

EXPLANATORY TEXT FOR NOVEMBER 6, 2007 BALLOT QUESTIONS

In addition to the slate of candidates running for election on November 6, 2007, the following questions will also appear on the ballot. Please take the time to read and understand the questions so you can make an informed vote at the polls on Election Day.

FARMLAND PRESERVATION. At their July 16, 2007 meeting, the Board of Selectmen voted to add the following question to the November 6, 2007 ballot:

“Shall the Town of Ellington appropriate \$2,000,000 for acquisition of development rights with respect to agricultural lands constituting working farms, and authorize the issue of bonds, notes and other obligations to finance the portion of the appropriation not defrayed by grants?”

A “yes” vote on the farm land preservation question would authorize the town to borrow up to \$2,000,000 either as needed or in anticipation of the need and to use it to purchase the development rights of land currently used as a “working farm”. The farmer would continue to own the land and be able to continue farming the land but would not be able to develop the land for housing or commercial uses. No particular land is identified in this question and any particular development rights being purchased will require future town meeting approval.

TOWN CHARTER: The Town Charter is the basic law that defines the organization, powers, functions, essential procedures for the Town of Ellington. This important document guides our leaders and citizens in the smooth operation of the Town. In September 2005, the Board of Selectmen appointed a six-member Charter Revision Commission. The members, Joe Wehr (Chair), Charlotte Adams, Tim Olmstead, John O’Shaughnessy, Gary Riley and Terry Shook, were charged with reviewing the Charter and recommending changes. The commission solicited input from all Departments and Commission/Boards/Agencies and scheduled a public hearing to listen to the citizens’ ideas. The next 14 months were spent discussing the proposed revisions. The questions, as they will appear on the ballot and the explanation of each, are listed below.

The following documents are available on website, www.ellington-ct.gov, in the Town Clerk’s Office and the First Selectman’s office: Town Charter, Charter Revision Commission Final Report and the Board of Selectmen’s Minutes approving the revisions for voting.

Proposed Charter Revision Ballot Questions

Questions as they will appear on the ballot are in bold; followed by an explanation.

1. Shall the Planning and Zoning Commission be appointed rather than be elected?

Currently the Planning & Zoning Commission (PZC) consists of six elected regular members and three appointed alternate members. A “yes” vote on Question #1 would eliminate the election of regular members who would then be appointed.

2. Shall the Zoning Board of Appeals be appointed rather than be elected?

Currently the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) consists of six elected regular members and three appointed alternate members. A “yes” vote on Question #2 would eliminate the election of regular members who would then be appointed.

3. Shall the Planning & Zoning Commission consist of 7 regular and 2 alternate members rather than the present 6 regular members and 3 alternate members?

A “yes” vote on Question #3 would increase the number of regular members on the PZC by one to a total of seven, and decrease the number of alternate members by one.

4. Shall the Zoning Board of Appeals consist of 5 regular and 3 alternate members rather than the present 6 regular members and 3 alternate members?

A "yes" vote on Question #4 would reduce the number of regular members on the ZBA from six to five, the statutory number of ZBA members, and makes no change in the number of alternate members.

5. Shall a Shared Services Commission be established for the purpose of recommending areas where the sharing of support services between the Town and the Board of Education is in the best interest of Town residents by increasing efficiency and reducing costs?

A "yes" vote on Question #5 would result in the establishment of a permanent Shared Services Commission with the majority of its members not representing any of the agencies responsible for areas of the budget. This Commission would be responsible for finding services that might be shared by more than one agency or department in a more cost-effective manner. This commission would have no authority to require a change in practice except by negotiation and persuasion.

6. Shall the Board of Selectmen annually review and modify goals to be accomplished over the next five years?

A "yes" vote on Question #6 would require the Board of Selectmen to set and modify goals over a five-year planning period.

7. If the vote on the Annual Town Budget is adjourned to a referendum, shall all further votes on the Annual Town Budget be by referendum every other week until final approval is given?

