



CITY OF BALTIMORE
MAYOR BRANDON M. SCOTT

TO	The Honorable President and Members of the Baltimore City Council
FROM	Ty'lor Schnella, Deputy Director, Mayor's Office of Government Relations
CC	Mayor's Office of Government Relations
DATE	April 21, 2026
SUBJECT	26-0172 Charter Amendment - Charter Committee Recommendations

BILL SYNOPSIS

This package of proposed charter amendments, developed by the Charter Review Special Committee, seeks to modify various aspects of Baltimore City's governance structure, including mayoral veto authority, budget and appropriations processes, procurement requirements, and other administrative provisions within the charter.

SUMMARY OF POSITION

Budget Delivery to Council – Favorable with Amendments

While the Administration supports earlier delivery of the Ordinance of Estimates to the council, the proposed April 15 deadline does not adequately account for the timing of State budget actions and the need to incorporate the most current fiscal information which may include impacts to our budget based on legislation passed by the Maryland General Assembly. The Administration recommends amending the deadline to April 30 to ensure a complete and accurate budget proposal.

Contingent Fund Cap Removal – Favorable

The Administration supports removing the \$1,000,000 cap on the contingent fund, as it no longer reflects the scale or complexity of modern City operations. Eliminating this cap provides necessary flexibility to respond to emergencies, emerging needs, and unforeseen costs in a timely manner without introducing additional risk.

Procurement Reform – Favorable

The Administration supports removing prescriptive procurement requirements from the Charter and allowing these standards to be established by ordinance and/or administrative regulations. This aligns with best practices by ensuring the charter sets broad governing principles rather than operational details.

Minor Privilege Reform – Favorable

The Administration supports streamlining the minor privilege process by removing the requirement for Board of Estimates hearings. This commonsense change reduces administrative burden, allows the Board to focus on higher-impact decisions, and enables more efficient processing while maintaining appropriate oversight mechanisms.

New Budget Article – Favorable

The Administration supports establishing a standalone budget article within the charter.

Mayoral Veto Timeline – Unfavorable

The Administration does not support shortening the Mayor's time for final action on legislation or the budget. The veto timeline is a crucial logistical component of the legislative process. While Mayor Scott has exercised his veto authority only twice in more than five and a half years, there have been a few instances this term where legislation needed to be returned to Council for correction. The executive branch of any governmental system needs time to thoroughly review legislation sent to it by the legislative branch, assess legal and operational impacts and make informed decisions about whether to sign or veto a bill on behalf of residents. Following the final passage of any piece of legislation, the law department is required to review the ordinance for approval for final form and legal sufficiency before those ordinances reach the Mayor's desk. For simple and routine legislation, this could be done within a day or two, however, for complex legislation or legislation that has undergone significant change through the amendment process, this review could take at least several days if not longer. Limiting the Mayor's timeline, while extending the Council's time to act, creates an imbalance in the process that offers no operational benefit. Rather, it introduces the possibility for less considered and responsible decision-making that could undermine the quality of future actions taken by both the Council and the Mayor.

Conditions on Appropriations – Unfavorable

The Administration also has concerns about the proposal to allow the Council to place conditions on the release of appropriations. Introducing conditions on the release of appropriated funds opens the door to uncertainty, delays implementation, and risks disrupting the delivery of essential services. Most importantly, it creates the opportunity for future abuse of this power.

While we are deeply grateful for the partnership with the current council and the integrity-driven approach the current council takes, these charter amendments will govern the action of all future councils. As changes to the Charter are permanent, until or unless another ballot provision or state law change takes place, the changes that are being considered today have to be discussed in the context of how they could be utilized in the future under different executive and legislative leadership.

Under this proposed amendment, we must consider how this would function in practice – especially under the worst circumstances, rather than the best. Who determines whether a condition has been met, and on what standard? What happens when a condition is placed on appropriations that is purposefully vague and the Administration makes its best effort to meet those conditions, but the Council does not agree?

The implications are not just procedural, they are financial. The Ordinance of Estimates is not a project level summary of efforts to be undertaken over the upcoming fiscal year, but rather a

document to reflect the broader budgeting for a department or agency. Delays in releasing funds could jeopardize the City's ability to meet deadlines tied to grants, matching funds, or our ability to meet debt obligations. This alone could endanger the City's bond rating and cause broader economic impact. In those cases, the cost is not theoretical, it is real dollars that the City risks losing.

Non-Lapsing Funds – Unfavorable

The Charter currently provides an important safeguard by requiring that non-lapsing funds be established through a charter amendment, and for good reason. These funds are not routine. They carry long term fiscal implications.

For that reason, these funds should remain rare, deliberate, and subject to the higher standards that the Charter requires. Opening the door to the proliferation of non-lapsing, restricted funds would further constrain the Council and the Administration's ability to respond to emerging priorities, address urgent needs, and close budget gaps. This would also undermine the integrity of the budget process.

There are also broader financial implications. The accumulation of non-lapsing obligations could be viewed negatively by our credit rating agencies, as it reduces budgetary flexibility and signals less control over long term fiscal planning. For these reasons, the Administration does not support including this provision in the proposed amendment.

AMENDMENTS

Amendment No. 1

Reverting to current veto provisions.

Amendment No. 2

Eliminate proposal authorizing the City Council to amend the Ordinance of Estimates through conditional appropriation provisions.

Amendment No. 3

Eliminate proposal authorizing the City Council to create non-lapsing funds by ordinance.

Amendment No. 4

Revise the date by which the Board of Estimates shall submit to the City Council the proposed Ordinance of Estimates from April 15th to April 30th.

Amendment No. 5

Authorize the Planning Commission to submit additional recommendations regarding capital projects to the City Council after the introduction of the Ordinance of Estimates by the Council President. Authorize the City Council to reduce, eliminate, increase, or add amounts to the Ordinance of Estimates as may be requested by the Planning Commission. As may be amended under these provisions, authorizing the City Council to exceed the total amount of the Operating Budget or the Capital Budget as proposed by the Board of Estimates to the City Council.

Amendment No. 6

Amending the effective date of the Resolution.