

Virginia Charters  
**Bridgewater, Town of**  
County of Rockingham

**History of incorporation**

Incorporated by an 1835 Act of Assembly.  
Charter, 1835, c. 190; repealed 1960, c. 197.  
Charter, 1960, c. 197; repealed 1984, c. 207.

**Current charter**

Charter, 1984, c. 207.

**Amendments to current charter**

2017, c. 810 (§§ 2.1, 2.2, 2.3 through 2.8 [added], 3.1:1 [added], 3.2, 3.5, 3.6, 3.7 [repealed], 4.1)

**Chapter 1. Incorporation and Boundaries.**

**§ 1.1. Incorporation.**

The inhabitants of the territory comprised within the present limits of the Town of Bridgewater, as such limits are now or may hereafter be altered and established by law, shall constitute and continue to be a body politic and corporate, to be known and designated as the Town of Bridgewater ("the Town"), and as such shall have perpetual succession, may sue and be sued, plead and be impleaded, contract and be contracted with, and may have a corporate seal which it may alter, renew, or amend at its pleasure by proper ordinance. (1984, c. 207)

**§ 1.2. Boundaries.**

The boundaries of the Town until altered, shall be as recorded in the Clerk's Office of the Circuit Court of Rockingham County, Virginia, in Deed Book 703, page 86. (1984, c. 207)

**Chapter 2. Powers.**

**§ 2.1. General grant of powers.**

(a) Powers authorized in Code of Virginia. The Town shall have and may exercise any or all powers now or subsequently authorized for exercise by towns in Title 15.2 or elsewhere in the Code of Virginia of 1950, as amended, regardless of whether such powers are set out or incorporated by reference in this charter. All ordinances in force in the Town of Bridgewater as of July 1, 2017, not inconsistent with this charter, shall be and remain in force until altered, amended, or repealed by the town council.

(b) Powers exercised by governing body. All powers vested in the Town by this charter shall be exercised by its governing body unless expressly provided to the contrary. Such powers shall include those not expressly prohibited by the Constitution and general law of the Commonwealth, and which are necessary or desirable to secure and promote the general welfare of the Town's inhabitants and the safety, health, peace, good order, comfort, convenience, morals, trade, commerce, and industry of the Town and the Town's inhabitants, and the enumeration of specific powers shall not be construed or held to be exclusive or as a limitation upon any general grant of power, but shall be construed and held to be in addition to any general grant of power. The exercise of the powers conferred under this section is specifically limited to the area within the corporate limits of the Town, unless otherwise conferred in the applicable sections of the Constitution and general laws, as amended, of the Commonwealth.

(c) Repeal of prior inconsistent acts and charters. All acts and parts of acts in conflict with this charter are hereby repealed, insofar as they affect the provisions of this charter, provided, however, that nothing contained in this act shall be construed to invalidate or to in any manner affect the present existing indebtedness and liabilities of the Town, whether evidenced by bonded obligations or otherwise, or to relieve it of any part of its present obligation or liability on account of bond issues, liabilities, or debts of whatsoever nature or kind. Upon the effective date of this charter, all references to the Town superintendent in the Town's resolutions, ordinances, code provisions, contracts, and all other official acts and governing documents then in effect shall be deemed as referring to the Town manager. (1984, c. 207; 2017, c. 810)

## **§ 2.2. Financial powers.**

(a) Generally. In accordance with the Constitution of Virginia and the United States Constitution, the Town may raise through annual taxes and assessments on property, persons, and other subjects of taxation that are not prohibited by law such sums of money as in the judgment of the Town are necessary to pay the debts, defray the expenses, accomplish the purposes, and perform the functions of the Town, in such manner as the council deems necessary or expedient. The Town shall impose no tax on its bonds.

(b) Assessments for local improvements. The Town may impose special or local assessments for local improvements and enforce payment thereof, subject, however, to such limitations prescribed by the Constitution of Virginia as may be in force at the time of the imposition of such special or local assessments.

(c) Water, light, and sewerage rates; rates and charges for public utilities or services, etc., operated, etc., by Town. The Town may establish, impose, and enforce water, light, and sewerage rates and rates and charges for public utilities, or other service, products, or conveniences, operated, rendered, or furnished by the Town and assess, or cause to be assessed, water, light, sewerage, and other public utility rates and charges directly against the owner or owners of the buildings, or against the proper tenant or tenants, and in the event that such rates and charges shall be assessed against a tenant, then the council may, by an ordinance, require of such tenant a deposit of such reasonable amount as may be by such ordinance prescribed before furnishing such services to such tenant. (1984, c. 207; 2017, c. 810)

## **§ 2.3. Contractual powers; gifts; grants.**

(a) Acquisition of property generally; holding, selling, leasing, etc., Town property. The Town may acquire, by purchase, gift, devise, condemnation, or otherwise, property, real and personal, or any estate or interest therein, within or without the Town or state and for any of the purposes of the Town.

