

**A GUIDE TO
RUNNING FOR
LOCAL OFFICE
IN WESTFORD**

The League of Women Voters of Westford

LWV[®]



Why This Guide was Written

The Westford LWV feels strongly that all residents are well served when elections for local office are contested. This leads to more debate and a choice for voters. This Guide has been written to help anyone who is interested in running for local office. It gathers information from many available sources, as well as providing suggestions and tips for running for office not found anywhere else. Many League members and town residents have generously shared their time and expertise to provide a complete picture of what needs to be done to run for local office.

This Guide is intended to be used for many years. As such, specific dates and times are not listed. However, the Guide will always reference the appropriate place on the town's website (westfordma.gov) where current information can be found.

About the League Of Women Voters

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. It never supports or opposes political parties or candidates. The League takes action on selected matters of governmental concern that its members have studied. Membership in the League is open to all.

The League of Women Voters of Westford

Acknowledgements

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The following sources were also reviewed:

Concord-Carlisle League of Women Voters, *Getting Elected in Concord, 2012*

League of Women Voters of Wisconsin, *Why and How to Run for Elected Office, 2008*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Making The Decision To Run	1
Elected Boards.....	2
How To Start	5
Nomination Papers	6
Dates To Remember	8
Planning A Campaign.....	9
Campaign Finance.....	11
Publicity.....	12
LWV Voters' Guide.....	12
LWV Candidates' Night	13
Other Tips	13
Campaigning	14
Fundraising.....	14
Conclusion.....	15
Additional Resources.....	15

MAKING THE DECISION TO RUN

Running for office can be a rewarding experience and candidates gain tremendous knowledge about themselves personally as well as professionally.

One of the first steps for successfully running for office is to think through your decision to run. Do you feel a civic responsibility to contribute and make Westford a better place to live? Do you feel that you could contribute more? Are you tenacious and thick-skinned enough to withstand criticism? Talk to people who are on boards to learn about their experience. Be clear on your motives for running, as you certainly will be asked. If you have been more focused on a single hot-button issue, be aware that if elected, you will be representing the town on many other issues that come before boards and committees, and you should be ready to continually exhibit that same level of passion and dedication.

Running for office involves hard work, time commitment, and good planning. The specific elected office and the number of candidates running will also determine the amount of time required. A contested Select Board race, for example, will require more effort than an uncontested Library Trustee race. If elected, serving on a board will require time to attend meetings, as well as preparing for them, and also require time to respond to town resident phone calls, emails, and requests.

“Running (and winning) resulted in a great sense of accomplishment.”

Kelly Ross, Selectman, 2013

ELECTED BOARDS

The Westford Town Charter, which was adopted in 1989, established seven elected boards or positions in our town government:

Elected Position	Number of Seats	Term
Board of Health	5	3 years
Housing Authority	5	5 years
Library Trustee	6	3 years
Planning Board	5	5 years
School Committee	7	3 years
Select Board	5	3 years
Moderator	1	3 years

The Board of Health is responsible for protecting the public health of the town by adopting appropriate local health regulations and by carrying out preventive programs. The Board oversees the activities of the Health Department, and has responsibility for enforcing the state health, sanitary, and environmental codes. They generally meet on the second Monday of each month in the evening.

The Housing Authority is the local body responsible for the expenditure of state and federal housing grants. The Authority owns and manages a number of housing units for the elderly, for low-income residents, and for those with special needs. The Authority meets the second Thursday of each month in the evening.

The J.V. Fletcher Library Board of Trustees is empowered by Massachusetts law to establish policy and oversee administration of the town Library. The Trustees hire the Library Director and Assistant Director and work with the director to develop and enforce library policy. They also administer the Library trust funds. The Trustees generally meet in the evening on the first Monday of the month.

The Planning Board establishes planning goals and develops strategies to implement those goals, which take the form of zoning by-laws. In addition, they administer the Subdivision Control Law, which establishes the process for development of new roads and

new housing. They meet the first and third Monday of every month in the evening.

The School Committee works with the Superintendent of Schools to establish educational goals, prepare and approve budgets, and develop policies for the schools. Under Massachusetts General Law, the Committee has the authority to select and terminate the Superintendent. They usually meet every other Monday evening during the school year.

The Select Board is the chief policy-making entity of the town and is ultimately responsible for the enforcement of all town bylaws and regulations. The Select Board hires the Town Manager, appoints Town Counsel, and appoints residents to certain committees. They have the responsibility of crafting and assembling the articles on the Town Meeting warrants. They normally meet twice each month on the second and fourth Tuesday evening.

