

# Frequently Asked Questions on Code Home Rule and Charter Government

In the 2024 General Election, residents of Charles County will have the opportunity to decide on the form of the county government. Currently, Charles County is governed under the code home rule system. Voters will choose whether to maintain this system or transition to a charter government.



This document provides details on the two forms of government, helping voters make an informed decision for the election on November 5, 2024.

## Background Information

### 1. Why is Charles County voting on a new form of local government?

During the [March 21, 2023](#), Board of Charles County Commissioners meeting, the Commissioners established a Charter Board to draft a charter. The Commissioners voted to approve the Charter Board. The Charter drafted by the Charter Board is required by law to be submitted to the voters of the county for their approval or opposition.

The primary purpose of the proposed charter form of government is to approve a set of laws known as a Charter that will form the basis of the county system of government. The Charter can only be approved, amended, or repealed by a vote of the people of the county. The proposed Charter provides for an elected executive, which is not an option under any other form of government.

### 2. How was the proposed 2024 Charles County Charter drafted?

In June 2023, the Charles County [Charter Board](#) convened to draft a Charter proposing a new executive and legislative structure for the county government.

Over the past year, the Charter Board has consulted with current and former county executives, legislative directors with the Maryland Association of Counties, fire chiefs, law enforcement officials, and other community members and experts to craft a Charter that defines how the county would function under this proposed government structure.

Pursuant to the presentation of the Charter by the Charter Board to the County Commissioners as of July 23, 2024, the proposed 2024 Charles County Charter has been officially drafted and will not receive any additional revisions before the 2024 General Election.

### 3. Where can I read the proposed 2024 Charles County Charter?

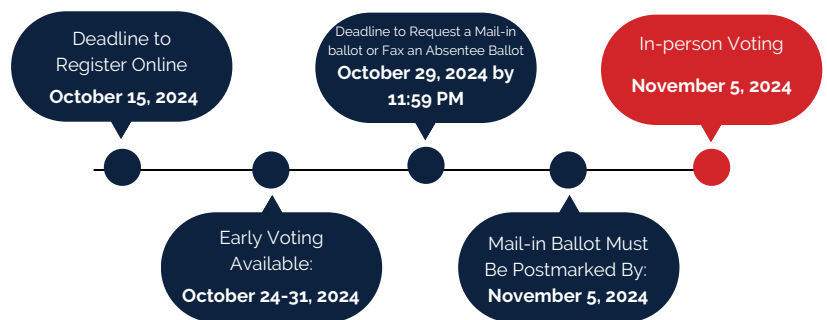
The official draft of the proposed 2024 Charles County Charter is available online, [here](#).

### 4. What is the timeline for the decision?

At this stage, voters are encouraged to review the proposed 2024 Charles County Charter and determine whether to support this new form of government or retain the county's current structure, code home rule.

#### Important dates for the General Election:

- Online voter registration deadline: October 15, 2024
- Early voting: Available Thursday, October 24 through Thursday, October 31, 2024, (including Saturday and Sunday) from 7 AM to 8 PM
- Deadline to request a mail-in ballot or fax an absentee ballot: October 29, 2024, by 11:59 PM
- In-person voting deadline: November 5, 2024, by 8 PM



# Frequently Asked Questions on Code Home Rule and Charter Government

## 5. If the proposed 2024 Charles County Charter is adopted, what is the timeline between the election and implementation of the new form of government?

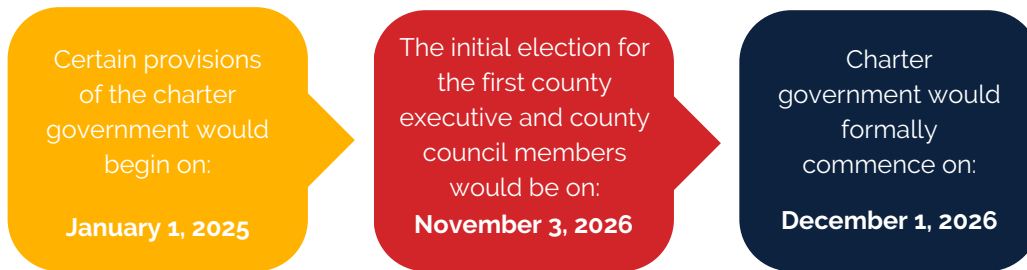
If approved by voters, certain provisions of the charter government would be implemented starting January 1, 2025, to facilitate the initial election of officials on November 3, 2026. These changes would affect election rules, terms of office, and County Council member qualifications. In addition, the Charter requires the appointment of a Transition Commission by July 31, 2025, for the specific purpose of evaluating the structure, performance, and effectiveness of the Department of Planning and Growth Management and preparing recommendations to be considered by the County Executive and County Council once elected.

