

BALTIMORE CITY COUNCIL



CHARTER REVIEW SPECIAL COMMITTEE

*LO25-0038 - Charter Review
&*

*26-0172 – Charter Amendment
Charter Committee Recommendations*

Public Testimony

CITY OF BALTIMORE

Brandon M. Scott – Mayor
Zeke Cohen – Council President



Office of Council Services

Nancy Mead - Director
100 Holliday Street, Room 415
Baltimore, MD 21202

CHARTER REVIEW SPECIAL COMMITTEE

**The Honorable Ryan Dorsey
CHAIR**

Attendance Sheet

4/15/2026

26-0172

Charter Amendment – Charter Committee Recommendations

SIGN IN TO TESTIFY			Position:		Check if Baltimore City lobbyist*
FIRST NAME	LAST NAME	ORGANIZATION AND/OR CONTACT INFORMATION	SUPPORT	OPPOSE	
JOAN	FLOYD	JoanL Floyd@ hotmail. com	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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** IF YOU ARE COMPENSATED OR INCUR EXPENSES IN CONNECTION WITH THIS BILL, YOU MAY BE REQUIRED BY LAW TO REGISTER WITH THE CITY ETHICS BOARD AS A LOBBYIST. REGISTRATION CAN BE DONE ONLINE AND IS A SIMPLE PROCESS. FOR INFORMATION VISIT: [HTTPS://ETHICS.BALTIMORECITY.GOV/](https://ethics.baltimorecity.gov/) OR CALL: (410) 396-7986*

From: Angel Amor

Sent: Thursday, April 2, 2026 12:43 PM

To: Charter Review Committee (City Council) <charter.review.committee@baltimorecity.gov>

Subject: 2026 Formal Testimony from Angel Amor: Structural Accountability and the Proactive Mandate for Coldstream Homestead Montebello

Importance: High

Dear Members of the Charter Review Special Committee,

I submit this testimony as a Baltimore native, a filmmaker, and a stakeholder in our city's future. My perspective is shaped by the institutions that raised me: Baltimore City Public Schools, Morgan State University, and Johns Hopkins University. I also write through a unique professional lens at Notre Dame of Maryland University (NDMU).

At NDMU, I serve as the Research and Operations Manager for Institutional Advancement and the Operations Manager for the Noyes Alumni House. In the specialized field of higher education philanthropy, I lead Prospect Research, a role that requires me to analyze complex data sets to identify and qualify high-value donors who can fuel the university's mission. Furthermore, I am a writer and print journalist for Universitas magazine, the university's flagship publication. In this capacity, I represent both Institutional Advancement and University Communications & Public Relations, tasked with documenting the legacy of our alumni and the strategic vision of the institution.

Even as I pursue global fluency through weekly Spanish and French tutoring to better communicate in an increasingly interconnected world, I find myself returning home to a neighborhood where basic communication with the city is broken. In my personal life as a homeowner in Coldstream Homestead Montebello (CHM), I am forced into an unpaid, high-intensity role as an unofficial city dispatcher just to maintain basic habitability on my block.

The 2026 Charter Review must address a fundamental inequity: Why must a professional who spends his day conducting strategic research and managing university operations work a second, unpaid job as a sanitation coordinator just to receive the same baseline services that affluent neighborhoods receive by default?

The Current Reality: A Reactive and Broken System

1. The 311 Fallacy and the "Resilience Tax"

- **The Problem:** While Councilwoman Odette Ramos, Mark Washington, and city agencies respond swiftly when I "ring the bell," the system is purely reactive. I am essentially an off-the-books Director for these agencies, submitting requests daily and weekly.
- **The Affluence Gap:** In neighborhoods like Roland Park, Guilford, Homeland, Mount Washington, and Canton, trash is collected and streets are swept by default. In CHM, cleanliness is treated as a "special request" rather than a standard of living.
- **The Personal Toll:** Every day, I get out with my own trash can and picker to clean my street and surrounding blocks. I am physically removing "dirty flowers"—the snack wrappers

and rotting debris—that wash into our gutters. Homeowners in CHM are 5 times more likely than those in wealthy zip codes to self-mitigate sanitation issues. This is an unpaid labor tax on our residents.

2. Infrastructure Decay and the Rat Crisis

- **The Problem:** Crumbling asphalt, deep potholes, and cracked alleyways collect standing water and rotting debris. This structural decay is a breeding ground for vermin. In 2026, neighborhoods with high pavement deterioration see a 40% increase in rodent sightings. The city's failure to maintain the "bones" of our neighborhood is an active subsidy for rat infestations.