The Moderator is elected to a three-year term to preside at Town Meeting and appoints the members of the Finance Committee, who advise the voters through recommendations at Town Meeting. The Moderator may advise the Select Board as well as private citizens submitting warrant petitions, as they prepare articles for Town Meeting warrants and motions for Town Meetings.

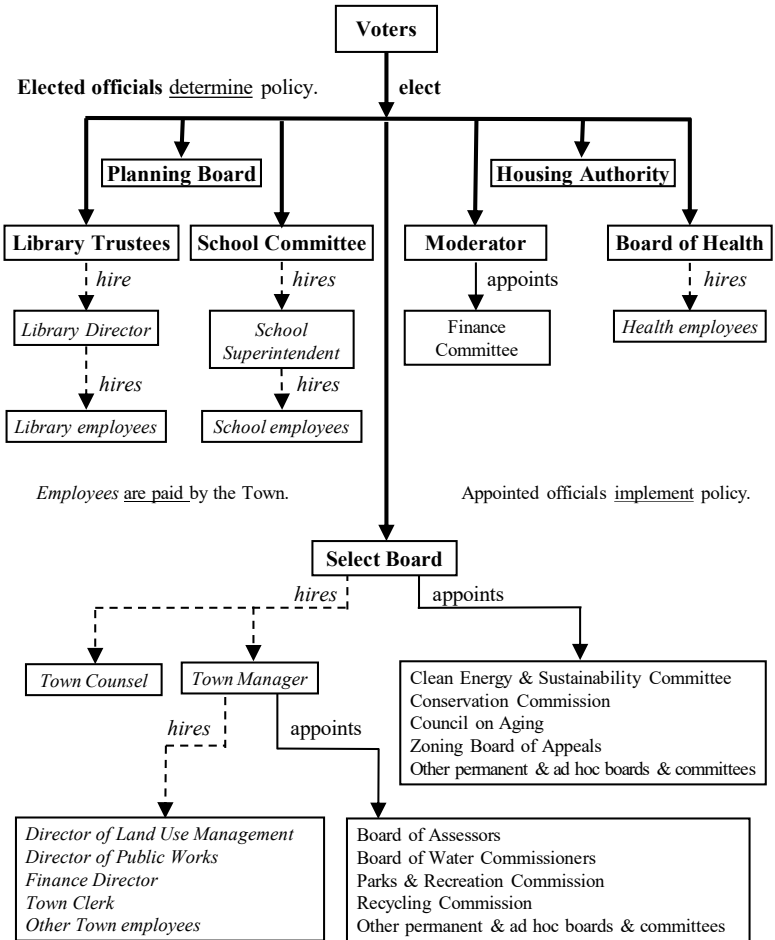
Members of elected boards may also serve on subcommittees to work on specific short-term projects for their boards. Some members may serve on behalf of their board as liaisons to other committees to facilitate communication. (The Library Board of Trustees, for example, appoints one Trustee to attend the Friends of the J.V. Fletcher Library monthly meetings.) This may increase the amount of meeting and preparation time involved.

If an elected board member resigns prematurely, the Select Board and the board will jointly appoint an interim member to serve until the next town election, the following May, at which time the position becomes open but only for the remaining years of the original term.

See the town [website](#) or refer to the [Annual Town Report](#) for more information on these elected boards. The [Town Charter](#) describes

how the town is to be governed under a Select Board/Town Manager form of administration.

This diagram shows the relationships among elected officials, appointed officials, and town employees.



Westford Town Government

HOW TO START

Once you have made the decision to run for a specific position, talk to as many people as possible to understand the issues and topics that are important to them. Attend board meetings, talk to committee heads and board chairs to get their perspectives, and share your intention to run. Attending these sessions in person is also another opportunity to gain campaign visibility.

When meeting with committees, it is helpful to express your interest to the committee chair and to the appointing authority, usually the Select Board or the Town Manager. (Finance Committee members are appointed by the Moderator.) Call members of the board and tell them you are considering a run for the office and ask that they consider supporting you.

Watching committee meetings on WestfordCAT or via Zoom and reading [town-posted meeting minutes](#) are additional ways to familiarize yourself with the issues and decisions being made.

Previous committee experience is always a plus, and you may consider first serving as an appointed member of a committee to gain experience and knowledge about the town's operations. Residents interested in volunteering for a committee can complete an online [Citizen Activity Form](#).

“Do your homework and attend as many meetings as possible. Prior to running for the Board of Selectmen, I served on the Energy Committee.”

