OFFICE OF THE CONTROLLER

CITY AND COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO

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Controller

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Charter Reform Working Group Meeting – Draft Meeting Summary
February 5, 2026
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place, Room 201
3:00pm

1) **Welcome and Introductions**

Alicia John-Baptiste opened the meeting by welcoming new members and thanking members for their participation.

Controller Greg Wagner provided a brief recap of prior discussions and outlined today's agenda. Working group members raised several process questions:

- Fred Blackwell asked whether the process would culminate in a written report and how feedback and disagreement would be characterized. Greg Wagner confirmed that his office will produce a report analyzing each option and summarizing group feedback, including disagreements. The group will not vote on a package of options or attempt to seek consensus.
- Kim Tavaglione requested that written public comment be circulated to working group members, and staff agreed to do so.

City Performance Director Natasha Mihal shared the results from a January 30 core values exercise and asked members to complete a worksheet ranking their top values.

2) **Commission Streamlining Task Force Updates**

Rachel Alonso, Project Director in the City Administrator's Office, presented an overview of the Commission Streamlining Task Force's final report and recommendations, then facilitated a brief Q&A:

- Bob Fischer asked if this will be a recurring process.
- Rachel Alonso confirmed that the Task Force recommends a periodic review of the entire City Charter, including boards and commissions.
- Supervisor Bilal Mahmood requested clarification on which recommendations will be included in ordinance, and which require Charter amendments.
- Rachel Alonso explained that most public meeting bodies may be amended via ordinance, but several recommendations require Charter amendments (e.g., changes to department head hiring/firing authority).

- Katherine August-deWilde asked why the Task Force's recommendations must go back to voters.
- Rachel Alonso clarified that Proposition E gave the Task Force the authority to make some changes via ordinance, but only the voters may amend the Charter.
- Kim Tavaglione strongly opposed term limits for specialized commissions (e.g., the Health Service Board), arguing these roles require expertise and continuity. She also criticized the Task Force's approach and lack of engagement with current commission members.
- Steven Baccio praised the Task Force's process and analysis.
- Michael Pappas asked who department heads would report to if their commissions become advisory.
- Rachel Alonso clarified that they would report to the Mayor.
- Tim Omi raised concerns about moving the Small Business Commission from the Charter to the Administrative Code and about proposed changes to seat qualifications for commission members.
- Rachel Alonso explained that the Task Force generally recommended making seat qualifications desirable rather than mandatory to broaden the pool of qualified applicants.

3) **City Organization**

Greg Wagner presented an overview of the City's organizational structure and eight possible reform ideas to increase accountability and flexibility. Natasha Mihal facilitated discussion:

- Laurie Thomas asked what was the rationale that led to 90% of San Francisco's departments being established in the Charter.
- Greg Wagner urged working group members to answer Laurie's question based on their own experience and clarified that each of these departments was voter approved.
- Steven Baccio noted the upside of insulating departments from ballot measures by special interests and asked whether there was a way to protect departments if they're moved to the Municipal Codes.
- Alicia John-Baptiste noted that keeping departments in the Charter ensures stability but limits flexibility, while moving departments to code allows quicker adjustments to evolving needs, but carries the risk of frequent changes.
- Steven Baccio noted that raising signature thresholds for ballot measures could help address this.
- Greg Wagner asked the group what level of detail the Charter should include about departments.

- Andres Power asked whether the Charter could establish the basic purpose of departments and any additional detail could be moved to code, suggesting a higher threshold to make changes to departments in code.
- John Doherty said that most people probably care about the basic purpose and responsibilities of each department more than the actual structure of those departments. Simplifying the City's organizational structure could be useful as long as each department's responsibilities and services continue.
- Shakirah Simley asked City staff to explain the difference between a department, an agency, and an enterprise and why some might need to be in Charter while others do not.
- Greg Wagner explained that enterprise generally refers to departments that generate their own revenue (e.g., the Public Utilities Commission, which is funded by water and wastewater rates). Those revenues are restricted to pay for the services they provide. "Department" and "agency" can be used interchangeably. In some cases, the "agency" model has been used as a workaround to combine Charter departments.
- Katherine August-deWilde noted that it feels like we tie the hands of elected officials. She asked what we can learn from other cities.
- Greg Wagner noted that San Francisco uses ballot measures to make changes more often than other cities.
- Natalie Sandoval asked what guardrails have been considered to increase transparency and accountability when thinking about increasing mayoral authority. She fully supports a regular Charter review process but asked how this could be technical and evidence-based rather than political.
- Alicia John-Baptiste suggested the Controller and City Administrator's Offices develop Charter reform recommendations, since those are both technical and apolitical departments, and forward those to the Mayor and Board of Supervisors for consideration. She emphasized openness to other ideas and feedback.
- Greg Wagner suggested that guardrails may differ by department and asked for ideas from the group.
- Tim Omi expressed the importance of giving elected officials the ability to lead and supported giving more power to the Mayor and Board while setting up oversight processes.
- Kim Tavaglione acknowledged that mayoral appointment of department heads could be a good idea but stressed the need for a thoughtful and deliberative process for developing recommendations.
- Bob Fisher agreed with Tim and added that money influences ballot measure outcomes, which shouldn't be how we run our government.
- John Doherty noted that we are a Charter city, which allows us to set priorities that are different from the State.

