



**This November, you're voting on  
how to **elect councilmembers.****

**Be **prepared.****

## **TABLE TALK: YOUR VOICE, YOUR VOTE**

### **2025 Referendum Community Conversation/Discussion Toolkit**



CITY OF  
**VIRGINIA  
BEACH**



**TABLE TALK**  
**Your Voice, Your Vote**

**2025 Referendum**  
**Community Conversation/Discussion Toolkit**

Welcome and Thank You!

Thank you for your interest in hosting a Table Talk community conversation/discussion focused on the 2025 Virginia Beach referendum. This toolkit is designed to support you in leading a respectful, informed and meaningful conversation about the upcoming referendum question that will appear on the Nov. 4, 2025, ballot.

Inside this toolkit, you will find everything you need to plan and facilitate a successful forum, including:

- The link to the official Referendum 2025 webpage
- Referendum flyer with the full text of the ballot question, including an explanation of what a "Yes" or "No" vote means, a 500 word explanation of the question as permitted by state law, and a QR Code to the Referendum 2025 web page
- The purpose of the community conversation/discussion and the intended audience
- A list of optional materials that may enhance your session
- Rules of engagement for a respectful conversation/discussion
- Guidance on how to designate a facilitator and their responsibilities

This toolkit is intended to make it easy for you to engage your neighbors, friends and community members in a constructive dialogue about how Virginia Beach residents choose their local elected representatives.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to a member of the Public Engagement Team at [SpeakUp@vb.gov](mailto:SpeakUp@vb.gov).



**This November, you're voting on  
how to elect councilmembers.**

**Be prepared.**

Our local election structure matters, and there is a choice to be made on which structure to use to elect city councilmembers. Be prepared and make your choice by voting this November.

## **The following question will be on November's ballot:**

**Should the method of city council elections set forth in the Virginia Beach City Charter be changed from a modified 7-3-1 system to a 10-1 system?**



A "yes" vote means that you support the 10-1 system, which was used in the 2022 and 2024 City Council elections. In the 10-1 system, the City is divided into 10 districts and the voters of each district elect a single councilmember with the Mayor elected at-large (city-wide).



A "no" vote means you support the 7-3-1 system described in the current city charter as modified by a general law change that occurred in 2021. In the modified 7-3-1 system, the City is divided into 7 districts and the voters of each district elect a single councilmember, with three other councilmembers and the Mayor elected at-large (city-wide).

**We'll help you prepare. #referendum2025**

Visit [VirginiaBeach.gov/referendum](https://VirginiaBeach.gov/referendum) to learn more.



CITY OF  
**VIRGINIA  
BEACH**



# Explanation of the Referendum Question

The referendum question asks whether the public wishes to request the General Assembly amend the City Charter to reflect the 10-1 election system used in the 2022 and 2024 elections (yes) or to retain the 7-3-1 system stated in the Charter as amended by general law in 2021 (no).

For background, Section 3.01 of the City Charter states that the city council “shall consist of eleven members, including the mayor, one member to be elected by the city at large from the residents of each of the seven districts and three members and the mayor to be elected by and from the city at large.”

In 2021, a general law was adopted stating that where a city imposes district-based residency requirements for members of a city council, the member elected from each district shall be elected solely by the qualified voters of that district, rather than by the locality at-large. Consequently, representatives of the seven districts referenced in the City Charter would be elected only by voters living in those districts, rather than at-large (city-wide).

This is known as the modified 7-3-1 system, referring to 7 district representatives, 3 at-large representatives, and 1 mayor. Although the all at-large 7-3-1 system described in the Charter was used for many years, because of the events described below, no election has been held under the modified 7-3-1 system.

In March 2021, a federal court ruled that the all at-large election system in the City Charter (prior to the 2021 general law change) diluted the voting power of a coalition of minority voters in violation of federal law. In December 2021, that court imposed a voting system consisting of 10 districts, each represented by a councilmember elected by the voters of that district, plus a mayor elected at-large (“the 10-1 system”).

The federal court order imposing the 10-1 system was vacated in July 2022 because of the 2021 general law change. However, it was too late to change the election system for the 2022 election, and that election used the 10-1 system.

In 2023, to comply with a state law that requires each city to adopt an ordinance establishing its election districts once every decade based on decennial census data, the City hired the University of Virginia’s Weldon Cooper Center to facilitate a public engagement program and conduct a statistically valid public opinion survey regarding the election system.

Based on the Cooper Center’s findings, in August 2023, the City Council adopted a redistricting ordinance implementing the 10-1 system and that system was used again in the 2024 election. The City Council requested the General Assembly amend the Charter to reflect the 10-1 system in its 2024 session; however, this amendment was vetoed by Governor Youngkin.

The purpose of this referendum question is to address the conflict between the Charter and the City’s redistricting ordinance. A “Yes” vote would re-submit the 10-1 Charter amendment to the General Assembly. A “No” vote would indicate a desire to use the modified 7-3-1 system in future elections. City Council voted on May 6 to move forward with adding this drafted question to the November 2025 ballot.



**TABLE TALK**  
**Table Talk: Your Voice, Your Vote**

Referendum Ballot Question

***Should the method of city council elections set forth in the Virginia Beach City Charter be changed from a modified 7-3-1 system to a 10-1 system?***

- **A “yes” vote** means that you support the 10-1 system, which was used in the 2022 and 2024 city council elections. In the 10-1 system, the city is divided into 10 districts and the voters of each district elect a single council member with the mayor elected at-large (city-wide).
- **A “no” vote** means you support the 7-3-1 system described in the current city charter as modified by a general law change that occurred in 2021. In the modified 7-3-1 system, the city is divided into 7 districts and the voters of each district elect a single council member, with three other council members and the mayor elected at-large (city-wide).

