

Charter Reform Working Group



- ❖ Office of the Mayor
- ❖ Board of Supervisors
- ❖ City Administrator's Office
- ❖ Office of the Controller

March 4, 2026

Opening Remarks

Alicia John-Baptiste
Rafael Mandelman

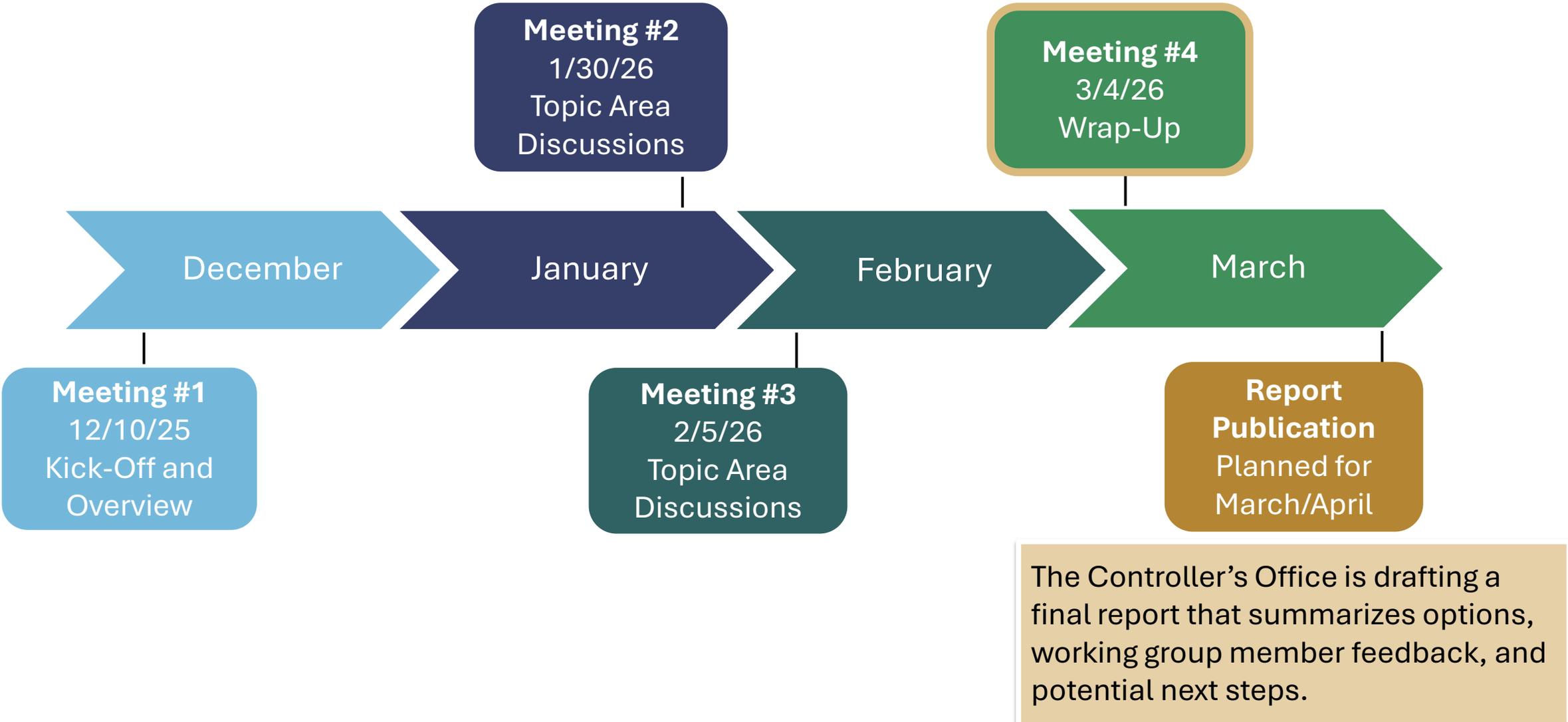
Administrative Reminders

- Working Group meetings are open to the public and public feedback is welcome.
- We will have the opportunity for public comment at the end of the meeting and accept written feedback at CharterReform@sfgov.org.
- This Working Group is not a formal policy body. Any legislation put forward based on these discussion will be part of a full Board of Supervisors process, where the public is also welcome to provide input.

Agenda

- 1 Opening Remarks and Introduction
- 2 Values Exercise: Results and Discussion
- 3 Presentation and Discussion by Topic Area:
 - 1) Policymaking
 - 2) Operational Efficiency
 - 3) City Organization
 - 4) Resource Management
- 4 Closing and Next Steps
- 5 Public Comment

Timeline



Recap: Working Group Purpose

- 1 Provide input on a set of potential Charter reforms to modernize and improve San Francisco's government
- 2 Enable more efficient and effective delivery of City services



Recap: What Problem are we Trying to Solve?

