

Portsmouth Local Ballot Questions—November 3, 2026

What is a referendum and why are we having one?

The Rhode Island Constitution requires voters directly make certain decisions instead of the General Assembly. A referendum is the way our legislative body (the General Assembly or town or city council) asks voters to make those decisions on proposals such as constitutional amendments, long-term borrowings like bonds, special laws affecting some cities and towns (like municipal charters) or other matters requiring voter approval.

The referendum is always asked as a question for voters to approve or reject. Local questions appear in **consecutive order** after **State Questions**. They will appear under the heading of **Local Questions** and will be **colored yellow**.

Portsmouth voters will be presented with two **local questions 6 and 7**.

Question 6 is a bond question asking whether the Town should be authorized to issue bonds and/or notes in an aggregate principal amount not to exceed \$41,000,000 for school construction and renovation projects included in the Portsmouth School Department RIDE Stage II program approved in 2026.

Question 7 is a charter question asking voters if the Town Charter should be amended to make the offices of Town Council and School Committee non-partisan.

The following pages provide more information about these questions.

Question 6. What it will look like on the ballot.

6. SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION AND RENOVATION PROJECTS BONDS AND/OR NOTES NOT TO EXCEED \$41,000,000

(Local Act Numbers 017 & 018 – Local Acts 2026)
Shall an Act, passed at the 2026 session of the general assembly, entitled "An act authorizing the Town of Portsmouth to issue not to exceed \$41,000,000 general obligation bonds, notes and other evidences of indebtedness to finance the construction, additions, renovation, improvement, alteration, repair, furnishing and equipping of schools and school facilities throughout the Town," be approved?

If approved, the Town shall borrow an amount not to exceed \$41,000,000 for the above school projects. All school projects included in the Necessity of School Construction Stage II application approved by the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education and funded by the bond will be eligible for a minimum of 35% Housing Aid Reimbursement.

☒

Approve

☐

Reject

Approve
Your vote to "Approve" this question means that you support authorizing the Town of Portsmouth to issue not more than \$41,000,000 in general obligation bonds and/or notes for school construction and renovation projects.

Reject
Your vote to "Reject" this question means that you oppose authorizing the Town of Portsmouth to issue not more than \$41,000,000 in general obligation bonds and/or notes for school construction and renovation projects.

Explanation and Purpose of Bond Question.

Voters are being asked whether to authorize the Town of Portsmouth to issue general obligation bonds and/or notes in an aggregate principal amount not to exceed \$41,000,000 to finance school construction, renovation and improvement projects included in the Portsmouth School Department's RIDE Stage II school construction program. The approved Stage II program totals approximately \$40.407 million.

What is a bond?

A bond is a form of borrowing. The Town receives funds for eligible capital projects and repays the borrowed principal over time with interest.

How much money will be borrowed?

Approval of Question 1 would establish a maximum borrowing authorization of \$41,000,000. It would not require the Town to borrow the full amount or to issue all bonds at one time. The Town Council would determine the amount and timing of each issuance and the projects to be financed, within the voter authorization and applicable law. Bonds may be issued in phases as projects proceed.

Estimated Financing Cost and Tax Impact.

The Town's financial advisor currently modeled the maximum \$41 million authorization using a 25-year financing term and an estimated 4.25% interest rate. Under that preliminary model, principal and interest total approximately \$67.77 million before State Housing Aid; estimated State Aid is approximately \$23.72 million; and estimated net debt service is approximately \$44.05 million. The model estimates average annual net debt service of approximately \$1.76 million and a tax-rate impact of approximately \$0.37 per \$1,000 of assessed value - about \$147 per year on a \$400,000 property, \$203 on a \$550,000 property, and \$258 on a \$700,000 property. Actual costs will depend on the amount and timing of bonds issued, interest rates, State reimbursement, assessed values and other factors.

Project Timetable.

Projects are planned over the approved five-year Stage II program. Current planning identifies the Portsmouth Middle School roof replacement as the first priority, targeted for Summer 2027. Actual sequencing will depend on Town Council authorization, project readiness, procurement and financing decisions.

All projects are planned to be completed over the approved five-year Stage II program with construction estimated to begin in July of 2027 and end no later than June 30, 2031.

Projects.

The approved Stage II program presently includes health and safety improvements and educational learning space enhancements. At Melville and Hathaway Elementary Schools, proposed projects will address building HVAC controls upgrades and site improvements such as vehicular and pedestrian safety and storm water management. At Portsmouth High School, proposed projects include significant renovations and upgrades to the science classrooms/laboratories and Childhood Development Career & Technical Education (CTE) classrooms as well as bathroom renovations, partial roof replacement, select HVAC unit replacement, vehicular and pedestrian safety and improvements to exterior lighting. It is anticipated that the majority of work will occur at Portsmouth Middle School and include a complete roof replacement, paving restoration, new classroom additions and renovations to the 8th Grade wing, and the reorganization of the nurse and social/emotional health spaces.

Why now?

The School Department's facility planning identified capital needs that exceed what can reasonably be addressed through the annual operating budget alone. The Stage II process establishes State reimbursement eligibility for approved projects while allowing the Town to determine which projects to finance, when to undertake them, and how much of the voter-authorized amount to borrow.

