

# Guide to Political Party Organization in Vermont

## Title 17, Chapter 45 (17 V.S.A. §§2301-2320)

Updated June 2015

**Major parties:** Must organize in at least 30 towns and 7 counties. 17 V.S.A. §2313(a)(2)

**Minor parties:** Must organize in at least 10 towns. 17 V.S.A. §2381(b)

**Voters cannot participate in more than one party organization.** (“No voter shall vote in the biennial town, county, or State caucus of more than one party in the same year, nor shall any voter simultaneously hold membership on the committees of more than one political party.” 17 V.S.A. §2317)

### **Town Caucus:**

1. The state chair of each major and minor party must set the date for town caucus. The date must be between September 10 and September 30.
2. At least 14 days prior to the date of the caucus, the state chair must notify (e-mail or mail) town clerks and town and county party chairs of the date and purpose for the caucus.
3. The town chair must post notice at least 5 days prior to the caucus in the town clerk’s office and at least one other place in town. In towns with more than 3,000 people, the town chair shall also publish notice in a newspaper or in a “nonpartisan electronic news media website that specializes in news of the state or community”. The caucus must take place in a “public place”. Although “public place” is not defined in the law, a reasonable reading would permit the caucus to be held at any stated location where the general public is welcome. It should be a place that is both familiar to voters in town and accessible to them. However, in very small towns, a house could be used, if it meets these criteria and if no other public space is available.
4. If there is no town chair, any 3 voters in town can arrange to have a town caucus by following the above procedure for notice and comply with all other procedural requirements.
5. On the day of the meeting, voters at the caucus must elect a chair, vice-chair, secretary and treasurer. The committee may elect other officers as it sees fit. The committee must also elect delegates to the county committee (the number is established by party bylaws).
6. Within 72 hours after the caucus, the chair and secretary of the committee must mail a copy of the notice for the caucus, the list of names and mailing addresses of officers and members to the Secretary of State and chairs of the county and state committees. Forms are available on the Secretary of State’s website (<https://www.sec.state.vt.us/elections/parties/party-organization.aspx>)

7. If a town fails to hold a caucus, any three or more voters of the party residing in the town may call and hold a caucus by following the procedures above.

### **County Caucus**

1. The state chair of each major and minor party shall set a date not more than 45 days after the date of the caucuses for the first meeting of each county committee. The state chair shall notify each county chair of the date of the meeting.
2. The chair of the county committee must notify all of the delegates (e-mail or mail) of the place and time of the meeting at least 10 days prior to the meeting.
3. At the county meeting, the delegates elect county officers (chair, vice-chair, secretary, and treasurer). The chair of each county committee shall be a member of the state committee. Committee members shall also elect at least 2 additional members to the state committee and any other additional members as provided by party bylaws.
4. Within 72 hours of the meeting, the chair and the secretary shall mail a copy of the notice and the names and addresses of committee members to the Secretary of State and to the state party chair. Forms are available on the Secretary of State's website (<https://www.sec.state.vt.us/elections/parties/party-organization.aspx>)

### **State Committee**

1. The chair of the state committee calls for a state committee meeting not less than 15 nor more than 30 days after the date set for the county party meetings. The chair must notify all members-elect in writing at least 7 days before the meeting.
2. Within 10 days of the meeting of the state committee, the chair and secretary shall file the certificate of party organization, the names and mailing addresses of members (including the counties they represent), the name by which the party will be identified on any Australian ballot (not more than 3 words), and a copy of the notice of the meeting with the Secretary of State. Forms are available on the Secretary of State's website (<https://www.sec.state.vt.us/elections/parties/party-organization.aspx>)
3. The Secretary of State must accept or reject the certificate of organization within 10 days.

## **Statutory Duties of Town Chairs**

### **For Party Organization or Party Reorganization (in odd-numbered years):**

1. Calls a caucus for the purpose of organizing a town committee between September 10 and September 30 of every odd-numbered year, on a date specified by the chair of the state committee. Posts a notice containing the date, time, place and purpose of the caucus at least five (5) days before the caucus at the town clerk's office and at least one other public place in town. In towns of 3,000 or more population, the notice must also be published in a newspaper having general circulation in the town or in a "nonpartisan electronic news media website that specializes in news of the state or community". 17 V.S.A. §2303
2. Presides at the caucus to elect the town committee until a new town chair is elected. 17 V.S.A. §2304
3. Convenes first meeting of the town committee immediately following the caucus. 17 V.S.A. §2305
4. With the secretary of the town committee, sends to the Secretary of State, the chair of the county committee, and the state chair a copy of the notice calling the caucus, the certification form listing of town committee members and delegates to the county committee. This form must be signed by the chair and secretary and mailed within 72 hours following the town caucus. 17 V.S.A. §2307

### **For nomination of Justices of the Peace by Political Parties in Election years (even-numbered years):**

1. Calls a caucus to nominate candidates for justice of the peace on or before the primary election in August (August 9, 2016). 17 V.S.A. §2413(a) Posts a notice containing the date, time, place and purpose of the caucus at least 5 days before the caucus at the town clerk's office and two other public places in town. In towns of 3,000 or more population, it must also be published in a newspaper having general circulation in the town or in a "nonpartisan electronic news media website that specializes in news of the state or community and on the municipality's website, if the municipality actively updates its website on a regular basis" not less than one day before the caucus. 17 V.S.A. §2413(d)
2. Before filing the statement of nomination for justices of the peace with the town clerk, checks with each nominee and confirms that each one consents to having his or her name printed on the ballot for that position and to serve if elected. 17 V.S.A. §2385(e)
3. Files with the town clerk not later than 5 p.m. on the third day following the primary election (17 V.S.A. §§2413(c), 2387) a signed statement of nomination of the justices of the peace and a copy of the notice calling the meeting. 17 V.S.A. §2385(a)

