
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

HEARING NOTES

LO25-0038
Charter Review

Hearing Date: 11/19/2025

Hearing Start Time: 4:00 PM

Hearing End Time: 6:00 PM

Location: Du Burns Council Chamber / Webex

Total Estimated Attendance: 15

Committee Members in Attendance:

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

Additional Councilmembers in Attendance

- Antonio Glover
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MAJOR SPEAKERS

(This is NOT an attendance record.)

- Ty'lor Schnella – Mayor's Office of Government Relations
 - Ros Fraser – Department of Legislative Reference
 - Jeff Hochstetler – City Law Department
 - J Hardy – Office of the Comptroller
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NOTES

- Chair Dorsey introduced the committee
- The committee began by reviewing new topics submitted via charter.review.committee@baltimorecity.gov
 - Chair – we want to give all topics due consideration and will continue to discuss what is appropriate and inappropriate charter materials
 - This should become clearer to the public and others about what belongs in the charter
 - 7 new topics since last meeting
 - Public – available for review on Legistar

- Proposal to eliminate mayoral appointees to board of estimates
 - Identical to previously reviewed topic
 - Guarantee floor vote to bills stalled in committee
 - Automatic advancement to bills stalled for 90 days
 - Can be triggered by each council member up to three times a year
 - Restore control of budget to city council
 - Requires mayoral submission of draft budget
 - Preventing mayoral veto of budget
 - Consolidation of all offices into executive departments under CAO control
 - Establish special recall elections and process specifically for the role of the council president
- Chair also introduced some new topics of his own
 - Accountability restructuring for city administrator so the position is accountable to the mayor AND council
 - more akin to a weak mayoral form of government
 - Repealing term limits as established by question K in 2022
- Further discussion of topics from previous meeting
 - Reiterated three questions that we will consistently be asking, in addition to questions throughout about whether something is proper charter material
 - 1. Which of the three buckets does a proposal fall into
 - Agreement between council and mayor
 - Agreement amongst council only
 - No agreement amongst council
 - 2. Feasibility for 2026 vs. 2028
 - 3. DLR ability to draft in advance of 2026
 - Board of Estimates Composition
 - Vice Chair Bullock – mayor has outsized role due to designees
 - There have been suggestions, including by the current mayor, to rebalance the composition
 - Chair – there have also been proposals to abolish the Board
 - NYC does not have a BOE – instead sets a threshold for matters that must go before the Council
 - CM Ramos – Finance and Law have expressed concerns about our bond rating
 - To understand what format changes would result in requires an assessment of the impacts
 - CM Jones – Are we looking to determine what bucket things go in or are we having the discussion
 - Chair – some may be so impactful and already understood that it can be both
 - This is clearly not in the “everyone is on the same page bucket”
 - Here there may not even be consensus among the council
 - CM Ramos – though there is an agreement that we should make a change
 - Here in Baltimore we have a part-time council, that could causes issues with respect to ending the BOE as an entity
 - CM Blanchard – BOE does both contracts and the budget

- What do we want the budgetary process in the city to look like
 - We need to consider this particular topic with a much broader lens
 - Chair – is there a financial and bonding implication to abolishing the BOE
 - Vice Chair – No that is not a real concern
 - Three people vs. five making a decision is not going to affect your bond rating
 - This initial conversation allows us to assess gaps in our own knowledge
 - CM Ramos – we would also have to do more work on procurement
 - How do other jurisdictions handle procurement and spending without a BOE
 - What about the Board of Public Works at state level
 - What about thresholds – do things like travel expenditures need to go to the BOE?
 - Chair – What goes to our BOE vs. others
 - CM Jones – What is actually required under the charter vs. what do we do by convention
- Procurement Reform
 - Chair – MOGR previously shared bill to remove procurement from Charter to ordinance
 - MOGR – yes, that was previously drafted
 - Chair – Anything in the charter prescribing procurement process that should be removed
 - Chair – what about proposals to do more by BOE memo
 - CM Ramos – would like to see previous MOGR proposal
- Chair
 - BOE for now – unclear path forward
 - Removing overly prescriptive procurement rules and replacing with ordinance has general consensus from all parties
- Current thresholds are so low because alterations and changes require charter amendments
- CM Blanchard – good government is about allowing government to do good things efficiently
- CM Ramos – yes, and it's all in the charter
- Chair – procurement reform has general consensus
- Department of Legislative Reference (DLR) – there may be something already drafted, will check and return to the committee
- Board of Finance Composition
 - Council GC – adjusts makeup
 - Members – please clarify what Board of Finance does
 - Council GC – certain things require BOF approval
 - Most recent example is noncontiguous TIF – need approval to put bonds on market from BOF
 - Chair – but also requires BOE and, sometimes, complementary legislation
 - Currently made up of comptroller, mayor, and members of the public appointed by the mayor
 - Discussion of Charter Article VII sections on Board of Finance
 - Chair – is this common in other jurisdictions