3. The Slumlord and Private Property Crisis

- **The Problem:** Out-of-state slumlords allow backyards and fronts to overflow with tall weeds and bulk trash. 40% of non-owner-occupied properties in CHM have chronic sanitation violations. This filth spills into our shared alleys, undoing the hard work of legacy residents. My family has anchored this community since 1959; my late great-grandparents passed this home down to me, and my Grandmother has been a pillar here for 67 years. We refuse to let slumlords devalue our legacy.

The 2026 Charter Solutions: How to Fix Baltimore

To bridge the gap between CHM and Baltimore's affluent wards, the Charter must be amended to mandate proactive excellence:

Fix 1: Mandate Proactive "Old School" Foot Patrols

- **The Change:** Shift the burden of discovery from the resident to the city. The Charter must mandate Interagency Foot Patrols where code enforcement and police walk the blocks—fronts, backs, and alleys—on a fixed, weekly schedule. The city must identify the trash and the pavement cracks before they draw rats, not after I send a daily email.

Fix 2: Aggressive Penalties for Slumlord and Public Neglect

- **The Change:** Empower the city to issue aggressive, escalating fines tied to property liens for both front and backyard neglect. If a landlord fails to remediate a violation within 48 hours, the city must be mandated to clean it and bill the owner at 300% of the cost. Additionally, if city-owned land is not maintained to the same standard as Guilford or Roland Park, it must trigger an automatic administrative audit of that agency.

Fix 3: Establish an Infrastructure Equity Fund

- **The Change:** Codify a requirement that 40% of all street and alley repair funds be prioritized for historically redlined neighborhoods like CHM until pavement quality scores match those of the city's most affluent zip codes. Infrastructure should be distributed based on need, not political capital.

Fix 4: Mandatory Face-to-Face Representation

- **The Change:** Mandate Minimum Face-to-Face Engagement Standards for District Councilmembers. Representation is not a social media post; it is standing on the ground and

seeing the systemic failure that requires a professional journalist and operations manager to spend his afternoons with a trash picker.

Fix 5: The "Right to Resolution" Clause

- The Change: Establish a Charter-mandated Office of the Citizen Advocate. We need a "Standard of Care" clause that ensures every neighborhood receives a baseline of cleanliness and structural integrity by default. A 311 ticket should not be "closed" until a community representative verifies the work is actually done.

Conclusion

I am more than a 311 number. I am a homeowner who deserves a city that works as hard as I do. My family has anchored Coldstream Homestead Montebello for 65 years. We will no longer accept a system where "good service" is only available to those who have the energy to scream for it daily.

Clean our public spaces, fix our crumbling alleys, penalize the slumlords, and show the residents of CHM that their peace of mind is worth more than a reactive ticket.

Respectfully submitted,

Angel Amor

MA in Film and Media, Johns Hopkins University, Class of 2025

TESTIMONY OF LINDA BATTS REGARDING THE PROPOSALS SET FORTH BY THE CHARTER REVIEW SPECIAL COMMITTEE – APRIL 15, 2026

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the recommendations of the Charter Review Special Committee and the process used to develop them.

The Committee's work is framed around several important questions: whether agencies collaborate effectively, whether accountability systems are strong, whether residents are meaningfully engaged, whether neighborhoods have equitable access to services, and whether government is transparent and responsive.

These are the right questions. However, the answers are already clear and, in most cases, do not require Charter amendments. Baltimore does not suffer from a lack of authority. It suffers from a lack of consistent execution and accountability. Agencies remain fragmented in mission and in practice. Capital projects are not coordinated. And there is still no unified, citywide strategy to address the complex challenges facing our communities, especially in underserved neighborhoods.

The City Council is fully aware of these issues. Yet too often, it has not exercised its existing authority to hold agencies accountable. A recent example is the Housing Options and Opportunities Act. Residents repeatedly requested written equity and fiscal analyses from all agencies—information essential to understanding who would benefit and how communities would be affected. Those requests were not fulfilled. Despite repeated calls for the Council to require agency accountability through hearings, which is already within its authority, no hearings with city agencies were convened. Instead, incomplete and unattributed data was accepted without meaningful scrutiny.

That is not a failure of the Charter. It is a failure of oversight.

The issue of public engagement is equally concerning.

We are told that residents are “meaningfully included” in decision-making. The reality suggests otherwise.

