



OFFICE OF THE CONTROLLER

CITY AND COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO

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Charter Reform Working Group Meeting – Draft Meeting Summary

January 30, 2026

1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place, Room 201

3:00pm

1) **Welcome and Introductions**

Board of Supervisors President Rafael Mandelman welcomed attendees and briefly introduced new members and those who could not attend the last meeting. He reminded members that the purpose of this working group is to review possible reform ideas and provide feedback to policymakers.

Alicia John-Baptiste, the Mayor's Chief of Infrastructure, Climate, and Mobility, expressed her ongoing appreciation to working group members for their engagement.

Controller Greg Wagner reviewed the agenda, purpose of the working group, upcoming meeting schedule, and process for qualifying for the ballot. He also summarized feedback from the prior meeting, including requests for more information about San Francisco's Charter, how it compares to our peers, and a discussion of values.

2) **Core Values Exercise**

City Performance Director Natasha Mihal introduced a written exercise asking working group members, *"what core values should be reflected in our Charter?"* Members completed worksheets for submission at the end of the meeting.

3) **Ballot Measure Standards**

Controller Greg Wagner presented an overview of ballot measure standards, explaining the current process for qualifying for the ballot and nine potential reform ideas.

Natasha Mihal facilitated discussion on these proposals:

- John Doherty asked when proponents would be able to amend ballot measures and whether amendments would invalidate collected signatures. He cautioned that proponents could "gut and amend" a measure to alter it substantially.
- Greg Wagner clarified that only technical amendments consistent with the measure's original intent would be allowed.

- Missy Narula acknowledged that the Charter is too long, and that ballot measures are one reason why. She strongly supported Options #1 and 3.
- Laurel Severt asked whether amendments to voter-approved ordinances must follow the ethos of the original ballot measure.
- Greg Wagner explained that some ballot measures already include language allowing the Board to make amendments consistent with the original intent.
- Kim Tavaglione observed that most ballot measures were sponsored by a Board majority, suggesting that raising thresholds won't significantly shorten ballots. She warned that voters will be concerned about what will appear to be a consolidation of power.
- Marie Hurabiell asked whether the City Attorney's Office could review initiatives before they qualify for the ballot, citing a 2022 "Amazon tax" measure with drafting errors. She stressed the need for serious guardrails if elected officials are allowed to amend voter-approved language.
- Laurie Thomas appreciated the benchmarking information and asked whether other jurisdictions allow amendments after signature gathering (Option #7) and how such changes would be communicated back to voters.
- Greg Wagner noted that the State allows limited modifications to statewide measures but has constraints about what can be changed once signature gathering begins.
- Steven Bacio supported raising thresholds across the board for the Mayor, the Board, and voters, citing GrowSF research showing 400+ ballot measures since 1996.
- Fred Blackwell emphasized the importance of putting the "right" ballot measures in front of voters and ensuring transparency for any technical changes post-signature gathering. Drawing on his experience as a former City official, he supported allowing amendments after a set time period to incorporate lessons learned from implementation but stressed the need for strong guardrails. Fred also noted San Francisco's activist culture and suggested debating whether long ballots are flaws or features of our democratic process. He warned against changes that might concentrate power with the most wealthy and influential residents.
- Aimee Alden identified Option #5 (raising the Board threshold for Charter amendments) as most important, given the Charter's length, and urged data-driven decision-making.
- President Mandelman noted that the data doesn't capture everything happening under the surface. For example, some measures are introduced at the Board and then withdrawn after negotiations, and measures often receive additional sponsors once it becomes clear that they will qualify for the ballot, which may obscure their original level of support. Raising thresholds for the Mayor and Board may be beneficial.

- Andres Power explained that measures from four Supervisors bypass the full legislative process, while Board-majority measures require hearings and opportunities for amendment.
- Anne Marie Presutti reiterated the need for data-driven decision-making.
- Shakirah Simley called for tracking whether ballot measures achieve their intended outcomes and holding the City accountable. She also raised concerns about the high cost of signature gathering and its impact on racial and socio-economic disparities in ballot access.
- Kim Tavaglione referenced Andres' point and wondered whether the bigger problem is the lack of process and public hearing around four Supervisor measures.
- Andres Power clarified that these measures require a public hearing, but Supervisors cannot make amendments.
- Kim Tavaglione suggested improving this process and making it more responsive to public comment.
- Zach Goldman supported Options #7-9 to make government more effective. Citizens groups often don't have expensive attorneys and may benefit from the ability to make technical changes or withdraw measures after they have been submitted. It would also be appropriate to allow for legislative changes after a certain period of time, such as ten years.
- Aimee Alden and Katherine August-deWilde pointed out that most measures are placed on the ballot by a Board majority, and asked members of the Board to explain why.
- Supervisor Mahmood said that a deeper level of analysis would be helpful to understand what those ballot measures are, but explained that some things require voter approval, including taxes, bond measures, and Charter amendments, while others go to the ballot for political or strategic reasons.
- John Doherty felt that this discussion really comes down to ballot access by public initiative and argued that the group should focus on cleaning up the Charter rather than limiting ballot access. He noted that peer differences might not be as stark as what people think, citing San Diego's sliding scale where 3% of voters can place a measure on the ballot with Board approval. He echoed Fred and Shakirah's earlier points that ballot access shouldn't just be for rich and powerful people who can fund it.

