

Greensboro

ARTICLE 2. - INITIATIVE, REFERENDUM AND RECALL

Sec. 2.71. - Powers of initiative, referendum and recall.

- (a) (1) The voters of the city shall have the power, except as provided in paragraph (2) of this subsection, to propose ordinances to the City Council. If the Council rejects an ordinance proposed hereunder or passes it with amendment, the voters shall have power to approve or reject the proposed or amended ordinance at the polls. These powers comprise the initiative power.
- (2) The initiative shall not extend to the proposing of: (i) any part or all of the annual budget; or (ii) any ordinance making or repealing any appropriation of money, fixing the salaries of city officers or employees, or authorizing or repealing the levying of taxes.
- (3) Voters seeking to propose an ordinance subject to initiative shall proceed by way of initiative petition addressed to the Council and containing the full text of the proposed ordinance. An initiative petition must be registered with the Guilford County Board of Elections, as required by G.S. 163-218, before it is circulated for signatures. The valid signatures required on the petition must equal twenty-five percent (25%), in number, of the number of persons voting at the last preceding citywide election for City Council members occurring before the registration of the initiative petition. It is not necessary that the signers of the petition have voted in the last election. The petitioner's committee shall have one year from the date of registration with the Board of Elections to file the initiative petition with the City Clerk.
- (b) (1) The voters of the city shall have power, except as provided in paragraph (2) of this subsection, to require reconsideration by the Council of any adopted ordinance, including any ordinance initiated under subsection (a) of this Section and adopted by the Council. If the Council fails to repeal an ordinance which it has been required to reconsider, the voters shall have power to approve or reject that ordinance at the polls. These powers comprise the referendum power.
- (2) The referendum power shall not extend to (i) any part or all of the annual budget or the property tax levied therein; (ii) to any ordinance making or repealing any appropriation of money or fixing the salary of any officer or employee; or (iii) to any repealing ordinance adopted by the Council in compliance with a referendum petition.
- (3) Voters seeking a referendum on any ordinance shall proceed by way of a referendum petition addressed to the council, identifying the ordinance concerned and requesting that it be either amended, repealed, or referred to the voters of the city. Any referendum petition must be registered with the Guilford County Board of Elections, as required by G.S. 163-218, before it is circulated for signatures. Such registration must be within 30 days after adoption by the council of the ordinance concerned. The valid signatures required on the petition must equal twenty-five percent (25%), in number, of the number of persons voting at the last preceding citywide election for City Council Members occurring before the date of adoption of the ordinance referred. It is not necessary that the signers of the petition have voted in the last election. The petitioner's committee shall have one year from the date of registration with the Board of Elections to file the referendum petition with the City Clerk.
- (c) (1) The voters of the city shall have the power, which shall be known as the recall power, to remove from office any member of the city council, including the Mayor.
- (2) Voters seeking the recall of any member of the council shall proceed by way of a recall petition addressed to the council identifying the council member concerned, requesting his/her removal from office and stating the grounds alleged for his/her removal. The grounds for recall must be for cause, misfeasance, malfeasance, nonfeasance, or a violation of the oath of office. A recall petition must be registered with the Guilford County Board of Elections before it is circulated for signatures; however, no recall petition may be registered within six months before a general election involving the members named in the petition. With respect to the Mayor or any council

member elected at large, any recall petition must be filed with the city clerk within one year after registration and the valid signatures required on the petition must equal twenty-five percent (25%), in number, of the number of persons voting at the last preceding citywide election for Mayor or city council members occurring before the registration of the recall petition. It is not necessary that the signers of the petition have voted in the last election. With respect to any city council member elected from a district, any recall petition must be filed with the city clerk within one year after registration and the valid signatures required on the petition must equal twenty-five percent (25%), in number, of the number of persons voting at the last preceding district election occurring before the registration of the recall petition. It is not necessary that the signers of the petition have voted in the last district election.

