

*Can citizens petition a selectboard to change the name of a road?*

State law vests the authority to name and rename town roads exclusively with the selectboard and citizens cannot compel a selectboard to name or rename a road. 19 V.S.A. § 304(a)(17), 24 V.S.A. §§ 2291(16), 4463(c). Therefore, if a selectboard receives a petition to consider naming or renaming a road, the discretion to act upon the petition resides solely with the selectboard.

Twenty-four V.S.A. § 4463(c) requires that the selectboard hold a public hearing before renaming a public street. While this statute appears to apply only to those roads located within a newly approved subdivision, VLCT recommends holding a hearing whenever the selectboard is considering a name change. We also recommend sending written notification of the hearing to all landowners abutting the street or road.

While the selectboard cannot be compelled to change the name of a road, members should bear in mind that they are elected by, and ultimately accountable to, the citizens of the municipality they serve. The issue of naming or renaming streets can evoke a great amount of public sentiment, and a selectboard should be reticent to dismiss such a request without first hearing from those who made it. Remember, simply holding a public hearing does not obligate a selectboard to name or rename a road. Ultimately, it is the selectboard's decision.

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