

REDISTRICTING

Frequently Asked Questions

What are voters being asked to authorize with this question?

Voters are being asked to approve changes to the City's electoral areas to meet U.S. Constitutional requirements of equal representation.

What is redistricting, and what does it mean for Burlington voters?

Redistricting is the process of adjusting electoral area boundaries to meet U.S. Constitutional requirements of equal representation, the one person one vote principle. The City's boundaries are written in the City Charter and to change them requires both voter and legislative approval. The proposed redistricting City Charter changes are on the **March 4, 2014** ballot. If they are approved by voters, they will go to the State Legislature, and if approved there would go into effect in for the March 2015 elections. An overview of the redistricting process is available at <http://www.burlingtonvt.gov/CityCouncil/Ward-Redistricting>.

Why does Burlington need to re-district?

Historically, the City's electoral areas are called Wards. As the City has grown over the years, the number and shape of our Wards have been changed in order to ensure that every citizen is fairly represented on the City Council. The City's growth does not affect each Ward equally. Population changes within Wards, particularly in those Wards experiencing significant population growth, create a situation where residents of those Wards are under-represented compared to residents in wards that have grown relatively slowly. The courts have determined that except in extraordinary circumstances, the difference between the population of the Ward with the highest number of people living in it and the Ward with the lowest number of people living in for purposes of City Council representation should be less than 10 percent. The results of the 2010 US Census show that Ward 1 residents are under-represented, and Ward 4 and 7 residents are over-represented with the difference between Ward 1 and Ward 4 being 41.5 percent and between Ward 1 and Ward 7 being 36.2 percent. The difference between Wards 2, 3, 5 and 6 and Wards 4 and 7 are also over the 10 percent threshold. The current system was created in 1993 and can be viewed through the link to the existing Wards at <http://www.burlingtonvt.gov/CityCouncil/Ward-Redistricting/Maps/>.

How does the City Council propose to correct this problem?

On January 27, 2014, the City Council voted to place a redistricting plan on the March 4th ballot. The proposed plan would replace the City's current 7 Ward, 14 Councilor system with an 8 Ward, 4 District, 12 Councilor system. A new, eighth Ward would be created, made of parts of the current Wards 1, 2, 3, and 6. Four new districts would also be created (East, Central, North and South), each made up by combining 2 Wards (East=W1 & 8; Central=W2 & 3; North=W4 & 7; South=W5 & 6). The current Wards range in population from 5081 residents to 7593 residents. Under the proposal, the new Wards would range in population from 5097 resident to 5565 and the Districts' range would be between 10206 residents and 11, 104 residents. Consequently, under the plan, the biggest difference between the most populace Ward and the least populace Ward is 8.8 percent and the biggest difference between the Districts is 8.5 percent.

The City Council debated redistricting for a year and a half before securing majority support for this plan. A map and further details on this plan are available on the City's website at <http://www.burlingtonvt.gov/CityCouncil/Ward-Redistricting/Summary-of-Proposed-Charter-Changes/>.

How would this proposed change alter the City Council?

Currently, each of the seven Wards elects two Councilors. Under the proposal, each of the 8 Wards would be represented by 1 City Councilor and each of the 4 Districts would be represented by 1 City Councilor. Like the current system, voters would vote for one City Councilor each year—their Ward representative one year, and their District representative the next. The new City Council would have 12 members instead of the current 14 members. While the plan has Councilors serving 2-year terms, it has a transition year where Ward Councilors who are elected in 2015 would serve a single 3-year term until 2018 and then begin the 2 year term cycle. District Councilors would serve 2-year terms from the start of the new system.

What about the School Board? How is it impacted by redistricting?

The School Board will change to mirror the City Council's new 12-member structure, with the same transition for elected members.

Will there be any difference between Councilors representing Wards and Councilors representing Districts?

No - each of the 12 councilors (8 Ward councilors and 4 District councilors) would get one vote on all council matters.

Who decides who runs for what?

Candidates would decide the seat for which they want to run. The first year all 12 seats will be up for election at once.

How will City Council elections work under this plan?

Similar to the current system, voters would vote for one Council race every March and be represented by two City Councilors, a Ward Councilor and a District Councilor. With the exception of the first year when all Councilors are elected, a voter would be voting in a Ward election one year and a District election the next. The polling place for all elections (Ward and District) would remain in the Ward.

Should we have looked in to a system including at-large councilors like they have in Boston?

During the 1.5 years of consideration, at-large solutions were considered. The City Council concluded that most people like the fairly intimate size of the City's current wards and did not want to move towards a system with at-large councilors (who would have to represent the whole City).

Are there other changes being suggested to implement this proposal?

The proposal requires that new election officers (ward clerks and inspectors of election) be elected for the newly created Ward 8. The Voter Registration Board also requested that 1 person be added to the board to ensure that it has enough people to do its work in the new Ward; the City Council agreed and is proposing to add a member in order to bring the number of board members to 10.

How can I learn more about redistricting and the role of voters in approving the change on the March 4, 2014 ballot?

The Mayor and City Council will lead a broad public information effort at the Neighborhood Planning Associations, through the Front Porch Forum listserves, through the North Avenue News and through other efforts. The Mayor also anticipates holding a “telephone town hall” shortly before the vote that would allow interested voters to call in with specific questions about redistricting. More information is also available on the City’s website at <http://www.burlingtonvt.gov/CityCouncil/Ward-Redistricting/Summary-of-Proposed-Charter-Changes/>.