



RUNNING for

ELECTIVE OFFICE

in AMHERST

The League of Women Voters (LWV), 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 is open to both women and men.

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Why This Guide Was Written

The LWV of Amherst believes that all residents are well served when elections for local office are contested, leading to a choice for voters. The League supports diverse perspectives as fundamental to a responsible and representative government.

This Candidates' Guide is a supplement to the information found on the [Amherst Town](#) website and the Massachusetts State Office of Campaign and Political Finance ([OCPF](#)) website. It is intended to help anyone interested in serving the town in an elective position.

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DECIDING TO RUN FOR AN ELECTIVE OFFICE IN AMHERST

Your first consideration is to think through your reasons. Do you feel a civic responsibility to make Amherst a better place to live? Do you have perspectives that are not represented and need a voice? Do you have concerns about the direction the town is taking on issues important to you and want to work toward their resolution? Do you feel you have skills and experience that could serve the elected office?

Tip: Talk to elected officials about their experience.

Previous experience is a plus. Attending meetings, reading minutes, and collaborating with other members can foster an increased understanding of town operations. You may want to consider first serving as an appointed member of a committee or board to gain experience. Residents interested in volunteering to serve on a town committee should use the [Community Activity Form](#) on the town website to apply.

The [Town of Amherst](#) website contains resources for understanding the structure of town government (Amherst Home Rule Charter), the town budget, and the Master Plan.

Boards typically meet at a regularly scheduled time. Check the meeting schedule of the board you are considering to be sure you will be able to attend.

Be clear on your goals for running. You will be asked about them. If elected, you will need to exhibit a level of understanding on many town issues. If you are more focused on one hot-button issue, think about whether you would derive more satisfaction working on a committee dedicated to that goal.

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 to run. A contested Town Council race, for example, will require more effort than an uncontested race. An At-Large seat on the Town Council will require more effort than a District Council seat. Candidates are expected to speak at coffee hours, panels, and candidate forums.

Once elected, serving requires time to prepare for meetings, work on standing committees, and serve as liaisons to other groups. It will also require time to respond to phone calls and emails.

HOW TO GET STARTED

Once you decide to run, share your intentions. Talk to as many residents as possible to understand the issues that are important to them. Keep informed on town-wide issues by attending meetings and reading the minutes, all of which are posted on the town's website. Many meetings are recorded and are available for viewing on the [Amherst Media](#) website. However, attending sessions in person is another opportunity to gain campaign visibility.

ELECTIVE OFFICES IN AMHERST*

OFFICE	<u>Positions</u>	<u>Required Signatures</u>
Town Council – District Councilor**	2 per district	25
Town Council – Councilor-at-Large	3	50
School Committee	5	50
Jones Library Trustee	6	50
Housing Authority	3	50
Elector, Oliver Smith Will	1	50

*You must be a **registered voter** in Amherst to run for an elective Town Office.

**You may only run for District Councilor of the district in which you are registered to vote.

NOMINATION PAPERS

1. Obtain nomination papers from the Town Clerk's office in Town Hall. Your name will appear at the top of each nomination paper exactly as it appears in the Town Clerk's voter registration record.

2. Obtain signatures. Collect the required number of signatures of registered voters for the position. Volunteers can circulate papers for you. Never leave nomination papers unattended in public places. Signers must use the street address at which they are registered to vote. P.O. addresses are not allowed.

Ask signers to print their name after or above their signature.

If you are running for a district seat, all signatures must come from your district.

Tip: Get extra signatures (20-30% more) in case the Town Clerk cannot certify a name.

Collecting signatures is an opportunity to meet voters and introduce yourself. The Amherst Farmers' Market, the Amherst Survival Center, school events, and the Transfer Station are good places to meet residents.

Tip: It helps to have handouts with you, particularly if you are not well known.

3. Nomination signature deadline: Returning your papers well before the deadline allows the Town Clerk time to notify you about names that cannot be certified, giving you time to collect more if necessary. (Be aware of duplicate names on all your sheets, including from helpers.)

