

VERMONT DEMOCRACY AND YOU

Voting: A Primer

Voting is our clearest civic duty. Yet in the United States, often fewer than 50% of those eligible vote in general elections. Here in Vermont, participation rates are usually higher, but the fact remains: thousands of eligible Vermont voters let someone else decide who will govern them. Your opinion is important, and your participation is needed.

To be eligible to vote in Vermont, you must be at least 18 years old and a resident of Vermont. When you first move to Brandon, you must fill out a voter registration form and mail or deliver it to the town clerk, or register online at the Vermont Secretary of State website <https://olvr.sec.state.vt.us/>. It's easy to register by stopping in at Town Offices during regular business hours.

Many people register to vote when they apply for a driver's license or a car registration (a program dubbed "**Motor Voter**"). If you register to vote at the Department of Motor Vehicles or any other State agency, double-check with the Town Clerk at least two weeks before the next election to make sure your registration form was received.

Voters who are added will be notified by mail. If you have registered but do not receive confirmation before voting day that your name has been added, contact the Town Clerk. You may also find your registration at the states My Voter Page at <https://mvp.sec.state.vt.us/>

Brandon citizens vote on Town Meeting Day (first Tuesday in March) and on Election Day (first Tuesday after the first Monday in November). They also vote in state party primaries (second Tuesday in August), the Presidential Preference Primary (every four years on Town Meeting Day), and in special elections warned to decide a particular question, such as whether to borrow money for a specific purpose, or update the Town Plan.

The Brandon voting location is the Brandon Town Hall, 1 Conant Square. Voting is always wheelchair accessible. Brandon uses Australian ballots and for larger elections, uses a machine tabulator. For smaller elections, Brandon sometimes uses paper ballots that are hand counted.

The polls are typically open from 7 a.m. until 7 pm. On Town Meeting Day, Brandon voters are encouraged to attend the evening meeting to discuss and vote on issues wared on the agenda. See "A Voter's Guide to Town Meeting Procedures" section.

When you enter the polling place to vote, you will be asked to give your name to a poll worker and will be given paper ballots for state and local races. You then step into a voting booth and vote in private. After you mark your ballots, exit the booth. You will be asked for your name one more time before you deposit the ballots in the ballot box. Even though the poll workers may know you, they are required to ask for your name and to make certain it is on the voter checklist.

The ballots are both machine counted by the tabulator and hand-counted by the members of the Board of Civil Authority and volunteers shortly after the polls close. The results of the election are usually available within two to three hours (and are posted at townofbrandon.com the day after an election). Volunteer poll workers are essential to the integrity of elections. If you are interested in volunteering to help with the tasks that keep democracy strong in Brandon, contact the Town Clerk.

Many voters take advantage of Vermont's **early voting option**. Formerly known as the "absentee ballot," early voting is available to any voter who requests a ballot prior to voting day. You do not need to be out of town or ill to vote early.

Contact the Town Clerk's office if you are interested in voting early. You can either vote early at the Town Clerk's office or have the ballot mailed to you.

State and Federal Representatives

State Representatives

Every two years, Brandon voters, along with Pittsford and Sudbury, elect **two State Representative for the Rutland-6 legislative district**, and join with the other towns in Rutland County to elect **three State Senators**. You can contact your legislators and senators by visiting the State website at <http://legislature.vermont.gov/> .

The General Assembly meets at the State House in Montpelier, usually from early January through mid-May (sometimes later). It enacts and amends State laws and, each year, must appropriate funds for the operations of State programs. Vermont's legislative session is biennial, which means that it extends over two years; the first half takes place during an odd-numbered year, and the second half takes place the following year. A budget must be passed every year.

Unlike many states in which being a legislator is a full-time job, Vermont still has a "citizen legislature," people who have other occupations during the rest of the year. In addition to dealing with legislative issues, legislators can sometimes help you in dealing with State agencies. All legislators do "case work" for their constituents, and can be powerful allies in problem solving.

The Vermont Legislative Home Page is at <http://legislature.vermont.gov/> Information you'll find at this site: scheduled committee meetings; bills, calendars, and journals; the legislative bill tracking system; text of bills and other legislative documents; minutes of selected committee meetings.

Federal Representatives

Vermont has two U.S. Senators and one Representative to Congress. These leaders want to hear your views, and also can offer valuable help in problem solving. Senator Patrick Leahy can be reached at <https://www.leahy.senate.gov/> and Senator Bernie Sanders can be reached at <http://www.sanders.senate.gov/> . Congressman Peter Welch can be reached at <https://welch.house.gov/> .

Vermont Voter Rights

You may see a ballot in advance.

- The Town Clerk has sample ballots for you to see at least ten days before the election.

You have a right to assistance.

- You may bring a person of your choice into the voting booth with you to help you vote. (Not your employer or union representative.)
- You can get help marking the ballot. Ask an election official for assistance. Two election officials will help you. But no one can tell you how to vote!
- You can bring a magnifying glass or other device to help you vote.
- If you are disabled or ill, you may ask the election officials to bring a ballot out to your car.
- You may bring a list of candidates into the voting booth to help you vote. (You may not show your list to other voters or leave it in the booth.)

You can vote early or vote from home.

- You can vote at the Town Clerk's office or take a ballot home to vote anytime 30 days before the election. Call the Town Clerk or sign a request and the Clerk will send you a ballot by mail.

You can get a new ballot if you make a mistake.

- If you give your first ballot to an election official you can get another ballot to vote. You can get up to three ballots.

You may write-in a candidate.

- If you wish to vote for a candidate who is not listed, write the name of the candidate on the write-in line. Or you may place a sticker with the candidate's name on the write-in line.

Your ballot is private.

- No one has the right to see how you voted or to ask you how you voted.

Please ask questions.

- Election officials are here to help you understand how to vote. They cannot help you decide who to vote for, and they may not tell you candidate names or party designations.
- If you are not sure that you are being properly assisted, ask to speak to the presiding officer.

For more information, please contact the Secretary of State's office at 1-800-439-8683.