(b) Debts and evidence of indebtedness. The Town may contract debts, borrow money, and make and issue evidence of indebtedness.

(c) Gifts. The Town may accept or refuse gifts, donations, bequests, or grants of any kind from any source, absolutely or in trust, which are related to the Town's powers, duties, and functions, or for educational, charitable, or other public purposes, and do all the things and acts necessary to carry out the purposes of such gifts, grants, bequests, and devises, with power to manage, maintain, operate, sell, lease, or otherwise handle or dispose of the same, in accordance with terms and conditions of such gifts, grants, bequests, and devises. (2017, c. 810)

## **§ 2.4. Operational powers.**

(a) Generally. The Town may provide for the organization, conduct, and operation of all departments, offices, boards, commissions, and agencies of the Town, subject to such limitations as may be imposed by this charter or otherwise by law, and may establish, consolidate, abolish, or change departments, offices, boards, commissions, and agencies of the municipal corporation and prescribe the powers, duties, and functions thereof, except where such departments, offices, boards, commissions, and agencies or the powers, duties, and functions thereof are specifically established or prescribed by charter or otherwise by law.

(b) Records and accounts. The Town shall provide for the control and management of the Town's affairs and shall prescribe and require the adoption and keeping of such books, records, accounts, and systems of accounting by the departments, boards, commissions, or other agencies of the local government necessary to give full and true accounts of the affairs, resources, and revenues of the municipal corporation and the handling, use, and disposal thereof.

(c) Expenditure of money. The Town may expend money of the Town for all lawful purposes.

(d) Construction, maintenance, etc., of improvements, buildings, etc., for use and operation of Town departments. The Town may construct, maintain, regulate, and operate public improvements of all kinds, including municipal and other buildings, comfort stations, markets, and all buildings and structures necessary or appropriate for the use and proper operation of the various departments of the Town, and may acquire by condemnation or otherwise all land, riparian, and other rights and easements necessary for such improvements, or any of them.

(2017, c. 810)

## **§ 2.5. Utilities; public improvements.**

(a) Water works and water supply. The Town may own, operate, and maintain water works and acquire in any lawful manner in any county of the state such water, lands, property rights, and riparian rights as the council may deem necessary for the purpose of providing the Town with an adequate water supply, and of piping or conducting the same; lay all necessary mains and service lines, either within or without the corporate limits of the Town, and charge and collect water rents therefor; erect and maintain all necessary dams, pumping stations, and other works in connection therewith; make reasonable rules and regulations for promoting the purity of the Town water supply and protecting it from pollution and for this purpose exercise full police powers and sanitary patrol over all lands comprised within the limits of the watershed tributary to any such water supply wherever such lands may be located in this state; impose and enforce adequate penalties for the violation of any such rules and regulations and prevent by injunction any pollution or threatened pollution of such water supply and any and all acts likely to impair the purity thereof; and for the purpose of acquiring lands, interest in lands, property rights, and riparian rights or materials for any such use exercise within the state all powers of eminent domain provided by the laws of this state. For any of the purposes aforesaid, said Town may, if the council shall so determine, acquire by condemnation, purchase, or otherwise any estate or interest in such lands or any of them in fee.

(b) Streets; parks, playgrounds, etc.; infrastructure; vehicles. The Town may establish, maintain, improve, alter, vacate, regulate, and otherwise manage its streets, alleys, parks, playgrounds, and all of its public infrastructure and public works, in such manner as best serves the public interest, safety, and convenience; regulate, limit, restrict, and control the services and routes of and rates charged by vehicles for the carrying of passengers and property in accordance with general law;

permit or prohibit poles and wires for electric, telephone, telegraph, television, and other purposes to be erected and gas pipes to be laid in the streets and alleys and prescribe and collect an annual charge for such privileges; and, subject to the provisions of franchise agreements, require the owner or lessees of any such poles or wires now in use or hereafter used to place such wires, cables, and accoutrements in conduits underground in accordance with the Town's prescribed requirements.