It is too hard to deliver services to the City and County of San Francisco. Government processes can be uncoordinated and inconsistent.

This leads to:



Difficulty effectively responding to big challenges



Decreasing faith in the public sector



Struggling to efficiently serve vulnerable San Franciscans who rely on city services the most



Diffuse accountability and problems holding elected officials accountable



Today's Goals

- 1 Provide additional research and analysis, as requested by Working Group members
- 2 Summarize, confirm, and discuss Working Group member feedback
- 3 Close out our work together and update members on next steps

Working Group Participation

- We want to hear from all Working Group members
 - During discussion, please raise your hand to participate and we will facilitate the discussion.
 - Give your fellow working group members an opportunity to address the group.
- If you have additional thoughts after today's meeting, please let us know by emailing CharterReform@sfgov.org.

Values Exercise

Natasha Mihal



Values Exercise Framing

Timeline:

- Meeting #1 – feedback that the Charter should reflect San Francisco’s core values
- Meeting #2 – brainstormed a list of core values
- Meeting #3 – ranked these values from highest to lowest priority
- Today – group discussion

How will these values be used?

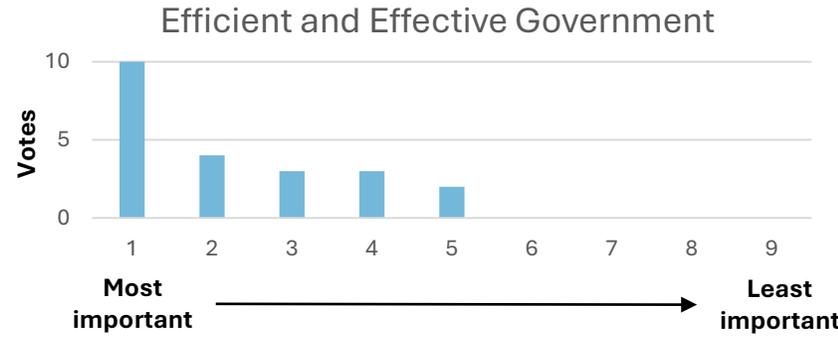
- They will be memorialized in our final report
- The report will help inform policymakers as they’re considering possible Charter amendments

Which Values Rose to the Top?

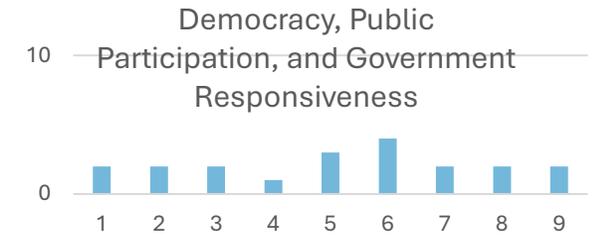
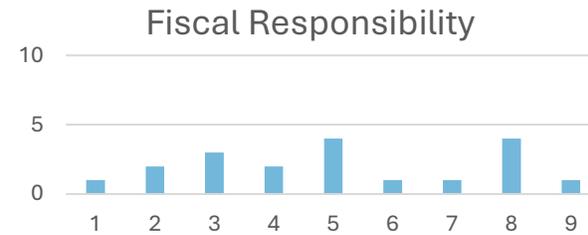
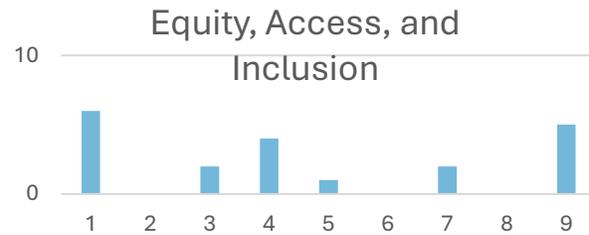
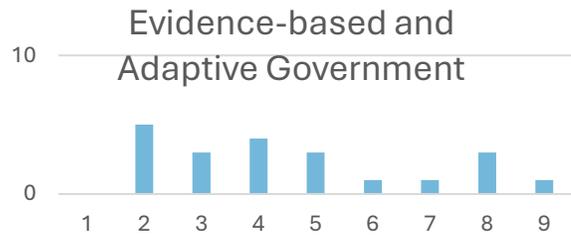
Theme	What You Said	How You Rated It
Efficient and Effective Government	Effective, efficient, results, streamline	1 (most important)
Transparency, Accountability and Public Integrity	Accountability, anti-corruption, fraud, Inspector General, public trust, transparency, waste	2
Evidence-based and Adaptive Government	Best practices, data-driven, flexibility, innovation	3
Equity, Access, and Inclusion	Access, altruism, anti-discrimination, civil rights, egalitarian, equity, fairness, inclusion, parity, sanctuary	4
Fiscal Responsibility	Budget sustainability, don't waste taxpayer money	5
Democracy, Public Participation, and Government Responsiveness	Democracy, public input, responsiveness	6
Community Supports and Affordability	Affordability, lower burden, make life easier, protect, support	7
Coordinated Service Delivery	Consistency, cooperation, coordination, seamless	8
Executive Authority	Authority, leave legislation to legislators	9 (least important)

Which Values Rose to the Top?