The approved Stage II project cost is eligible for a minimum 35% State Housing Aid reimbursement, subject to State requirements.

Useful Life and Bond Term:

The current financial model assumes a 25-year bond term. **The individual school projects will have useful lives ranging between 25 and 40 years.**

Question 7. What it will look like on the ballot.

7. AMENDMENTS TO THE PORTSMOUTH HOME RULE CHARTER—NON-PARTISAN TOWN COUNCIL AND SCHOOL COMMITTEE ELECTIONS
(Resolution of the Town Council adopted April 14, 2025)

Shall the offices of Town Council and School Committee be non-partisan? (Amends Art. II, Sec. 201 and Art. VII, Sec. 701)

If approved, Article II, Section 201, and Article VII, Section 701, of the Portsmouth Town Charter will be amended to identify the offices of Town Council and School Committee as “non-partisan,” to remove party designations from the ballot, and to add text for a candidate placement lottery for School Committee candidates.

 **Approve**

 **Reject**

Approve

Your vote to “Approve” this question means that you support changes to the Town Charter that identify the offices of Town Council and School Committee as “non-partisan,” remove party designations from the ballot, and add text for a candidate placement lottery for School Committee candidates.

Reject

Your vote to “Reject” this question means that you oppose changes to the Town Charter that identify the offices of Town Council and School Committee as “non-partisan,” remove party designations from the ballot, and add text for a candidate placement lottery for School Committee candidates.

Explanation and Purpose of Charter Question.

Voters are being asked to authorize changes to the Portsmouth Town Charter, Articles II and VI, that identify the offices of Town Council and School Committee as “non-partisan,” remove party designations from the ballot, and add text for a candidate placement lottery for School Committee candidates.

What is a non-partisan office?

Non-partisan offices require elections in which all of the candidates for that office are listed on the ballot **without** party labels identifying any political parties with which the candidates are affiliated or by which the candidates are nominated and/or endorsed.

Proposed Charter changes to **Article II, Town Council**, and **Article VII, School Committee**, are shown on the next page.

Proposed Changes to Town of Portsmouth Home Rule Charter.

Article II, Town Council

Current Charter	Proposed Change
§201. Number, Term, Selection. The Town Council shall consist of seven (7) members elected from the Town at large, each to serve for a term of two (2) years, or until a new Council has been elected and a majority of its members qualified. Elections for Town Council and for all other Town offices filled by the voters shall be held at the biennial state general election on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November of each even numbered year. The name of all candidates for Town Council who shall have qualified to appear on the ballot shall be listed along with their respective party designations in an order determined by the Board of Canvassers by the drawing of lots. Each elector shall cast their vote for no more than seven (7) candidates for Town Council, and the seven (7) receiving the greatest number of votes shall be declared elected. (Adopted November 7, 1972; eff. date July 1, 1973; amended November 2, 2004; eff. date July 19, 2005 by General Assembly approval; amended November 3, 2020; eff. date same.)	§201. Number, Term, Selection. The non-partisan Town Council shall consist of seven (7) members elected from the Town at large, each to serve for a term of two (2) years, or until a new Council has been elected and a majority of its members qualified. Elections for Town Council and for all other Town offices filled by the voters shall be held at the biennial state general election on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November of each even numbered year. The name of all candidates for Town Council who shall have qualified to appear on the ballot shall be listed along with their respective party designations in an order determined by the Board of Canvassers by the drawing of lots. Each elector shall cast their vote for no more than seven (7) candidates for Town Council, and the seven (7) receiving the greatest number of votes shall be declared elected. (Adopted November 7, 1972; eff. date July 1, 1973; amended November 2, 2004; eff. date July 19, 2005 by General Assembly approval; amended November 3, 2020; eff. date same.)

Article VII, School Committee

Current Charter	Proposed Change
§70I. School Committee. There shall be a School Committee consisting of seven (7) members, each of whom shall be elected from the Town at large by the electors of the Town of Portsmouth, to serve for a term of four (4) years and until a successor is elected and qualified. Four (4) members of the Committee shall be elected at the first election after the adoption of this Charter and at said elections every fourth year thereafter and three (3) members shall be elected at the subsequent biennial election and at said elections every fourth year thereafter. All members of the School Committee in office when this Charter goes into effect shall continue in said positions as members of the School Committee until the expiration of the terms for which respectively they were chosen. (Adopted November 7, 1972; eff. date July 1, 1973.)	§70I. School Committee. There shall be a non-partisan School Committee consisting of seven (7) members, each of whom shall be elected from the Town at large by the electors of the Town of Portsmouth, to serve for a term of four (4) years and until a successor is elected and qualified. The name of all candidates for School Committee who have qualified to appear on the ballot shall be listed in an order determined by the Board of Canvassers by the drawing of lots. Four (4) members of the Committee shall be elected at the first election after the adoption of this Charter and at said elections every fourth year thereafter and three (3) members shall be elected at the subsequent biennial election and at said elections every fourth year thereafter. All members of the School Committee in office when this Charter goes into effect shall continue in said positions as members of the School Committee until the expiration of the terms for which respectively they were chosen. (Adopted November 7, 1972; eff. date July 1, 1973.)