

City of Ithaca Propositions on November Ballot

How many times have you walked into a voting booth and stared at propositions on the ballot that you knew little to nothing about? As you quickly scan the text, you think to yourself "I don't remember hearing anything about these issues". Finally, you make an educated guess on the topic and fill in a bubble, not really sure you made the "right" decision.

The City of Ithaca wants to make sure that all voters understand the issues they are voting on. This year, the City has 3 propositions on the general election ballot, the first is in preparation for the redistricting efforts next year, and the others are a result of efforts to streamline and simplify the City of Ithaca Charter and Code and to eliminate obsolete, redundant, repetitive and contradictory language.

Pursuant to New York State Municipal Home Rule Law, Common Council has the authority to amend the Charter by Local Law. They do this on a routine basis to ensure that the City's legislation is consistent with current operating procedures.

Common Council unanimously adopted local laws in March and June of 2011 on the following issues; however, approval of the voters is required because they modify the powers and authority of either the Mayor or Common Council.

Please look for these important propositions on the back of your ballot!

Proposition #1: Staggered two year Council terms following Census

Issue:

Since at least 1980, following each federal census, Common Council has tried to anticipate redistricting so that legal requirements for population and legislative representation are met. The way it has chosen to do this is to have those Council members elected in a year ending in "1" receive 2-year terms. As a result, all 10 Council seats have been up for election in the years ending in "3," at which time half of the seats are filled for 2-year terms and half for 4-year terms thereby restoring the staggered terms.

Common Council considered this issue and recommended using the same approach for 2011 and 2013 and in future years following a census. By making this an automatic action following each census, the possibility of having Council members elected from the same ward but representing people within different ward boundaries and election districts would be eliminated.

The question you will be asked on the ballot is:

Shall a local law be approved, that would amend the Ithaca City Charter, in order to (1) establish two-year terms for the members of Common Council elected in the general election following every 10-year federal census (for example, in 2011 or 2021, etc), and (2) provide that in the following general election (for example, in 2013 or 2023, etc), two members of Common Council shall be elected from each ward - one for two years, and one for four years?

Proposition #2: Designation and Appointment of City Officers

Issue: There are currently 3 terms used interchangeably and at times inconsistently regarding the appointment of City Officers in the Charter and City Code. Common Council recommends that only two terms be used: "appointed by the Mayor" and "appointed by the Mayor with the approval of Common Council". They have also recommended that the methodology of appointment for each City officer be defined in the "Appointment of City Officers" section of the Charter (§C-5), and only in that section. The proposed revisions do not change who currently has the authority to appoint any City department head; however, Common Council has proposed a change in the appointment process for certain Deputy and Assistant positions. There are four

deputy/assistant titles that are currently appointed by the Mayor with the approval of Common Council. Council has proposed that the respective department heads be given the authority to appoint these positions, so that all deputies and assistants are appointed by the same process.

There is outdated language in the Charter that needs to be removed as it is inconsistent with other laws and practices.. For example, a referendum was approved by the voters in 1997 giving the Police Chief the authority to appoint and remove all subordinate police officers; however, when that language was enacted, an older section of the Charter was overlooked and not repealed that gave the Mayor those same authorities. This proposition deletes the contradictory language and maintains the Police Chief's authorities. Similarly, outdated language in the Charter gives the Board of Public Works and the Board of Fire Commissioners the authority to prescribe the duties of the respective department heads and also gives the Superintendent of Public Works and the Fire Chief the authority to fix the compensation of staff. In another section of the Charter, it states that the Mayor is the supervisor of all department heads and, as such, prescribes the duties of the department heads within the parameters of their respective job descriptions. All salaries are established through negotiated labor contracts which are ratified by the respective unions and Common Council. This proposition will remove the outdated and contradictory language.

The question you will be asked on the ballot is:

Shall a local law be approved, that would amend the Ithaca City Charter and Code, in order to (1) clarify and simplify the descriptions of the positions of various, appointed City officers (primarily, the heads of City departments), (2) remove Charter language that grants authority to or places constraints upon certain department heads that are inconsistent with State law and/or best practices, and (3) provide for the appointment of deputy and assistant department heads by their respective department heads, rather than by the Mayor?

Proposition #3: Basic Authorities of Department Heads and Deputies

Issue: Currently, there is a wide variation in whether, how and where the authorities of department heads and deputies are delegated and described in the City Charter and Code. Some positions have expansive definitions that include minor details about daily work duties; other positions are not mentioned at all. The proposed changes to the Charter will consolidate the basic authorities and responsibilities inherent in all department head and deputy positions into one section. This proposition is required because of the new authority of 4 Department Heads to appoint their Deputy or Assistant positions as opposed to the Mayor with the approval of Common Council if Proposition #2 is approved.

The question you will be asked on the ballot is:

Shall a local law be approved, that would amend the Ithaca City Charter, in order to (1) provide a single, consistent description of the general authority and duties of the City's various department heads – including their power to appoint and discipline all departmental employees, and (2) create a streamlined description of the general role of the City's deputy and assistant department heads?

You can find more information, including the full text of the Local Laws adopted by Common Council regarding these propositions on the City's website, www.cityofithaca.org