- Fred Blackwell expressed that, in order for the Mayor to be held accountable, they must have the authority to do their job. He supported ideas #1 and 2. He did not have strong opinions about which departments should remain in the Charter but suggested moving operational details out. He expressed that details likely exist in the Charter because voters want continuity, but if elected officials spend all of their time re-organizing departments they might not get re-elected.
- Supervisor Mahmood asked what the concrete benefits are of moving a department from the Charter to code.
- Greg Wagner shared an example around permitting reform and the benefits of a flexible and iterative approach to department consolidation.
- Alicia John-Baptiste shared an example of outdated performance metrics that SFMTA must report on due to Charter requirements.
- Supervisor Mahmood asked whether any of the proposed changes could create budget flexibility for departments.
- Greg Wagner suggested this was a great segue to the next conversation about resource management.

4) Resource Management

Greg Wagner presented an overview of budget baselines and set-asides and eight possible reform ideas to increase flexibility and transparency. Natasha Mihal facilitated a group discussion:

- Dan Bernal asked whether baselines include local matches for state or federal grant money.
- Greg Wagner shared an example of local matches (SNAP benefits) and explained that these are restricted funds that are different from baselines.
- Susan Hirsch asked which baselines have sunset dates.
- Greg Wagner and President Mandelman clarified that while some baselines have sunset dates, they all have been re-authorized before they would have expired, sometimes at higher rates.
- Missy Narula acknowledged that this is a difficult conversation, and that each baseline exists for a reason. She observed that budgeting is a zero-sum game—as one portion of the pie grows, others must shrink. She asked which departments rely most on discretionary general fund revenue.
- Greg Wagner responded that six large departments—DPH, HSA, HSH, POL, FIR, and SHF—depend heavily on discretionary general fund revenue.
- Tiffany Waugh asked whether the appendix slides include a comprehensive list of all baselines, and Greg Wagner confirmed that they do.

- Andres Power acknowledged that all baselines are important priorities with strong political support. He suggested there's a lot of potential benefit from standardizing technical features across baselines (e.g., suspension triggers).
- Katherine August-deWilde said it wasn't reasonable to think the Mayor and Board of Supervisors wouldn't fund these services if they weren't required to.
- Kim Tavaglione shared historical context around the creation of the library set-aside and cautioned that changes to any baseline require understanding of its history and politics. She urged a deep, two-way engagement process with all options on the table, rather than rushed or top-down decisions.
- Bob Fisher asked for the perspectives of the Board President and Controller.
- President Mandelman expressed mixed feelings. He noted that voters establish baselines when they are concerned that services won't be adequately funded through the regular budget process. Parks and libraries are two services that residents agree are amazing, in part because baselines ensure they're well-funded. However, baselines divert funding from other priorities, such as infrastructure. He suggested finding a way to cap baseline growth.
- Ben Rosenfield observed that the City has debated this issue for twenty years without action, while the problem has worsened. As baselines squeeze the remaining budget, other services seek similar protections. He recommended incremental steps and suggested bringing advocates together to figure out how to consolidate overlapping baselines and reduce constraints.
- Sherilyn Adams agreed that baselines and set-asides pose challenges but emphasized that they reflect voter priorities and values. She urged a careful, incremental approach with deep engagement, noting that meaningful change will take time and likely extend beyond the current process.
- Fred Blackwell agreed with Sherilyn and Ben and suggested the City sequence changes. A first step could be to not allow new baselines to go forward without strict rules. Then, the City could engage in a methodical process of convening stakeholders to identify improvements to existing baselines.
- Shakirah Simley complicated the idea that baselines are set in stone, noting the example of declining hotel tax revenue impacting arts funding. She emphasized baselines as an equity issue protecting vulnerable residents, supported common-sense technical adjustments, and urged examining the $8.8 billion in enterprise funds not discussed today.
- Steven Baccio asked whether baselined services would receive less funding through the regular budget process.
- Andres Power clarified that the only reason to eliminate baselines is to create flexibility to reduce funding. The City can already fund these services above the required amount.
- John Doherty offered that sometimes it is useful to tie people's hands.

5) Meeting Closeout and Next Steps

Greg Wagner thanked members for their participation and briefly stated next steps.

6) Public Comment

- Christin Evans stated that time and again politicians have failed to support the least powerful. She then shared a statement from Anna Royal of the People's Budget Coalition. She highlighted that baselines are incredibly popular, and voters have approved them repeatedly. She also noted that the Dignity Fund has a deficit trigger, which has stopped promised increases from taking effect. On commission streamlining, she felt that public comment has not been adequately reflected in the Task Force's recommendations.
- Jennifer Friedenbach from the Coalition on Homelessness discussed the origins and benefits of OCOH, noting that over five thousand people have been housed and thousands more have received services through this funding. She cautioned that removing baselines is a bad idea.
- Denise Louie, an advocate for fire prevention and preparedness, criticized the Commission Streamlining Task Force's recommendation to eliminate the Urban Forestry Council, noting the Council's unmet responsibility to create an urban forest plan that addresses fuel reduction.
- An unnamed individual expressed that the Department of Police Accountability has overstepped its bounds beyond the role envisioned in the Charter.
- An unnamed individual raised the importance of having people who grew up in San Francisco in these conversations.