Until the new positions are elected, the code home rule government would remain operational.

The initial election for the County Executive and County Council members is scheduled for November 3, 2026. The charter government would become fully operative at noon on Tuesday, December 1, 2026, marking the first day in office for the newly elected County Executive and County Council.

All laws enacted by the County Commissioners under code home rule will remain in effect under the charter government unless repealed or amended by the newly elected officials.

For more details on the transition, refer to [Article Eight](#) of the Charter.



## 6. What happens if the proposed 2024 Charles County Charter is not adopted?

If the charter form of government does not pass in the General Election, Charles County's executive and legislative government will continue to operate under the code home rule, and no change will occur.

## About Charter Government

### 7. What is charter government?

A charter form of government establishes a document known as "the Charter," which defines the basic structure and organization of the county government, including the duties, powers, rules, and procedures of its leadership and departments. Using this "rulebook," the county outlines how it would operate and sets laws for specific local issues.

Under the proposed 2024 Charles County Charter, the Charles County Government would operate with a legislative branch (the County Council) and an executive branch (the County Executive).

The County Council would be responsible for making the laws that govern Charles County and representing the interests of its citizens. Each County Council member would be assigned to a district and speak on behalf of its residents within the council, with one Council member being the at-large member who represents the entire county.

Council members would introduce legislation and vote on its approval/denial as a group. This includes introducing legislation on behalf of the County Executive, Charles County citizens, and other county departments.



# Frequently Asked Questions on Code Home Rule and Charter Government

## 8. How do code home rule and charter governments function? What are their differences?

TOPIC	CODE HOME RULE	CHARTER GOVERNMENT
<b>Government Structure</b>	<p>Five commissioners, each elected at-large but representing a specific <u>district</u> within Charles County act as the legislative and executive branches of government. Commissioners are permitted to hold other employment while serving.</p> <p>* effective November 2026, unless charter passes in November 2024, the district commissioners will be voted by a plurality of voters in their district, and no longer at-large.</p>	<p>An elected County Executive is the top authority that oversees and executes county laws. The County Executive is prohibited from having other full-time employment. See <a href="#">Article Five</a> for more information.</p> <p>Four Council members are elected by district, and one County Council member is voted on at-large by the entire county. See <a href="#">Article Two</a>, section 204 (b) and (c).</p> <p>Council members are permitted to hold other full-time employment while serving. See <a href="#">Article Two</a> for more information.</p>
<b>Local Laws</b>	<p>Commissioners can enact, amend, or repeal local laws through an internal voting process.</p>	<p>The County Council can enact, amend, or repeal local laws through an internal voting process. The County Executive and the Council members can propose new laws, which the Council then votes on.</p> <p>The County Executive may veto new laws adopted by the Council, and the Council may override the veto with a supermajority vote.</p>
<b>Term Limits</b>	<p>Commissioners do not have term limits, but may enact them legislatively should a majority of the Commissioners approve.</p>	<p>Council members may serve multiple terms, but cannot serve more than two consecutive four-year terms. The County Executive shall serve no more than two four-year terms, whether served consecutively or apart.</p>
<b>Town Halls and Public Comment</b>	<p>Under code home rule, County Commissioners can hold Town Hall meetings, but they are not a mandatory requirement. Commissioner meetings currently have public comments during the first and last meetings of the month.</p>	<p>Under the proposed 2024 Charles County Charter, public Town Halls are mandatory for County Council members. See <a href="#">Article Four</a>, section 412 for more information.</p> <p>Every County Council meeting permits public comment.</p>

Learn more about the Charter's proposed legislative process in [Article Four](#) of the proposed 2024 Charles County Charter.

