

Charter Reform Working Group

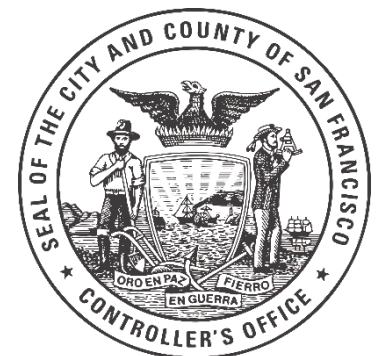
Summary and Analysis



Prepared by

**OFFICE OF THE CONTROLLER
CITY PERFORMANCE**

April 15, 2026



About the Controller's Office

The Controller is the chief financial officer and auditor for the City and County of San Francisco. We produce regular reports on the City's financial condition, economic condition, and the performance of City government. We are also responsible for key aspects of the City's financial operations — from processing payroll for City employees to processing and monitoring the City's budget.

Our team includes financial, tech, accounting, analytical and other professionals who work hard to secure the City's financial integrity and promote efficient, effective, and accountable government. We strive to be a model for good government and to make the City a better place to live and work.

About City Performance

The City Services Auditor (CSA) was created in the Office of the Controller through an amendment to the San Francisco City Charter that was approved by voters in November 2003. Within CSA, City Performance's mandate is to monitor and improve the overall performance and efficiency of City Government. The City and County of San Francisco works to be a national leader in public service delivery and the City Performance team plays a key role in this effort.

City Performance Goals:

- Support City departments in making transparent, data-driven decisions.
- Guide City departments in aligning programming with resources for greater efficiency and impact.
- Provide City departments with the tools they need to innovate, test, and learn.

City Performance Team

Natasha Mihal, Director
Janice Levy, Project Manager
Joanna Bell, Senior Performance Analyst
Henry O'Connell, Senior Performance Analyst
Arjun Paul, Performance Analyst

For more information, please contact:

Janice Levy, Project Manager
Office of the Controller
City and County of San Francisco
Janice.Levy@sfgov.org

Media inquiries: con.media@sfgov.org

 sf.gov/controller

 [@sfcontroller](https://twitter.com/sfcontroller)

 [Controller's Office LinkedIn](#)

Acknowledgements

The Controller's Office appreciates the time and thoughtful feedback from the Co-Chairs, City Participants, and Working Group members.

Co-Chairs

Alicia John-Baptiste, *Mayor's Office*
Rafael Mandelman, *Board of Supervisors*

Facilitator

Greg Wagner, *Controller*

City Participants

Chyanne Chen, *Board of Supervisors*
Carmen Chu, *City Administrator*
Bilal Mahmood, *Board of Supervisors*

Working Group Members

Sherilyn Adams, *Larkin Street Youth Services*
Sachin Agarwal, *GrowSF*

Alternate: Steven Bacio

Josh Arce, *California Alliance for Jobs*

Katherine August-deWilde, *Partnership for SF*

Larry Baer, *Advance SF*

Dan Bernal, *UC San Francisco*

Alternate: Aimee Alden

Fred Blackwell, *San Francisco Foundation*

Anni Chung, *Self-Help for the Elderly*

Meredith Dodson, *SF Parent Coalition*

Alternates: Jose Lopez; Alex Wong

John Doherty, *SF Building & Construction Trades Council*

Bob Fisher, *Pisces Foundation*

Rodney Fong, *SF Chamber of Commerce*

Norma Garcia

Zach Goldman, *SEIU 1021*

Susan Hirsch, *Third Plateau*

Alternate: Laural Severt

Lynn Mahoney, *SF State University*

Alternate: Luis Alberto De Paz Fernandez

Missy Narula, *Crankstart Foundation*

Shola Olatoye, *SF Downtown Development Corporation*

Tim Omi, *SF Council of District Merchants Associations*

Michael Pappas, *Interfaith Council*

Andres Power, *Abundant SF*

Anna Marie Presutti, *SF Travel*

Alternate: Christine Gaudenzi

Ben Rosenfield, *SPUR*

Natalie Sandoval, *Urban Land Institute*

Shakirah Simley, *Booker T. Washington Community Service Center*

Kim Tavaglione, *SF Labor Council*

Laurie Thomas, *Golden Gate Restaurant Association*

Tiffany Waugh, *ConnectedSF*

Thank you to the many City employees who supported this process.

City Employees

Michelle Allersma, *Controller's Office*
Rachel Alonso, *City Administrator's Office*
Amar Bhardwaj, *Mayor's Office*
Aly Bonde, *Mayor's Office*
Sarah Crowley, *City Attorney's Office*
Jon Givner, *City Attorney's Office*
Heather Goodman, *City Attorney's Office*
Dan Kaplan, *Controller's Office*
Wendy Lee, *Controller's Office*
Carol Lu, *Controller's Office*
Eileen Mariano, *Mayor's Office*
Laura Marshall, *Controller's Office*
Melanie Matthewson, *Board of Supervisors*
Valerie Okelola, *Controller's Office*
Molly Peterson, *City Administrator's Office*
Katie Petrucione, *City Administrator's Office*
Manu Pradhan, *City Attorney's Office*
Glynis Startz, *Controller's Office*
Claire Stone, *Controller's Office*
Maeve Skelly, *Board of Supervisors*
Stephanie Tang, *City Administrator's Office*
Anh Ton, *City Administrator's Office*

Executive Summary

The San Francisco Charter acts as our city's constitution, establishing the basic structure of government and the powers and responsibilities of city officials. However, hundreds of amendments have created a complex patchwork of rules that slow down government and limit its ability to meet residents' needs.