General consensus that these are **high priorities**



Wide variation in responses



General consensus that these are **lower priorities**





Discussion Questions

- Did anything surprise you?
- What does it mean to you for the Charter to reflect these values?
- Which do you think are most/least important and why?

Polycymaking

Greg Wagner

Policymaking: Ballot Measure Standards

Recap: Options for Reform



Raise **signature thresholds**

to ensure only the most impactful measures are on the ballot



Reduce **legislative and/or mayoral access**

to the ballot to ensure only the most salient measures are on the ballot



Create processes that **increase the quality** of ballot measures

to reduce the likelihood for unintended consequences



Allow **amendments to voter-approved ordinances** after a

certain amount of time has passed

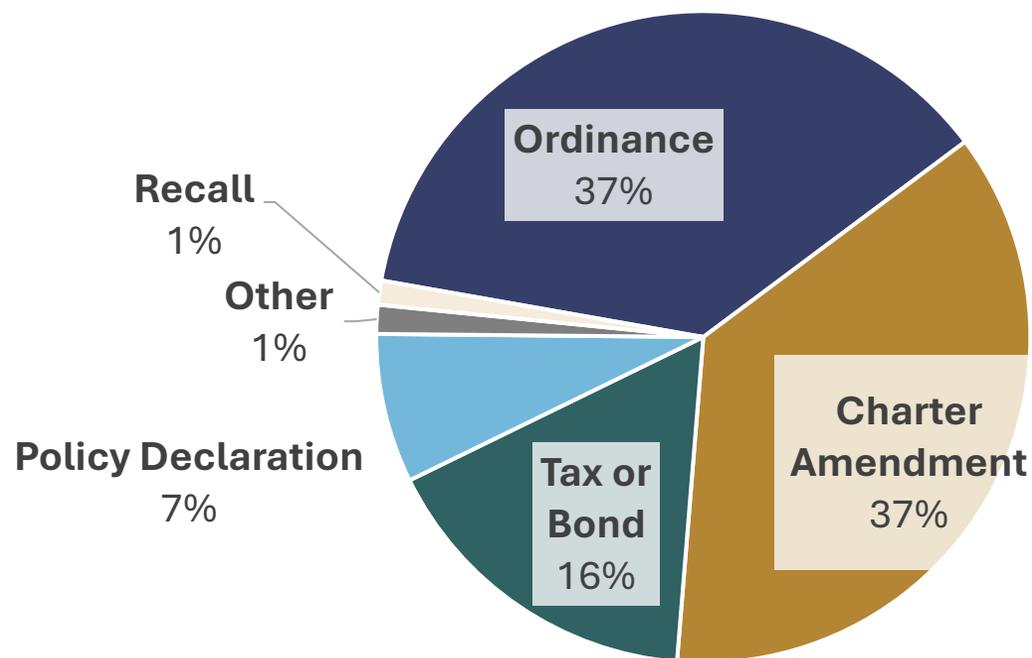
to allow legislators to adapt over time

Policymaking: Ballot Measure Standards

Additional Research

- Working Group members requested additional data on types of measures:

