



CHARTER REVIEW SPECIAL COMMITTEE

The Honorable Ryan Dorsey
CHAIR

HEARING NOTES

LO25-0038
Charter Review

Hearing Date: 3/4/2026

Hearing Start Time: 4:00 PM

Hearing End Time: 7:00 PM

Location: Du Burns Council Chamber / Webex

Total Estimated Attendance: 10

Committee Members in Attendance:

- **Chair** Ryan Dorsey
 - Odette Ramos
 - Jermaine Jones
 - **Vice Chair** John Bullock
 - Zac Blanchard
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MAJOR SPEAKERS

(This is NOT an attendance record.)

- Committee members
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NOTES

- Chair Dorsey welcomed the members of the committee
- The Chair discussed today's agenda
 - After the last meeting the Chair met with the City's Budget Director who had some suggestions for the budget process that could be included in what has already been asked of DLR to draft
 - Conversation on how we frame the work of the committee in the context of a longer range, broader mission
 - We should begin to consider what our vision is
 - We have had two community listening sessions
 - Discussed the proposals the committee has discussed to date
 - Will continue to tweak how they go based on location
- Staff touched on public input received since the last committee meeting – available on Legistar
- We spent the last few meetings detailing proposals in detail
- Councilwoman Ramos indicated she would provide additional details on two proposals within the next week

- Separating the capital from operating budget
- Reforming the Office of Council Services and Department of Legislative Reference
 - Also dovetails into the idea of a budget office
- Councilman Jones indicated that any change to the BOE would need to include other elements including those related to the Department of Finance
- Councilman Blanchard indicated that the committee's proposal should have a clear framing
 - We should discuss how we consider things like BOE reform and minor privileges as part of one process
- The Chair noted that during last night's session and others he has tried to frame the proposals through three lenses
 - Improve interactions with city government
 - Improve city government's ability to improve itself
 - Improve city government's ability to respond to new and emerging needs
- The chair shared with the committee a document detailing every reference to the Board of Estimates in the Charter and Code – it is approximately 170 pages
- Budget proposals
 - Tax rate decoupling
 - Last year, the General Assembly considered a bill that would move up the date local jurisdictions are required to certify their tax rate
 - Currently it is required five days before the Charter requires the Council to pass the budget
 - But the charter also ties the passage of the tax rate ordinance to the passage of the budget ordinance
 - It does not need to be in that order
 - The introduction of the budget and tax rate in tandem results in the proposed tax rate always covering proposed expenditures
 - Any cuts would need to be so dramatic that the tax rate would need to be cut
 - CM Blanchard inquired about whether BBMR had voiced an opinion on this
 - This was the Budget Director's proposal
 - Comptroller's office did not express a concern
 - CW Ramos indicated that she puts value in the comments of the Budget director and believes it would make sense to work it into the draft at this stage
 - This will be incorporated into the current draft
 - Permitting Council budget increases in non-general funds
 - Common with federal and state grants that we receive late in the budget process
 - Currently, the City must go through the supplemental appropriations process
 - This delays our ability to spend the money we are awarded
 - At the request of the finance department
 - This is how amendments in other parts of the budget process work already
 - DLR asked if there was a discussion of the overall purpose and why we accept grants in that process
 - The amendment process corrects for a requirement in the charter that may not need to exist for this type of money
 - What are we checking for before we accept this money