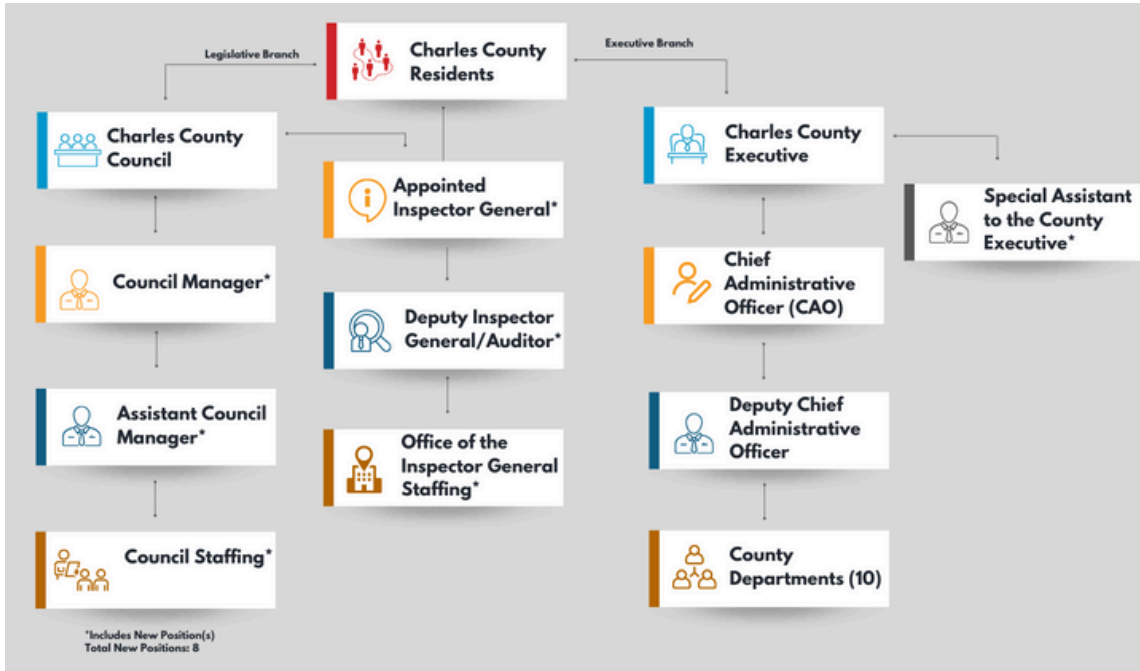


# Frequently Asked Questions on Code Home Rule and Charter Government

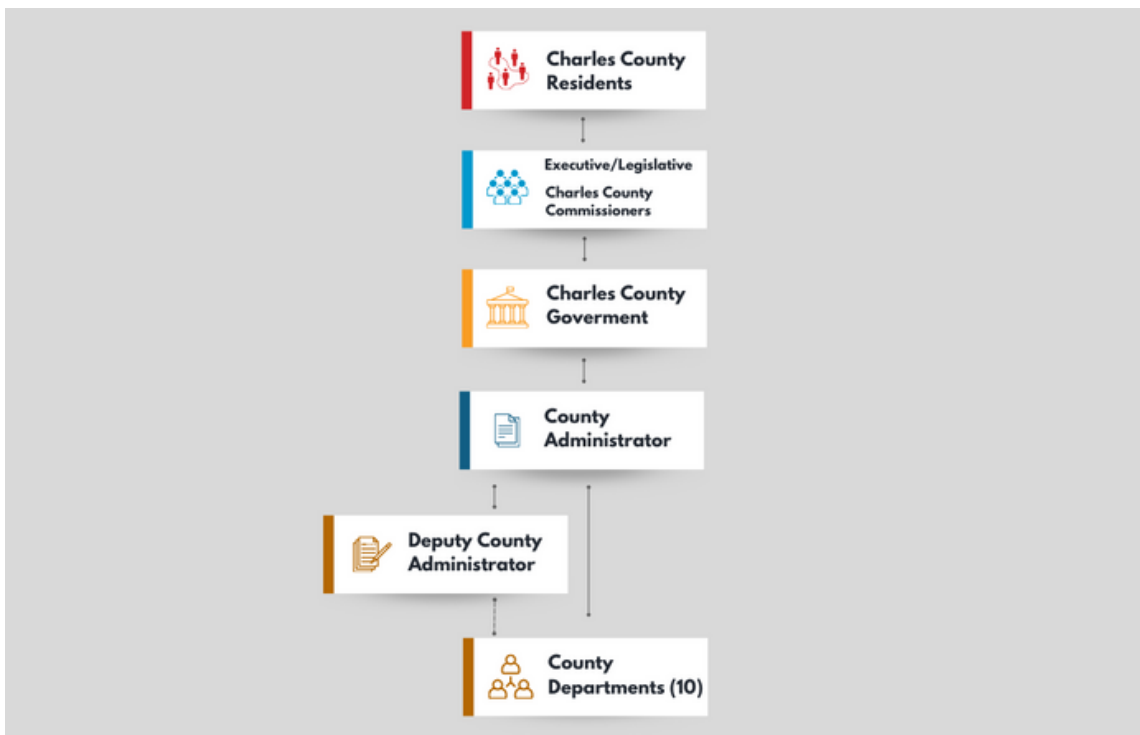
## 8. How do code home rule and charter governments function? What are their differences? (Cont.)

