



## Vermont League of Cities & Towns

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89 Main Street, Suite 4  
Montpelier, VT 05602

P: 802-229-9111  
F: 802-229-2211

info@vlct.org  
vlct.org

Date: July 1, 2021

To: Members of the Vermont Legislature

From: Karen Horn, Director, Public Policy & Advocacy

Re: 2021 Veto Session

I am writing on behalf of the 246 member cities and towns of the Vermont League of Cities and Towns to thank you for your commitment to local government during the 2021 veto session, which took place on June 23 and 24. More than any other session in recent memory, last week's veto session was all about city and town government. We are grateful for your strong support of local democracy and local control during the two days of debate and action on two locally approved charter amendments – H.177, Montpelier, and H.227, Winooski – as well as S.79, a bill that would move the responsibility for inspections of rental housing from the local volunteer health officer to the Division of Fire Safety, except in those municipalities that choose to administer a comprehensive inspection program.

The impassioned floor speeches and arguments made in support of the Montpelier and Winooski charter changes reflected a much-appreciated respect of local control, local democracy, and local officials. We urge you to consider these values as we work with you in coming sessions to address the reality that Vermont is one of the few “Dillon’s Rule” states – where local governments may act only if the legislature grants them authority to do so. To date 61 Vermont cities and towns, and 45 incorporated villages have gone to the legislature to seek permission to do everything from collecting local option taxes to hiring librarians to changing the functions of a municipal manager. This approach to local governance is hardly the Norman Rockwell image Vermonters have of participatory democracy. It is not efficient, effective, or respectful of local democracy you so ardently defended in last week's veto session.

Vermont was able to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic because of a strong partnership between the state and local governments, which turned on a dime to implement innovative and highly effective responses to the emergency. We wish to acknowledge the tremendous amount of work you undertook this session – from providing pandemic relief to addressing some of the largest social and economic issues Vermonters have faced in recent times. Forty bills impacting local governments were passed this year. As our [Legislative Wrap Up](#) suggests, there is a lot for our members to digest this summer. We hope that in the future you will consider the implications for cities, towns, and villages when you pass any piece of legislation, and we urge you to consult with the local officials in the municipalities you represent when considering local issues.

As always, we welcome your questions about the impact of legislation on local governments at any time, and we particularly look forward to working with you in 2022 to shift the partnership toward affirming the actions of local voters in charter votes and away from the historically paternalistic 19<sup>th</sup> century system that is Dillon’s Rule.