Most ballot measures since 1996 are charter amendments or ordinances



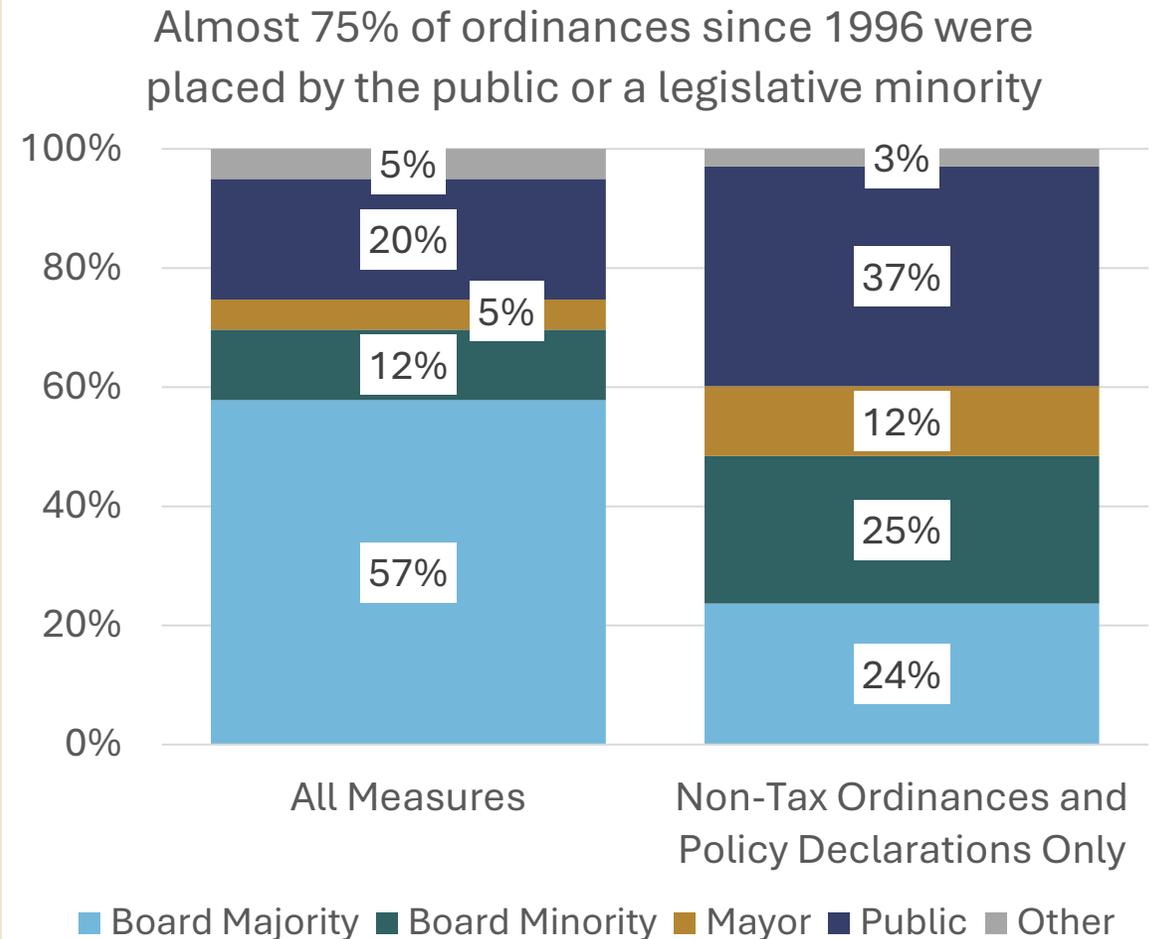
- 44% (186) of measures are non-tax ordinances or policy declarations.
- Legislators could pass these through the normal legislative process, without going to the voters.

Policymaking: Ballot Measure Standards

Additional Research

Working Group members requested additional data on how measures get on the ballot:

- **Almost 75%** of non-tax ordinances and policy declarations are placed by **the public**, a **Board Minority**, or **the Mayor** (137 out of 186 measures).
- **Most ballot measures pass:**
 - 72% of all measures
 - 66% of ordinances/policy declarations
- Over 50% of ordinances/policy declarations placed by the public failed



Summary of Working Group Member Feedback

Problem Statement

San Francisco places more than twice as many ballot measures before voters than other large California City, in part because it has lower thresholds to access the ballot.

Does the problem statement resonate with Working Group members?

What we heard so far:

- ✓ Yes, ballots are too long
- ✓ Yes, sometimes ballot measures pass that are difficult to implement
- Make sure the data shows that options would address the problem statement
- ✗ No, long ballots may be a feature of San Francisco's culture of activism, not a bug

Does this feedback represent your views on the problem statement?

Summary of Working Group Feedback



Options to raise **signature thresholds**

Comments expressed **mixed feedback**:

- ✓ **Support increasing signature thresholds**
- ✓ **Support aligning San Francisco's thresholds with peers**
- ✗ **Concern that raising thresholds would favor those with wealth/power** in the political process
- ✗ **Concern that citizen initiative provide a check against unresponsive elected officials**



Options to reduce **legislative and/or mayoral access**

Comments expressed **mixed feedback**:

- ✓ **Support amending legislative/mayoral ballot access**; changes to both maintain balance of power
- ✓ **Support adding Mayoral veto** to Board-sponsored Charter amendments
- ✗ **Concern about removing a check on the Board majority**
- **New option raised:** Retain Board minority threshold, require process with full legislative hearing and opportunity for amendments

- ✓ **Appreciation that options address both public and legislative ballot access**
- ✗ **Concern that proposed options would not address concerns about ballot length**

Summary of Working Group Feedback



Options to create processes that **increase the quality** of ballot measures

Comments expressed **general support**, provided **guardrails** are in place:

- ✓ **Amendments should be clearly defined and technical**, consistent with the intent of the original measure
- **Amendment process** should be based on existing processes in other jurisdictions
- **How would changes be communicated back to signees?**



Options to allow **amendments to voter-approved ordinances**

Comments expressed **tentative support**, provided **guardrails** are in place:

- Suggested guardrails include:
 - Only allowing amendments after **10 years**
 - Developing a process to **assess implementation** of the ordinances prior to permitting amendments