4. If a caucus to nominate justices of the peace is not held, the town chair must call a meeting of the town committee to nominate candidates. 17 V.S.A. §2413(b) This meeting must follow the procedures outlined in 17 V.S.A. §2381-2387 The town chair sets the date, time and place of the committee meeting and must give not less 3 days notice in writing (mail or e-mail), specifically stating that justices of the peace are to be nominated, to all committee members. Notice must also be posted at the town clerk's office and two other places in town, no less than 3 days prior to the meeting. 17 V.S.A. §2413(b)

#### **Duties performed as needed:**

1. Calls meetings to nominate candidates to fill a vacancy in the office of justice of the peace (17 V.S.A. §2623) by notifying all committee members in writing not less than five days before the date of the meeting and stating on the notice the specific office for which the nomination is to be made. 17 V.S.A. §2383 Submits the names of candidates to the governor, who makes the appointment. 17 V.S.A. §2623
2. Carries out the duties of a town committee chair as delegated by the state party, by calling town committee meetings throughout the year as necessary to transact the business of the party.

## **Statutory Duties of County Chairs**

#### **For Party Organization or Party Reorganization (in odd-numbered years):**

1. Calls a county committee meeting in September of odd-numbered years for the purpose of organizing a county committee on a date set by the state chair (not more than 45 days after the town caucuses). Sets the hour and place of the meeting and notify all delegates-elect by mail not less than 10 days before the meeting. 17 V.S.A. §2309
2. With the secretary of the county committee, sends to the secretary of state, the county clerk and the state party chair a certified list of names and mailing addresses of county committee officers and delegates to the state committee along with a copy of the notice calling the meeting (within 72 hours of the first meeting of the county committee). 17 V.S.A. §2311

#### **In Election years (even-numbered years):**

1. Serves on the state committee. 17 V.S.A. §2310
2. In election years, with the county clerk, serves on the county canvassing committee and with the senatorial district clerk (usually the county clerk), serves on the senatorial canvassing committee to receive and tally returns and issues certificates for all county and senate offices (except Justices of the Peace) and all county wide questions. 17

V.S.A. §2592 (b), (c). These canvassing committees shall meet at 10:00 a.m. on the third day following the primary election, 17 V.S.A. §2368, and at 10:00 a.m. one week following the general election. 17 V.S.A. §2592 (g)

**Duties performed as needed:**

1. May call the first meeting of a probate district committee when necessary by giving seven days written notice to all other members. 17 V.S.A. §2323
2. Calls county committee meetings to fill a vacancy in any county office on the general election ballot caused by the death, removal or withdrawal of a candidate or the failure of the party to nominate a candidate by primary. 17 V.S.A. §§2381, 2382. Calls county committee meeting to fill any other vacancy in county offices and recommends names of candidates to the governor. (The governor is not bound by the recommendation.) 17 V.S.A. §2623 Notifies all county committee members in writing not less than five days before the date of the meeting, and states on the notice the specific office for which the nomination is to be made. 17 V.S.A. §2383
3. Carries out the duties of a county committee chair as delegated by the state party by calling county committee meetings throughout the year as necessary to transact the business of the party.

**Statutory Duties of State Chairs**

**For Party Organization or Party Reorganization (in odd-numbered years):**

1. Sets a date between September 10 and 30 in odd-numbered years for party members to meet and caucus in their towns to organize town committees. At least 14 days before the date set for the caucuses, mails a notice of the date and purpose of the caucuses to each town clerk and to each incumbent town and county committee chair. 17 V.S.A. §2302
2. Sets a date, not more than 45 days after the date of the party's town caucuses, for the first meeting of the county committees. Mails a notice of the date and purpose of the caucuses to each county committee chair. 17 V.S.A. §2309
3. Sets the hour and place for a meeting of the state committee on a date not less than 15 nor more than 30 days after the day set for the first meeting of the county committee and provides notice of this meeting in writing to each member-elect of the state committee at least seven days before the day for the meeting. 17 V.S.A. §2312
4. Within 10 days after the first state committee meeting, sends to the secretary of state a certificate stating the party has completed its organization for the ensuing two years and has complied with the provisions of 17 V.S.A. §2313 The certificate of organization shall 1) contain a list of the names and mailing addresses of the officers and members of the state committee and the counties they represent, 2) be accompanied by a copy of the notice calling the meeting, and 3) designate, in not more than three words, the name by which the party shall be identified on any Australian ballot.

**In Election years (even-numbered years):**

1. Calls a party platform convention on or before the fourth Tuesday in September in even-numbered years. In presidential election years, this shall be the same convention held to nominate presidential electors. 17 V.S.A. §2319
2. Serves on the canvassing committee for state and national offices and statewide public questions. 17 V.S.A. §2592(a). The state canvassing committee shall meet at 10:00 a.m. one week following both the primary and the general election. 17 V.S.A. §§2368, 2592(g)

**Duties performed as needed:**

1. Calls state committee meetings to fill a vacancy in any statewide office on the general election ballot caused by the death, removal or withdrawal of a candidate or the failure of the party to nominate a candidate by primary. 17 V.S.A. §§2381, 2382 Calls meetings to fill any other vacancy in statewide offices and recommends names of candidates to the governor. (The governor is not bound by the recommendation.) 17 V.S.A. §2623 Notifies all committee members in writing not less than five days before the date of the meeting, and states on the notice the specific office for which the nomination is to be made. 17 V.S.A. §2383.