

Vote ‘no’ on charter



Tyler Sizemore/Hearst Connecticut Media

The Stamford Government Center.

The Stamford League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan issue-oriented organization. Our goal is to support voter access, participation and education. This is why we are saying vote “no” on the charter revisions on this November’s ballot.

Voter participation is reduced by holding it in an off-year

The Stamford Charter states, “To the extent permissible under applicable state law, the Board of Representatives shall endeavor to schedule the referendum on any proposed charter amendments or revisions to coincide with a general election at which either the Mayor, state officials or federal officials are to be elected.”

The 2024 presidential election is likely to have three times the number of voters at the polls as compared with this off-year election. Compared with the 80 percent of registered voters expected in next year’s election, based on voter participation data in a similar off-year election, it is possible that only 32 percent of registered voters would vote this November. This means that it is possible for 16 percent of registered voters to approve the proposal and have it be enacted. Given the large scope of the proposed charter changes and their broad impact on all Stamford residents, it is irresponsible to the general populace to not have more participation. The spirit of the Stamford Charter language dictates participation as a core objective.

Voter education is reduced due to time constraints

The voters need to make an informed decision about whether they support or oppose the charter revisions. There has been insufficient outreach from the commission to actually educate the public on the changes. In past revisions there has been enough time for Charter Revision Commission members to attend forums hosted by civic organizations to educate the public on the changes and their effects on the city. To hold the vote this November gives very little time to educate the public on what the changes are and what their impact would be on our city.

Transparency and access are reduced in a single up-or-down vote

With hundreds of proposed changes, the stakes are too high to allow a single vote up or down on the ballot question. In prior charter revisions, the proposed changes were grouped and voted on individually giving the voters: 1) more transparency, 2) better explanation of dense legal language, and 3) more control on what to vote for or against. To have all the changes in the more than 170-page Charter boiled down to an up or down vote on EVERYTHING is not giving the residents and voters of Stamford a transparent indication of what is included in those changes.

Governing precedent of previous charter changes is not followed

Recent charter change votes took place in major elections (even years) following the Stamford Charter’s guidelines. These propositions grouped the choices into various items, so that voters could easily understand what they were voting for or against. City officials devoted notable periods of time to educate voters about the choices, and several propositions were hotly contested in the spirit of civil public debate.

The LWV takes nonpartisan issue positions when its core values of voter participation and voter education are challenged. The LWV never supports or opposes candidates. With our concerns about there being insufficient time to educate the public, holding a vote during this off-year election, and having a single up or down vote on the many proposed changes, the Stamford League of Women Voters recommends to vote “no” on the ballot question.

League of Women Voters of Stamford Steering Committee member Kristine Goldhawk submitted this on behalf of the league.