

## Testimony for H.926 – Colchester Charter Change

In Colchester, the Town Clerk and Treasurer positions are currently filled by individuals running for election. H.926 proposes to modify the town's charter, to have these two positions appointed by the Town Manager with the advice and consent of the Select Board.

The Colchester Select Board held two public hearings on the proposed charter change: 1/9/2018, and 1/23/2018. At the second public hearing the current town clerk expressed her support for the change due to technological and professional knowledge needed for the position.

This year's town meeting ballot contained an article proposing this change. The results were 1661 votes in favor of the change and 979 opposed.

Colchester is the fourth largest municipality in Vermont with a population of 17,000. It is the 13<sup>th</sup> largest by area. Colchester has the 4<sup>th</sup> largest education grandlist value in the state, and her municipal budget is about \$11 million.

The town clerk has a budget of \$416,000 and manages a staff of 4 full-time individuals and one half-time worker. Together they accomplish the following:

- Collect and process more than \$53 million in town and school tax receipts.
- Collect all recreation and storm water fees.
- Receive, record, and index all documents and maps that regarding title of property.
- Manage vital records: births, deaths etc.
- Run elections
- Process passports
- Issue liquor licenses
- And Along with the Board of Civil Authority, hear tax appeals and abatements.

Colchester town administration includes a Chief Financial Officer (CFO)/ Deputy Town Clerk responsible for much of the town's finances. Still, the Treasurer signs and receives all checks. Town accounts are balanced and managed by the CFO as a check against the treasurer. The town is audited annually.

The town clerk has wide authority in the running of the town. As an elected official s/he is answerable only to the ballot box. S/he cannot be fired or reprimanded. The town government can propose policies for the clerk to follow, but there are no means of enforcing those policies. Widely accepted and prudent accounting checks and balances can be ignored. Though the job requires an understanding of state statutes, municipal ordinances and finances, the elected positions of clerk and treasurer require no training or background in these areas.

The town of Colchester understands that it has grown to the point where it requires a competent, experienced and knowledgeable person in these positions. The voters of Colchester approved this charter change, enabling the town manager and select board to properly search for and vet candidates with the education, training and experiences necessary to properly manage the day-to-day working of the clerk and treasurer's office.