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<b>FROM</b>	NAME & TITLE	Robert Cename, Budget Director	CITY of <b>BALTIMORE</b>  <b>MEMO</b>	
	AGENCY NAME & ADDRESS	Bureau of the Budget and Management Research Room 432, City Hall (410) 396-4774		
	SUBJECT	City Council Bill 19-0441-Charter Amendment—Charter Review Commission		

**TO**

DATE:

The Honorable President and  
Members of the City Council  
City Hall, Room 400

January 13, 2020

**Position: Support**

The Department of Finance is herein reporting on City Council Bill 19-0441, Charter Amendment—Charter Review Commission, the purpose of which is to require that a Charter Review Commission be convened at least every ten years to review and make recommendations for changes to the City Charter.

**Background**

The Baltimore City Charter is the central governing document for the City, outlining the framework for government operations. There are currently two avenues to amending the Charter, which require final approval of City voters. First, through a resolution of the Mayor and City Council. Second, through a petition of 20% of the qualified voters of the City, 10,000 signatures as a minimum. There have been several amendments to the Charter, but no major coordinated revisions since 1994.

In 2018, former Mayor Catherine Pugh established the Mayor’s Charter Review Commission, comprised of over fifty individuals and charged with developing recommendations to streamline and update the Charter so City operations are performed more effectively and efficiently. The Commission established six subcommittees focused on audits, budget and finance, City Council and legislative process, Mayor’s Office and executive function, human resources, and procurement and purchasing. The Department of Finance met with various subcommittees to share recommendations and provide feedback. The final report from the Commission included a set of global recommendations, as well as specific recommendations, to clarify Charter language and improve City operations. However, most of the recommended revisions were not approved by City Council and did not go before voters.

**Fiscal Impact**

The incremental cost of having a Charter Review Commission every decade is small. Based on conversations with Baltimore, Howard, and Montgomery Counties, the Department of Finance estimates that it could cost up to \$5,455 each year the Commission is convened. This funding fulfills the reporting and outreach requirements established in this legislation. Printing costs of the Commission report could cost up to \$365, with print copies for the City Council and Mayor. Based on recent spending for a similarly structured event, the Board of Estimates Taxpayers Night, the Department anticipates a cost of approximately \$1,190 to advertise and host the public hearing at a City facility. Additionally, other jurisdictions reimburse Commission members for parking, which would cost approximately \$260 per member for approximately 20 meetings.

Charter Review Commission Costs	
Report Printing	\$365
Advertisements and Outreach	\$1,190
Travel reimbursement (\$260 per member)	\$3,900

Finally, staffing support for the Commission, as well as staff time for employees meeting with subcommittees, would be absorbed in current personnel time and budgets.

### **Other Considerations**

The Department of Finance supports the creation of a Charter Review Commission because we believe it is important that the Charter is updated to ensure that City services are provided effectively and efficiently. The recommendations put forward by the Commission should be informed by City agencies and national best practices.

During the 2018 review process, the Department of Finance was consulted and recommended changes to specific processes and procedures, as well as examining fine rates, that are established and authorized by the Charter. For example, the Charter requires that the Ordinance of Estimates be published in two daily local newspapers (Article VI, Section 6.a), which may no longer be the most accessible means for public notice. Additionally, the Charter establishes certain tax and fee rates that are not updated to reflect inflation, as well as procurement and grant appropriation processes that do not adjust to changes in business and grant operations. It is critical that any Commission engage directly with agency subject matter experts.

Surrounding counties, including Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Howard, and Montgomery Counties, have Charter Review Commissions, which operate under similar staffing and budget structures. Commissions have staffing support from legislative support staff throughout the term of the Commission, as well as advice from legal counsel during Commission meetings. However, only Baltimore County's statute designates staff support for the Commission, "the County Attorney and the Secretary to the County Council, or their designees, shall provide to the commission advice and technical assistance". Most of the Commissions do not have a budget appropriation, except for funds to print the final reports and reimburse members for transportation. Staff support and other costs are absorbed within existing personnel and costs.

### **Conclusion**

As the central governing document for City operations, it is important for the Charter to be periodically reviewed and updated to ensure that processes and procedures are up to date and reflect the current context of City operations.

**For the reason stated above, the Department of Finance supports City Council Bill 19-0441.**

cc: Henry Raymond  
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