

3/26/2021

From the Office of the Mayor of Winooski

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To: Senate Government Operations Committee

Dear Senators,

Thank you for hearing my testimony on municipal priorities for self-governance. As you know, Winooski voters have approved several charter changes, including language that could allow us to access, with a local vote, charter changes already approved by the legislature for other municipalities in Vermont. Our residents supported this proposed change for several benefits:

- This would allow our community to implement changes more quickly. If we see another community using something Local Options Tax, for example, to success, we could follow the lead and access that success sooner, without having to wait for legislative approval.
- This would support equity and parity across our state, reducing barriers. Why should the legislature pick and choose which communities have access to different statute and authority? This method of implementation is rife with room for unconscious bias.
- This would reduce redundancy and increase the capacity of the Legislature to do more work. Why should legislators spend time reviewing the same change multiple times for different communities, when there are so many other priorities to address in our State?

In lieu of this proposed change, the Legislature may consider a different approach, granting more self-governance for certain specific matters that have a strictly local impact. For example, our charter changes include items of a strictly administrative nature: Changing language to allow our City Manager to appoint an HR Director instead of an HR Manager, and references to volunteer firefighters as now all are paid. Our city and staff have grown and we should be able to update this language without the Legislature having to weigh in on our individual staffing. We also have proposed changes that bring our charter into alignment with state statute, for example in our local petition signature collection. Again, this is an administrative task that ought not require legislative oversight, given we are aligning to state statute implemented by the Legislature. And a final example involves our local candidate elections process. We did not include this in our current proposed charter changes, but it was something we did discuss and may revisit in the future: We currently require a sitting City Councilor to step down in order to run for Mayor. We have considered removing the requirement to resign and allowing a sitting Councilor to run during their unexpired term. This change would have no



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impact outside of our city and so is a matter of import only to Winooski voters, and should not require the time of the State Legislature to review.

These are just a few examples of areas where local control makes sense, and would benefit all of our shared constituents, as well as those of us who serve and have a great deal of work to do in service of Vermonters.

Sincerely,

Kristine Lott
Mayor

