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Surfside residents to vote on changes to town charter

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Residents of Surfside will soon be able to decide the fate of seven amendments to the town's charter.

The charter establishes the town's form of government and sets rules for elections.

The ballot questions deal with qualifications for office, vacancies on the Town Commission, and requirements for run-off elections.

"Many of the questions address ambiguous provisions and previously unanticipated circumstances that we faced over the last few years," said Mayor Daniel Dietch.

One of the major changes being proposed would increase the two-year terms for commissioners to four years and establish staggered terms for the entire commission starting with the 2016 general election.

Vice Mayor Eli Tourgeman, who is in favor of the changes, acknowledges that in the past residents have expressed concern with a four-year term.

"Surfside needs some stability and continuity at the commission," said Tourgeman, who was elected in March. "I think four-year staggered term is the way to accomplish this initiative."

Dietch, who was automatically re-elected in March, agrees.

"This would allow for greater continuity on the commission as well as improved stability for the town as a whole," he said while noting that the mayor's term would remain at two years.

Voters will find these seven amendments on the ballot:

- **Qualifications for office.** The current charter requires the members of the town commission be 21 years old and measures the one year residency requirement by the date they registered vote. The proposed amendment will change the minimum age to 18 and begin the one-year residency requirement from the time the person qualifies for office. It also would delete the language regarding dual-office holding to be consistent with the prohibition of the Florida Constitution.
- **Vacancies on the commission.** This ballot question addresses issues raised during the 2012 general election. The current charter does not expressly allow for the scheduling of a special election to fill vacant seats on the commission when the vacancy is due to a lack of candidates. The proposed charter amendment allows for the needed special election to fill vacant seats. It also will give the commission the power to determine whether good cause exists to excuse a commission members' failure to attend meetings.
- **Election procedure.** This amendment proposes to remove charter section 105(8), which states that if five or more candidates have qualified for the general election and the number of qualified candidates are later reduced after the qualifying period has ended, then the election will be postponed and supplemental qualifying will occur.
- **Canvassing Board.** This ballot question asks voters if the towns canvassing board can be deleted from the town charter and incorporated into the Chapter 26 of the Town Code, which governs elections.
- **Qualifying for elected office.** This proposed amendment would change the timeframe for candidates who qualify for office by submitting petitions. Candidates could still collect signatures on petitions before the time period.
- **Establishing staggered terms and increasing commissioners' terms from two to four years.** The proposed charter amendment increases the terms of the four town commissioners from two to four years, and establishes staggered terms.
- **Runoff elections.** The current charter provides for a runoff election if a tie results between candidates for the "fifth" commission seat. This amendment asks if the charter should be changed to require a runoff election for any commission seat.

For more information on the seven ballots questions visit [townofsurfsidefl.gov](http://www.townofsurfsidefl.gov) (<http://www.townofsurfsidefl.gov/>) or contact the Town Clerks office at 305-861-4863 ext 226.

Early Voting will be open from Oct. 20 to Nov. 2. Election day is Nov. 4.

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