

Municipal Charter Provisions on Budget Referendum Process:

Comparative Analysis of Hartford County, Connecticut

Towns Surveyed:

- Avon – population 18,392 (2020)
- Bloomfield – population 21,535 (2020)
- East Hartford – population 51,045 (2020)
- Farmington – population 26,712 (2020)
- Glastonbury – population 35,159 (2020)
- Hartford – population 121,045 (2020)
- Newington – population 30,527 (2023)
- Rocky Hill – population 20,845 (2020)
- South Windsor – population 26,918 (2020)
- West Hartford – population 64,083 (2020)
- Wethersfield – population 27,298 (2020)
- Windsor – population 29,492 (2020)

Town	Deadline for submitting referendum petition	Number of signatures required	E-signatures accepted?	Timeline for election	Requirements for successful referendum	Multiple petitions/referendums permitted?
Bloomfield	Seven (7) days	7.5% of electors (approx. 1,615)	No		Majority of voting electors must approve AND total number of votes in approval must equal 15% of total number of current registered electors	Yes
Avon	N/A – Automatic	N/A – Automatic		7-14 days after the Annual Budget Meeting	Budget passes by a majority of voting electors; vote is conducted at adjourned town meeting vote on voting machines IF LESS THAN 9% OF ELECTORS VOTE, BUDGET PASSES EVEN IF A MAJORITY VOTES AGAINST.	Yes, but maximum of two (if budget fails, budget is revised and put to 2 nd referendum – no specified process for second failure)

East Hartford	15 days	15% of electors (approx. 7,657)	No (charter specifies ink)	20-27 days after town council meeting (meeting must occur within 4 days of town clerk issuing the certification of petition; clerk must certify petition within 5 days of petition filing)	Majority of voting electors AND at least 20% of currently registered electors must have voted (total)	No
Farmington	N/A – Automatic	N/A – Automatic	N/A – Automatic	10 th day after the annual town budget meeting	Majority of voting electors AND at least 15% of currently registered electors must have voted (total)	Referendums to occur until a budget is passed – each subsequent budget must be lower than previous one
Glastonbury	Twenty-one (21) days after tax rate is fixed	8% of electors (approx. 2,813)	No (charter specifies ink or indelible pencil)	41-47 days following fixing of tax rate (town clerk must certify signatures in 5 days and council shall then call referendum in 3 days)	Majority of voting electors AND total number of votes in approval must equal 18% of total number of current registered electors	No
Hartford	N/A – No provision for referendum	N/A – No provision for referendum	N/A – No provision for referendum	N/A – No provision for referendum	N/A – No provision for referendum	N/A – No provision for referendum

Newington*	15 days after publication	5% of electors (approx. 1,527)	Not specified	20-30 days after petition filed, EXCEPT maybe held at Town or general election if scheduled for 10-30 days after petition filed	Majority of voting electors AND total number of votes in approval must equal 5% of total number of current registered electors	Unclear – not specified.
Rocky Hill*	30 days after publication	5% of electors (approx. 1,042)	Not specified	30-60 days after filing petition	Majority of voting electors AND total number of votes in approval must equal 10% of total number of current registered electors	No
South Windsor*	Thirty (30) days of enactment	10% of electors (approx. 2,692)	No (charter specifies ink or indelible pencil)	If council does not act (e.g., repeat an ordinance contested by petition for referendum), 60 days after passage of ordinance	Majority of voting electors AND at least 20% of currently registered electors must have voted (total)	Not specified
West Hartford	Twenty-five (25) days	6% of electors (approx. 3,845)	No (charter specifies ink or indelible pencil)	At least 10 days after publishing the referendum in a town newspaper and shall be held on a Tuesday.	Majority of voting electors AND at least 15% of currently registered electors must have voted (total)	Yes, but with a maximum of two (initial and substitute; the second substitute budget is not subject to referendum)

Wethersfield*	Twelve (12) days	5% (approx. 1,365)	Not specified	30-45 days after filing petition; OR 60-120 days after filing petition IF such regular or special election is scheduled within this timeframe	Majority of voting electors AND total number of votes in approval must equal 5% of total number of current registered electors	No
Windsor*	N/A – Automatic	N/A – Automatic	N/A – Automatic	Not specified, town council “shall set a date”	Not specified, but vote is conducted at adjourned town meeting vote on voting machines	No petition required; votes scheduled until budget passes

Sample language regarding the 15% rule:

Farmington: “Unless rejected by a majority of those voting at a referendum of those persons entitled to vote in Town Meetings, at which referendum the number of those voting equals at least 15% of the number of registered electors of the Town as determined from the latest official list of the Registrars of Voters, the recommended budget as presented by the Council to the Annual Town Meeting (with any increases, decreases, or addition of an appropriation that is not in the recommended budget approved at such Annual Town Meeting), shall become effective at the conclusion of the referendum.”