- Why does the department head and staff not do this
 - If not, why does it not go to the BOE
 - Vice Chair – Comptroller Henry has a knowledge of government and understanding of why some things exist at present
 - Chair – would like an understanding from finance director on whether this board is necessary and what they rely on the board for that they cannot do
- Parking benefits district
 - CM Blanchard – allow main streets with meters to allow those meters to access some of that revenue
 - Would we need to establish the fund
 - Or are we required to establish funds by charter
 - Chair – law/DLR, what in the Charter requires that special funds are established in the charter
 - What is the constraint on our budgetary power that disallows this by ordinance such that any special fund must come by charter amendment
 - Council GC – Charter requires that funds go through ordinance of estimates, which goes through board of estimates
 - Law – two questions
 - Does the fund need to be in the charter; and,
 - Does the funding for the fund need to be in the charter
 - CM Ramos – affordable housing trust fund
 - Funds can be established by several specific mechanisms
 - Law – will take back to review what needs to be in the Charter
 - And council creation of funding sources into the funds
 - CM Blanchard – what is preventing just legislating this thing
 - CM Ramos – we should not think about this topic as exclusively tailored to parking benefits districts but funds broadly
- Reform of DLR and Office of Council Services
 - CM Ramos – independent body for analysis
 - Vice Chair – what is DLR and Council Services’ perspective
 - MOGR – concern over bill reports and referrals needing pass through an independent agency
 - Chair – likes the idea of DLS doing reports
 - If executive agencies want to push back against a report they are welcome to lobby on the bill
 - A fully independent charter agency could make modernization difficult
 - CM Ramos – budget analysis is done by DLS
 - Would need to be well-funded
 - Chair – DLR was once independent
 - Regretful of the vote to do so
 - Need to have Directors of DLR and OCS about the proposal
- Overly-Prescriptive Provision Reform
 - Chair – Departments do not need to exist in the Charter
 - Stripping Department of Transportation language from the Charter would not result in the department ceasing to exist

- Would not be prohibited from legislating on things in the Charter
- CM Jones – eliminating limitations would give us flexibility to move in a positive direction
 - Those limitations do also create guardrails to prevent a negative direction
 - Currently, that is not a concern but we do not know that this will always be the case
- Chair – once upon a time, everything in the City operated under the Department of Public Works
 - Eventually moved into separate agencies to remove from control of DPW
 - Future leaders may be just as cautious as us
- Chair – say for example we repeal all of the operating language under the Departments – instead replace with “There is a Department of XXX, XXX, XXX, etc.... and any agencies created by ordinance.”
 - Any other constraints we need can be codified by ordinance
- Chair – can charter amendments be made effective on passage of legislation
 - Law – some concern here, not sure, will review election law article
- Chair – we are often prevented from doing things that our constituents expect of us
- MOGR – we should not oversimplify, this is a foundational document and residents deserve to know how the government is structured in Charter

Hearing Packet in bill file? ----- ☒ YES ☐ NO ☐ N/A
Attendance Sheet 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: 11/19/2025

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