

Voter's Guide

Local
Elections
in British
Columbia



BRITISH
COLUMBIA

Ministry of
Community Aboriginal
and Women's Services

This guide is designed to answer a few of the basic questions BC residents might have about local government and local elections in this province.

Local government is government at the community level—government that affects all of us, every day.

Local governments include:

- ◆ municipalities
- ◆ regional districts
- ◆ school districts
- ◆ Islands Trust

Do I qualify to vote?

You may vote in a BC local election as a **resident elector** if you:

- ◆ are a Canadian citizen;
- ◆ are 18 years of age or more on general voting day;
- ◆ have lived in BC for at least six months before you register to vote; and
- ◆ have lived in the municipality, regional district or school district where you wish to vote for 30 days or more before you register to vote.

I own property somewhere else in BC—can I vote there also?

As a non-resident property owner—you own property in one place but live in another—you have the right to vote both where you live and where you own property.

You may vote in a BC local election as a **non-resident property elector** if you:

- ◆ are not a resident elector in that community;
- ◆ are a Canadian citizen;
- ◆ are 18 years of age or more on general voting day;
- ◆ have lived in BC for at least six months before you register to vote; and
- ◆ have owned the property for at least 30 days before you register to vote.

What if I own property with someone else?

Only one non-resident property owner may vote for each property.

In other words, if two or more non-resident property owners own a single piece of property, the majority of owners must designate—in writing—one owner as the non-resident property elector for that property.

What if I own property with someone else, and that person is living in the house?

The person living in the house may vote as a resident elector because he or she lives there. As a non-resident property owner, you are also eligible to vote for that property, but you will still need the written consent of the other owner.

What if I own more than one piece of property?

You may only vote as a non-resident property elector for one piece of property in any municipality, regional district or school district.

In other words, if you own two pieces of property in one municipality, you may vote only once. If, however, you own one piece of property in one municipality and a second piece of property in another, you may vote in both jurisdictions.

Is there anyone who cannot vote in a local election?

You may not vote in a BC local government election (as either a resident elector or a non-resident property elector) if you:

- ◆ have been convicted of an indictable offence and are in custody; or
- ◆ have been found guilty of an election offence.

How do I register to vote?

You may register before the local election at your municipal or regional district office, or you may register at the voting place.

Some communities may choose to register all voters on the day they vote. Please check with your municipality or regional district for registration procedures in your area.

Do non-resident property owners register the same way?

Non-resident property owners may also register in advance or at the voting place. However, if you choose to register at the time you vote, you must be sure to obtain a Non-Resident Property Elector Certificate.

To obtain this certificate, you must produce proof that you are the registered owner of the property. If you are one of two or more owners, you must also demonstrate—in writing—that you have the consent of the majority of all owners to vote as the non-resident property elector

Check with the municipality or regional district in the area where you own the property for a more detailed explanation of registration procedures.

When are local elections held?

Local elections are held every three years. General voting day is always the third Saturday in November.

Additional elections—known as by-elections—may be called at other times to fill vacancies.

How can I get more information about voting in local elections in BC?

For specific questions on voting where you live or own property, please call or write your municipality or regional district. Addresses and phone numbers are listed in the blue pages of your local phone book.

For questions on voting for school board trustees, please call or write your school district or:

**Ministry of Education
Governance and Legislation
PO Box 9146 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria, BC V8W 9H1
Phone (250) 356-1404**

For questions on municipal, regional district or Islands Trust elections please call or write:

The Ministry of Community,
Aboriginal and Women's Services
**PO Box 9490 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria, BC V8W 9N7
Phone (250) 387-4020**

Can I vote before general voting day?

In every community, one advance voting day will be held on the Wednesday 10 days before general voting day, from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Many communities will also offer a second advance voting day on a date determined by the individual municipality, regional district or school district. Check with your local government to find out if and when a second advance voting day will be held in your area.

What if I need assistance to vote?

All local governments are required to make voting places as accessible as possible to people with disabilities or impaired mobility.

- ◆ If you find it difficult to get into a voting place, but can make it to the parking lot or the curb outside, you may request an election official to bring you a ballot. This is called curbside voting.
- ◆ If you are unable to mark your own ballot, you may ask an election official, friend or relative to help you.
- ◆ If you need a translator, you may bring someone to assist you.
- ◆ Local governments may also choose to use mail ballots for people who are unable to reach the voting place due to illness, injury or physical disability.

Check with your local government to find out if mail ballots are offered in your area.

What are the penalties for not following elections laws?

Anyone who commits an election offence, such as double voting or signing a false statement, is liable to a fine of up to \$5,000 and/or up to one year in prison. He or she may also be prohibited from holding office and/or voting in local government elections for up to six years.

Anyone convicted of a more serious election offence, such as vote buying or intimidation, could be subject to a fine of up to \$10,000 and up to two years in prison.



Do I need identification?

Yes. You will need two pieces that prove who you are and where you live. One of them must have your signature on it.

Check with your local government office to see what they require.