Requires 15% of voting population to vote; then simple majority will win.

Newington: “The ordinance shall be null and void in the event that a majority of the electors voting thereon, such majority consisting of at least 10% of the qualified electors of the Town, shall vote in opposition to the ordinance.”

Ordinance only fails if a majority of voting electors vote in opposition AND that majority represents at least 10% of electors.

South Windsor, Sec. 312: "Unless at least twenty percent of the electors entitled to vote on the question shall have voted, such proposed ordinance or measure shall not become effective, and the result shall be construed as against adoption."

Ordinance proposed by referendum fails unless 20% of voting population votes (and, presumably, the measure passes by majority but that is not specified).

South Windsor, Sec. 313: "A majority vote of the electors to repeal the ordinance or measure shall not become effective unless a total of at least twenty percent of the electors entitled to vote on the question shall have voted."

Ordinance contested by referendum stands unless 20% of voting population votes AND a majority of voters vote against the ordinance.

Avon, Sec. 9.4.1(f): "If the majority of the ballots cast at any referendum of the adjourned Annual Budget Meeting on a budget recommended by the Board of Finance shall be "Yes" the budget shall be deemed approved as of the date of such affirmative vote."

Avon, Sec. 9.4.2(a): "Subject to the provisions of Section 9.4.4, in the event the majority of the ballots cast at a referendum conducted pursuant to Section 9.4.1(e) or conducted pursuant to Section 9.4.2(c)(ii) shall be "No," the Annual Budget Meeting shall be deemed to be further adjourned to a date certain to be designated by the Town Council in accordance with Section 9.4.2(c)(i), except as prohibited by Section 9.4.3."

Avon, Sec. 9.4.4: "If the number of persons voting at any referendum conducted pursuant to this Charter shall be less than nine percent of the electors of the municipality, as determined by the last completed active registry list, the budget voted upon shall be deemed approved notwithstanding that a majority of the votes cast shall be for rejection of the budget."

If at least 9% of eligible electors vote, the majority controls the outcome. Otherwise, budget passes even if a majority of voters vote against.

Connecticut General Statutes: Title 7, Selected Sections

Sec. 7-9. Petitions for vote. Form. Statement by circulator.* Whenever under the provisions of the general statutes or any special act, any action for a vote by the electors or voters of a municipality is to be initiated by the petition of such electors or voters, in addition to such other requirements as such statute or special act may impose, such petition shall be on a form prescribed or approved by the clerk of such municipality, and each page of such petition shall contain a statement, signed under penalties of false statement, by the person who circulated the same, setting forth such circulator's name and address, and stating that each person whose name appears on said page signed the same in person in the presence of such circulator, that the circulator either knows each such signer or that the signer satisfactorily identified himself to the circulator and that all the signatures on said page were obtained not earlier than six months prior to the filing of said petition. Any page of a petition which does not contain such a statement by the circulator shall be invalid. Any circulator who makes a false statement in the statement hereinbefore provided shall be subject to the penalty provided for false statement.

Sec. 7-9c. Dates and hours of referenda.* Unless otherwise provided by law, a referendum on any question may be held at such hours as is provided in section 7-9b and on such date as the legislative body of the political subdivision holding such referendum shall determine pursuant to the provisions of the local charter, special act or home rule ordinance or not earlier than the thirtieth day following the day upon which the municipal clerk, upon instruction from the legislative body, issues a warning therefor by publishing a notice thereof in a newspaper having a general circulation in the municipality. In the case of any question to be submitted at an election as that term is defined in section 9-1, the provisions of sections 9-369, 9-369a and 9-370 shall apply. The provisions of this section shall not apply to votes scheduled under section 7-7.

***NOT obligatory for budget referenda (sec. in Chap 90, Town and other Community Meetings – referenced for guidance only.**