Testimony rules vary widely across Council members. More importantly, participants in the Charter Review Special Committee sessions were not treated as partners in the process. They were encouraged to attend but not required to review the Charter. In fact, they were discouraged from reviewing it because of its length. They were asked to listen to pre-developed recommendations with limited time for discussion. They were not provided with minutes from prior sessions that would have allowed them to evaluate their recommendations in light of earlier public input. And in many cases, they were discouraged from offering proposals of their own, sometimes explicitly told to wait for another election cycle.

That is not meaningful engagement. It is managed participation—engagement by fiat.

Attendance itself also raises concerns. Across four in-person sessions, there were roughly 100 instances of participation, many likely involving repeat attendees, in a city of more than 570,000 residents. That level of engagement does not support claims of broad public input.

Yet the Committee concluded its final public meeting on April 14 and moved to vote on its recommendations less than 24 hours later, on April 15. That timeline alone undermines any assertion that the process was community-driven or that serious consideration was given to public recommendations.

The substance of the recommendations also lacks sufficient justification. Significant proposed changes, such as altering the composition of the Board of Estimates and modifying lowest-bid contracting requirements, were not supported by clear data or analysis. For example, residents asked for:

- evidence of systemic failure under the current model;
- studies showing how proposed changes to the “lowest bid” requirement would improve outcomes without harming small, disadvantaged, and women-owned businesses, along with identification of who would benefit and which communities would be affected;
- studies reflecting the impact of changes to “minor privileges” on neighborhoods, communities, and protected groups;
- under the proposed “Ordinance of Estimates,” budget requests—both capital and operating—that would specify how spending would improve services district by district and neighborhood by neighborhood, identify tangible outcomes and deliverables, and establish systems of accountability to ensure taxpayer funds are spent appropriately;
- additional time to review the lengthy Board of Estimates proposals, along with a clear explanation of how those changes would affect the workload of the City Council, especially where salary adjustments appear to be a desired outcome;
- guardrails to prevent abuse of the provision allowing bid awards to be limited to residents and business owners in a particular neighborhood, given that neighborhoods are not similarly situated and such discretion requires public oversight;
- a process for public input before the Council President appoints City Council members to chair special committees, as well as limits on how many such committees any one council member may chair, to prevent systemic steering of the City’s future;
- consideration of whether the City Council is acting in the interests of taxpayers, rather than functioning at cross purposes with the Mayor, and whether the Council should have its own empowered, compensated advisory board composed of district representatives selected by residents; and
- inclusion of the recommendations from the Charter Review Commission headed by Kobi Little.

These requests have not been met.

At the same time, longstanding inequities in service delivery and representation across neighborhoods remain unresolved, despite years of testimony before the City Council. Finally, on transparency: the Committee has stated that its work is open and community driven. But transparency is not a statement. It is practice. A transparent process would have included advance notice of the Committee's formation, meaningful opportunities for residents to prepare, and district-level engagement before recommendations were developed. That did not occur. And even if, as participants were reminded at last night's meeting, a similarly limited process occurred in the 1990s, that does not make it right. Throughout the life of the Charter Review Special Committee, residents asked that the Charter be discussed within each Council district. That request was acknowledged, but disregarded.

In closing, the Charter is the most important governing document of this City. It reflects and protects democratic governance. It should not be revised through an expedited process that lacks rigorous analysis, broad public engagement, and clear justification.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Council to reject the current recommendations or, at a minimum, pause this process to allow for a more deliberate assessment of the proposed changes and more meaningful public engagement.

Respectfully Submitted,

Linda Batts

From: D. Druckman

Sent: Thursday, April 16, 2026 5:28 AM

To: Charter Review Committee (City Council) <charter.review.committee@baltimorecity.gov>; Cohen, Zeke (City Council) <Zeke.Cohen@baltimorecity.gov>

Subject: Serious Concern for 26-0172. Public Testimony 4/15/26

To: The Charter Revision Committee

From: Dolph Druckman, MD MPH

Members of the Committee: I am writing to express serious concerns regarding both the process of this important effort and the substance of the current draft.

While this effort was marketed as transparent and inclusive, the reality for Baltimore residents has been quite the opposite. To ensure this process maintains credibility, I urge the committee to address the following:

1. Failure of Meaningful Transparency

Transparency requires more than just posting a file; it requires accessibility. Relying solely on Legistar—a system that is not user-friendly for the general public—without providing plain-language summaries has created a barrier to entry for most residents. Furthermore, posting the draft- only days before this hearing, and providing critical agency reports- with less than 24 hours' notice, makes it impossible for the public to offer informed consent or critique. Unfortunately, this accelerated timeline suggests that public input is being treated as a formality rather than a necessity.

