

Sam for Council

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The Docket A Newsletter from the Providence City Council

**October 2012
Ballot Questions**

Local Questions on November Ballot for Providence Voters

On November 6th, Providence voters will be asked to vote on ten (10) ballot questions--one which would approve bonds for street and sidewalk improvements--and nine which would amend the city's home rule charter.

Every decade, the city charter is reviewed by residents appointed to a commission by the mayor and council. The council then votes to approve questions that will appear on the ballot. All proposed questions must be approved by Providence voters.

The questions are numbered 8 through 18 on the November ballot. Below are brief explanations of each question. Follow this [link](#) to see the questions as they will appear on the ballot.

Please email us at council@providenceri.com if you would like more information about the ballot questions and the proposed charter amendments.

Question 8:

Finance the Design, Construction, Repair, Rehabilitation and Improvement of Streets and Sidewalks - \$40,000,000

If approved, Question 8 would authorize the City to issue a \$40 million general obligation bond for a citywide paving plan. The plan calls for repaving over 65 miles of roads throughout Providence. Streets

were selected from a citywide survey of roads that relied upon standardized measures developed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Construction would begin in spring 2013 and is projected to be completed in 2016, creating as many as 750 jobs. Total debt service over 20 years is expected to be \$64 million, or \$20 per resident per year. The proposed paving plan, along with further information, is available [here](#).

Question 9:

Shall the terms used in the Charter be defined as follows for clarity and consistency?: (a) "City" shall mean the City of Providence, in the County of Providence, and the State of Rhode Island. (b) "Council" shall mean the duly elected city council of the City of Providence. (c) "Domiciled" shall mean that place where a person has his or her true, fixed, and permanent home and principal establishment, and to which whenever he or she is absent has the intention of returning. (d) Mayor. Whenever the word "mayor" is used, it shall mean the mayor of the City of Providence. (e) "Quorum" shall mean a majority of the members of a public body or duly appointed committee. [Adds Section 107.]

This amendment provides definitions to be applied to the language used throughout the Providence Home Rule Charter. Voting "Yes" on Question 9 will add a new section (Section 107) to the charter listing definitions for common terms and phrases used throughout the charter, including "city," "quorum," "domiciled," and others. The charter review commission proposed this amendment with the goal of ensuring that the charter is consistently interpreted and applied.

Question 10:

Shall charter review commissions be appointed as of September 1, 2021, and every ten years thereafter? [Amends Section 1302]

Every 10 years, a charter review commission is appointed by the mayor and council to review and make recommendations for changes to the Providence Home Rule Charter. A "Yes" vote on Question 10 will require that the commission be appointed four months earlier to allow more time for members to review the charter and hold public meetings. If the question is approved, the next commission would be appointed in September 2021.

Question 11:

Shall amendments approved by electors of the city be effective upon approval, unless otherwise noted? [Amends Section 1401]

Question 11 clarifies that charter amendments approved by the electors of the city during a general election take effect immediately.

Question 12:

Shall the term "personnel department" be replaced with "human resources department" wherever it appears in the charter? [Amends Sections 901 through 903.]

The Question 12 amendment replaces the term "personnel department" with "human resources department" throughout the Providence Home Rule Charter. The change in language would modernize the terminology used in the document.

Question 13:

Shall it be the responsibility of the human resources department to enforce the procedures for suspension, discharge, reduction in class position, and layoff of employees? [Amends

Section 903(j).]

If approved, Question 13 would vest the authority to suspend, discharge, demote, and layoff in the human resources department. Currently, that responsibility is decentralized among department heads, hiring authorities, and other supervisory positions. Those same groups would instead make a recommendation to the human resources department to suspend, discharge, demote, or layoff if this question is adopted. Vesting this power in a centralized office is consistent with human resources best practices.

Question 14:

Shall the responsibility of the human resources department be changed to eliminate examining and approving all payrolls and monitoring residency requirements? [Amends Sections 901(l) and (p).]

If approved, Question 14 would eliminate several antiquated, procedural responsibilities vested in the human resources department. First, the department would no longer have to approve payrolls--a function which is currently overseen by a different city department. Second, human resources staff would no longer be responsible for overseeing local residency requirements. State law prohibits residency requirements, so this change would bring the charter into compliance with Rhode Island General Law.

Question 15:

Shall the qualifications for the director of the department of public property be a bachelor's degree, or a minimum of five (5) years of experience in the field? [Amends Section 1006]

Question 15 is proposing to change the required qualifications of the director of the department of public property. Approving Question 15 will amend section 1006 of the charter by changing the qualifications of this position to a bachelor's degree or a minimum of five years' experience in the field. The amendment requires that preference be given to a candidate with a college degree.

Question 16:

Shall the Providence Emergency Management Agency and Homeland Protection Department be placed under the jurisdiction of the Department of Public Safety, under the supervision of the Commissioner of Public Safety? [Amends Section 1001]

Question 16 is a proposal to place the existing emergency management agency and homeland protection department under the jurisdiction of the department of public safety, to be supervised by the commissioner of public safety.

Question 17:

Shall the Charter prohibit city officials from using their authority or influence to secure city employment for any person within his or her family or any business associates? [Amends Section 1206 to add subsection (e)]

Section 1206 of the home rule charter outlines various prohibited activities for officers and employees of the City. The new language proposed in Question 17 would prohibit officers and officials from using their influence to secure employment for family members or business associates, thereby disallowing nepotism in City government.

Question 18:

Shall the committee on ward boundaries be elected by the city council in January of 2021 and every tenth year thereafter, and shall new requirements for revising ward boundary lines be established to include additional public hearings and opportunities for public comment, specifications for council approval of the plan, and criteria for drawing ward boundaries? [Amends Section 204]

This amendment would extend the amount of time the City's committee on ward boundaries has to redraw the city council ward boundaries following the federal census and would mandate new requirements for how the committee conducts its work. Every ten years, the City is required to adjust boundaries to ensure that wards are of equal population, are compact and contiguous, and do not arbitrarily divide neighborhoods.

Currently, the committee on ward boundaries is formed in the September following the completion of the census and has until March 1st of the following year to complete its work. Voting "Yes" on this question would mandate that the committee form on January 1st following the completion of the census and would have until May 1st of the following year to complete its work. The amendment also (a) requires a minimum of four public meetings on potential ward boundary changes, (b) prohibits the drawing of wards to favor or discriminate against an incumbent, political candidate, or political party, and (c) requires a vote of at least two-thirds of the city council members present at the meeting for final approval of the boundary changes.

To find out about upcoming Providence City Council meetings, meeting dockets and committee meetings, please visit the link below.

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