(S.L. 1989, Ch. 896, § 1; S.L. 1991, Ch. 4, § 1; S.L. 2008, Ch. 48, § 1)

Sec. 2.72. - Petitioners' committee.

In each initiative, referendum, or recall petition there shall be named a petitioner's committee representing all the petitioners and composed of five members who shall be qualified voters of the city and signers of the petition concerned. The petitioner's committee shall be responsible for registration and circulation of the petition and for its assembling and filing in proper form. The committee may also amend or withdraw its petition as provided in this Article.

(S.L. 2008, Ch. 48, § 1)

Sec. 2.73. - Initiative, referendum and recall petitions: Form and sufficiency.

- (a) Initiative, referendum and recall petitions shall be governed by the rules regarding form and sufficiency set out in this Section, as well as by such other rules regarding form and sufficiency as the City Council may impose by ordinance consistent with the provisions and with the spirit and purpose of this charter.
- (b) The signatures to a petition shall be executed in ink or indelible pencil and need not all be affixed to one paper, but all papers of a petition shall be of uniform size and style and shall be assembled as one instrument for filing with the city clerk. Each signature shall be followed by the address of the signer. Petitions or petition papers which reasonably comply with these requirements shall be accepted by the clerk without delay upon presentation and their filing shall be completed by his acceptance. Noncomplying petitions or papers may be rejected by the clerk until they are brought into reasonable compliance.
- (c) The clerk shall not accept any petition until it indicates: (1) by name and address, the five petitioners who constitute the petitioners' committee for that petition and (2) the address to which all notices for the petitioners' committee are to be sent.
- (d) Any petition shall be certified or determined insufficient which: (1) is validly signed by less than the required number of qualified voters of the city, (2) proposes, or requests repeal of, an ordinance not subject to the power under which the petitioners are proceeding, (3) if a petition, is not registered or filed within the time allowed, or (4) if a recall petition, seeks the removal of an official not subject to recall hereunder.
- (e) No signature on a petition paper shall be counted in support of the petition involved if that paper (1) being part of an initiative petition, has not contained or had attached to it throughout its circulation the full text of the proposed ordinance, (2) being part of a referendum petition, has not contained throughout its circulation a clear, concise designation and description of the ordinance concerned, or (3) being part of a recall petition has not contained or had attached to it throughout its circulation a copy of the recall petition identifying the council member concerned and stating the grounds alleged for his removal.

- (f) No signature on a petition paper shall be counted in support of the petition involved if that paper at the time of Filing, does not have attached to it an affidavit, executed by the circulator of that paper, to the effect: (1) that he personally circulated the paper; (2) that each signature on the paper was affixed in his presence; (3) that he believes each signature to be the genuine signature of the person whose name it purports to be; (4) if an initiative petition is concerned, that the full text of the proposed measure was attached to or contained in the accompanying paper throughout its circulation, and that each signer of the accompanying paper had an opportunity before signing to read the full text of the ordinance attached; and (5) if a referendum petition is concerned, that each signer of the accompanying paper had an opportunity before signing to read the designation and description of the ordinance in question; and (6) if a recall petition is concerned, that a copy of the recall petition was attached to or contained in accompanying paper throughout its circulation, and that each signer of the accompanying paper had an opportunity before signing to read the full text.
- (g) Upon receipt of a petition that complies with the requirements of subsections (b) and (c) of this Section, the clerk shall examine the petition to determine whether, on its face, it is insufficient under paragraphs (1), (2) or (3) of subsection (d). If he finds the petition insufficient on its face for any of these reasons, he shall so certify to the City Council at the next regular Council meeting occurring not sooner than five days after the filing of the petition, and the determination shall be subject to review in the manner provided in subsection (e) of Section 2.75. If he does not find the petition insufficient for these reasons, the clerk shall determine which signatures on the petition papers may be counted in support of the petition under subsections (e) and (f). He shall then clearly mark the signatures that may be so counted. Within ten days after the filing of the petition he shall deliver the petition papers with signatures marked to the Guilford County Board of Elections for a checking of the marked signatures against the registration books. The Board of Elections shall complete its check within 15 days after receipt of the petition papers; except that the said board shall not be obligated to conduct a check in any 30-day period immediately preceding, or in any 10-day period immediately following, a county-wide or city-wide election. Upon completion of its check, the Board of Elections shall forthwith certify to the city clerk: (1) the total number of registered voters of the city or the municipal electoral district, whichever is applicable, at the time of the relevant election of members of the City Council; and (2) the number of voters registered in the city or in the municipal electoral district, if applicable, whose signatures, marked by the clerk, appear on the petition papers that the board found it necessary to examine. If it was found unnecessary to check all names on the petition papers, this fact shall be indicated on the certificate. The petition papers shall be returned to the city clerk by the Board of Elections together with its certificate.

