

# **City of Winter Springs Local Bill — Governance Modernization Act (2026)**

*Legislative Packet: Bill Summary and Justification*

## **BILL SUMMARY**

This local bill revises the Charter of the City of Winter Springs to modernize the city's governing structure, aligning it with other Seminole County municipalities such as Lake Mary, Longwood, and Oviedo. It replaces the outdated non-voting mayor system with a unified and accountable five-member City Commission that includes a voting mayor.

- Key Provisions:
  - Creates a five-member City Commission including a voting mayor who presides over meetings and votes on all matters.
  - Four commissioners must reside within geographic districts but are elected at large by all city voters.
  - Eliminates the mayor's veto authority, ensuring decisions reflect the will of the majority.
  - Provides for a Deputy Mayor selected from among the commissioners.
  - Implements a phased transition beginning in 2026 and concluding in 2028.
  - Authorizes the City Commission to make conforming charter amendments by ordinance.
  - Protects the terms of current officeholders; no existing terms are shortened.

## JUSTIFICATION & BACKGROUND

### 1. Resolving Structural Tension and Lack of Accountability

Winter Springs' current structure, in which the **mayor does not vote** yet retains **veto power**, creates a dysfunctional tension between the mayor and the commission. When disagreements arise, the mayor can block decisions made by the elected legislative body, despite not having to share responsibility for the vote.

This disconnect has repeatedly led to **stagnation and public frustration**, as residents see conflict without clear accountability. The non-voting mayor can **influence debate, wield veto power, and stall progress** without ever casting a public vote. This structure is an anomaly among Seminole County cities and has been a source of repeated dysfunction.

The proposed bill **eliminates the veto authority** altogether, ending a system that effectively gives the mayor *three no votes* (the veto itself plus the votes needed to sustain it). By making the mayor a voting member, accountability becomes transparent: every major decision will now be a matter of record, and every elected official will be directly answerable to the voters for their vote.

### 2. Removing an Obstacle to Progress

Over the past several years, Winter Springs has faced substantial governance challenges, including financial mismanagement, failed infrastructure planning, and repeated rebukes from state oversight agencies. Many of these issues have been **exacerbated by political gridlock** under the existing system.

The mayor's veto has been used as a tool of obstruction, **stalling necessary reforms** and discouraging consensus among commissioners. By contrast, neighboring cities such as Lake Mary and Longwood, where mayors vote as part of the council, have avoided these structural deadlocks and maintain solid fiscal footing and high resident satisfaction.

A **voting mayor structure** promotes transparency, unity, and shared responsibility, ensuring decisions reflect the will of the entire community rather than the leverage of a single office.

### 3. Strong Public Support

In a **2021 public survey** conducted among Winter Springs residents, an overwhelming **83% supported converting to a five-member council with a voting mayor**, while only 17% favored keeping the current system.

That survey was conducted **before** many of the city's recent controversies and governance breakdowns came to light—issues that have further underscored the need for a clear, functional leadership model. Public sentiment today likely exceeds those numbers in favor of reform.

Residents have made it clear: they want a government that works, not one hamstrung by internal stalemates. This bill directly answers that call.

#### **4. Legal and Constitutional Authority**

Article VIII, Section 2(b) of the Florida Constitution explicitly provides that municipal charters may be established or amended 'pursuant to general or special law.' This grants the Legislature clear authority to enact or amend a city's charter through a local bill without requiring a referendum. Legislative action is therefore the proper and lawful mechanism for this reform.

#### **5. A Unique and Outdated Governance Structure**

Among small and mid-sized cities across Florida, research revealed not a single municipality operating under the same governing model as Winter Springs — where the mayor holds veto power but no vote. Every comparable city within the region uses a unified voting body structure, with the mayor serving as an equal voting member. Winter Springs is thus an outlier, and this structural reform brings the city in line with best practices in municipal governance.

#### **6. Restoring Confidence and Functionality**

The goal of this bill is to eliminate confusion, prevent stalemates, and create an accountable, collaborative city government. By ensuring every elected official casts a public vote on city decisions, Winter Springs will strengthen trust, restore transparency, and empower its leadership to focus on solving real challenges — from infrastructure to fiscal responsibility and resident services.