Tip: Filing nomination papers makes your candidacy public. Be prepared to be contacted by news outlets and to see your name in the media.

How your name will appear on the ballot:

Your name will appear on the election ballot as it appears in the Town Clerk's voter registration records. If you are registered as Bonita Lopez but everybody knows you as Bonnie, you can ensure the voter recognizes your name on the ballot by referring to yourself in your campaign literature as Bonita "Bonnie" Lopez.

Write-in candidates:

Although preferable, it is not necessary to have your name on the ballot. If you have missed the nomination deadline, you may bypass the nomination process by running a write-in campaign. Your name will not appear on the ballot; your supporters can write your name in when they vote.

ELECTION SCHEDULE

A note regarding the November 2021 town election:

This Guide is intended to be used for many years and thus specific dates are not given. That said, the upcoming election is occurring during a pandemic year when a number of practices mentioned here, such as door-to-door campaigning and home gatherings, may not be feasible.

Amherst election dates are set by the Amherst Town Charter, with elections held on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November of odd-numbered years.

The [Amherst Town Election Calendar](#) can be found on the Town Clerk page on the Town's website. This calendar will also be included in the packet you are given with your nomination papers.

Tip: You may find it helpful to generate a timeline to organize your events: those that you can control, such as Letters to the Editor, and those you cannot, such as Candidates' Nights and campaign finance deadlines.

MANAGING CAMPAIGN ACTIVITIES

Organize Your Committee of Volunteers

Most candidates say they could not have run a competitive race without serious help from others. **Do NOT do this alone.**

A committee helps in sharing the work of a campaign. Having supporters to off-load campaign activities will allow you more time to immerse yourself in the issues and to connect with voters. The campaign committee can also serve as a “kitchen cabinet,” meeting regularly during the campaign to brainstorm strategy and offer support.

Campaign Manager

A campaign manager oversees the overall progress of the campaign, making strategy decisions on how to use media to your advantage and how to make your name and your positions known to voters. This person often maintains and monitors a campaign timeline, keeping track of filing deadlines and scheduled events.

Treasurer

The **treasurer** is the only committee member required by law.

The candidate cannot be his/her own treasurer.

A state or local public employee cannot serve as a treasurer for a campaign.

The treasurer controls and records the flow of campaign contributions and expenses, maintains financial records, and takes responsibility for filing the required campaign finance reports.

Before you can receive or spend any funds, you will need a treasurer and a campaign bank account.

1. Once you have designated a treasurer, register your campaign with the Town Clerk by filing the Statement of Organization form. The chairperson named on the form can be yourself if you don't have a campaign manager. Banks often require this filing before a campaign account is opened.

2. You will need an employer identification number (EIN) from the IRS in order to open a campaign bank account. The OCPF website can help to guide you through the application process.

Tip: For the purpose of applying for an EIN, the IRS considers you a Non-Profit running for elective office.

3. Open a campaign bank account.

Tip: Most candidates in Amherst use local banks familiar with setting up campaign accounts. Not all banks will do this. Avoid a bank that charges a monthly fee.

Volunteers with Print and Social Media Expertise

- Can help with lawn and campaign signs, prepare campaign literature and mailings and whatever campaign materials you decide to use.
- Can take advantage of electronic and social media, such as Instagram and Twitter.
- Can create a Facebook page and post regularly. Urge your friends and supporters to “Like” it. Some feel a Facebook presence has more impact than a website these days.
- Can create and maintain a campaign website. Some use packaged political websites.

Tip: Have someone proofread all campaign material and mailings!

Volunteers with Database and Spreadsheet Expertise

Town voter lists are available upon request to candidates for elective office. The Town Clerk’s office maintains both an Active Voter list of registered voters and an Inactive Voter list. An Amherst resident is moved from the Active to Inactive Voter list when neither the Annual Street List form nor the follow-up confirmation postcard are returned to the Town Clerk’s Office. Voters on the Inactive Voter list remain registered but are required to show identification at the polls when they next vote.

