Questions and Answers

Q: What does it cost to add a referendum on a ballot?

A: This is not clear. However we do have one point of reference. For one town in Green County the County thought the language on the referendum was too long and said that if we wanted to use our standard language, we would have to pay eight-cents per ballot. In this town we estimated that this would be about $16.00. Our champion worked with the town and county to shorten the ballot language so they would not charge extra for the ballot. Originally a member of the Green County Board told a member of the Town Board that April ballots tend to have so many differences among communities that they're all different anyway. But their view changed once they receive the actual ballot language we proposed.

If a town asks about the cost tell them that we have not had to pay in other towns. If you town is resistant, suggest that if they will get the cost you will try to find a way to work with them or reimburse them. One town that originally had a problem with the cost saw our determination and just picked up the cost. None so far have ultimately refused based on cost.

We have pared the language on the ballot to its shortest possible while still being clear to give the voters the context for what they are voting on. Try to get the board or clerk to not truncate it.

Q: Why does United to Amend prefer that the town or county put a referendum on a ballot rather than just pass the resolution directly?

A: While state statutes do not require towns and counties to pass our resolution, nor put a referendum on a ballot, several reasons from this answer for cities and villages apply here as well.

a) More Power: Citizen votes have more power than a council or board voting for a resolution (especially with a high YES vote),

b) More Media: Having multiple communities pass ballot after ballot generates more statewide media than unreported council or board votes. This generates more awareness which builds the movement and results in more champions contacting us. And, obvious reported significant success generates inspiration and more movement. We are building a movement ballot by ballot.

c) Consistent Language: The council/board might be likely to accept our resolution language if that is what the citizens voted for – we are working for a consistent language, which has more credibility. Statewide, and better nationwide, wording consistency shows solid citizen agreement,

d) More Representative Warning: We might get the town clerk to send letters to all their federal and state representatives if this is on the ballot – letting all levels of representation know we want reform,

e) More Citizen Education: We educate citizens when they see the referendum language on a ballot,

f) More Supporters: Increased visibility from education efforts yield new supporters, grow the movement, and increases the YES vote percentage (the record 91% YES vote supports support this idea),

g) More Cover for Scared Politicians: Occasionally, where council/board members are politically oriented, it gives them perceived political cover – because voters wanted the “passage” of the resolution.
Q: What timelines do I need to understand to ensure the referendum gets on the ballot?

A: There are no timelines for the town or county to approve putting a referendum on the ballot. While you want to show interest at board meetings after introducing and asking them to put the referendum on the ballot – and show interest until they do so – you or they are not constrained by any timeline. Remember, they don’t have to do it and can decide at any meeting to do it or not.

If you are targeting a specific election date you, and they, do have one timeline to be aware of. As with cities and villages, a town has to send the language for the referendum on the next ballot by 70 days prior to that election date. For example, if you are targeting an election on April 5th, the town board should have voted to put it on the ballot and instructed the clerk to do so by January 26th.

They might approve it the first night you ask them. Or, they might decide to address it at the next meeting and then at that meeting decide they need time to consider it further before voting – which could be two months or more. So don’t start too late for the election you are targeting.

Q: What If I start too late for the board to approve putting it for my target ballot date?

A: This is not a problem if you are flexible – and you should be. Let’s say you target to put it on the ballot for the next election on April 5th. And you do not get started until January 2nd. You are likely hoping they will vote before January 26th to put it on the ballot. (See last question for why I say January 26th.)

What if you find out that their next meeting is on, say, February 2nd. Well two things can happen. First, if you get them to vote to put it on the ballot at that February 2nd meeting they can still ask the county if they are able to “slip it in” and get it on the April ballot. If the board is willing to ask and the county says it can and will, voila! – you are done. So start planning the pre-ballot education campaign.

If the county clerk says this is too late, or if the board does not ask this of the county, then it can be put on the next election ballot – likely in November. Nothing wrong with this – unless it causes you anxiety – which I hope it doesn’t.

The second option is that the board says, we will pass it but it will go on the November ballot. And you say: Great, thank you very much for letting the people speak. Thank you Thank you! … OK, that’s a little overboard. Be gracious and thankful and build relationships for the future – remember we are building a movement and we need local friends in our municipalities to win.