- ✓ See value in both options
- Questions about implementation

Operational Efficiency

Greg Wagner

Operational Efficiency

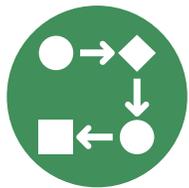
Recap: Options for Reform



Grant the **City Administrator more authority** over citywide administrative functions to create operational efficiencies and improve service delivery



Change how the City sets **procurement rules** to centralize accountability for purchasing processes and allow for simplification, standardization, and modernization of procurement rules over time



Streamline the **contract approval process** to reduce contracting timelines for non-controversial, non-discretionary products



Increase the **City Administrator's independence** to insulate core City operations from day-to-day politics

Operational Efficiency

Additional Research

- Working group members requested additional benchmarking
- Among 12 peer jurisdictions, five have a mayor-council form of government with an appointed Chief Administrative Officer (CAO)

City	Pop.	CAO Responsibilities	Appointment	Term	Removal
San Francisco	827,526	Internal city services	Mayor, subject to Board confirmation	5 years	Mayor, subject to Board approval
Fresno	550,091	All day-to-day government operations	Mayor	No fixed term	Mayor
Los Angeles	3,878,718	Internal city services	Mayor, subject to City Council confirmation	No fixed term	Mayor ¹ ; Subject to recall
Oakland	443,575	All day-to-day government operations	Mayor, subject to City Council confirmation	No fixed term	Mayor
Philadelphia	1,573,916	Internal city services	Mayor	No fixed term	Mayor
Washington, D.C.	702,250	All day-to-day government operations	Mayor	No fixed term	Mayor

Footnotes:

1. The Mayor may remove the CAO by written notice, however, within ten calendar days, the CAO may appeal to the City Council, who may re-instate by a 2/3 vote

Summary of Working Group Member Feedback

Problem Statement

Departments set their own operations and administrative policies, sometimes creating redundancies, delays in service delivery, and increasing costs.

Does the problem statement resonate with Working Group members?

What we heard so far:

- ✓ Yes, there are challenges with procurement and other administrative functions
- ✓ Yes, the City should investigate how centralizing administrative functions can improve efficiency
- Make sure that options account for unique knowledge needed in some departments/situations
- Consider that some procurement policies were hard fought, so there may be certain policies that should not be amended
- Consider whether Charter changes are needed to address these problems

Does this feedback represent your views on the problem statement?

Summary of Working Group Feedback



Grant the City Administrator more authority over citywide administrative functions

Comments expressed **general support, provided guardrails are in place:**

- ✓ Give **more authority** to the City Administrator to **oversee internal City functions**
- Could the Mayor affect these changes **without a Charter amendment?**
- Draft any Charter amendment in a way that **preserves flexibility** for the Mayor and Board to govern as they see fit

- Support a stronger role for the City Administrator provided that any increases in power are paired with accountability mechanisms



Increase the City Administrator's independence

Comments expressed **mixed feedback on term length; concerns about raising the bar for removal:**

- ✓ Institutional change takes time and a longer term may be useful in seeing change through
- ✗ Longer terms may reduce accountability by limiting Mayor and Board's influence over City Administrator
- ✗ Do not make it more difficult to remove the City Administrator from office

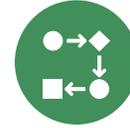
Summary of Working Group Feedback



Change how the City sets **procurement rules**

Most comments **did not provide detailed feedback on specific reforms:**

- ✓ General support for the need to change current process
- Some procurement laws are about City policy goals, not administration. There may be reasons to carve out some topics or issue areas



Streamline the **contract approval process**

Most comments **did not provide detailed feedback on specific reforms:**

- Contracts are political by nature; commissions can provide a useful firewall
- ✗ Some contracts require more public oversight. Don't lose the ability to hold contractors accountable

- Agreement that the City's procurement processes need improvement

What Additional Feedback Do You Have on These Options?



Change how the City sets **procurement rules**

Grant the City Administrator sole authority to propose changes to purchasing laws

Including goods, services, grants, and/or construction, in consultation with the Mayor and Board of Supervisors

Clarify that all departments must continue to comply with citywide purchasing rules

Including departments with special authorities listed in the Charter (e.g., MTA, PUC)

Permit changes to outdated voter-approved Administrative Code sections

Related to the City's official newspaper, physical posting of solicitations, and required terms in City contracts



Streamline the **contract approval process**

Reset the threshold for contracts requiring Board approval based on 2026 dollars

From \$10 million to \$25 million, and adjust automatically with inflation

Re-define the universe of contracts that require Board approval

For example, exempt certain commodities contracts

City Organization

Greg Wagner

City Organization

Recap: Options for Reform



Create ongoing **flexibility in the Charter by moving some details to Code**

so that structures can adapt as needs changes and new challenges arise



Enable the **Mayor to manage more effectively**

to allow the Mayor the flexibility needed to accomplish policy goals and create clearer lines of accountability.