The Town voters list contains both active and inactive registered voters. Printed lists are in precinct/street/name order.

Electronic lists are in text format (raw data). This data can be sorted by any of the fields (district, precinct, street address, etc.).

The Town Clerk’s Office also maintains voter history files. There is a separate history file for each election, with each file accompanied by a format key identifying all fields in the file.

A candidate wishing to concentrate campaign efforts on those residents who voted in the past three local elections, for example, can request the three files for those specific election dates. It is the candidate’s responsibility to manipulate the data.

Getting the Word Out

Suggested Activities

-Home gatherings. Have friends and supporters organize small house parties for a more personal “meet and greet” and to provide an opportunity for you to hear attendees’ concerns.

-Door-to-door canvassing. Knocking on doors is a time-proven way to meet voters, to listen to their concerns about the town and about their neighborhood. Tell them your positions and ask for their vote. Some candidates find knocking on doors daunting to do alone but enjoyable when accompanied by a friend, who can also take notes while the candidate engages the voters.

Tip: Be mindful of household schedules and mealtimes.

-Town events. Attend as many public events as possible and introduce yourself to other attendees. Consider attending with a supporter, particularly someone connected to the event, who can introduce you to others.

-Neighborhood heartbeats. Seek out the “gathering places” of neighborhoods, such as the laundry room on Saturday mornings or an apartment building outdoor potluck. Have a supporter from that neighborhood accompany and introduce you. A good opportunity to hear resident concerns is in small group settings.

-Sign holders. Supporters holding your campaign signs at selected times and locations show enthusiastic support for you. Popular gathering spots in Amherst are the Amherst Transfer Station and the Saturday Farmers’ Market on the Town Common. Other sites are heavily trafficked intersections on the Friday evening, Saturday morning, and Monday evening before Election Day.

On Election Day, enlist sign holders throughout the day to greet voters near the polling locations. By state law these signs cannot be held closer than 150 feet from the entrance to any polling place and they cannot be left unattended.

Visibility

Buttons, T-shirts, bumper stickers, palm cards and other handouts

Tip: Design signs and buttons to be reused at your next election. For example, do not include dates or “It’s time for a change!”

Lawn signs.-A volunteer can help coordinate the supporters who agree to display your sign on their property. The volunteers can distribute the signs to homes and remove them after the election. Signs may not be placed on public property, including along roads.

Tip: Lawn signs keep your name in view. They are allowed no earlier than 60 days prior to an election and must be removed within 3 days after.

Publicity

Take every opportunity to make yourself visible and your positions known. The type of position and campaign you are running will determine how much publicity you want, but when in doubt, more publicity is better than less.

Press releases. Send a press release to local media announcing your candidacy. Keep press releases short and simple. Include a photo.

Newspaper ads. Place an ad in the local papers or online. Learn the news media deadlines and charges, and plan accordingly.

Letters to the Editor. Supporters who can speak to your positions can send letters to local papers.

Tip: Candidates often find it difficult to brag about themselves; it is very effective when others do it for them.

Mailings. Include handwritten notes, if possible, when mailing campaign flyers or cards.

Tip: The Post Office in Amherst can help you with cost options for mailings and whether it is worth investing in a bulk mail permit. Some candidates have found that online mailing services can be used to target an area.

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Supporter contact list. Compile a contact list for communicating via electronic media to get your message out. On Election Day, email, text, or tweet your supporters to remind them to vote!

Endorsements. Consider endorsements carefully. Sometimes it is better to do without endorsements rather than being aligned with someone whose ideas run counter to yours.

Candidates with similar views sometimes run as a group. Consider how you wish to engage with large active political committees and other organizations in town regarding their endorsements and coverage.