**TABLE TALK**  
**Your Voice, Your Vote**

**Purpose of the Conversation/Discussion:**

To bring together a small group of community members for honest, respectful and informed dialogue around the upcoming referendum that will determine how Virginia Beach residents elect their representatives. Given the sensitive nature of this public issue, the conversation/discussion is intentionally designed to be a small and intimate space, with the goal of fostering meaningful conversations that promote understanding, civic awareness and thoughtful reflection.

**Intended for:**

- Civic league members
- Neighborhood associations
- Faith or advocacy groups
- Community leaders and residents

**Suggested Materials:**

- Printed ground rules or discussion agreements
- Pens and notecards (for anonymous questions)
- Printed topic summary or fact sheets (these can be found on the Resources tab on the Referendum 2025 webpage)
- Flipchart or whiteboard and markers (optional)
- Refreshments (optional for hospitality)

## **TABLE TALK**

### **Your Voice, Your Vote**

#### **Rules of Engagement**

The following rules of engagement are provided to ensure that your small group conversation/discussion remains productive, inclusive and respectful. A facilitator is the key to maintaining the flow of conversation and ensuring all participants feel heard, while preventing any one voice from dominating. By adhering to these principles, your conversation/discussion will encourage positive and constructive dialogue, even on controversial issues.

#### **General Guidelines for Engagement**

1. **Respect All Participants:** Treat everyone's opinion with respect, even if you disagree. Ensure that all voices are heard.
2. **Stay Focused on the Topic:** Keep the conversation centered on the subject at hand. It's OK to bring in personal anecdotes, but they should relate to the issue being discussed.
3. **Be Open-Minded:** Approach the conversation with a willingness to listen and learn. Engage in thoughtful reflection rather than seeking to "win" an argument.
4. **Speak from Personal Experience:** Use "I" statements to express your thoughts, feelings and opinions rather than making generalized statements.
5. **No Interrupting:** Allow each person the time to finish their thoughts without interruption. If you feel strongly about something, make a note and wait for your turn.
6. **Avoid Personal Attacks or Criticism:** Focus on ideas, not individuals. Disagree respectfully and focus on the issue, not the person presenting it.
7. **Maintain Confidentiality:** What is shared within the group stays in the group. Feel safe sharing your perspective knowing it won't be used outside of the meeting.
8. **Encourage Equal Participation:** Allow everyone a chance to speak. If you notice certain voices dominating the conversation, gently encourage others to share their thoughts.
9. **Stay Civil:** If things get heated, take a step back. Remember that everyone is here to understand, not to argue.

## **TABLE TALK**

### **Your Voice, Your Vote**

#### **Facilitator Guidelines**

##### **Role of the Facilitator**

The facilitator plays a vital role in ensuring the forum runs smoothly, remains respectful and encourages a balanced exchange of ideas. They help guide the conversation, maintain neutrality, and keep the group focused on the topic.

##### **Facilitator Guidelines:**

1. **Remain Neutral:** The facilitator does not express personal opinions on the issue being discussed. They remain neutral and do not take sides. Their job is to ensure everyone has an equal opportunity to speak.
2. **Setting the Tone:** Start the conversation with a welcoming and respectful tone. Clearly outline the purpose and establish ground rules at the beginning of the forum.
3. **Guiding the Discussion:** The facilitator asks questions to help move the conversation forward, ensuring all participants have an opportunity to speak.
4. **Encourage Active Listening:** Ensure that everyone is actively listening to others, not just waiting to speak. Facilitators can encourage paraphrasing and summarizing key points: "Can someone summarize what was said?"
5. **Acknowledge Emotional Responses:** If a participant becomes emotional, acknowledge it and ensure that everyone feels heard: "I see this is a very important issue to you, and I appreciate your perspective. Let's continue to listen to each other."
6. **Use Open-Ended Questions:** Encourage reflection and deeper engagement with questions such as: "What impact do you think this might have on your community?" or "How does this issue affect you personally?"
7. **Encouraging Balanced Participation:** Ensure that quieter participants are invited to share their thoughts while also managing those who may dominate the conversation. "Can we hear from someone who hasn't shared yet?"
8. **Managing Conflict:** If tension arises, the facilitator will step in to remind participants of the ground rules and help de-escalate any confrontations. They may suggest a short break or ask participants to refocus on the issue at hand.



9. Time Management: Ensure the discussion stays on track and within the scheduled time. If the conversation strays too far off topic or becomes unproductive, the facilitator redirects it.

### **Ending the Conversation/Discussion**

At the close of the discussion, the facilitator should:

1. Summarize: Briefly recap the key points and different perspectives shared during the forum.
2. Thank Participants: Show appreciation for everyone's time, insights and respectfulness.
3. Next Steps: Provide information on how participants can stay involved or next steps for further engagement (For example, voting dates, other scheduled conversations/discussions).

If you or anyone participating in a community conversation/discussion has a question that was not addressed in the provided materials or on the Referendum 2025 webpage, please email [SpeakUp@vbgov.com](mailto:SpeakUp@vbgov.com). A member of the Public Engagement Team will respond as soon as possible.