City Organization

Additional Research

- Working group members requested some additional benchmarking:

Peer City	Mayor Has Department Head Hire/Fire Authority	Mayor Has Department Reorganization Authority	Mayor's Office Has Cabinet/Deputies
San Francisco	No Commissions have nominating/firing authority in most cases	Yes, in certain cases Only among executive branch departments	No
Philadelphia	Yes Most heads. Some require Council approval.	No Not mentioned in Charter	Yes
Washington D.C.	Yes Subject to Council approval.	Yes Council may disapprove	Yes
Denver	Yes Most heads. Some require Council approval.	No Not mentioned in Charter	Yes
Boston	Yes Most heads	No Council has reorganization authority	Yes
Seattle	Yes Most heads	Yes Mayor and Council	Yes
Los Angeles	Yes Most heads, subject to Council approval.	Yes Subject to Council approval	Yes

Summary of Working Group Member Feedback

Problem Statement

San Francisco's Charter is overly prescriptive and dictates specific structures and functions, constraining the ability to adjust the City's organization as needs change.

Does the problem statement resonate with Working Group members?

What we heard so far:

- ✓ Yes, the Charter seems to restrict the Mayor's ability to lead
- ✓ Yes, it makes sense that overly detailed processes or structures should not be in the Charter
- Make sure that changes are done thoughtfully, and that there is still oversight if moving details out of the Charter or giving the Mayor more power
- ✗ No, San Francisco's unique structures and approach to governance gives the City freedom to operate under its own priorities

Does this feedback represent your views on the problem statement?

Summary of Working Group Feedback



Options to create **ongoing flexibility** by moving some details to Code

Comments reflected **general support**:

- **Questions** on benefit of being in Charter; why is SF government organized this way?
- ✓ It makes sense to **move operational details** out of the Charter
- ✓ **Responsibilities and services are more important** than department structure
- ✓ There should be a **process to regularly review the Charter**
- **New option proposed:** for departments moving to Code, increase threshold to amend them. E.g., require 2/3 Board of Supervisors to approve.



Options to enable the **Mayor to manage more effectively**

Comments reflected **general support**:

- ✓ Important to **give the Mayor the authority to lead** once elected
- ✓ Allow the **Mayor to hire and fire** most department heads.
- **Balance flexibility and continuity**
- Balance increases to Mayoral power with **increased transparency and accountability**
 - E.g., ensure **public input** is still considered in making hiring/firing decisions.
- Exclude departments with clear reasons to maintain independence, e.g., Elections, CSC

What Additional Feedback Do You Have?



Options to create **ongoing flexibility** by moving some details to Code

Move some departments from the Charter to the Municipal Codes

Allow the City to flexibly re-organize more departments through the regular legislative process

Move some department functions from Charter to the Municipal Codes

Retain mission and values in the Charter while moving process requirements and other details to code

Move detailed operational requirements from the Charter to Municipal Codes

Create more flexibility to adjust operations as needs change

Examples:

Departments that could move to Code:

- Environment
- Public Works
- Human Rights

Department functions or operational requirements:

- Library hours: 1,400 system hours delivered per week; 27 branches
- Minimum staffing for Police and Sheriff oversight departments
- Cable car schedules
- Annual reporting requirements; e.g. annual customer service plans

Any specific departments, functions, or operational requirements that should not be touched?