Learn more about the Charter's proposed legislative process in [Article Four](#) of the proposed 2024 Charles County Charter.

### Proposed 2024 Charles County Charter Organizational Chart



### Current Charles County Code Home Rule Organizational Chart



# Frequently Asked Questions on Code Home Rule and Charter Government

## 9. What new positions would the Charter add to the Charles County Government?

The proposed 2024 Charles County Charter includes new positions to establish the executive branch of local government. Click below for information on the different roles, their responsibilities, and more.

**County Executive:** The County Executive is the chief executive officer of Charles County. This role takes on executive, administrative, and representational functions for the government.

See additional FAQs for more details or read [Article Five](#) of the proposed 2024 Charles County Charter. Click [here](#) for fiscal details regarding the County Executive position.

**Executive Support Staff:** Charles County's executive support staff handle a range of responsibilities to assist the County Executive in managing the county government. Positions include Chief Administrative Officer; Deputy Chief Administrative Officer; Public Information Officer, Special Assistant to the County Executive, County Attorneys, and other support staff.

Click [here](#) for financial information regarding the executive support staff.

**Inspector General:** The Inspector General's role is to oversee internal audits and investigations to ensure that Charles County is complying with legal, ethical, and fiscal guidelines. This position also reviews the effectiveness of programs and operations and detects/prevents fraud, waste, and abuse within the Charles County Government.

See [Article Three](#) of the proposed 2024 Charles County Charter for more information and click [here](#) for fiscal details regarding the Inspector General position.

**Deputy Inspector General/Auditor:** This role supports the Inspector General to ensure that the Charles County Government complies with laws, regulations, and policies. This can include reporting, recommending policy improvements, and supporting investigations.

Click [here](#) for fiscal details regarding the Deputy Inspector General position.

**County Attorney:** Under the proposed 2024 Charles County Charter, the County Attorney would support the Inspector General's office and serve as the county's chief legal advisor. This would include representing Charles County in legal matters, assisting in legislation review, reviewing contract agreements, and more.

See [Article Five](#) for more information on this position. Click [here](#) for fiscal details regarding the County Attorney.

**County Council Members:** The County Council positions outlined in the proposed 2024 Charles County Charter are not new roles, but rather a replacement for the Board of County Commissioners that would be enacted if the proposed 2024 Charles County Charter is approved by the residents of Charles County on November 5th.

The Council is comprised of five members who act as a legislative body for Charles County. The members are responsible for making the laws that govern Charles County and representing the interests of its citizens.

See [Article Two](#) for more information on the County Council. Click [here](#) for fiscal details regarding the County Council members.

Additional Support Staff: Support positions would be added under the proposed 2024 Charles County Charter to support county programs and data management for budget analysis.

Click for details on the support staff positions within the [Inspector General's office](#) and in the [County Council](#).

## 10. What is the role of a County Executive in charter government?

The County Executive has three primary roles in a charter government: 1) Serve as the executive branch of the county government; 2) Facilitate and coordinate the day-to-day administrative functions of the county's many departments and budget; 3) Represent the county when working with outside public agencies, other government agencies, and within the business community.



**Executive Office Functions:** County Executives can sign bills passed by the County Council and veto legislation, with some restrictions. See [Article Four](#), Section 406 of the proposed 2024 Charles County Charter for more information.



**Administrative Functions:** This role includes maintaining the county's fiscal health, appointing committees and their members, and ensuring the efficacy of all county departments through policy, goals, and objectives.



**Representing Charles County:** As a goodwill ambassador and government leader for the county, the County Executive would represent Charles County in meetings with other government and public agencies, and within the business community.



# Frequently Asked Questions on Code Home Rule and Charter Government

## 11. Will a change in local government affect how Charles County is represented at the state and federal levels?

Voters will continue to elect the same number of representatives to the Maryland General Assembly and United States Congress, regardless of whether the proposed 2024 Charles County Charter is adopted.

## 12. How does either form of government impact public services?

Regardless of the government structure, essential services such as waste disposal, utility operations, public transportation, and parks will continue without interruption. These important functions will remain operational and effective, even if the county changes its form of government.



## 13. Will the change in government impact Charles County's educational system?

The education system in Charles County is determined by the Board of Education and the State of Maryland. A change in the form of local government will not impact the operation of Charles County Public Schools.