Four free opportunities to get your positions before the voters:

-Candidate statements. Candidates whose names will be on the ballot can submit a statement to the town for publication on the Town of Amherst Bulletin Board. For details see [Candidate Statement](#).

-Candidate video spots on Amherst Media. Amherst Media invites candidates to their studio (or through Zoom in this pandemic year) to film short video statements, which are then viewable at the Amherst Media website as well as frequently broadcast on Public Access TV channel 17 up until the election.

Tip: Contact Amherst Media to set up a recording session if you do not hear directly from them.

-LWV of Amherst Election Guide.

The Amherst League helps inform voters about candidates by publishing an Election Guide in the *Amherst Bulletin* a week or so before the election.

Shortly after nominations have closed, each candidate on the ballot is invited to email a written response to several questions. Election Guides from previous years are available on the LWV of Amherst website.

Tip: While you're not required to submit your responses, think of the impact of "No Response Received."

-LWV of Amherst Candidates' Night. A Candidates' Night is held by the League shortly before the election. Whether or not you are running in a contested race, you will have the opportunity to speak. Voters deserve the opportunity to get to know you and hear what you want to accomplish once you take office. The League will send you an invitation to participate that will include details about the event. This event will be recorded and

will be rebroadcast on Amherst Media, allowing for a wide audience viewing.

Tip: Practice speaking your statements aloud to keep within the allotted time.

CAMPAIGN FINANCE

Campaign finance regulations specify how to handle and report any finances raised as part of your campaign. Even if you do not plan to raise or spend any money on your campaign, there are campaign finance reports that must be filed with the Town Clerk's office to be posted on the Town website. There are two reports: one due eight days preceding the election, and the second due at the end of the year. These forms are emailed to candidates by the Town Clerk.

If you do decide to raise and spend money as part of your campaign, there are procedures you need to follow for managing, spending, and reporting money. Note that there are limits on individual donations.

Become familiar with the state law governing this area. Both the Amherst Town Clerk's office and the Massachusetts State Office of Campaign and Political Finance ([OCPF](#)) have guides that can help you through this process. Both offices are very willing to help.

FUNDRAISING

Talk to former candidates to get estimates for the cost of campaigning for the office you are considering. Estimates for recent races varied widely from small amounts for less contested races to more significant amounts (\$1,000 - \$6000) for contested town-wide races. [Candidate financial reports](#) from recent elections can be viewed on the Town of Amherst website.

Fundraising can be one of the most awkward activities for many candidates. You will most likely need some seed money to get started (perhaps for a flyer) and for day-to-day campaign activities, such as postage for vote cards and thank-you notes to those who made contributions.

Other campaign expenses may include lawn signs, position mailings, handouts, social media accounts, website fees, bulk mail permits, and, in this pandemic year when house parties may not be feasible, a video conferencing account (such as Zoom).

AFTER THE ELECTION

Remember to thank the voters and people who helped you!

A year-end campaign finance report is due in January of the following year.

Elected officials will receive the Summary of the Conflict of Interest Law for Municipal Employees and are required to complete the Online Training Program within 30 days of becoming an employee. (All elected officials are considered employees of the Town.)

Elected Officials need to be sworn into office before their first meeting.

Study the Open Meeting Law. You will need to be versed in it on day one!

CONCLUSION

The League encourages you to consider running for local office. Amherst is fortunate to have many dedicated residents participating in local government. Whether you want to address concerns you have about the directions of the town or you wish to contribute to the work of town government, the League hopes this Guide helps with those efforts and is a start on the path to a successful run for elective office.

Tip: Have fun! Running for office can sometimes feel thankless. Remind yourself of your reasons for wanting to contribute to our community.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many League members, elected officials, town staff, and residents have generously shared their time and expertise to describe what needs to be done to run for local office.

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Guidebooks from other Massachusetts Leagues that have similar efforts were reviewed. The Amherst League is greatly appreciative of the LWV of Westford, MA, for graciously sharing their publication: [Running for Local Office in Westford, 2014.](#)