

**The Ridgefield Democratic Town Committee (DTC) supports approval of all twelve (12) questions on the 2018 ballot and urges voters to answer “yes” to each question.** The DTC believes each initiative advances the cause of good government, increasing transparency, accountability, fiscal responsibility, efficiency and effectiveness.

The DTC has created this guide to assist voters in considering these questions. Each question is listed as it appears on the ballot, followed by a brief “plain language explanation” and a brief “reasons for supporting”. This guide is intended to provide simple and honest explanations of each proposal and the DTC’s reasons for urging voters to answer “yes”.

Questions are listed in the order they appear on the ballot, under three headings:

- Questions pertaining to the State Constitution: questions 1 and 2
- Questions pertaining to the Town Charter: questions 3-11
- WCPA Referendum question: question 12

## **QUESTIONS PERTAINING TO THE STATE CONSTITUTION**

1. Shall the Constitution of the State be amended to ensure (1) that all moneys contained in the Special Transportation Fund be used solely for transportation purposes, including the payment of debts of the state incurred for transportation purposes, and (2) that sources of funds deposited in the Special Transportation Fund be deposited in said fund so long as such sources are authorized by statute to be collected or received by the state?
  - a. Plain language explanation: This proposed amendment will “lock up” the dollars collected to fund transportation and impede the Legislature from raiding and diverting those dollars to other purposes (as has happened in the past).
  - b. DTC’s reasons for supporting: By ensuring that dollars collected from sources specifically established to fund transportation are actually spent for transportation, the amendment will improve fiscal transparency and discipline.
2. Shall the Constitution of the State be amended to require (1) a public hearing and the enactment of legislation limited in subject matter to the transfer, sale or disposition of state-owned or state-controlled real property or interests in real property in order for the General Assembly to require a state agency to sell, transfer or dispose of any real property or interest in real property that is under the custody or control of the agency, and (2) if such property is under the custody or control of the Department of Agriculture or the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, that such enactment of legislation be passed by a two-thirds vote of the total membership of each house of the General Assembly?

- a. Plain language explanation: This proposed amendment will require the legislature to hold a public hearing and pass a specific bill before it can sell public land. It sets a 2/3 majority requirement for selling any property regulated by the Department of Agriculture or Department of Energy & Environmental Protection.
- b. DTC's reasons for supporting: The requirements of public hearings, stand-alone legislation, and supermajorities for agricultural or environmentally-vulnerable real estate, will ensure transparency and guard against the reality or appearance of corruption or secrecy in the disposal of public lands.

### QUESTIONS PERTAINING TO THE TOWN CHARTER

3. Shall the Town Charter be amended to make certain technical and administrative changes?
  - a. Plain language explanation: This proposal will make grammatical corrections to the Charter and correct outdated references within the Charter and between the Charter and other law.
  - b. DTC's reasons for supporting: This proposal makes non-substantive corrections to improve accuracy and avoid confusion.
4. Shall Section 4-5 of the Town Charter be amended to provide that no person shall be eligible to run for more than one elective office of the Town of Ridgefield at the same election where the terms of such office overlap?
  - a. Plain language explanation: This proposal will prohibit a single candidate from running for multiple positions with overlapping terms in the same election.
  - b. DTC's reasons for supporting: In both the 2015 and 2017 local elections, individual candidates ran for multiple overlapping positions in the same election, resulting in delays in determining winners and in unelected individuals being awarded or appointed to seats immediately after the election. Although Democrats benefited from the current structure, we support this change to ensure voters have clear choices and that their intentions will be fulfilled.
5. Shall the Town Charter Sections 4-1, 4-9 and 9-1 be amended, and Section 9-17 be added to the Town Charter to provide that the Town Treasurer become an appointed position?

*and*

6. Shall the Town Charter Sections 4-1, 4-9 and 9-1 be amended, and Section 9-18 be added to the Town Charter to provide that the Tax Collector become an appointed position?
  - a. Plain language explanation: These proposals will make Town Treasurer and Town Tax Collector appointed positions (both are currently elected).
  - b. DTC's reasons for supporting: Both positions require special technical expertise and neither involves policy-making. If a person lacking the requisite skills is elected to such position the Town could lose millions of dollars.
  
7. Shall the Town Charter Sections 10-1(a), (b) and (c) be amended to adopt a "Master Budget" schedule specifying the timing and process of the Budget Cycle?
  - a. Plain language explanation: This proposal will set a firm schedule for final budgets to be published to the public in advance of the Town Meeting.
  - b. DTC's reasons for supporting: This will increase transparency by ensuring residents have time to review budgets in advance of the Town Meeting.
  
