

# Running for Local Office



*Make a  
Difference  
by Serving  
Your City,  
Town or  
Village*



*Serving and Strengthening  
Vermont Local Governments*

Vermont is blessed by hard-working, down-to-earth local governments that are small enough to be extraordinarily responsive to citizen needs. Unlike the state or federal government, local governments are very close to the people that they serve, with great results.



All photos by Jeb Wallace-Brodieur

Local governments are built on a solid foundation of volunteers who choose to run for the offices of select-board, city council, village or library trustee, clerk, treasurer, lister, and others. There are 5,000 elected local officials in Vermont, and your community would surely appreciate your interest in being one of them.

Your city, town or village will benefit from your participation, as will you! Not financially – local officials are quick to point out that they aren't in it for the money – but in other ways. You will have a voice in how your town provides services, how it accommodates change, and how it will look in the future. You'll make friends and get to know your community better. Most likely you will miss a few evenings at home each month, but you will be participating in the local democracies that make our state so special.

We hope that this brochure will encourage you to run for local office, or otherwise serve your local government, and that it answers any questions you may have about running. Good luck!

William A. Shepeluk  
President, VLCT Board of Directors

## Which Office?

Local elected offices are specified by the Vermont Statutes (17 V.S.A. §2646). However, if a municipality operates under a governance charter (approximately 37 in Vermont do), these offices may be different, as could be the municipality's town meeting date. Generally, the following offices can be elected:

- ◆ Moderator
- ◆ Town Clerk
- ◆ Town Treasurer
- ◆ Selectperson
- ◆ Lister (property appraiser)
- ◆ Auditor
- ◆ Constable
- ◆ Collector of Current Taxes
- ◆ Collector of Delinquent Taxes
- ◆ Grand Juror
- ◆ Town Agent
- ◆ Trustee of Public Funds
- ◆ Cemetery Commissioner
- ◆ Road Commissioner
- ◆ Water Commissioner

If you are thinking of running, check with your town clerk to see which offices will be open and the deadlines for filing paperwork to get on the ballot. (See below, "Getting on the Ballot.") If you can, attend some meetings ahead of time to get a sense of the issues facing the board or commission you are interested in. For more information about the duties of different local government offices, visit the VLCT web site, [www.vlct.org](http://www.vlct.org), Vt. Local Government Section.

## Am I Eligible, and Qualified?

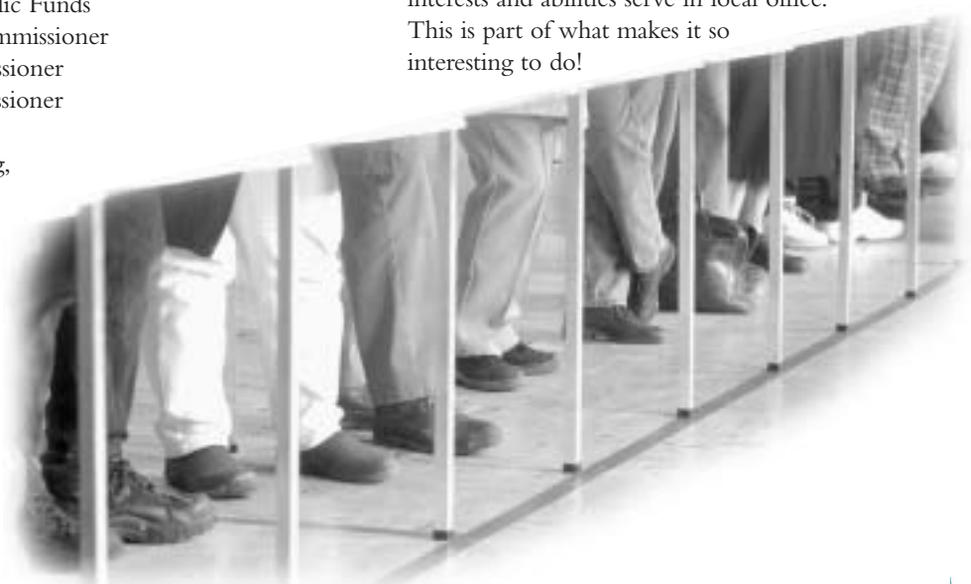
You must be a legally-qualified voter in your town to run for office. The qualifications are:

- ◆ Citizen of the United States
- ◆ Resident of Vermont
- ◆ Have taken the Voter's Oath
- ◆ 18 years of age or older

Other, "unofficial" qualifications are a basic understanding of municipal government (there are many resources available to help you master the duties of your particular office, once elected), the ability to work with a team, to listen and to communicate well. Local officials need to be open to the ideas of their fellow board members and citizens, and accessible to their constituents. Vested with the public's trust, they have to act with the highest integrity.

Don't let this list put you off. People of all backgrounds, interests and abilities serve in local office.

This is part of what makes it so interesting to do!



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# Getting on the Ballot

If your town elects officers from the floor at an open town meeting, nominations will be made from the floor, the vote will be taken, and the winner declared by the moderator. The only preparation you will have to do is to get someone to nominate you from the floor, and hope for a majority of ayes.

Many towns have voted to elect officers by Australian ballot (a pre-printed ballot marked by voters in the voting booth). If your town is one of them, nominations are made by petition. Unless otherwise specified by charter, your petition must be signed by “at least 30 valid signatures of [different, individual] voters of the municipality, or one percent of the legal voters, whichever is less.” (17 V.S.A. §2681) A good practice is to get a few more signatures than you need in case some turn out to be invalid. You must file your petition by the statutory deadline (the sixth Monday before the day of the election). With most town meetings occurring on the first Tuesday in March, these deadlines usually fall in late January. However, it’s a good idea to check in with your municipality’s clerk in December for deadline and petition requirements.

## Campaign Finance Guidelines

If you spend more than \$500 in your local election bid (a very rare occurrence in Vermont), you will have to file with your municipal clerk a campaign finance report 10 days before and within 10 days after the election. (17 V.S.A. §§2822, 2103 (13))

## Ethics Guidelines

If you already hold one office in town, you may not be eligible to run for certain other offices. Because they are charged with being independent overseers of town finances, auditors may not hold 13 other offices, and the spouse of one of those 13 officers cannot run for auditor. Selectpersons cannot be listers and the town manager may not hold any elective office in the town or the school district. (17 V.S.A. §2647)

If you are elected to a board that holds public hearings, takes evidence, and renders decisions, you will be expected to adhere to state guidelines for judicial officials. (12 V.S.A. §61, disqualification for interest, and 13 V.S.A. §§1102, 1106-1107, criminal prohibitions on accepting gifts and kickbacks) If it applies in your town, the Municipal Administrative Procedures Act (24 V.S.A. §§1201, et. seq.) also has conflict of interest guidelines.

Aside from these specific state laws, general ethics guidelines are optional for municipalities. For instance, some municipalities have conflict of interest policies that may prohibit municipal employees from holding various elected offices. Check with your clerk to see if your municipality has adopted an Ethics Policy, or has such language in its governance charter.

## Other Ways to Contribute

If, after reading this brochure and talking to local officials in your town you’ve decided that you aren’t quite ready to run for local office, please consider other ways to get involved with your municipal government. In many towns, planning and conservation commissioners and recreation committee and zoning board of adjustment members, to name just a few positions, are appointed by the selectboard. There are always other volunteer opportunities as well. Some may be for a specific project and therefore of a limited duration – perfect for lending your local government your interest and talents without making a long-term commitment. We hope, however, that it is the beginning of a long and mutually satisfying relationship!

## Local Contact Information

