

LOCAL

Palm Beach backs one-year residency requirement for those seeking elected office

Candidates for Town Council and mayor must be residents of Palm Beach for at least a year prior to becoming eligible to run.



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The Palm Beach Town Council has altered eligibility requirements for candidates seeking elected office.

In a unanimous vote Wednesday, council members adopted on first reading an ordinance imposing a one-year residency requirement for those considering a run for council or mayor.

The ordinance will come back to council for a second reading next month.

Council member Julie Araskog said she voted for the residency requirement because she felt it was important for anyone serving on the council to have a good understanding of the town.

More: Ted Cooney wins Group 1 Town Council seat

"I think when you've been a resident here for a year, that gives you a real feel for the town and also for the issues that are here," she said.

Earlier this year, the council asked Town Attorney John Randolph to research the issue and bring it back for consideration at its June meeting. Currently, all registered town voters are eligible to run for council, but there are no other residency requirements.

Town code permits candidates to qualify by: "Being nominated by an elector of the Town, and seconded by not more than three (3) electors, at the Town Caucus to be held on the second Tuesday of January of each year; and (b) Being endorsed by petition signed by at least

twenty-five (25) electors, filed with the Town Council no later than 5 p.m. on the day following the Town Caucus."

Last month, the Town Council agreed to move the caucus and qualifying dates to the first Tuesday and Wednesday in December for all future elections in response to a request by the Palm Beach County Supervisor of Elections.

At Tuesday's meeting, Randolph presented his research to the council and advocated for a one-year residency requirement if the council chose to impose one. A two-year residency requirement would not withstand judicial scrutiny, Randolph said.

"You would not be able to sustain a two-year residency requirement, but you could sustain a one-year residency requirement," he said.

Council members agreed with the one-year requirement, though there had been earlier discussions with Randolph about making it two, councilwoman Bobbie Lindsay said.

"We thought two years was reasonable, but (John) said one year is defensible," she said. "This is what other cities have been challenged on, and have been upheld. That's why we decided on a year, and a year is a lot. It's enough time where people can understand things."

Palm Beach will join other municipalities throughout the state that have imposed one-year residency requirements for council members, including South Palm Beach, Boca Raton, Longwood and Melbourne.

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