Jim Jarvie, Board of Selectmen candidate, 2013

You can also review the town website to familiarize yourself with posted material on current town budgets, the Open Meeting Law, and other information that could help you.

When considering what town board to run for, consider the meeting schedule of that board. Boards have a regular schedule (for

example, the 2nd and 4th Tuesday of each month at 7 p.m.). Be sure you are able to make these meetings before deciding to run for a position.

According to former candidates, the estimated costs for running for elected office can vary from a negligible amount for less complicated or uncontested races, to a high of \$4000-\$5000 for a contested Select Board race, where you may be doing a town-wide mailing.

NOMINATION PAPERS

The traditional way to run for elected office in Westford is to have your name on the May town election ballot. It is not necessary to have your name on the ballot—one Library Trustee was elected to office as a write-in candidate—but it is highly recommended.

To have your name on the ballot, you must take out and return nomination papers for your intended position. Nomination papers are available from the Town Clerk's office on January 1 of the election year, and must be returned to the Clerk's office 49 days before the election. Exact dates are in a Candidates' Timeline that is given to all those who pull papers.

Nomination papers require a minimum of 50 valid signatures of registered Westford voters. The Town Clerk will provide you with identical sheets for voters to sign. It takes time to collect signatures, and others can help you circulate the papers. (Be wary of duplicate signatures, however.) Meetings of town boards and committees are good locations for collecting signatures. Board members and those attending their meetings understand the process and are often willing to help.

Collecting signatures is an opportunity to meet voters and to introduce yourself and your positions. Because of the possibility of duplicate, illegible, or invalid signatures, it's a good idea to collect more than 50 signatures.

When you are at the Town Clerk's office, consider asking the staff to email you the full voter list, which can also include past election voter activity.

DATES TO REMEMBER

Town elections are set by town bylaws on the first Tuesday in May. In unusual circumstances, the date of a town election can be changed.

You can pick up nomination papers starting on January 1 of the year of the election. From January 1 through the town elections, there are some specific deadlines that you should know. The Town Clerk's office gives all candidates a Candidates' Timeline that includes the following dates:

- Last day to submit nomination papers to the Town Clerk's office for certification by the Board of Registrars: 49 days prior to the election, as mandated by state law.
- Last day to object to or withdraw nomination papers: 33 days prior to the election.
- Last day to register to vote or change party for Annual Town Election: 10 days prior to the election.
- Pre-election campaign finance reports due: eight days prior to the election
- Annual Town Election: first Tuesday in May

Once the election is over, there are a few more dates to keep in mind:

- Elected officers must be sworn into office by the Town Clerk before their first meeting of the board.
- Campaign finance reports are due 30 days after the election and by January 19 of the following year.

The League helps inform voters about the candidates in local elections. Questions for the Voters' Guide are sent out just after nomination papers are due, to be returned by late March or early April. Candidates' Night is held by the League in mid-April.

PLANNING A CAMPAIGN

Based on the competition in your race, a team can be helpful in sharing the burden of organizing and implementing your election activities. Try to gain the support of the town's influential people before they announce their support for your opponents.

As early as possible in your campaign, generate a list of potential financial and political supporters to contact personally. Add names to this list as the campaign progresses and the word of your candidacy spreads. Know that a good portion of campaign expenses may come out of your own pocket. Consider organizing a kick-off event to generate support and to raise money. Invite absolutely everyone, particularly those who may be wavering in their support for you.

Below is a suggested list for planning a campaign. Not all campaigns will warrant this depth and breadth. Running in a contested race with contentious issues can require much time, money, and hard work. On the other hand, running in an uncontested race can require little effort and no money at all.

- *Campaign Manager*

You may want to recruit someone to help manage the overall progress of the campaign, freeing you up for other candidate activities.

- *Treasurer (Required by state law)*

If you collect or expend money on your campaign, you are required by law to have a treasurer.

The treasurer will control and record the flow of campaign contributions and expenses, and take on the responsibility of maintaining financial records and filling out the required campaign finance reports. Campaign expenses may include lawn signs, "Dear Friend" cards, and position mailings.

The treasurer will help you set up a campaign account at a local bank. Try to find a bank manager who has done this before.

- *Media*

An experienced person to organize your media outreach can be a real plus. They can help design lawn signs, format campaign literature and mailings, and take advantage of various social media for your campaign, such as creating an attractive Facebook page and using texting, Twitter, and other platforms.