(S.L. 1963, Ch. 55, § 4; S.L. 1989, Ch. 896, § 2; S.L. 2008, Ch. 48, § 1)

Sec. 2.74. - Referendum petitions; suspension of ordinance after filing.

When, within the time allowed, a referendum petition is filed with the city clerk, the ordinance to which that petition is directed shall immediately be and shall remain suspended from taking effect. This suspension shall terminate when, in accordance with this Article: (1) a final determination is made that the petition concerned is insufficient, or (2) the petitioners' committee withdraws the petition, or (3) the Council reconsiders the ordinance and repeals it without modification. Any action taken pursuant to the respective ordinance while it was in effect shall remain valid.

(S.L. 2008, Ch. 48, § 1)

Sec. 2.75. - Initiative, referendum and recall petitions; procedure after filing.

- (a) Within five days after the return of the petition papers by the County Board of Elections, the city clerk shall complete a certificate as to whether the petition is sufficient. If the clerk certifies a petition insufficient, his certificate shall show the particulars wherein the petition is defective. As soon as he has completed his certificate, the clerk shall notify the committee of petitioners of the contents of the certificate. If a petition is certified sufficient, the clerk shall present his certificate to the City Council at

its next meeting and that certificate shall be a final determination as to the sufficiency of the petition. If a petition certified sufficient is a recall petition, the clerk shall also give written notice of the action taken to the Council member whose removal is sought. If a petition is certified insufficient under Section 2.73(d)(1), a majority of the committee of petitioners may elect to amend the petition; but if a majority does not so elect to amend the petition, the clerk shall present his certificate to the council at its next meeting and that certificate shall be a final determination as to the sufficiency of the petition.

- (b) If a majority of the committee of petitioners elects to amend the petition, then within ten days after notice of the contents of the clerks' [clerk's] certificate, the committee may file, for purposes of amendment, a supplementary petition upon additional papers. The supplementary petition shall be governed by the same requirements as an original petition with respect to such matters as uniformity and assembly of papers, listing of the petitioners' committee, text or designation and description of measures, circulators' affidavits, the writing and counting but not the number of signatures; and the clerk shall proceed as in the case of an original petition. Within two days after receipt of a supplementary petition complying with the requirements of subsections (b) and (c) of Section 2.73, the clerk shall deliver the supplementary petition papers to the county board of elections for a checking of the marked signatures against the registration books. The Board of Elections shall complete its check within five days after receipt of the said petition papers; except that the said board shall not be obligated to conduct a check in any 30-day period immediately preceding, or in any 10-day period immediately following a county-wide or city-wide election. Upon completion of this check, the Board of Elections shall forthwith certify to the city clerk the number of voters registered in the city or in the municipal electoral district, if applicable, whose signatures, marked by the clerk, appear on the supplementary petition papers that the board found it necessary to examine. If it was found necessary to check all names on the supplementary papers, this fact shall be indicated in the certificate. The supplementary petition papers shall be returned to the city clerk by the Board of Elections together with the certificate.
- (c) Within two days after the return of the supplementary petition papers by the Board of Elections, the clerk shall complete a second certificate as to whether the original petition, as amended by the supplementary petition is sufficient. If the clerk certifies the amended petition insufficient, his second certificate shall show the particulars wherein the petition is still defective. As soon as he has completed his second certificate, the clerk shall notify the petitioners' committee of its contents and shall present that certificate to the Council at its next meeting, and that certificate shall be a final determination as to the sufficiency of the petition.
- (d) If a petition has been certified insufficient and there is no election to amend it, or if an amended petition is certified insufficient, the clerk shall present his latest certificate on the petition to the Council at its next meeting.
- (e) If, in any one of the ways provided in this Section, a final determination has been made that a petition is insufficient, that determination shall be subject to judicial review, but no further action shall be taken on the petition unless the reviewing court directs otherwise. Such a final determination, even if sustained upon review, shall not prejudice the filing of a new petition for the same purposes.

