

BALTIMORE CITY COUNCIL



CHARTER REVIEW SPECIAL COMMITTEE

LO25-0038
Charter Review

Public Testimony

February 5, 2026 - February 18, 2026

From: Adam Golden

Sent: Wednesday, March 4, 2026 8:01 AM

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

Subject: suggestions for continued work

Dear Charter Review Committee,

I am very excited about some of the changes that the Committee seems likely to move forward on. I write today to provide a few notes on the prospective changes. I greatly appreciate the opportunity for public input, and I appreciate the Committee's hardwork on this most important matter---our local constitution.

First, I write in support of these already considered changes:

1. Give the Council additional time with the budget: Having sufficient time is an important part of the Council beginning to use its authority over the budget.
2. Remove of the BOE's broad grant of fiscal authority: At present, the Charter provides that the BOE "shall formulate and execute the fiscal policy of the City." The Law Department regularly uses these words to limit the Council's authority to do really anything in the realm of City finances. Councilman Dorsey is smart to remove these words in his proposal and to instead specifically enumerate the powers and duties of BOE. In so enumerating, I hope the Committee will give real thought to what powers the BOE will have.
3. Permit the Council to enact dedicated funds through ordinance: Frankly, it is absurd that our representatives must presently propose charter amendments simply to create dedicated funds. As our elected representatives, the Council should have the authority to create dedicated funds for important projects, funds with their own revenue sources of some sort and that use that revenue to serve the people of Baltimore in important ways. An open question to consider is whether these funds could have the General Fund be their source of revenue, i.e., whether a dedicated fund could state that some portion or fixed amount of general fund revenues is to be appropriated into the dedicated fund each year. In either event, the Council's authority to enact dedicated funds through ordinance should be stated expressly in the new Budget article.
4. Set conditions on agency appropriations: Again, it is truly ridiculous that agencies are not more responsive to Council Members and this authority, if used properly, should allow the Council to flex some real muscle.

Second, I write with these additional suggestions.

1. Eliminate the Mayor's line item veto: I know the Council is considering reforms to the Mayor's veto authority over the budget. It is silly that the Mayor can veto a single line item of spending. The Council is already limited by not being able to increase the top line budget amount, that the Mayor could then zero out spending agreed to by the Council is counterintuitive the balance of powers.
2. Skip the BOE in the budget process: The Committee seems likely to take the wise step of eliminating the requirement that the BOE sit on the budget for 30 days after making public the DOF and Planning Commission recommended operating and capital budgets.

At that point, there is little to no reason the BOE need to receive and vote on the budget at all---what we are left with is the Mayor proposing a budget and then giving it to a body that he controls to vote on again. At the state level and across many places in the United States, the executive budget is introduced directly into the legislature, so it should be in Baltimore as well.

3. Remove the BOE from the supplemental appropriations process: At present, supplemental appropriations must be first initiated by the BOE. There is no reason that the Council, at the very least, the Mayor directly should not be able to initiate supplemental appropriations. The BOE should be removed from this process just as it should be from the original budget process. The supplemental appropriations process should be spelled out expressly in the Budget article.
4. Add in a clear plan to reign in agency spending: A clear frustration of the Council is that agencies are regularly far exceeding their appropriation in the Ordinance of Estimates and then, having already spent the money, come to the BOE and Council asking for a supplemental appropriation that the Council has little choice but to grant. Perhaps this Committee thinks that the conditional appropriations will be sufficient to reign this in, but I think something more clear in the Charter may be appropriate. For now, I leave to the Committee to come up with such ideas.
5. Reform the procurement process to be more in line with other cities: At present, the Charter says that the BOE “shall be responsible for awarding contracts and supervising all purchasing by the City” but then allows the Council, by ordinance, to set the dollar threshold for which contracts must be approved by the BOE. The BOE does not need to be involved in the procurement process at all. The procurement provisions in the Charter should be completely removed, and the Council should create a new process, by ordinance, such that purchases under a certain threshold are reviewed by the existing procurement division within the Department of Finance and purchases/contracts above the threshold are voted on by the Council.
6. Create a Council Budget Office and ensure adequate funding: At present, there is a huge staffing asymmetry between the Mayor and the Council in which BBMR is housed under DOF and is thus under the control of the Mayor. I know some Council Members believe that BBMR should be made an independent body that is accessible to both the Mayor and the Council. While it may feel duplicative, a better structure is for both the Mayor and the Council to have dedicated budget staff of their own. This is how most state governments work. The Council will never be able to be on par with the Mayor in formulating the budget without professional budget staff of its own. The changes should include the create of a Council Budget Office and a provision that requires adequate funding to be appropriated each year in the Ordinance of Estimates.