
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: 11/5/2025

Hearing Start Time: 4:00 PM

Hearing End Time: 5:00 XM

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

- Zeke Cohen
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MAJOR SPEAKERS

(This is NOT an attendance record.)

- Nina Themelis – Mayor’s Office of Government Relations
 - Ben Guthorn –Department of Legislative Reference
 - Jeff Hochstetler – City Law Department
 - KC Kelleher – Office of the Comptroller
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NOTES

- Chair Dorsey introduced the Committee
- Council President Cohen offered some opening remarks
 - Federal assault on democracy – challenging judicial branch and pushing back against the constitution
 - Here in Baltimore we are doubling down on our democracy
 - Authorized this committee because our Charter must be reviewed and taken seriously, it is the people’s document and the people deserve to have a say in who governs them
 - Committee will hold listening sessions so the public can engage
 - We should be forward thinking about the City we want to build

- We are excited about the process and addressing both little and big things
- Chair Dorsey offered some opening remarks
 - It is vital that the people of Baltimore are able to offer their feedback and share their own ideas
 - The committee will exist for the remainder of the term but will endeavor to complete this series of work by May 2026 so that topics can be submitted for the 2026 ballot
 - We will soon announce listening sessions for May 2026
 - We invite the public to submit feedback via a dedicated email address: charter.review.committee@baltimorecity.gov
 - Will frequently reference appropriate and inappropriate material – the charter should be a foundational document to explain how the City government works and what the City government can do
- Chair Dorsey asked representatives from the Mayor’s Office, Law Department, Comptroller, and Department of Legislative Reference
- Chair Dorsey indicated transparency is of the utmost importance, this hearing will include a discussion of topics that have already been discussed and request that others be offered from representatives
 - Confident the list of topics will be extensive, we need to ask several guiding questions for how the work will be guided
 - Asking 3 questions
 - Where does the proposal fall among the following
 - Consensus between council and administration
 - Consensus between council only
 - Lacking consensus among the council
 - What is the immediacy of the need – should a proposal be handled before 2026 or can it wait for 2028
 - Can the department of legislative reference actually draft the bills in time
- Chair Dorsey handed the hearing to the Council President’s staff to walk through a slideshow of previously discussed topics
 - Structural Topics
 - Board of estimates composition
 - Councilwoman Ramos – lots of weight towards the mayor, more balanced approach
 - Board of Finance composition
 - Parking Benefits Districts
 - Chair – to incentivize main street area parking meter usage by way of a non-lapsing fund
 - There are many non-lapsing funds in the charter
 - This brings up the notion of matters in the charter that makes doing similar topics impossible by ordinance
 - Is there a goal behind a topic proposal that could be achieved by removing an overly prescriptive provision, rather than adding something else over prescriptive
 - Councilwoman Ramos – opportunity for the City Council to create funding sources and direct them into those funds

- Reform Department of Legislative Reference and Office of Council Services
 - Councilwoman Ramos – resembles the Department of Legislative Services in Annapolis
 - Vice Chair Bullock – how would DLR and Council Services feel
 - Procedural Topics
 - Overly-Prescriptive Provision reform
 - Touches on a vast array of issues, something broadly to keep in mind
 - Redistricting Reform
 - Council President – redistricting can be painful and we can do better, it becomes highly politicized
 - Veto Reform
 - Chair – comes up frequently
 - Timing of Budget delivery to the City Council
 - Chair – comes up throughout the Council
 - Revenue certification schedule
 - Audit timing requirements
 - Minor privileges reform
 - Chair – very onerous to put up a sign on or in front of a business, they require a minor privilege permit which must be approved by BOE
 - This has widespread agreement
 - Mayor’s Office – concur
 - Comptroller’s Office – reducing administrative burden would be beneficial
 - City Seal
 - Councilwoman Ramos – currently sits with Treasury but becomes important to the Council after passage of legislation, requirement for an ordinance number
 - Financial Topics
 - Conditional Budgetary Authority
 - Chair – state level electeds have indicated that the Council does not use its budget power the way it should
 - The Maryland State budget has requirements that condition funds
 - Critical part of how the general assembly conducts oversight of state agencies
 - We don’t have that power because the Charter only authorizes the conditional release of funding to non-city entities
 - For example the State’s Attorney or the Courts
 - Procurement Reform
 - Chair – many subtopics
 - Councilman Jones – Charter requires lowest bid when others may provide a greater value
 - Chair – specifically pertains to capital procurement
 - Chair – DOT has indicated an interest in design-build contracting
 - Mayor’s Office – administration does have an interest in removing language that is improper charter material
 - Biennial Audit Reform: Agencies

- Comptroller’s Office – has existed for 10 years and, reflecting on that, there is an opportunity to include those entities that receive significant city funds
 - Many Law Department processes are not auditable
 - Chair – this is an example of something that is but does not need to be in the Charter
- Biennial Audit Reform: Redundancies
- Capital Budget Reform
 - Councilwoman Ramos – important to ensure the Council has more of a role in the capital budget
- Close-out Supplemental Reform
 - Council General Counsel – at the end of fiscal years, surpluses being transferred from one agency to the other provide false sense of balance
- Split-Rate Taxation
 - Chair – this topic comes from Councilman Blanchard, does require enabling legislation from general Assembly
- Outside Counsel Reform
 - Council General Counsel – requests come from entities like the Police Accountability Board in instances of perceived conflict of interest, to establish neutral body to evaluate
- Chair Dorsey offered the opportunity to submit proposals to other Councilmembers, the public, etc.
 - Are there any topics that were not offered in the initial presentation?
 - None tonight
- Council President Cohen – truly looking forward to hearing from the public, this was a good first list but we want to ensure that the residents are provided deference
- Chair Dorsey remarked how the venue of the council chambers make this discussion awkward, would like to move to a different room to ensure this work is conversational
- Council General Counsel Aaron Degraffenreidt conveyed the importance of the timeline because they get approved by the voters and the process for getting onto the ballot is a facet of state law
 - May 1 is the best date to work from, must go from the Law Department to State Board of Elections by the end of July
 - After May 1, the budget process takes up a lot of Council bandwidth
- Ben Guthorn Department of Legislative Reference – changes with respect to the Charter may necessitate further revisions to the code

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

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Notes Date: 11/5/2025