(c) Public utilities. Subject to the provisions of the Constitution of Virginia, this charter, and general law, the Town may grant franchises for public utilities, reserving rights of transfer, renewal, extension, and amendment thereof.

(d) Collection and disposition of sewage, garbage, ashes, refuse, etc.; reduction and disposal plant. The Town may collect and dispose of sewage, ashes, garbage, carcasses of dead animals, and other refuse; make reasonable charges therefor; acquire and operate reduction or any other plants for the utilization or destruction of such materials, or any of them; contract for and regulate the collection and disposal thereof, and require and regulate the collection and disposal thereof. (2017, c. 810)

### **§ 2.6. Nuisances; sanitary conditions, etc.**

The Town may compel the abatement and removal of all nuisances within the Town; require all lands, lots, and other premises within the Town to be kept clean; regulate the keeping of animals, poultry, and other fowl therein; regulate the exercise of any dangerous or unwholesome business, trade, or employment therein; regulate the transportation of all articles through the streets of the Town; compel the abatement of smoke, dust, and unnecessary noise; compel the removal of grass and weeds from private and public property and snow from sidewalks; require the covering or removal of offensive, unwholesome, unsanitary, or unhealthy substances allowed to accumulate in or on any place or premises; require the filling in to the street level of the portion of any lot adjacent to a street where the difference in level between the lot and the street constitutes a danger to life and limb; and require the raising or draining of the grounds subject to be covered by stagnant water and the razing or repair of all unsafe, dangerous, or unsanitary public or private buildings, walls, or structures. (2017, c. 810)

### **§ 2.7. Police powers.**

(a) The Town may exercise full police powers as provided by general law and establish and maintain a department or division of police.

(b) The Town may also do all things whatsoever necessary or expedient for promoting or maintaining the general welfare, comfort, education, morals, peace, government, health, trade, commerce, or industries of the Town or its inhabitants; prescribe any penalty for the violation of any Town ordinance, rule, or regulation or of any provisions of this charter, not exceeding the fine or sentence imposed by the laws of the state; pass and enforce all by-laws, rules, regulations, and ordinances that it may deem necessary for the good order and government of the Town, the management of its property, the conduct of its affairs, and the peace, comfort, convenience, order, morals, health, and protection of its citizens or their property; and do such other things and pass such other laws as may be necessary or proper to carry into full effect any power, authority, capacity, or jurisdiction that is or shall be granted to or vested in said Town, or in the council, court, or offices thereof, or which may be necessarily incident to a municipal corporation. (2017, c. 810)

## **§ 2.8. Miscellaneous powers.**

(a) Removal or reconstruction of unsafe buildings, etc.; protection of public gatherings. The Town may regulate the size, height, materials, and construction of buildings, fences, walls, retaining walls, and other structures hereafter erected in such manner as the public safety and conveniences may require; remove or require to be removed or reconstructed any building, structure, or addition thereto, which by reason of dilapidation, defect of structure, or other causes may have become dangerous to life or property, or which may have been erected contrary to law; and enact stringent and efficient laws for securing the safety of persons from fires in halls and buildings used for public assemblies, entertainments, or amusements.

(b) Fees for permits, etc. The Town may charge and collect fees for permits to use public facilities and for public services and privileges.

(c) Cemeteries. The Town may provide in or near the Town lands to be used as burial places for the dead; improve and care for the same and the approaches thereto; charge for and regulate the use of ground therein; and provide for the perpetual upkeep and care of any plot or burial lot therein. The Town is authorized to take and receive sums of money by gift, bequest, or otherwise, to be kept invested, and the income thereof is to be used for the perpetual upkeep and care of the said lot or plat for which the said donation, gift, or bequest shall have been made.

(d) Injunctive relief. The Town may maintain a suit to restrain by injunction the violation of any ordinance, notwithstanding any punishment that may be provided for the violation of such ordinance. (2017, c. 810)

## **Chapter 3. Mayor and Council.**

### **§ 3.1. Election, qualification and term of office for mayor and council.**

The Town shall be governed by a town council composed of six council members and the mayor, all of whom shall be qualified voters in the Town and shall be elected by the qualified voters of the Town in the manner provided by law from the Town at large. The council and the mayor in office at the time of adoption of this charter shall continue in office until the expiration of the terms for which they were elected or until their successors are elected and qualified. An election for three council members and the mayor shall be held on the first Tuesday in May, 1984, and for three council members and the mayor on the first Tuesday in May, 1986. Elections shall be held on the first Tuesday in May every two years thereafter. The council members shall serve for a term of four years, and the mayor shall serve for a term of two years or until their successors are elected and qualified; however, those persons elected in May, 1984, and May, 1986, shall not take office until the first day of September following their respective elections. Subsequently commencing in 1988, the term of each person elected under this section shall begin on the first day of July next following their election. (1984, c. 207)