4) Role of the City Administrator

Controller Greg Wagner presented an overview of the role of the City Administrator, explaining the current role, changes over time, and nine potential reform ideas to centralize administrative authority and streamline procurement.

Natasha Mihal facilitated a general discussion with working group members about the proposed ideas:

- Andres Power supported centralizing some functions with the City Administrator but raised accountability concerns if their term is extended and it becomes more difficult to remove the City Administrator from office.
- Tim Omi supported giving more decision-making authority to the City Administrator and asked whether this change would have support from a Board majority.
- President Mandelman noted that there are two pathways to the ballot and people could gather signatures for any idea they like. At the Board, there will be a long public process, and he can't predict where his colleagues will land. He made a pitch for ten year terms, citing the benefits of continuity across mayoral administrations, but acknowledged the Mayor and Board would need to think carefully about appointments.
- Marie Hurabiell echoed Andres' concern about increasing the City Administrator's authority while decreasing their accountability and expressed a preference not to increase their term length or make it more difficult to remove them from office.
- Natalie Sandoval asked whether there are lessons learned with the switch from a Chief Administrative Officer to a City Administrator in the 1996 Charter.
- President Mandelman expressed that Chief Administrative Officers were generally viewed as highly competent and above politics. With the switch to a City Administrator reporting to the Mayor, the quality of people appointed may have gone down, with the exception of Carmen Chu.
- Natalie Sandoval and Alicia John-Baptiste discussed how long it takes to create institutional change and whether a longer term is needed. They separated term lengths from the removal process, which is more central for accountability.
- President Mandelman highlighted that procurement is complex and fraught. He noted that Option #3 (grant the City Administrator sole authority to propose changes to purchasing laws) will have to be handled carefully to protect hard-won gains and adapt to changing circumstances in the future.
- Katherine August-deWilde supported giving more authority to the City Administrator, comparing the role to a Chief Operating Officer, while holding the person accountable for results. She noted that when companies streamline procurement, they often save 10-15%, which is money the City could reinvest in better services.
- Michael Pappas felt that contracts are by their very nature political, and that commission oversight can be a helpful firewall and accountability mechanism.
- Luis De Paz Fernandez offered that there could be regular performance reviews and accountability mechanisms built into a longer ten year term.
- Kim Tavaglione acknowledged that there are issues with procurement but felt that the City could resolve them without amending its Charter. She also noted that the last City Administrator was forced to step down, so guardrails and accountability are important.

- Sherilyn Adams fully supported extending the City Administrator's term, with guardrails. She has been contracting with the City since 1997 and acknowledged that something has to change. She urged colleagues in the room to be open to change that will improve the lives of San Francisco residents.
- Missy Narula noted the benefits of institutional continuity that comes with a longer term, paired with checks and balances. We need to make it easier to work with the City, and having an accountable leader seems like an appropriate step.
- Andres Power acknowledged that the Mayor could affect some changes without a Charter amendment but argued the case for an apolitical role focused on contracts for basic city needs (e.g., lightbulbs and paperclips). He also drew a distinction between contracts for goods and services. Finally, he agreed that institutional change takes time, but asked whether, if that's the case, the Mayor and Board should also have longer terms.
- Fred Blackwell agreed with the spirit of these reforms but wondered whether there's a way to draft Charter language that leaves flexibility for the Mayor and Board to govern as they see fit. He asked whether the Mayor currently has the authority to assign department/division oversight to the City Administrator.
- Greg Wagner replied that the Mayor can reorganize some department functions, but not others, and that this would be the subject of discussion next week.
- Alex Wong asked whether the City Administrator could support SFUSD with procurement, noting recent challenges with SFUSD's payroll system.
- Supervisor Chen asked what best practices we can draw from peer cities.
- Greg Wagner noted this would be a good topic for additional benchmarking, but it gets tricky because our strong Mayor system with a professional City Administrator is somewhat unique.
- Shakirah Simley uplifted some of the City's recent work on equity in contracting. Regarding contract approval thresholds, she did not want to lose any ability to hold contractors accountable.

5) Meeting Closeout and Next Steps

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

6) Public Comment

Four members of the public provided public comment:

- Darius Kemp, Executive Director of California Common Cause, opposed a recommendation from the Commission Streamlining Task Force that would allow the Board of Supervisors to veto ballot measures proposed by the Ethics Commission. He warned that if this provision is included in the broader Charter amendment, CA Common Cause, the League of Women Voters, and the Clean Money Campaign would oppose the full package.

- Christin Evans raised concerns about public transparency and representation and urged the working group to do things that will make the City better. She noted that comparisons to other cities are not appropriate, because San Francisco is a city and a county.
- Rudy Gonzalez supported reform but cautioned against overloading the City Administrator with highly complex or specialized work, such as public utilities contracts.
- Patrick Ford, Executive Director of the San Francisco Ethics Commission, clarified the narrow scope of the Ethics Commission's ballot authority, arguing that it's a necessary safeguard against corruption.

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