Resource Management

Greg Wagner

Resource Management

Recap: Options for Reform



Sunset baselines

to give policymakers more flexibility to make budget choices



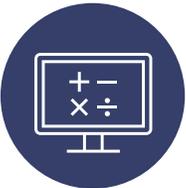
Limit **baseline growth** over time

to preserve some discretion in the General Fund



Introduce more **budget discretion** for policymakers

to fund programs and services that address the City's most pressing needs

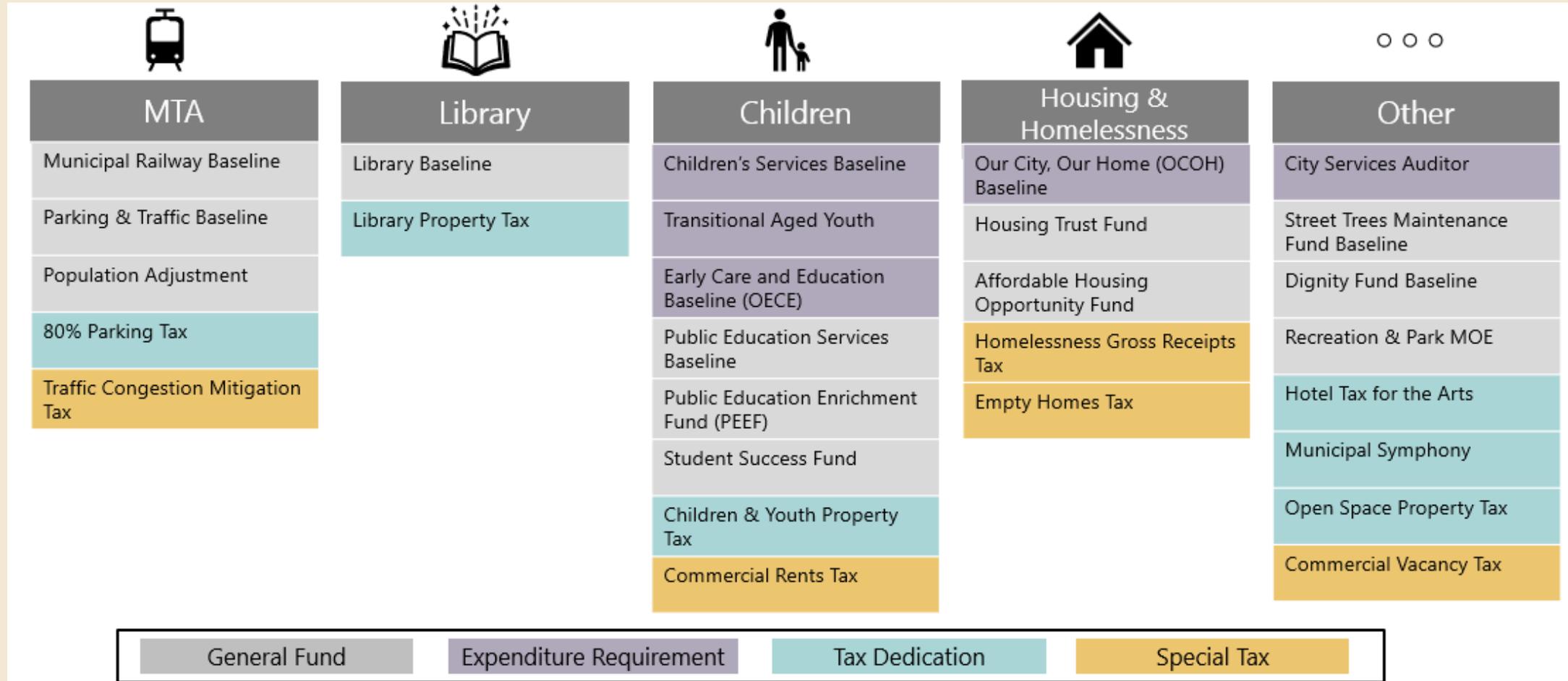


Simplify **baseline administration**

to spend less time tracking dollars spent and more time tracking services and outcomes

Resource Management

Additional Research



General Fund: General Fund is transferred to special funds for specific uses.

Expenditure Requirement: Minimum appropriations that the City must meet every year. Ensures dedications of funding (from General Fund or otherwise) “do not supplant” base year funding levels.

Tax Dedication: Dedications of existing taxes to special funds for specific uses (e.g., \$0.025 per \$100 NAV of Property Tax for the Library Preservation Fund).

Special Tax: Taxes dedicated to a specific purpose, with all collections held in special funds (e.g., Commercial Rents Tax for the Babies and Families First Fund).

Summary of Working Group Member Feedback

Problem Statement

Baselines are approved one at a time, sometimes for overlapping issue areas, without a big-picture view of the City's services and budget.

Does the problem statement resonate with Working Group members?

What we heard so far:

- ✓ Yes, there should be more budget flexibility
- ✓ Yes, there is benefit to standardization; making baselines work better
- Make sure any changes are made through a thoughtful process with significant stakeholder engagement
- ✗ No, baselines reflect San Franciscans' priorities and protect key services from budget cuts

Does this feedback represent your views on the problem statement?

Summary of Working Group Feedback



Sunset baselines

Comments **raised concerns**:

- ✗ All baselines are important priorities with strong political support; little appetite to eliminate any
- ✗ No baselines have ever sunset. All have been re-authorized before expiring, sometimes at higher funding levels
- It may be worth re-evaluating whether certain baselines are necessary, or are accomplishing their goals, as part of a comprehensive review



Limit **baseline growth** over time

Comments expressed **mixed feedback**:

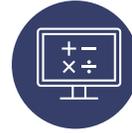
- Baseline growth is a serious issue
- ✓ Interest in common-sense, technical reforms (e.g., standardizing deficit triggers)

- Each baseline exists for a reason, so any reforms will be difficult

Summary of Working Group Feedback



Introduce more **budget discretion** for policymakers



Simplify baseline administration

Comments expressed **openness to some reforms, if part of a more comprehensive process:**

- ✓ There may be value in consolidating overlapping baselines and reducing overly specific constraints on baseline spending
- Substantive reforms should only be undertaken in partnership with relevant stakeholders. Must establish a more comprehensive process involving advocates
- It is important to understand the historical and political context of each baseline
- ✗ Voters adopt baselines because policymakers fail to fund priority issues at sufficient levels. Changing requirements may undermine voters' intent

Closing and Next Steps

Mayor Lurie
Greg Wagner

Recap: How Will Your Input Inform a Charter Amendment?

