

Hello All, my name is Anne Watson, I'm the Mayor of Montpelier. Thank you for giving me some time to speak today.

I'm here today representing both the Montpelier city council as well as the residents of the city of Montpelier. Both the city council and the public voted in favor of allowing green-card holders to vote on local issues. It was unanimously approved by the city council and the public voted two-to-one in favor of the measure (Yes: 2857 (66%), No: 1488 (34%), Total: 4345).

The logistics of this measure, should it be approved, mean that green-card holding Montpelier residents would be able to vote on municipal issues.

Like most people, I used to think that it was simply not legal for non-citizens to vote. Period. But as you've heard from your legal council, there is no federal law that expressly prohibits non-citizens from voting in local elections. We, the city of Montpelier, would like to extend this privilege to our legally-documented, non-citizen, tax-paying, permanent-resident, green-card-holding neighbors. This is reminiscent of the sentiment "taxation without representation" because indeed, these green-card holders are paying taxes. Their children are in our school systems. They are our friends, spouses, and neighbors. Extending this limited ability to vote feels like an appropriate and kind way to enfranchise them as members of our community.

Undoubtedly our national dialogue has played a role in people's decision about this charter change. During a time in which the status of immigrants is very much in the news, we are hungry for ways in which we can welcome and enfranchise immigrants. I hope that this body would see fit to honor the wishes of the residents of Montpelier.

I understand from your legal counsel report that there are no constitutional impediments for allowing legal resident non-citizens to vote on local issues, and so this becomes a matter of policy. If it's not unconstitutional, shouldn't the wishes of the public be honored? It is important to consider that when we use the phrase "tax-payers" that that phrase is not synonymous with the word "citizen". Is it right and appropriate for permanent residents tax-payers to have some degree of voice in the use of their tax dollars? I think it is, the people of Montpelier think it is, and I hope you will agree.

Thank you for your time.