



OFFICE OF THE CONTROLLER

CITY AND COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Greg Wagner
Controller

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Charter Reform Working Group Meeting – Draft Meeting Summary

December 10, 2025

1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place, Room 201

3:00pm

1) Welcome and Introductions, Mayor Lurie and President Mandelman

Mayor Lurie welcomed attendees. Board of Supervisors President Mandelman provided an overview of the effort and welcomed attendees. Working group members introduced themselves and their organizations. Mayor Lurie thanked everyone for their participation.

2) Purpose of the Charter Reform Working Group, Controller Greg Wagner

Controller Greg Wagner explained the purpose of the working group. The working group will provide input on reforms aimed at improving the efficiency and effectiveness of City services. Controller Wagner explained that the Charter sets the structure and operating rules for government but also creates legislative and operational challenges.

Controller Wagner provided an overview of the key challenges that will be discussed by the working group, including 1) the organizational structure of the City, 2) the operational efficiency of the City, 3) the policymaking process, and 4) the City's resource management process. Controller Wagner defined each challenge and provided examples. Controller Wagner stated that these challenges are not yet set recommendations but are a framework for this group to discuss Charter reform.

3) Charter 101, Chief Assistant City Attorney Jon Givner

Chief Assistant City Attorney Jon Givner provided an overview of the San Francisco City Charter, describing it as the City's "local constitution." He noted that as a Charter City and County, San Francisco has the authority to adopt laws that diverge from state rules through voter-approved amendments.

Chief Assistant City Attorney Givner outlined the Charter's evolution, highlighting major reforms in 1932 and 1996. He explained how the Charter limits elected officials' involvement in departmental operations. Chief Assistant City Attorney Givner also



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described the complexity of the City's governance model where different City departments report to various elected and appointed officials including the Mayor, Department Heads, the City Administrator, and Commissions.

Chief Assistant City Attorney Givner concluded by noting that the City Attorney's Office provides legal counsel to all City agencies and drafts Charter amendments but cannot provide legal advice to external parties.

Working group members had the following questions:

- Supervisor Mahmood asked about the City's governance and reporting structures and the challenges they present. Chief Assistant City Attorney Jon Givner described the variation in how departments report to different entities including commissions, department heads, or the Mayor's Office.
- Shakirah Smiley noted that while the Charter is bloated, it reflects the social values of voters and is a north star for our social promises. Chief Assistant City Attorney Givner explained that every Charter amendment embodies San Franciscan values, especially those tied to baselines and set-asides, which often reflect community priorities.
- Bob Fischer asked whether any research had been done to compare San Francisco's organizational structure to other cities. Ben Rosenfeld noted that San Francisco's Charter is significantly longer than those of other cities because it uniquely outlines nearly all City departments and most organizational decisions, whereas other cities typically include only foundational departments.
- Katherine August-deWilde asked how much of San Francisco's reputation as the worst run city is because of the Charter. City Administrator Chu responded that some issues stem from the Charter while others do not.

4) Current Efforts, City Administrator Carmen Chu

City Administrator Carmen Chu outlined ongoing efforts to improve City operations and noted that not all challenges stem from the Charter. She described the work of the Commission Streamlining Task Force and the Government Operations effort to streamline procurement.



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City Administrator Chu also described challenges in capital delivery and technology, noting difficulties with project coordination, uneven resource allocation, and fragmented technology systems. City Administrator Chu concluded her presentation with an update on efforts to revamp the City's technological infrastructure, including an effort to consolidate technological resources and identify IT investments that will strengthen the City's systems.

Working group members asked the following questions:

- Fred Blackwell asked whether the working group should consider the Commission Streamlining Task Force recommendations as a part of this group's Charter reform efforts. City Administrator Chu clarified that her intent was to highlight overlapping efforts between the working group and the Commission Streamlining Task Force and highlighted the overlapping timelines of the two efforts.
- Katherine August-deWilde asked how much money the City could save with a more efficient procurement system. City Administrator Chu noted the City Administrator's Office is working with the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission to develop a scalable citywide procurement system.
- Zach Goldman asked how procurement processes are related to the Charter. City Administrator Chu explained that some departmental responsibilities are embedded in the Charter, which can complicate attempts to centralize efforts.
- Shola Oyatole expressed concerns about the City's multiple Microsoft contracts and asked if the City Attorney could declare an emergency to address it. City Administrator Chu responded that the Charter restricts such emergency declarations and, in some instances, allows separate license purchases. Supervisor Mahmood noted that, unlike Los Angeles, the Charter does not include such declarations and suggested the working group consider this issue.

5) Discussion

Natasha Mihal facilitated a general question and answer session with working group members.



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- Missy Narula asked how much of the budget is discretionary given current set-asides. Controller Wagner explained that over half of the City's \$16 billion budget is tied to enterprise funds, while 30% of the \$7 billion general fund is committed to set-asides and baselines.
- Andres Powers asked if the working group would operate by consensus. Controller Wagner explained that the working group will provide feedback to guide the Board of Supervisors. President Mandelman added that the working group is a forum for thoughtful discussion and noted that the Controller's Office will engage with the group on ideas, including baselines and ballot access.
- Larry Baer asked how the working group would interact with the Commission Streamlining Task Force. President Mandelman explained that while both groups address oversight responsibilities in the Charter, the Commission Streamlining Task Force specifically focuses on recommending changes to commissions and department provisions.
- Fred Blackwell asked for clarity on the working group's responsibilities and deadlines, noting that the Charter is lengthy. Alicia John-Baptiste explained that decades of accumulated rules in the Charter have constrained governance. She further explained that the Mayor is seeking input on how to address what is not working, how to improve government flexibility and clarify governance roles. Supervisor Mandelman added that the Controller's Office will facilitate focused discussions on these topics.
- Josh Arce expressed interest in capital and infrastructure delivery and asked which sections of the charter address this topic. Chief Assistant City Attorney Givner stated that Chapter 6 of the Administrative Code provides additional details.
- Meredith Dodson said this effort is exciting and noted that education baselines are incredibly important and can be improved. She asked how changes to the City's baselines could provide additional funding for children and schools.
- Katherine August-deWilde requested that the working group receive synthesized information about charter sections. e. Controller Wagner informed the working group that the Controller's Office is preparing topic-specific materials for the working group.
- Rodney Fong noted that in the 1906 earthquake, City officials could not make decisions in time. He emphasized the need to make charter reform decisions that have longstanding impact and address future City emergencies.



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- Mike Casey noted that the Charter provision allowing four Supervisors to place measures on the ballot gives access to groups who otherwise could not get a majority of the Board to support certain positions. He also noted that these measures often reflect San Francisco values and expressed concern about removing this particular avenue to the ballot.
- John Doherty noted that we ended up with many of the challenging charter provisions because changes were not made through regular efforts. In this effort, there will be opposition from groups that fought for these changes at the ballot.
- Tim Omi highlighted the challenges that small businesses experience working with the City, especially in permitting, and expressed support for reform efforts that would mitigate those challenges.
- Aimee Alden highlighted some of the concrete improvement ideas from City Administrator Chu's presentation, focusing on IT procurement, serving children better, and saving money. She also expressed interest in discussing how values could inform discussions around service improvement, which would be the reason to take on charter reform.
- Sherilyn Adams agreed with Aimee Alden and acknowledged the difficulty of changing set-asides for specific services.

6) Closing and Next Steps

Controller Wagner closed the meeting by outlining next steps. He noted that the Controller's Office will prepare materials and the working group will reconvene in the new year.