2. Lack of Comparative Clarity

The committee has characterized many changes as either technical updates or deletion of items that are no longer applicable. However, no "redline" or side-by-side document has been provided to show exactly what is being omitted and what is replacing it. I truly don't understand how the public can be expected to understand let alone support revisions where the "before and after" remain a mystery.

3. Preservation of Board of Estimates Oversight

Regarding the content, there is serious concern for the proposed summary deletion of the Board of Estimates' review of Minor Privileges- without substantive work that identifies 1) The Scope of Minor Privileges and 2) What is to replace oversight?. As, indicated in the review by the Law Department, Developing replacement processes in not a simple job and to not have statutory options and consensus in hand, may be hazardous. Omitting or altering this section invites a high risk of unintended legal and procedural consequences. This section should remain untouched until there is sufficient time to develop the replacement oversight processes. "Kicking the can" down the road to a future time / process is not wise.

Conclusion

If the goal of this committee is truly to modernize our city's foundational document, that work must be done with the public, not in spite of them. I request that the committee significantly limit

the work scope for this year, plain-language impact statements, and pause any changes to the Board of Estimates' current authority.

Thank you.

From: John Ford

Sent: Saturday, April 4, 2026 4:07 AM

To: Charter Review Committee (City Council) <charter.review.committee@baltimorecity.gov>

Subject: Charter Review Thoughts - D1 Resident

Dear members of the committee:

I'm John P Ford, a resident of district 1 from Fleet St and East Ave near the border of Highlandtown and Canton. I'm a workforce development professional for the City, but my thoughts are my own and do not represent the City.

If we are reconsidering the fundamental structure of City government, there's one target for special consideration: The Board of Estimates. This body, mostly unknown to even well-informed City residents, is a given incredible power over spending and contracting, and everyone acknowledges is under the complete control of one person, the Mayor. This makes the Mayoralty of Baltimore a tempting target for corruption and unaccountability, and there's a reason most cities have either moved away from this model or never adapted it. It's also a chokepoint that micromanages all City spending decisions under the illusion of performative accountability that, really, just bogs down all decisions, slows City services for months, and delays simple administrative decision-making to a crawl. All while all issues that come to the board are pre-decided in closed-door pre-meetings and all public input, and City Council input, and Comptroller input, is left to the mere performance of democracy.

If we can't abolish and replace the Board in whole, it needs to be restructured. Moving away from approval for minor privilege permits is a good step. Raising the threshold for purchases that require Board approval with inflation, requiring instead other quicker more modern accountability mechanisms, would be another good one. Or, creating a genuine Board that does what it is alleged to do on paper - give five independent votes - by making the other two Board positions currently under the full control of the mayor truly independent. This could be by giving them to other independently elected or appointed positions, or by giving them for-cause job protections that enabled them to decide to vote against the mayor when their independent judgement thinks it necessary.

Thank you for your consideration,

- John Preston Ford

No part of this email was composed using generative AI.

Ceterum censeo Suburbia esse delendam

To All Talking About Baltimore City Charter Change,

DO YOUR HOMEWORK FIRST...

Know the History and Structure of Baltimore Charter
to know WHY IT MUST BE CHANGE AND HOW
IT SHOULD BE CHANGED TO BENEFIT THE
EQUALITY AND JUSTICE FOR ALL
BALTIMORE CITIZENS - PERIOD...

Baltimore City Charter MUST be all out changed to
be inline With the United States and Maryland
CONSTITUTION. Futher it Must redact All those
bias and unconstitutional parts of the Charter and
distribute equal powers amount the 3 branches of
Baltimore Government - Mayor/City Council/District
Court. Something the Charter DO NOT DO. ALL the
City Power under this Charter is in THE MAYOR
hand and the Private "BOARD OF ESTIMATES"...
BE BLESSED!!!!

Deborah Morris

- a. 1949 charter revision While details on the 1949 revision are less publicized than others.

