

Sometimes we lose track of our powers and responsibilities. We forget there is a fundamental difference between the governance of a Vermont town and any other form of government in the world. We let the selectboard rule and we fall into that old habit of complaining about the way things are run, when it's really our fault all along for not getting involved.

But what can we do, people ask. It's the Vermont legislature that makes the law. Local government is just another agency to do the state's bidding. This is true, but there are options. Towns do not have to abide by general state law. Any town in Vermont has the authority to adopt a charter that can change the general state law for that

good news is that the legislature is usually very willing to accommodate towns with new ideas on how government should work at the local level.

This pamphlet is designed as an introduction to the process of reforming government by local charter. It is only a seed. The hard work of developing a charter belongs to you.

Process is our subject. Here we give you an idea of how creative you can be with a charter. We describe how to draft the basic document, how to prepare a proper petition, what to expect at public hearings—both those at home and in Montpelier—and describe in detail each of the steps you must take to make your charter the law of

your community. Democracy—the principle that the people rule—is a radical idea. Of course, it's not so radical if we sleep on our rights and let representative government control us. That's why it's so important to stay involved. Too often we become frustrated and alienated and we just give up. The good news is that the process is in place for us to reassume control of local government through a proper charter. All we need to do is organize.

What Can a Charter Do?

Another wants to guarantee that any decision the select-8(c)vo i-1

Another wants a three-year term for delinquent tax

centralizing the power in the selectboard's hands. Another would like to charge penalties for late payments of installment taxes. Another wants an express vote at an annual meeting before any further paving of highways is done.

WARNING

This is a subversive document. It contains instructions on how to change your government. In the wrong hands, it can be a dangerous weapon. Used properly, it can bring many years of productive life to town government.

Deciding what you want to change is a good place to start. In starting out, dare to dream about a town government that is just to your liking. Try to imagine how you could



Every charter proposal requires two public hearings. Each hearing must be warned at least thirty days in advance, by posted and published notice. The election vote also requires similar warning of at least thirty days.

Votes on charter proposals or amendments can only be taken at the annual Town Meeting, at a state primary, or at a general election.

The Election Process

The vote is by Australian ballot, which means you can vote by absentee ballot. The law allows anyone to vote absentee, so if you are interested in ensuring that as many as possible of your supporters actually vote, you will need to ensure that everybody knows how to order one. All it takes is the voter's consent to request a ballot.

You can also have