(S.L. 1963, Ch. 55, § 5; S.L. 1989, Ch. 896, § 3)

Sec. 2.76. - Consideration by the city council and submission to the voters.

- (a) When the City Council has been presented with, or has an initiative or referendum petition which has been finally determined sufficient in accordance with the preceding Sections of this Article, it shall proceed at once to hold a public hearing thereon and consider that petition. If an initiative petition is concerned, the ordinance it proposes shall at once be introduced and shall undergo all other procedures required for ordinances of the same kind, however, not later than 30 days after the date on which the petition proposing the ordinance is finally determined to be sufficient, the Council shall complete its consideration of the proposed ordinance and shall adopt it with or without amendment or reject it. If a referendum petition is concerned, the ordinance to which that petition is directed shall

be reconsidered by the council and, not later than 30 days after the date on which the referendum petition was finally determined sufficient, the Council shall repeal or sustain the ordinance.

- (b) If the Council fails to adopt, or adopts with amendment, a proposed initiative ordinance, or if the Council fails to repeal an ordinance reconsidered pursuant to a referendum petition, it shall submit the originally proposed initiative ordinance or refer the reconsidered ordinance concerned to the voters of the city.
- (c) When the Council has been presented with, or has, a recall petition which has been finally determined sufficient in accordance with the preceding Sections of this subchapter, it shall thereupon fix a day for holding a recall election unless, prior to Council consideration of the matter, the Council member whose removal is sought has resigned and his resignation has been accepted by the Council. Any recall election for a council member from an electoral district shall be held within that district only.
- (d) An initiative election shall be held at the next regularly scheduled primary or general election in Guilford County for state, county or municipal officials following ninety (90) days after the petition has been finally determined to be sufficient. A referendum or recall election shall be held no sooner than ninety (90) days and no later than one hundred twenty (120) days after the petition has been finally determined to be sufficient, but no recall election shall be held within the first six months or the last six months of the term of office of the member.

(S.L. 1989, Ch. 896, § 4; S.L. 1991, Ch. 4, § 2; S.L. 2008, Ch. 48, § 1)

Sec. 2.77. - Ballots for initiative, referendum, and recall elections.

