

The Town Charter mandates that the budget referendum be held in as little as 7 days after the Town Meeting. While this was feasible when we used lever machines, it only gives the Registrars of Voters six calendar (6) days to prepare for the referendum vote. Below is a listing of the tasks that the Registrars must complete to prepare for a vote. A crucial step is getting the ballots printed by one of only two state-approved vendors. In 2018, the Annual Town Meeting was held on April 2nd and the Budget Referendum Budget Referendum was held on April 11th, only 6 business days after the Town Budget Meeting. The ballots in 2018 were not delivered until 2:00 PM on April 10th, just 16 hours before opening the polls. We nearly faced opening the polls without official ballots. Keep in mind that the Charter calls for a “machine vote.” We cannot use photocopied ballots and hand-count the results at the end of the night.

When you have a near-disaster experience like we did in 2018, you modify your future actions in order to assure that a disaster doesn't occur. The timeframe for this proposed referendum is 4 business days after this Special Town Meeting. The wheels are already in motion for a Referendum on July 26th, and the ballot is at the Printer. We want to give you fair warning that Bethel risks not having ballots by 6:00 AM on July 26th.

Before every voting event, the Registrars of Voters test the ballot tabulators and their ability to read the ballots. A few years ago, we discovered while testing the tabulators that the ballots could not be read. The ballots had defective coding, and the ballots had to be reprinted. If there is any problem this time with the ballots, there will not be time to reprint them by July 26th.

In 2019, the Registrars testified to the Charter Revision Commission that the current time frame of holding a Referendum not less than seven (7) days from the date of the Town Meeting is not safe and reasonable given our current ballot voting system. We asked that the Charter Revision Commission consider amending the Charter to mandate that the machine vote to be held no less than ten (10) business days after the Annual Town Budget Meeting. The Charter Revision Commission agreed with our recommendation and prepared revision language. That language could have been in place today if the Town had complied with the statutory public notice requirements so that the Bethel voters could act on the proposed Charter changes. However, nothing in the Charter precludes holding a referendum 10 days after the Special Town Meeting.

REFERENDUM Preparation Process

Prior to Town Meeting

TC submits proof of ballot text and ballot order to LHS.

ROVs reserve polling places and coordinate with other Depts.

ROVs hire workers – Establish Moderators, ARs and other
Pollworkers

After Town Meeting

Absentee Ballots (photo copied) are available. (TC)

TC confirms ballot text with LHS and gives OK for printing.

LHS prints test ballots and mails to ROVs.

LHS mails test ballots to IVS to program dataset for AVS voting system.

LHS programs memory cards to read ballot.

LHS mails memory cards to ROVs.

IVS notifies ROVs that AVS dataset is ready to download.

ROVs install dataset on AVS machine and print test deck.

ROVs test ballot tabulators and memory cards.

ROVs make and print Moderator Returns and Tally Sheets.

LHS ships official ballots to TC.

ROVs inspect, pack and seal ballots for three polling places.

ROVs print poll books for each polling place.

ROV's assemble Moderator Books and print worker nametags.

ROVs assemble supply boxes for each polling location.

ROVs cross off voters who voted by absentee ballot.

On the Day Before Referendum

ROVs set up polling places, deliver supplies & ballots, and program AVS systems at each polling place.