#### **§ 3.1:1. Term of office for mayor and council effective, July 1, 2017.**

Notwithstanding the provisions of § 3.1, effective July 1, 2017, the mayor and members of council shall serve four-year terms or until their successors are elected and qualified. (2017, c. 810)

### **§ 3.2. Vacancies.**

Vacancies on the council shall be filled in accordance with general law. (1984, c. 207; 2017, c. 810)

### **§ 3.3. Council, a continuing body.**

The council shall be a continuing body, and no measure pending before such body nor any contract or obligation incurred shall abate or be discontinued because of the expiration of the term of office or removal of any council members. (1984, c. 207)

### **§ 3.4. Mayor.**

The mayor shall be the chief executive officer of the Town. He shall have and exercise all the privileges and authority conferred by general law not inconsistent with the charter. He shall preside over the meetings of the town council and shall have the right to speak therein as a member of the council. He shall have a vote as a member of council but shall have no veto power. He shall be the head of the Town government for all its ceremonial purpose and shall perform such other duties consistent with his office as may be imposed by the town council. He shall see that the duties of the various town officers are faithfully performed and shall authenticate his signature on such documents or instruments as the council, this charter or the laws of the Commonwealth shall require. (1984, c. 207)

### **§ 3.5. Vice mayor.**

Biennially, at its organizational meeting, the town council shall, by a majority of all of its members, elect a vice mayor from its membership to serve for a term of two years in the absence of or during the disability of the mayor, and the vice mayor shall possess the powers and discharge the duties of the mayor when serving as mayor. (1984, c. 207; 2017, c. 810)

### **§ 3.6. Meetings of council.**

(a) Organizational meeting. The town council's organizational meeting held for the purposes set forth in § 15.2-1416 of the Code of Virginia shall be its first meeting held after January 1 of each year.

(b) Regular meetings. The council shall fix the time of its regular meetings, which shall be at least once each month.

(c) Special meetings. Special meetings may be called at any time by the mayor or any four members of the council, provided that the members of the council are given reasonable notice of such meetings. No business shall be transacted at the special meeting except that for which it shall be called. If the mayor and all the members of the council are present, this provision requiring prior notice for special meetings is waived.

(d) Rules of procedure. From time to time, the council shall adopt rules of procedure governing its meetings, such rules not being inconsistent with state law. (1984, c. 207; 2017, c. 810)

### **§ 3.7. (1984, c. 207; repealed 2017, c. 810)**

## **Chapter 4. Appointive Officers.**

### **§ 4.1. Appointments.**

The town council may appoint the following officers:

(a) Town manager. A town manager who shall be responsible to the town council for the proper administration of all affairs of the Town, for the control and management of all town departments and property, for the appointment, supervision, and dismissal of town employees, including the treasurer and police chief, if any, for the preparation and implementation of an annual budget, and for any other duties as prescribed by the council;

(b) Town attorney. A town attorney who shall be an attorney at law licensed to practice under the laws of the Commonwealth. The town attorney shall receive such compensation as provided by the council and shall have such duties as prescribed by the council; and

(c) Other officers. The council may appoint any other officers that the council deems necessary and proper. (1984, c. 207; 2017, c. 810)

**§ 4.2. Term of office.**

Appointees under this chapter shall serve at the pleasure of the council. The council may fill any vacancy in any appointive office. (1984, c. 207)

**Chapter 5. Financial Provisions.**

**§ 5.1. Fiscal year.**

The fiscal year of the Town shall begin on July 1 of each year and end on June 30 of the year following. (1984, c. 207)

**Chapter 6. Miscellaneous.**

**§ 6.1. Ordinances continued in force.**

All ordinances now in force in the Town, not inconsistent with this charter, shall be and remain in force until altered, amended, or repealed by the council. (1984, c. 207)

**§ 6.2. Severability of provisions.**

If any clause, sentence, paragraph, or part of this charter shall for any reason be adjudged by any court of competent jurisdiction to be invalid, such judgment shall not affect, impair, or invalidate the remainder of the charter but shall be confined in its operation to the clause, sentence, paragraph or part thereof directly involved in the controversy in which such judgment shall have been rendered. (1984, c. 207)