



City of Barre, Vermont

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Testimony on H.902 to the Vermont State Senate Committee on Government Operations

I want to thank Chair Collamore and the members of the Committee for the opportunity to testify today on H.902, which would codify two changes to the Barre City Charter approved by the voters at the May 2025 Town Meeting Day election.

The first change relates to sale or lease of City property. The charter as currently written provides that only the mayor may sign all conveyances of City property. The change approved by the voters would expand this definition to provide that in addition to the mayor, the City Manager or a Councilor so authorized by an action of the Council to sign such conveyances.

This change is about good governance and preventing future crises. Imagine for a moment that a mayor in the future became incapacitated, or was travelling abroad, or flat out refused to sign a conveyance. This change would allow for either the City Manager or a Councilor to effectuate a sale or lease of City property that is so authorized by the full City Council.

This charter change was widely supported by the voters, and passed by a vote of 522 to 293, or 64% to 36%.

The second charter change before you relates to the cap on our undesignated fund balance. Currently, Barre City is allowed to retain up to 5% of our general fund budget as an undesignated fund balance. The proposed change

would double the cap to allow the City Council to vote to retain up to 10% of our general fund budget as an undesignated fund balance.

The impetus of this charter change was the aftermath of the 2023 flood. Going into the recovery from that flood, the City of Barre had retained the full 5% of our allowable fund balance – which equated to approximately \$600,000. We had built up this fund balance – like many other communities across the State – from vacancy savings from positions we were struggling to fill. It was not a fund balance we wanted or desired – we much rather would have preferred to have had those positions (be they police officers, or DPW workers) filled.

That said, having this fund balance allowed us to recover from the 2023 floods without having to borrow a nickel. As you know, FEMA is a reimbursement-based program – Barre and other impacted communities have to pay to make repairs and then we get reimbursed on the back-end. Our fund balance allowed us to pay for repairs without going into debt.

We are seeking to double the amount to be retained because we know that 2023 (or 2024) will not be the last time we need to tap into reserves for an emergency. Many other communities across Vermont have even more flexible limits on fund balance retention. Our proposal to our voters was modest, and forward-looking, and the voters responded by approving this charter change.

The margin for this charter change was even wider than the first charter change. By a 618-174 margin, or 78% to 22%, voters said yes.

I appreciate the Committee's time and welcome the opportunity to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you.