

Charlestown Town Charter Amendment - Advertising of Proposed Ordinances

Article IX Ordinances

§C-33. Introduction.

Every proposed ordinance, other than an emergency ordinance, shall be read a first time by title and explained by its sponsor at the meeting at which it is to be introduced. An affirmative vote of three (3) of the members of the Council shall be necessary for its introduction. A date shall be set for a hearing on the proposed ordinance. At least seven (7) calendar days prior to the hearing, ~~the proposed ordinance shall be published in a newspaper having distribution within the town~~ a summary of the proposed ordinance, including a description of the matter under consideration and the intent and effect of the proposed ordinance, shall be published in a newspaper of general circulation within the Town, with the full text of the proposed ordinance made available on the Town's official website. The summary shall include directions on where to locate the proposed ordinance. With respect to zoning ordinances or amendments thereto, all notice and hearing requirements shall be conducted in strict compliance with Rhode Island General Laws § 45-24-53, as amended. Nothing herein shall be construed to limit or supersede any applicable requirement of state law.

What are voters being asked to decide?

Whether to change how the Town publishes proposed ordinance amendments, while maintaining public notice, hearings, and compliance with state law.

Background

- **Newspaper publication of full ordinances can cost \$175 to over \$1,300 each**
- **The Town's advertising costs have increased by over \$90,000 in the past five years**
- Our local newspaper is reducing its circulation, no longer publishing a Sunday and Monday paper.
- The Town already provides full ordinance text online.
- This approach maintains transparency while updating how information is shared.

Current Requirement

Before a public hearing, the Town must:

- Publish the full text of the proposed ordinance in a newspaper
- Provide at least 7 days' notice

Proposed Change

The amendment would:

- Continue requiring newspaper notice
- Allow publication of a summary instead of the full ordinance
- Require the full text to be posted on the Town's website
- Require the notice to include instructions for accessing the full ordinance

What Stays the Same

- ✓ Public hearings are still required
- ✓ At least 7 days' notice is still required
- ✓ Ordinances must still be introduced at a public meeting
- ✓ The public still has access to the full ordinance

State Law Compliance

- Zoning ordinances must continue to follow Rhode Island General Laws § 45-24-53
- The amendment does not override or reduce any state law requirements

How Would You Access the Full Ordinance?

- Visit the Town's official website at charlestownri.gov.
- Follow the directions included in the newspaper notice.

Prior Vote

A similar proposal was considered in 2024 and was not approved:

- 57% Reject | 43% Approve

This version clarifies compliance with state law and access to full ordinance text.

Bottom Line

This amendment would:

- **Keep public notice and hearings**
- **Maintain legal compliance**
- **Provide full access to ordinances online**
- **Allow more flexible and cost-efficient publication methods**