- (a) Any initiative or referendum ordinance to be voted on in accordance with this charter shall be presented for voting by ballot title. The ballot title shall be prepared by the city attorney. The ballot title may differ from the legal title and shall be a clear, concise statement describing the substance of the ordinance without argument or prejudice. If the ballot used in voting is a paper ballot, it shall have below the ballot title the following instructions: "Place a cross (x) in only one of the squares below." Below this instruction shall appear, in the order indicated the following propositions: "FOR THE ORDINANCE" and "AGAINST THE ORDINANCE." Immediately at the left of each of the two propositions set out, there shall be a square in which by making a cross (x) the voter may cast his vote.
- (b) The ballots used in a recall election, if a paper ballot is used, shall contain the following instructions: "Place a cross (x) in one of the squares below." Below the instruction shall appear, in the order indicated, the following propositions: "FOR THE RECALL OF (NAME OF OFFICER)" and "AGAINST THE RECALL OF (NAME OF OFFICER)." Immediately at the left of each of the two propositions thus set out, there shall be a square in which by making a cross (x) the voter may cast his vote.
- (c) If voting machines are used for an initiative, referendum or recall election, the ballot title shall have below it the same two propositions appropriate to its nature as prescribed for the paper ballot, one above the other or one preceding the other in the order indicated, and the voter shall have an opportunity to vote in favor of either of the two propositions and thereby to vote his preference.
- (d) Any number of initiative, referendum or recall proposals may be voted on at the same election and may appear on the same ballot. Paper ballots used for voting on one or more such proposals shall be used for that purpose only. If more than one proposal appears on the same paper ballot or if voted on by paper ballot at the same election, each one shall be presented for voting with ballot title, instruction, propositions, and voting squares as prescribed for single proposals. If voting machines are used, each proposal shall be presented for voting as prescribed for single proposals on voting machines.

Sec. 2.78. - Withdrawal of initiative and referendum petitions.

- (a) A petitioners' committee may withdraw an initiative or referendum petition:

- (1) At any time after the City Council, if an initiative petition is concerned, has finally rejected or has adopted with amendment the ordinance proposed; or, if a referendum petition is concerned, has finally refused to repeal the ordinance to which the petition is directed; but the city clerk shall retain the petition papers as part of the official records of the city.
 - (2) But not later than the fifteenth day immediately preceding the day scheduled for a vote in the city on the proposal concerned.
- (b) No petition shall be withdrawn except by written request for its withdrawal filed with the Council within the time limits prescribed for withdrawal and signed by at least four of the five members of the petitioners' committee for that petition. The filing of such request immediately withdraws the petition and there shall be no further action on or under that petition and no city vote or further action pursuant to that petition on the proposal concerned.

Sec. 2.79. - Results of election.

- (a) If a majority of the voters of the city voting upon a proposed initiative ordinance shall vote in favor of it, the ordinance involved shall thereupon be an ordinance of the city. A referred ordinance not approved by a majority of the voters voting on it shall thereupon be repealed.
- (b) If a majority of the votes cast on the question of recalling a Council member be against his recall he shall continue in office for the remainder of the unexpired term, but subject to recall as before. If a majority of such votes be for the recall of the Council member designated on the ballot, he shall be removed from office.
- (c) If a Council member in regard to whom a sufficient recall petition is submitted to the Council shall resign before the election and his resignation be accepted by the Council, or shall be removed as a result thereof, the vacancy shall be filled in the manner provided by this charter for filling vacancies in such office, except as otherwise provided in subsection (d) of this Section. But a Council member removed by the voters as the result of a recall election, or resigning after a sufficient petition for his recall has been submitted to the Council shall not be re-elected to fill the vacancy caused by his own removal or resignation.
- (d) If the recall of a majority of the members of the City Council, including the mayor as one of the members, shall be effected at a single recall election, the successors of the Council members recalled shall be elected by the registered, qualified voters of the city at a special municipal election, and said successors shall serve for the unexpired part of the term of the Council members recalled. The members of the City Council who have not been recalled are empowered to call such special election and to make all necessary provisions regarding the same in conformity with the Constitution and general laws of North Carolina. If the recall of the members of the City Council, including the mayor, shall be effected at a single recall election, they shall be continued in office for the sole purpose of calling a special municipal election for the election of their successors as above provided, and of ascertaining and declaring the results thereof.

Sec. 2.80. - Publication of ordinances; repeal and amendment; conflicts.

No initiative petition proposing an ordinance that addresses essentially the same issue as, or requiring an amendment to, an ordinance that was the subject of a referendum election may be filed within one year after the referendum election.

(S.L. 2008, Ch. 48, § 1)