- *Lawn Signs*

You may want help to coordinate all activities associated with posting of lawn signs: maintaining a list of those who agree to have lawn signs, those who have them for distribution, and those who will plant the signs on your supporters' lawns. Signs may not be placed on public property, including along roads. Expect to need 150-300 lawn signs. Design your signs so they are easily readable from a distance and can be reused in case you decide to run for re-election. (For example, do not add dates to your signs, or use the slogan "It's time for a change!") And don't forget to pick up your signs immediately after the election.

- *Visibility*

Consider maintaining a list of volunteer campaign sign holders, those supporters who will hold your campaign signs at selected times and locations showing their enthusiastic support for you. Popular times for these sign holders are the Friday evening, Saturday morning, and Monday evening before Election Day. Popular locations are Minot's Corner and the Town Common. Six- or eight-foot lengths of pine strapping are often used to elevate your lawn signs at sign holding times.

On Election Day, enlist sign holders throughout the day to greet voters at the two polling locations, Stony Brook School and Westford Academy. By state law these signs cannot be held closer than 150 feet from the entrance to the polling location and they cannot be left unattended. These 150-foot boundaries are clearly marked on the pavement at both schools. Try to get your sign holders lined up early before they are committed to other candidates.

- *Photography*

Look to your talented friends and neighbors to help create a professional look to your campaign literature and your Facebook and other social media pages.

- *Publicity*

A savvy wordsmith can help craft your position statements and your letters to the editor so that your public image is clear and appealing. At the least, have someone proofread all campaign material and mailings to look for inadvertent misstatements and not-so-obvious blunders.

“Put together a list of people to be personally contacted by the candidates—these are the ‘movers and shakers’ in town, whose support you’ll need.”

Andrea Peraner-Sweet, Selectman, 2013

CAMPAIGN FINANCE

The state’s campaign finance regulations specify how your campaign needs to handle and report any funds raised as part of your campaign. If you decide to raise and spend money as part of your campaign, there are procedures you need to follow for managing, spending, and reporting money in your campaign. Even if you do not raise or spend any money on your campaign, you must fill out campaign finance reports.

Be sure to become familiar with the state law governing this area. Both the Town Clerk and the state Office of Campaign and Political Finance (OCPF) have put together guides to help you through the process. When you pick up nomination papers, the Town Clerk will give you the campaign finance reports that you will need to fill out during and after your campaign along with their Campaign Finance Reporting Guidelines. The OCPF’s Campaign Finance Guide is available [online](#).

Every elected official must file a year-end report by January 20 every year.

PUBLICITY

Take every opportunity to build your brand and make yourself visible and your positions known. The type of position and campaign you are running will determine to what degree you pursue these activities, but when in doubt, more publicity is better than less.

- Attend events in town that provide an opportunity to speak to Westford voters.
- Send a press release to all media including the Sun, Westford-CAT, Westford Patch, and Action Unlimited announcing your candidacy.
- Contact WestfordCAT about taping a campaign announcement to be shown on their cable channels.
- Solicit the support of friends and neighbors to place signs on high-visibility, private properties in high-traffic areas in town.
- Create a broad distribution list if you choose to mail campaign flyers or cards. Include handwritten notes if possible.
- Put together a broad contact list for communicating via electronic media and use it to get out your message. On Election Day, email, text, and/or tweet your supporters to remind them to vote!
- Create a Facebook and/or an Instagram page, and get your friends and supporters to “Like” it. Post regularly.
- Place an ad in any local publications or online, though traditionally this is not often done in town elections.

LWV Voters’ Guide

The League produces a Voters’ Guide that is available on the League’s website several weeks before the election. Each candidate is invited to supply via email a biography, a written response to two questions, and a photo. [Examples](#) from previous elections are available on the League website.

It is not required to respond to the League’s questions for the Voters’ Guide, but think about how a “No Response Received” will look to voters, even if you’re running unopposed.

LWV Candidates’ Night

Whether or not you’re running in a contested race, consider attending this event, since the moderator will announce that you declined the opportunity to participate if you choose not to be there. Voters deserve the opportunity to get to know you better and hear what you want to accomplish once you take office. The League will send you an invitation to participate which includes details about the event. Come prepared and understand that the event is recorded and will be replayed on WestfordCAT and will be available on demand on the League’s website and on Westford CAT’s YouTube channel, allowing for much broader audience viewing.

Both of these activities are opportunities to get your positions and personality before the voters for free.

“If possible, meet the other candidates prior to Candidates’ Night. This helps the interaction during the event.”

