

These guidelines are currently being reviewed to ensure information is clear and concise. Please contact the City Clerk for additional procedural assistance at (206) 684-8361 or Monica.Simmons@seattle.gov

**CITY OF SEATTLE
OFFICE OF THE CITY CLERK**

GUIDE FOR REFERENDUM PROCESS
An Information Resource

January, 2014

This document is provided to the members of the public for **informational and guidance purposes only**. Those desiring to become involved in the referendum process should refer to the City Charter, the Seattle Municipal Code (SMC), and/or the Revised Code of Washington (RCW) for specific requirements.

There is case law that exempts some subjects from the referendum process. See the [Initiative and Referendum Guide for Washington City and Charter Counties](#) published by Municipal Research and Services Center of Washington. Petition coordinators may also want to consult with a private attorney to seek legal advice.

Questions or requests for additional information should be directed to the City Clerk:

clerk@seattle.gov;
(206) 684-8344 or;

Physical address:

**Office of the City Clerk
600 4th Avenue, Floor 3
Seattle, WA**

Mailing address:

**Office of the City Clerk
PO Box 94728
Seattle, WA 98124-4728**

A referendum relating to an ordinance passed by the Mayor and City Council may be exercised by petition signed by at least 8% of the total number of votes cast for the office of Mayor at the last preceding municipal election (except those ordinances necessary for the immediate preservation of the public peace, health or safety, or providing for the approval of local improvement assessment rolls, or for the issuance of local improvement bonds). This guide summarizes some of the requirements for filing a referendum petition.

Step 1 **RESOURCES:**

The following documents contain specific information for an initiated referendum by the public. Copies of these documents are available from the Office of the City Clerk:

- [Seattle City Charter, Article IV, Section 1](#)
- Seattle Municipal Code, SMC Chapter [2.12](#) and [2.16](#)
- City Clerk Rule 00-01
- [Revised Code of Washington](#), RCW 29A.36.090 and 29A.36.071
- Guide for Referendum Process: An Information Resource for the Public (this document)

Step 2 REQUIREMENTS:

The referendum process is different from the initiative process in several ways. One difference is that for referenda there is no legal requirement that the petition be filed with the City Clerk prior to signature gathering.

Another difference is that the amount of time allowed to gather signatures is typically only 29 days.

Since the signatures have to be filed with the City Clerk prior to the ordinance in question taking effect, it is important to check the language in the ordinance regarding its effective date.

And, since there are specific requirements regarding the form of the petition, it is important to ensure that the petitions comply with the SMC requirements prior to collecting signatures. (see Step 5)

Step 3 REQUIRED SIGNATURES:

The number of registered voter signatures needed to qualify a referendum for a ballot is that number representing eight percent (8%) of the total number of votes cast for Mayor at the last Mayoral election.

Example: 2013 Mayoral race – 206,377 votes cast, so until the next Mayoral election, 16,510 valid signatures of registered Seattle voters will be required to qualify a referendum.

Step 4 FILING OF PETITION:

Once a sufficient number of valid signatures on the petition pages to qualify the referendum for the ballot have been collected, the petition pages may be submitted to the City Clerk. A letter of transmittal containing the name, address, and phone number of the contact person must accompany the petition pages. Also required is a Word electronic copy of the petition. Contact with the City Clerk is recommended as the deadline approaches to schedule an appointment for the submission of the petitions.

At the time the petitions are filed, an estimate of the number of signatures and number of petition pages will be requested. The pages should be numbered in sequence, beginning with 1 or 001, etc., in the upper right corner of each sheet. The City Clerk will then verify the estimated number of pages and signatures submitted.

Step 5 REVIEW OF PROPOSED REFERENDUM:

The City Clerk will review the proposed referendum and petition for approval or rejection as to form (SMC 2.12.020).

The City Clerk will review for the following:

- Is the petition printed on single sheets of paper of good writing quality?
- Are the petition pages at least 8 ½” wide and 11” long, and not larger than 11” wide and 17” long?
- Is there a top margin of at least 1”?
- Are the signature lines numbered, and are there not more than 20 signatures per page?
- Are the printed words legible?
- Do the petition pages contain the warning as required by SMC 2.12.020.A, and the form as required by SMC 2.12.020.B?
- Is the complete text of the whole ordinance, or the section or part in question, included on the petition form?

Step 6 **VERIFICATION PROCESS:**

If the petition and submitted pages are accepted, the City Clerk will send the signed petition pages to King County Records and Elections Division for verification of the validity of the signatures and to determine sufficiency or insufficiency. (Refer to Step 3 regarding the percentage formula used to determine the number of valid signatures required.) The King County Records and Elections Division is required to make such a determination with “reasonable promptness.” RCW 35.21.005(4).

Step 7 **INSUFFICIENT SIGNATURES:**

If the verification process determines that the petitions bear insufficient valid signatures, the City Clerk will notify the petition coordinator by phone and by certified mail, attaching a copy of the King County Records and Elections Division notification.

Step 8 **SUFFICIENT SIGNATURES AND REFERRAL TO COUNCIL:**

If a Certificate of Sufficiency is issued by King County Records and Elections, the proposed Referendum will be submitted to the City Clerk for introduction and referral to City Council at a regular Full Council at a regular meeting not less than twenty (20) days after the filing of the petition.

Step 9 **COUNCIL ACTION – PLACING MEASURE ON THE BALLOT:**

The Council will either pass a bill or adopt a resolution authorizing King County Records and Election to place the qualifying referendum measure on the Ballot. The Council can, at their discretion, put a referendum on a special election before the next regularly scheduled election.

ELECTION RESULTS:

The voters will be asked to approve or reject the ordinance (or part thereof). If a majority approves the ordinance, it goes into effect. If a majority rejects the ordinance, it becomes of no force or effect.

Following the election, written notification will be sent to the City Clerk from King County Records and Election certifying the results of the vote count. If the measure was approved, it becomes law upon Proclamation of the Mayor (generally within five days after certification of election, with budget-related exceptions). Notice will be published in the City's official newspaper, the Daily Journal of Commerce.