



2025 Referendum FAQs

What does the recent decision in *Branch v. City of Virginia Beach* mean for the referendum in November?

On June 30, 2025, Circuit Court Judge Randall Smith issued a ruling that the 2023 redistricting ordinance adopting the 10-1 election system is void, because the General Assembly did not pass legislation to amend the City's Charter.

The ruling only applies to future elections, because Judge Smith determined that current City councilmembers were duly elected under the 10-1 system.

The court has paused issuing a remedy until after the November referendum to see what effect the outcome may have.

Why is this referendum question necessary now?

A referendum is one of two ways that a city may seek changes to its charter.

In 2023, the City used the other method, a request to the General Assembly, following a public hearing. Pursuant to Virginia Constitution and because of the 2022 U.S. Census, City Council passed a redistricting ordinance in 2023 adopting the 10-1 system and made the request to the General Assembly to revise the Virginia Beach Charter. The General Assembly approved the request, but it was vetoed by Gov. Glenn Youngkin.

The Charter has not been changed and continues to reflect the prior 7-3-1 system of elections, as modified by legislation passed by the General Assembly in 2023.

The City is now defending litigation that contends that the City's redistricting ordinance is invalid and that the Charter must control.

Why doesn't the question simply ask which system the voters prefer and give them multiple choices?

State law requires that a referendum question be phrased as a "yes" or "no" proposition. Multiple choice questions are not permitted.

I keep hearing about the City Charter. What is the City Charter, and is it different or related to the City Code?

In the Commonwealth of Virginia, city charters are legal documents granted by the General Assembly that define a city's powers, organization and functions. They act as the city's constitution, outlining its governmental structure and authority. Cities in Virginia obtain their powers from their charter and general laws enacted by the General Assembly.

The city code, on the other hand, contains the specific laws and regulations enacted by a locality's governing body to govern local issues.

Would this be a binding or non-binding referendum / Once the results are in, what happens next?

This referendum is taking place in accordance with the provisions of Virginia Code Section 15.2-201 and asks whether the Virginia Beach City Charter should be changed to reflect the 10-1 voting system used in the 2022 and 2024 elections.

If a majority of the public votes in favor of the Charter change, then the following actions are required by Virginia Code Section 15.2-201: By order of the Court, after certification by the Secretary of the Electoral Board of Virginia Beach to the Virginia Board of Elections, the Court and the Clerk of the City Council, the City shall take such actions to transmit the Charter change request to the local delegation of the General Assembly. The local delegation would determine next steps. The General Assembly is not required to approve the Charter change.

If the public does not support the Charter change, the City Council will need to determine next steps.

The above frequently-asked questions are just a selection of all the FAQs on the referendum issue. To view the remaining FAQs, please visit VirginiaBeach.gov/Referendum. If you do not have access to a computer, staff at any of the Virginia Beach Public Library branches will be able to assist you. If you do not see your question included in the FAQs, please contact **Nancy Bloom, public engagement manager, at 757-385-6279**.



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