

**RESOLUTION NO. 2021-15**

**A RESOLUTION OF CITY COUNCIL PROPOSING AN AMENDMENT TO ARTICLE XIII, SECTION 2 OF THE CITY'S CHARTER TO REDUCE THE NUMBER OF SIGNATURES REQUIRED TO PROPOSE A CHARTER AMENDMENT BY THE PETITION METHOD**

WHEREAS, the Charter of the City of Bellingham provides for amendments proposed by petition; and

WHEREAS, the Charter currently defers to RCW 35.22.120, which states "On petition of a number (equal to fifteen percent of the total number of votes cast at the last preceding general state election) of qualified voters of any municipality having adopted a charter under the laws of this state, asking the adoption of a specified charter amendment, providing for any matter within the realm of local affairs, or municipal business, the said amendment shall be submitted to the voters at the next regular municipal election, occurring thirty days or more after said petition is filed, and if approved by a majority of the local electors of the municipality voting upon it, such amendment shall become a part of the charter organic law governing such municipality"; and

WHEREAS, using the number of votes cast at the last preceding general state election is inconsistent with Article X, Section 2 of the City Charter, which uses a percentage of "the total number of votes cast for the office of Mayor at the last preceding municipal general election" rather than the last state election for proposing initiatives; and

WHEREAS, municipal and state elections occur in different years with vastly different turnouts (voter turnout for the 2019 mayoral election was 30,937; voter turnout for the 2020 statewide general election was 55,260); and

WHEREAS, using the most recent turnout in a state election rather than the most recent turnout in a municipal election is disproportionate, setting too high a bar for signature gathering for a City Charter amendment; and

WHEREAS, Bellingham is one of six First Class Cities in Washington State with a mayor-council form of government. Seattle, Spokane, Everett, and Aberdeen all require a percentage of votes cast in the most recent municipal or mayoral election, usually 15 percent; only Bremerton defers to the RCW; and

**NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF BELLINGHAM:**

**Section 1.** Article XIII, Section 2 of the Charter shall be amended to read as follows:

~~This Charter may be amended by the petition method as provided by the laws of the State of Washington.~~

The registered electors of the City may propose specific amendments to this Charter, on petition of a number of qualified voters equal to not less than 15% of the total number of votes cast for the office of Mayor at the last preceding municipal general election. Every

petition proposing a specific Charter amendment shall be filed with the Finance Director, who shall promptly transmit the petition to the Whatcom County Auditor to verify the sufficiency of the signatures to the petition.

If the Auditor verifies the sufficiency of the signatures to the petition, then the proposed Charter amendment shall be submitted to the voters at the next regular municipal election, occurring thirty days or more after said petition is filed, and if approved by a majority of the local electors of the municipality voting upon it, such amendment shall become a part of this Charter, and be in full force and effect, and be published in the City official newspaper within 10 days after the official canvass of the ballots pursuant to law.

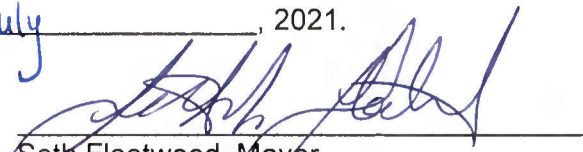
If more than one Charter amendment be submitted at the same municipal election, they shall be submitted to the voters in such manner that each proposed amendment may be voted on separately without prejudice to others.

**Section 2.** The Finance Director shall submit a copy of this resolution to the Whatcom County Auditor's office for submission to the qualified electors for approval or rejection at the next general municipal election.

**PASSED** by the Council this 12<sup>th</sup> day of July, 2021.


  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Hannah Stone, Council President

**APPROVED** by me this 19 day of July, 2021.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Seth Fleetwood, Mayor

**ATTEST:**   
\_\_\_\_\_  
Andy Asbjornsen, Finance Director

**APPROVED AS TO FORM:**

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Office of the City Attorney