8. Shall Section 10-1(c) be amended to allow the Town Meeting to decrease or delete a line item of the Board of Selectmen's Budget, or the whole Budget of the Board of Education, so long as there are at least 2% of the qualified voters present at the start of the meeting?
  - a. Plain language explanation: This proposal does two things: (1) brings the Charter into compliance with state law regarding Board of Education (BOE) budgets (state law does not allow line item modification of BOE budgets at Town Meetings); and (2) requires a quorum of at least 2% of eligible voters (about 360 people) at the Town Meeting in order for the majority to vote to decrease or delete the entire BOE budget or line items in the Board of Selectmen's budget.
  - b. DTC's reasons for supporting: This proposal will bring the Charter into agreement with governing state law (which applies regardless) and will guard against a small number of specially-interested individuals changing the budgets before the entire town is able to vote at referendum.
  
9. Shall the Town Charter be amended to add new Section 10-2(d) to define the process for dealing with appropriations or transfers of unexpended capital project balances?
  - a. Plain language explanation: The Charter's current language is ambiguous about which Town board is authorized to determine the use of leftover project funds;

Town attorneys interpret the ambiguous text to require the Board of Selectmen to determine such uses. This proposal revises the language to say the Board of Selectmen will make determine in consultation with the Board of Finance.

- b. DTC's reasons for supporting: The new text will make the Board of Selectmen's responsibility explicit and add a requirement that the Board of Selectmen consult with the Board of Finance in making its determination.
10. Shall Sections 4-11 and 4-16 be amended to separate the Inland Wetlands Board from the Planning and Zoning Commission, and further provide that the Inland Wetlands Board shall consist of 7 members to be elected at the election of November, 2019?
- a. Plain language explanation: State law requires each town to maintain an Inland Wetlands Board, either as a stand-alone board or combined with another board or commission, such as Planning and Zoning Commission (P&Z). This proposal will create two separate boards.
  - b. DTC's reasons for supporting: Ridgefield is one of only handful of Connecticut towns that combine Inland Wetlands with another board. While P&Z has been conscientious in its responsibilities, much of Ridgefield's remaining buildable land includes very vulnerable wetlands. To safeguard our wetlands and water courses, Ridgefield should establish a separate Inland Wetlands Board that can provide the more specialized and deeper review that future projects will require.
11. Shall Article XI be deleted in its entirety upon the approval and adoption of a Standard of Conduct Ordinance at a Special Town Meeting?
- a. Plain language explanation: The Charter currently contains Standards of Conduct for town officials, including those who serve as volunteers. This proposal will permit the Town to replace that with a Standards of Conduct code to be enacted by ordinance at a Town Meeting.
  - b. DTC's reasons for supporting: The Standards need to be updated with clear, binding definitions (rather than leaving to individual interpretation). Unprecedented situations arise regularly, so it is desirable to permit the Town to update the code more often than the four-year intervals of the charter revision process.

**WPCA REFERENDUM QUESTION:**

12. Shall the \$48,000,000 appropriation and bond authorization (less any grants expected to be received from the State of Connecticut Clean Water Fund) for the planning, design

and construction of the South Street sewer treatment plant and pump station upgrades be approved?

- a. Plain language explanation: The sewer treatment plant is in violation of state laws and must be upgraded. The full project cost is \$48 million. Under the currently-applicable state funding formula, the Town expects to receive about \$11.5 million in grants from the state to offset that cost. This proposal would apportion about \$8M of the remaining \$36.5 million to the Town's General Fund (to be paid by all Ridgefield taxpayers over 20 years), with the remaining \$28.5 million to be paid by sewer-using properties through increased sewer usage fees.
  
- b. DTC's reasons for supporting: The current state funding formula expires in early 2019 with a new formula to be adopted going forward. Given the state's fiscal situation, it is unlikely the next formula will as generous. Thus, it is prudent for the Town to receive grants under the current formula. It is reasonable to allocate \$8M (of the projected \$36.5M Town-borne cost) to general taxpayers because: (1) all Town residents benefit from Town offices, public facilities (Library, etc.) and village businesses that rely on the sewer system; and (2) Town residents with septic systems also burden the sewer treatment plant, since materials pumped out of septic systems are deposited in and treated by the plant. For all these reasons, the appropriation and is reasonable and should be approved.