**“CREATED A STRONG -MAYOR SYSTEM THAT CANNOT BE
IMPEACHED “**

Charter in 1964 changes, served as a significant update to the city's "Jim Crow" legal framework. A published legislative history on enactments before

1949 was later included in the 1949 edition of the charter, suggesting it was a substantial reorganization of existing laws rather than a minor amendment. 1964 charter revision A special (ALL WHITE) commission was formed to update the charter in 1963, and the resulting changes were approved by voters in November 1964 - Prior to the Civil Rights Laws and the Creation of HUD (Sept. 9, 1965) This revision was a response to several key concerns:

- Modernization: (Segregationist) Officials wanted to update the city's structure to handle new fiscal realities and administrative practices.
- Fiscal control: Revisions placed many fiscal, tax, and purchasing offices directly under the MAYOR's authority, shifting budgetary power to the executive branch.

1. The Executive Branch of Baltimore City includes the Mayor, who acts as the head of the branch, along with the City Comptroller and a wide range of departments and agencies. Many executive functions are carried out through the Board of Estimates, a body that oversees the city's fiscal policy and contracting. The Executive Branch of Baltimore City in 2025 includes the Mayor, who acts as the head of the branch, along with the City Comptroller and a wide range of departments and agencies. Many executive functions are carried out through the Board of Estimates, a body that oversees the city's fiscal policy and contracting. Key components of Baltimore's Executive Branch include:

Key components of Baltimore's Executive Branch include:

- The Mayor: As the chief executive, the mayor leads the city's administration and appoints many of the city's officials*
- The City Comptroller is a key member of the executive structure, serving as the secretary to the Board of Estimates.*
- The Board of Estimates is a powerful body consisting of five members: the Mayor, the City Council President, the Comptroller, the City Solicitor, and the Director of Public Works. This body is responsible for executing the city's fiscal policy, final awarding contracts, and supervising city purchasing.*

*[“Fraud, Waste, Abuse and Violation of Federal/
State Laws.] and {No Legally, transparency in government
spending}*

iv. *Mayor oversees numerous offices and department directly:*

*[“Fraud, Waste, Abuse and Violation of Federal/State Laws.]
and {No Legally, transparency in government
spending}*

- Office of Infrastructure Development
- Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement (MONSE)
- Office of Immigrant Affairs
- Department of Finance
- Department of General Services
- * Mayor’s Office of Homeless Services
- Department of Housing and Community Development
- Quasi-independent agencies: Some city leaders and agency heads also fall under the executive branch's umbrella, such the President of the Housing Authority of Baltimore City and the Police Commissioner.

**WEAKNESS OF 14 BALTIMORE CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS IN 2025
(Elected to serve Part-Time therefore Governing City of Baltimore is not
Priority)**

a. The weakness of the Baltimore City Council is primarily due to a series of charter amendments passed in 1898 that created a "strong mayor" system of government. These reforms concentrated significant power in the mayor's office, limiting the council's authority over the budget and other key functions.

- i. *The 1898 reform- Before the reforms, machine politicians controlled the City Council. Responding to public pressure for good-government reforms, state legislators passed STATE charter amendments that intentionally diminished the council's authority that never been sought by City Elected Officials to amend.*

Key changes made by the charter amendments included:

*Budgeting authority: The amendments removed the council's power to create or add items to the city's budget, giving that authority solely to the mayor. For 125 years, the council could only cut funds from the mayor's proposed budget, not reallocate them or add new spending.

*Term limits: The mayor's term was extended from two to four years, giving the executive more time in office to consolidate power.

*Board of Estimates: The powerful Board of Estimates was created, with the mayor holding one of five seats. This board is responsible for formulating fiscal policy and approving all city contracts and purchases

Legislative powers

*Ordinances and resolutions: The council has the power to enact all city ordinances and resolutions. Majority vote is needed for a bill to pass.

Land use and zoning

*Regulation of land use: The council is only **involved** in evaluating regulatory policy on land uses and projects that require city legislation

*Zoning code: The council can revise the city's zoning code, which governs how land is used across the city after Board of Estimates have made the decision to change.

*Judicial review: The council to recommend for judicial review by the Circuit Court for Baltimore City on matters related to planning and zoning after Board of Estimates recommended changes to the Land Plat.

<From 2012 to 2025 have never sought review from The Circuit Court on matters related to planning and zoning - {Baltimore certified as Brownfield from pass industrial plants contamination of soil and restricted covenants}>

Financial powers beyond the budget

*Bond issuance: The council is responsible for the appropriation and issuance of bonds, which are used to finance city projects.

*Contract oversight: **is part of the Board of Estimates, ONLY the council president supervises all contracts and purchases awarded by the city.**
{No Legal, transparency in government spending}