A "yes" vote on Question #7 will not require the annual budget be voted on at referendum, but if a referendum vote is held under existing rules and the budget is defeated, then all future votes on that budget must be by referendum. This may avoid the confusion that a later vote may be taken at a town meeting. This question also would require the vote be taken every other week instead of the current weekly vote where there may be insufficient time to reconsider the budget or to give required notice of the later vote.

8. Shall specified financial limits be increased to recognize inflation?

This change will affect the following sections:

SECTION 504. GENERAL POWERS AND DUTIES increase \$20,000 to \$40,000.

SECTION 603. SPECIAL TOWN MEETINGS (c) & (d) increase \$20,000 to \$40,000.

SECTION 813. PERMANENT BUILDING COMMITTEE (b) re: cost of construction projects, increase \$20,000 to \$40,000.

SECTION 1004. DUTIES OF THE BOARD OF FINANCE ON THE BUDGET – remove 7% maximum to the Capital Reserve Fund; maintains Town's credit rating.

SECTION 1004. DUTIES OF THE BOARD OF FINANCE ON THE BUDGET – increase amount from \$30,000 to \$40,000 for expenditures or transfers requiring a town meeting.

SECTION 1008. EMERGENCY APPROPRIATIONS – increase maximum emergency appropriation from \$100,000 to \$250,000.

SECTION 1009. EXPENDITURES AND ACCOUNTING – allows Board of Finance to approve additional appropriations in an amount up to \$40,000 or to close out a capital projects under \$40,000, which was approved at the Annual Town Budget meeting.

9. Shall purchases that exceed \$1,000,000 require a referendum vote?

This change to SECTION 603, new subsection (j), will require purchases that exceed \$1,000,000 be approved at a referendum.

10. May non-electors be appointed to ad hoc committees?

A "yes" vote to Question #10 will permit non-electors to be appointed to temporary committees such as youth services, drug advisory and graduation committees. Currently non-elector employees and interested business people are not eligible to serve. This would not change the requirement that only electors may serve on regular commissions.

11. Shall a Senior Center Endowment Fund Committee and Flood and Erosion Control Board be established in the charter?

A "yes" vote to Question #11 will create a permanent Senior Center Endowment Fund Committee to manage financial assets of the Senior Center not supported by taxes. It will also create a Flood and Erosion Control Board as a permanent board as required by statute.

12. Shall an Ethics Commission be established in the charter?

A "yes" vote on Question #12 will create an Ethics Commission that would be charged with developing an ethics code to be approved by the Board of Selectmen and thereafter to inform officials and the public as to those rules and to review issues that may arise under the code.

13. Shall section 918 Fire Department and Section 920 Ambulance Service be repealed and replaced with a new section entitled Emergency Services?

A "yes" vote rescinds certain sections that separately refer to the fire and ambulance departments that provide emergency services and combine the reference into a single section. It also requires that the Town execute a written contract with each of the services. It does not change any of the organizations now providing any of these services nor change their responsibility.

14. Shall the Board of Selectmen have the authority to require separate votes on the Town's operating budget and the Town's Education budget after the combined budget has failed to be adopted at least once?

Currently the vote on the annual budget requires a single vote for the total appropriation for all departments. A "yes" vote on Question #14 would permit the Board of Selectmen to divide the question and require a vote on the general town budget and a separate vote on the Board of Education budget. This ability to separate the budgets into two votes could only be exercised after the budget has been defeated at least once either at town meeting or at referendum.

15. Shall all grants that have the potential to impose any financial burden on the Town be approved by the Board of Selectmen and the Board of Finance prior to acceptance?

A "yes" vote on Question #15 requires that before the Town accepts any grant that may require the expenditure of Town funds, that both the Board of Selectmen and the Board of Finance approve the grant.

16. Shall technical changes be made to the charter to comply with State Statutes and collective bargaining agreements and to clarify ambiguities and format?

Revisions include grammatical and formatting changes, clarifications and technical changes.

Note: Charter amendments approved on November 6, 2007 shall take effect on January 1, 2008 except that any person who was elected shall be entitled to complete his or her elected term even if the board to which he or she was elected has been reduced in number or changed to an appointed position. Appointment shall be made pursuant to this charter to transition to staggered terms as soon as possible as vacancies occur in elected terms or expire.