- Chair - That is a good question, have we created a system that makes us do things we don't need to be doing
 - Article II (set by the state) indicates that we can receive grants from the federal government as approved by the Board of Estimates
 - This is a transparency matter but the current system does not need to be the exclusive means of appropriation
 - CW Ramos concurred – perhaps we should cut out the need for the BOE to approve grants
 - This will need some further investigation
- The Mayor's Office of Government Relations indicated they would like to receive formal committee requests if there are any of the administration
- Stars may be aligning about abolishing the Board of Estimates
 - There may need to be an effort to make city council positions full-time
- We laid out priorities at the previous meeting
- There does need to be some structure to procurement that remains
 - CM Jones suggested that we did not decide for certain where we came down on procurement
 - All of the related provisions that are currently in the Charter do not need to be there
 - CM Blanchard indicated that we should be looking at what other jurisdictions are doing
 - With respect to procurement, the revision would state that BOE would only approve those above a threshold set by ordinance
 - By a 2/3 majority vote
- The Committee does need to meet with other members to discuss with other council members in advance of introduction
- The Committee needs to come to a decision on whether the things DLR is drafting is one singular proposal or several
 - CM Blanchard indicates that he is not opposed to a singular proposal
 - CW Ramos indicates her belief that they should be broken up
 - CM Blanchard remarked that there are already too many things that voters are forced to unpack in an election
 - This is not one or ten, we should avoid overwhelming voters
 - The Chair indicated that many of these provisions are interrelated and wants to avoid a bizarre outcome from separating those that are interrelated
 - Particularly those related to the mayor, budget, and BOE
 - And with all of that tied together as one thing, there are only two other remaining topics
 - Strike of biennial audits and minor privileges
 - At that point, is it a meaningful ballot question that would necessitate any discrete campaign on that topic
 - Much more practical to talk about it as a unified effort
 - A vision to modernize government
 - CW Ramos suggested that procurement should be celebrated independently
 - The Chair indicated that the procurement proposal is part of the budget article
 - Because community outreach is being done in tandem, we should be considering all aspects conceptually as fast as possible

- The Council GC indicated that the Attorney General's Office will review the measure for clarity and the committee should be prepared for alternatives
 - It has been suggested to the committee that the single subject rule does not apply to amendments to the Charter like it does to ordinances
- We do not have a resolution on this point but we started that discussion
- CM Blanchard emphasized that we need the time to appropriately review the proposals in light of the timeline
- The proposals voted on previously were a rough approximation of what we will see from DLR
- The Chair and Committee discussed the Mayor and BOE-Budget revisions that were discussed previously
- CM Blanchard touched on a ground rent proposal he made at a previous meeting
 - The Department of Law indicated that ground rent piece may be unnecessary but land disposition agreements could be excluded from BOE approval via the Charter
 - Amend section 5 of article 5
 - Would like the committee to consider
 - The Chair indicated that this may warrant more time to consider
 - The city owns a vacant property it wants to dispose of with a buyer
 - DLR indicated that, from a charter perspective, there may be a more important conversation about who would be assigned the power to handle the disposition of a property
 - This may not be a ripe issue for this ballot cycle
- The bigger picture of this committee
 - There is a future without the Board of Estimates – that is the prevailing sentiment
 - Are actions now are little things that we can do not to move the needle without being in conflict of that bigger picture
 - Should we have someone independent of the executive branch who controls the outflows of money
 - Should the council have budget staff comparable to BBMR?
 - The Council has had budget staff who have difficulty getting information
 - Moving finance out of the executive branch addresses that
 - Comptroller Henry has previously brought that up under the guise of moving it to the Comptroller's office
 - Then; however, if the comptroller is in charge of audits it would be responsible for auditing itself
 - Why then not give audits to the city council
 - We should also avoid being duplicative just for the sake of spending taxpayer dollars unnecessarily
 - CW Ramos indicated that, after the 2026 cycle, we could work with other localities to determine what a better system would look like
 - Term limits is also part of that discussion
 - Doing away with BOE is really a change of government
 - What is the through line of the committee's work
 - A simpler to understand and a simpler to operate government
 - CM Jones
 - Remove errors and contradictions
 - Making government more flexible

- Bring balance and accountability to the structure
- At the moment we are waiting on 2026 and can use that time to have this broader conversation
 - How will our work be presented
- CW Ramos - When members are discussing this work in public we must emphasize how it touches residents
 - Efficiency has connected with residents
- We should talk about the tools that we have vs. the tools that we don't have because of the Charter
- The success of the effort relies on us having one voice
- Ultimately residents are the only ones who can change the charter
- We are trying to do the duty of stewardship

Hearing Packet in bill file? ----- **YES** **NO** **N/A**
Attendance Sheet in bill file? ----- **YES** **NO** **N/A**
Vote Record in bill file? ----- **YES** **NO** **N/A**
Agency reports read? ----- **YES** **NO** **N/A**
Hearing televised or audio-digitally recorded? ----- **YES** **NO** **N/A**
Certification of advertising/posting notices in the bill file? ----- **YES** **NO** **N/A**
Evidence of notification to property owners in bill file? ----- **YES** **NO** **N/A**

Notes by: Ethan Navarre
 Notes Date: 3/4/2026

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