## 14. What are the financial considerations for adopting the proposed 2024 Charles County Charter?

Charles County has created helpful fiscal notes to illustrate the financial considerations of transitioning to a charter government. Click below to review the documents. For additional budget and finance details, including performance-based metrics and budgeting, see [Article Six](#) of the proposed 2024 Charles County Charter.

- [Executive Office Fiscal Note](#)
- [Inspector General Fiscal Note](#)
- [County Council Fiscal Note](#)

## 15. Can individual sections of the proposed 2024 Charles County Charter be modified, or must it be accepted or rejected in its entirety?

The proposed 2024 Charles County Charter must be voted on in November and will either be accepted or rejected in its entirety. There is no provision for adopting only parts of the Charter to integrate into the existing code home rule structure of government.

## 16. What forms of government are other Maryland counties?

As of 2023, Maryland Counties operate under Code Home Rule, Charter Government, or Commissioner forms.

### Code Home Rule

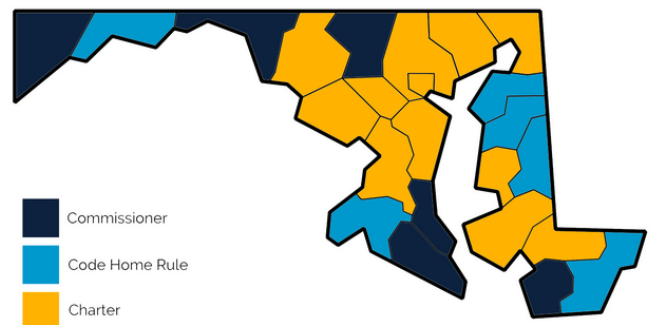
- Allegany County, Caroline County, Charles County, Kent County, Queen Anne's County, and Worcester County.

### Charter:

- Anne Arundel County, Baltimore City, Baltimore County, Cecil County, Dorchester County, Frederick County, Harford County, Howard County, Montgomery County, Prince George's County, Talbot County, and Wicomico County.

### Commissioner:

- Calvert County, Carroll County, Garrett County, St. Mary's County, Somerset County, and Washington County.



# Frequently Asked Questions on Code Home Rule and Charter Government

## Voter Information

### 17. Who is eligible to vote in this election?

Any registered voter living in Charles County can vote on this issue. If you need clarification on your registration status, click [here](#).

If you are not registered to vote, click [here](#) to learn how to register.

### 18. Can I check if I am already registered to vote?

Click [here](#) to review if you are already registered to vote.

### 19. How can I cast my vote?

Voters have several options when casting their ballot for the 2024 General Election:

#### In-person Voting

On Election Day: Polls will be open from **7 AM to 8 PM** on **November 5, 2024**.

Early Voting: Early voting will be available from **Thursday, October 24, 2024**, through **Thursday, October 31, 2024**, (including Saturday and Sunday) from **7 AM to 8 PM**.

Click [here](#) for a list of early voting centers in Charles County.

#### Early Voting

Early voting is available  
**Thursday, October 24, 2024**  
to **Thursday, October 31, 2024**  
7 AM to 8 PM

This includes  
Saturday and Sunday.

#### Mail-In Voting

Voters must request a ballot by  
**October 29, 2024 by 11:59 PM**  
to vote by mail.

The return envelope must be  
postmarked by  
**November 5, 2024**  
for it to be counted  
in the election.

#### Mail-in Voting

Any registered voter can request a mail-in ballot from the Maryland State Board of Elections. To receive your ballot by mail, you must request a ballot by October 29, 2024 by 11:59 PM. The ballot will be mailed 30-40 days before the election.

Click [here](#) to request a ballot.

The return envelope must be postmarked by November 5, 2024 for your mail-in ballot to count in the election.

You can drop off the ballot at a ballot drop box. Click [here](#) for a list of Charles County locations.

You can also hand-deliver your completed ballot to the Charles County Board of Elections by 8 PM on election day, or you may take it to an early voting center for drop off. Click [here](#) for more information on mail-in voting.

### 20. If I cannot vote on November 5th, can I vote on a different date?

Yes! You can vote before November 5th using a mail-in ballot or by voting at an Early Voting Center. See Question 19 for details.

### 21. Where can I find my polling place?

If you need clarification on your polling location, click [here](#) to search.

You can also call or email the Charles County Board of Elections with any questions:  
301-934-8972 | [elections@charlescountymd.gov](mailto:elections@charlescountymd.gov)

