

**Massachusetts House of Representatives
Bill Summary**

Bill #: H.5102

Title: An Act relative to the town of Reading Home Rule Charter

Sponsor: Rep. Bradley Jones

Committee: Joint Committee on Municipalities and Regional Government

Hearing Date: March 3, 2026

Current Law: The current town charter containing major revisions was approved as Chapter 16 of the Acts of 2015.

The town of Reading has a representative town meeting form of government, with 192 members elected from 8 precincts.

Summary: Section 1 of the bill would amend Article 1 of the town charter by replacing section 1.6 with a streamlined definition of "Majority Vote" which shall mean the affirmative vote of a majority of those present and voting, provided that a quorum for doing business is present. Current language makes the number dependent upon how the number of members on a board or committee is defined in the charter.

Section 2 amends Article 2 of the charter by replacing section 2.6 of the charter by making the language gender-neutral and adding a provision allowing a town meeting member, whose seat has been declared vacant due to excessive absences, an opportunity to be heard.

Section 3 amends Article 5 of the charter by replacing section 5.1, which relates to the appointment, qualifications and term of the town manager. In addition to making the language gender-neutral, this provision would reduce from 5 years to 3 years the minimum amount of experience that a candidate for town manager must have as a city or town manager or assistant city or town manager. They would still be able to substitute 5 years of equivalent level public or private sector experience. This section also deletes a provision in the charter which allows a town manager to receive termination pay worth up to 12 months of salary, as well as removing the requirement that the manager provides 60 days' notice before resigning.

Section 4 replaces section 5.4.2 of the charter (long term absences of town manager) with language that authorizes the select board to

appoint without delay a qualified individual to serve as acting town manager in the event the town manager is absent, incapacitated, or sick for more than 30 days. The acting town manager would serve under terms of employment to be determined by the select board.

Section 5 strikes section 8.11.2 (recall elections) and replaces it with language that increases from 250 to 2 percent (approximately 425) the number of voters whose signatures are needed to initiate a recall petition. It requires that an affidavit be filed with the town clerk containing the name of the official being recalled and a detailed statement of the reasons for seeking their removal, in particular showing the alleged breach of the officeholder's sworn responsibilities. The new language adds a requirement that the town clerk deliver a copy of the affidavit by certified mail to the elected official's address within 5 business days of the blank petition forms being delivered.

This section increases from 21 to 30 days the time within which the recall petitions are to be returned to the town clerk, and also increases the number of voter signatures required on the petitions from 10 to 20 percent, or approximately 4,246 signatures. The total number of signatures that may be from voters residing in any one precinct would be reduced from 25 percent to 20 percent.

Section 6 authorizes the Reading town clerk to make non-substantive changes to the numbering of the sections of the charter.

Section 7 provides for this act to take effect upon approval of the voters at a local municipal election the charter changes that were adopted as Article 8 during the November 10, 2025 special town meeting.

Notes: Approved as Article 9 by the November 17, 2025 Special Town Meeting. Declared approved by moderator with 147 voters present.