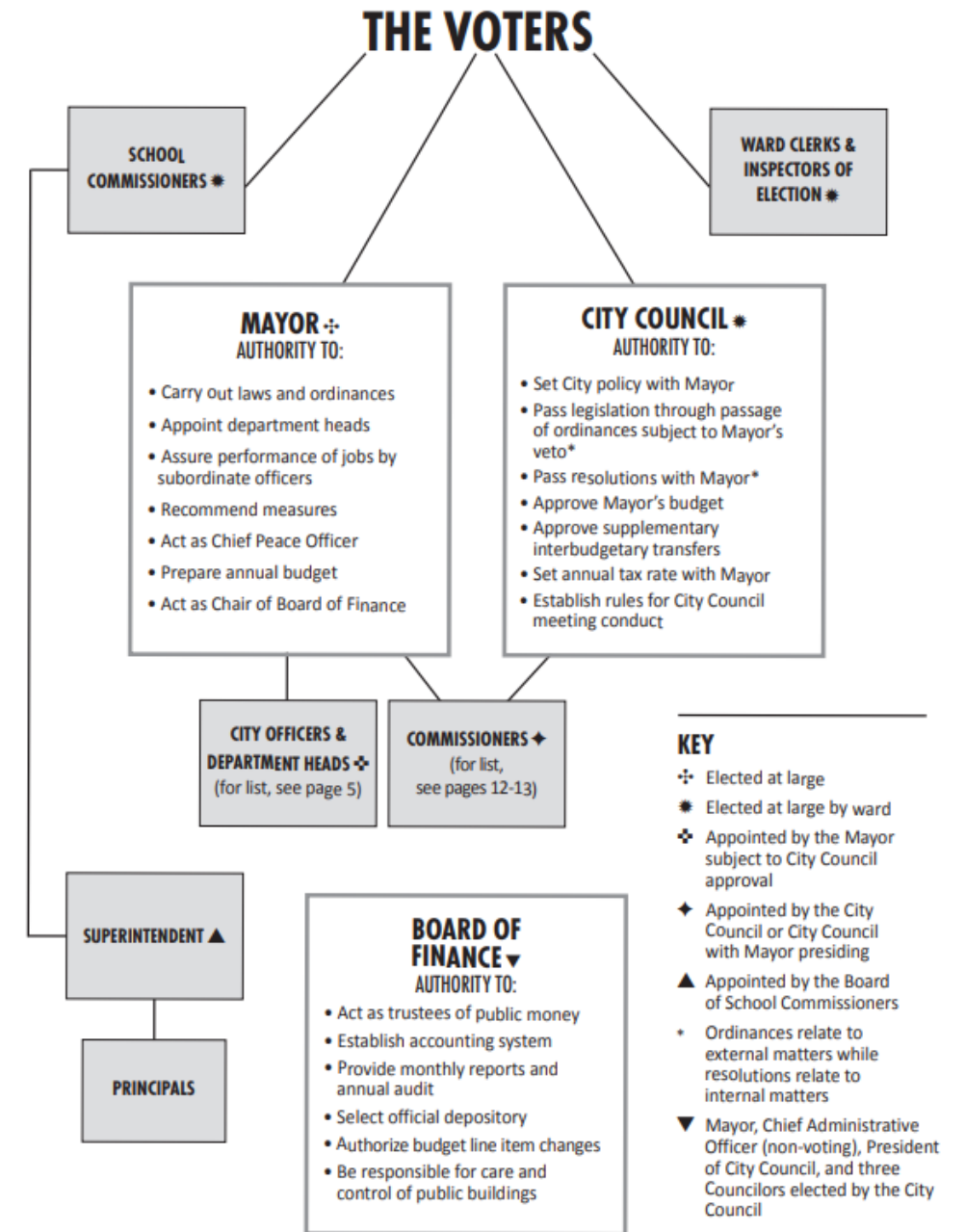
- Take advantage of regional strength and connectivity, situate community development in collective impact approach
- Create partnerships to pool grant writing and management tools
 - Essex Junction as spoke hub
 - Administrative Resource Associates, Salem, Indiana
- Leverage regional assets
- Vermont Energy and Climate Action Network
- Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission



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Engagement & Accountability

- Maintain communication & transparency
 - Website, social, annual reports
 - Great job! Fresh look, updated, comprehensive, easy to read
- Diagram from Burlington governance structure, (right, from 2022 Annual Report)
 - Who do I go to for.....
- Identifying the key workload and ensuring new governance has capacity to deliver
 - Administrative vs. executive
 - Collective impact & networks
 - "Under-promise & over-deliver"



Our Recommendation

- Avoid strong mayor to start
 - Financial considerations
 - Transitional phase
- Engage citizens to define representation
 - We recommend some form of wards/council representation in making government decisions, at least in transitional phase
- Eventually weak mayor or council president to carry out executive agenda
 - Regional networking and representation
 - Increased capacity over time
 - Leverage regional assets
 - Global Foundries, Champlain Valley Expo
- Engagement is critical
 - Get feedback from citizens in iterative, formal process
 - How well attended are current charter meetings?
 - Identify vulnerable demographics & scaffold supports to ensure inclusion





QUESTIONS?

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