**Judy Culver, former School Committee member,
2013**

Other Tips

- Generate a timeline to organize your events, those that you control, such as letters to the editor, and those you cannot, such as Candidates’ Night. Use the Town Clerk’s election timeline as the basis for your scheduling.
- Keep in mind that voters no longer have to wait till Election Day to vote. Ask the Town Clerk when mail-in ballots will be available, usually three to four weeks before the election. That’s when voters will begin to cast their ballots.

- Learn the news media deadlines and plan accordingly.
- Consider scheduling campaign events such as an announcement in the local media, supporters' letters to the editor (one a week would be ideal), town-wide mailings, posting the first campaign signs, sending "Dear Friend" cards, a kick-off party, and an election celebration.
- Keep press releases short and simple. Include most essential information up front, to plan for the potential of the article being cut back. Include a photo.

CAMPAIGNING

There are many ways to hit the campaign trail. Choose those activities that are most comfortable to you.

- Knocking on doors is one traditional way. Canvass neighborhoods, listen to the issues that are important to people, be sincere, and ask for their support.
- Attend as many public events as possible and introduce yourself to other attendees.
- Make the phone your friend. Obtain a list of potential supporters and call them. Introduce your candidacy and your position and ask for their vote on Election Day.
- Have friends and supporters organize small house parties for a more personal meet and greet.

Whatever your style, build relationships and make a connection. Look for opportunities to seek common ground, and value all ideas brought to the table.

FUNDRAISING

Fundraising can be one of the most awkward activities for most candidates. Especially in a contested race, you may need some amount of funds for day-to-day campaign activities. For example, you may need postage for vote cards, as well as thank you notes to those who made contributions to your campaign.

There are limits for donations. For more information on individual limits for donations, refer to the state’s [Campaign Finance Guide](#).

CONCLUSION

The League encourages you to consider running for local office. It can be an incredibly rewarding experience. Westford is very fortunate to have many dedicated volunteers, both elected and appointed. Whether you want to run to address a concern you have, or just to become more involved in the town, running for local office is a way to learn more about yourself and your town. The League hopes that this Guide starts you on the path to a successful run for local office.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Town of Westford

westfordma.gov

Town Clerk’s page has election information.

The Office of Campaign and Political Finance

One Ashburton Place, Room 411

Boston, MA 02108

(617) 979-8300 or 1-800-462-OCPF

ocpf.us

Massachusetts General Laws, Chapters 50–56 are available in local libraries and online

malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws

Massachusetts Secretary of State Elections Division

sec.state.ma.us/divisions/elections/elections-and-voting.htm



Join the League of Women Voters to Make a Difference!

There's never been a better time to join the League of Women Voters! Become a member today to make a difference in our community.

Your membership in the League will:

- Provide you information about government, voting events, and issues that matter
- Add your voice to advocacy for positive change
- Support the work of the League on the local, state, and national levels
- Give you experience in leadership, organizing, lobbying, researching, presenting, and facilitating

To join, go to [our website](#) or call 978-347-5989

The League's Mission Statement

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

For more information about the League

Westford: lwv.westford.org; facebook.com/LWVWestford

Massachusetts: lwvma.org

United States: lwv.org

About the League in Westford

For more than 50 years members of the League of Women Voters of Westford have shared a common interest in empowering voters and “making democracy work.” Our involvement in the community has been far-reaching.

Your membership or donation helps the League fund these programs, among many others:

Candidate Events

We have organized annual local Candidates’ Nights since 1970 and we publish the annual Voters’ Guide. We also organize forums for candidates running for the state Legislature.

Educational Programs

We set up mock elections in the Westford schools. We created a book and DVD – *Westford: A Sense of Community* – that illustrates Westford’s rich and diverse history. In addition to this *Guide to Town Meeting*, we wrote the *Guide to Running for Local Office* and *How Westford Works*.

Advocacy for Quality of Life Issues

We have studied a wide range of educational issues so that we can advocate for and spark improvements in our schools. We have advocated for affordable housing in Westford since our founding. Through active research and citizen education the League was instrumental in stopping the potential placement of a hazardous waste facility in Westford.

Voter and Public Service

We plan and host forums on important issues that are also often broadcast on WestfordCAT. We post vote signs for all elections, bought the large banners over Main Street alerting residents of upcoming elections and Town Meetings, and hold Warrant Reviews before all Town Meetings

LWW[®]



THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS[®] OF WESTFORD

P.O. Box 59

Westford, MA 01886

info@lww.westford.org

lww.westford.org

facebook.com/lwwwestford