Working Group members provided feedback on reforms that may end up on the November 2026 ballot.

Pathways to the Ballot:

Legislative Process:

Board majority or Mayor with Board approval may submit a Charter amendment for the ballot.

Introductions: May 2026

Voter Initiative:

Voters may place a measure on the ballot by gathering signatures and submitting the petitions to City.

Submittal Deadline: July 6, 2026

Election
Nov 3, 2026

Closing and Next Steps

- **Thank you for your participation!**
- **Final Report** is in progress
 - Will provide opportunity for member feedback.
 - Plan to publish at the end of March.

For questions and any public comment,
please email CharterReform@sfgov.org



Public Comment



Appendix



Ballot Measure Standards: Detailed Options

1

Raise signature thresholds for voter initiatives that change Municipal Codes

From 2% to 10-12%

2

Raise signature thresholds for recall elections

From 10% to as high as 15%

3

Raise thresholds for Board of Supervisors to place measures on the ballot

From four Supervisors to higher threshold

4

Remove ability for Mayor to unilaterally place measures on the ballot

5

Raise threshold for Board of Supervisors to place Charter amendments on the ballot

Add Mayoral veto option for Board amendments, subject to override by 2/3 Board majority

6

Modify the Ethics Commission's ability to place measures on the ballot

Require a Board hearing and action on proposed Ethics measures

7

Allow proponents to amend proposed initiatives before qualifying for the ballot

Create a process that mirrors the State's and includes public and legislative review periods

8

Make it easier for proponents to withdraw initiatives

Allow proponents to withdraw initiatives up to 120 days prior to the election

9

Allow the Board of Supervisors to amend voter-approved ordinances after a certain amount of time

Operational Efficiency: Detailed Options

Options for Discussion

1

Grant the City Administrator authority to issue citywide rules and regulations

For technology, real estate, fleet, and capital project delivery, especially where there are interdependencies

2

Grant the City Administrator authority to directly manage some citywide functions

Such as technology, real estate, fleet, and capital project delivery, especially where there are interdependencies

3

Grant the City Administrator sole authority to propose changes to purchasing laws

Including goods, services, grants, and/or construction, in consultation with the Mayor and Board of Supervisors

4

Clarify that all departments must comply with citywide purchasing rules

Including departments with special authorities listed in the Charter (e.g., MTA, PUC)

5

Permit changes to outdated voter-approved Administrative Code sections

Related to the City's official newspaper, physical posting of solicitations, and required terms in City contracts

6

Increase the threshold for contracts requiring Board approval

From \$10 million to \$25 million, and adjust automatically with inflation

7

Re-define the universe of contracts that require Board approval

For example, exempt certain commodities contracts

8

Increase the term of the City Administrator

From 5 to 10 years, consistent with the Controller

9

Raise the threshold to remove the City Administrator from office

From at-will to for-cause, subject to 2/3 Board approval

City Organization: Detailed Options

- 1 Remove restrictions on Mayor's Office staffing**
Allow the Mayor to hire deputies and delegate oversight of departments
- 2 Allow the Mayor to appoint and remove most departments heads***
Instead of their commissions, with a few exceptions (e.g., Ethics, Elections, Retirement)
- 3 Move some departments from the Charter to the Municipal Codes**
Allow the City to flexibly re-organize more departments through the regular legislative process
- 4 Move some department functions from Charter to the Municipal Codes**
Retain mission and values in the Charter while moving process requirements and other details to code
- 5 Allow the Mayor to move Charter-assigned functions between departments**
Among some executive branch departments, unless vetoed by the Board of Supervisors
- 6 Grant the Mayor broader authority to re-organize reporting relationships between department heads**
Among some executive branch departments, to increase efficiencies from agency model and increase flexibility to re-organize
- 7 Create a process to regularly review the Charter**
Require changes to go through the Board of Supervisors
- 8 Move detailed operational requirements from the Charter to Municipal Codes**
Create more flexibility to adjust operations as needs change

Resource Management: Detailed Options

- 1 Sunset baselines**
To give policymakers more flexibility to make budget choices
- 2 Cap baseline contributions**
At a fixed dollar value or as a percentage of the overall budget
- 3 Cap the amount that baseline contributions can grow each year**
For example, limit growth to 2% per year
- 4 Standardize and add suspension triggers to all baselines**
To suspend growth during difficult budget years
- 5 Allow the City to reduce baseline contributions in certain years**
Through the regular budget process involving Mayor and Board approval
- 6 Return unspent funds to the General Fund**
Instead of rolling over to the following fiscal year
- 7 Allow broader discretion within baselines**
So that funds for a particular population or policy area can go toward the most pressing needs
- 8 Consolidate related baselines**
To simplify administration