At the request of Mayor Daniel Lurie and Board of Supervisors President Rafael Mandelman, the Controller's Office convened a Charter Reform Working Group to consider possible reforms to help San Francisco (the City) run more effectively. The Working Group met four times between December 2025 and March 2026. Members provided feedback on 34 reform ideas across four topic areas: policymaking, city organization, operational efficiency, and resource management. The Working Group's goal was to provide input to the Mayor and Board of Supervisors as they consider possible Charter amendments for the November 3, 2026 ballot. The goal was not to reach consensus on a single, unified reform package.

For each topic, this report outlines research and analysis, reform options, and Working Group feedback. While the Working Group did not recommend a specific path forward on any topic, the Controller's Office provides potential tradeoffs and considerations for policymakers.

Policymaking

San Francisco places over twice as many ballot measures before voters as other large California cities. This can overwhelm voters and constrains policymakers' ability to lead, make decisions, and respond to new challenges.

Options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update ballot measure thresholds • Create processes that increase the quality of ballot measures • Allow amendments to voter-approved ordinances over time
Working Group Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members had mixed feedback on raising signature thresholds. Some expressed support. Others warned it could concentrate power among well-resourced individuals. • Some supported eliminating the power of the Mayor and four Supervisors to place items on the ballot, urging lawmakers to reach consensus. Others valued the four Supervisors pathway as a check on the Board majority, and proposed process improvements instead of eliminating that power entirely. • Discussions of ballot measure quality focused on concerns about the process and scope of amendments to proposed ballot measures. • Most comments expressed tentative support for allowing Board amendments to voter-approved initiatives after a set period (e.g., 10 years) and within limits (aligned with voter intent). At least one member opposed this option.
Considerations for Policymakers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balance concerns about potential impacts to the democratic process if raising ballot measure thresholds with the risks of many measures and increased voter fatigue if retaining current thresholds. • Consider including guardrails to ensure amendments to proposed ballot initiatives align with the original intent. • If expanding the Board's legislative powers, consider how to best respect the will of the voters.

Operational Efficiency

The City's 50 departments generally manage their own operations and administrative policies. This can sometimes create redundancies, delay service delivery, and increase costs.

Options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update procurement rules and oversight • Grant the City Administrator more authority over basic operations • Increase the City Administrator's political independence
Working Group Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members agreed that the City's procurement processes need improvement. • Generally, Working Group members supported giving more authority to the City Administrator to oversee internal City functions. They urged policymakers to pair any increase in power with accountability mechanisms. • Some raised concerns that increasing the City Administrator's term length would reduce accountability. Others noted that a longer term would be beneficial and could include accountability mechanisms. • Several members acknowledged that the Mayor could already make many of these changes without a Charter amendment.
Considerations for Policymakers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore common sense procurement reforms to save the City time and money. • Consider changing how the City adopts procurement laws. • The City Administrator's Charter authority has not been updated in thirty years. Policymakers should modernize and clarify it. • If increasing the City Administrator's term length, balance continuity with accountability. • City departments should continue working to improve operational efficiency, with or without Charter reforms.

City Organization

San Francisco's Charter authority is spread out and is overly prescriptive, dictating specific structures and functions. This leads to residents having difficulty holding officials accountable and leadership having difficulty responding to new needs quickly and efficiently.

Options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create ongoing flexibility in the Charter by moving some details from Charter to code • Enable the Mayor to manage more effectively
Working Group Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some agreed it likely made sense to move operational details out of the Charter, provided that general responsibilities and services are preserved. • There was general support for options to expand the Mayor's power to organize and oversee government. • Members generally supported allowing the Mayor to hire and fire most department heads. Some noted the intersections with commission streamlining and asked policymakers to evaluate changes to mayoral power holistically.

Considerations for Policymakers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider putting core values in the Charter instead of structures or operational details to allow for operations to evolve over time. • Explore ways to increase flexibility while minimizing unnecessary disruption to City operations. • Consider how to facilitate public input and transparency if increasing Mayoral power.
--	--

Resource Management

San Francisco voters have adopted nearly 30 different funding requirements, also called baselines. These restrict policymakers' ability to flexibly allocate resources. While each funds a critical service, these requirements often fund overlapping issue areas and lack a big-picture view of the City's services and budget.

Options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sunset baselines • Reform baselines
Working Group Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working Group members noted that all baselines fund important priorities with strong political support and did not consider eliminating them. • Several members highlighted the benefits of pursuing common-sense technical adjustments such as standardizing deficit triggers. • Members stressed the importance of understanding the historical context and politics around each baseline. They urged policymakers to involve the relevant stakeholders and advocates in discussion.
Considerations for Policymakers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Common-sense, technical reforms can simplify administration and provide more budget flexibility. • Convene relevant stakeholders to discuss more substantive changes to baselines. • While all baselines fund important services, voters may still find periodic re-evaluation healthy and worthwhile. • Explore ways to limit growth over time to generate long-run budget flexibility.

Developing a Consolidated Charter Reform Proposal

While the Working Group reviewed ideas by topic, policymakers should evaluate these proposals holistically. They should consider how individual reforms interact, reinforce, or complicate one another. The complete proposed package should (1) improve government performance, (2) preserve an appropriate balance of power between the executive and legislative branches, and (3) maintain public participation and oversight.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	3
Executive Summary	4
Table of Contents	8
Background and Introduction	9
Research and Options	11
Policymaking	14
Operational Efficiency	24
City Organization	33
Resource Management	44
Conclusion	55
Appendix A: Detailed Department List	58
Appendix B: San Francisco’s Baselines and Set-asides	61

Background and Introduction

INTRODUCTION

A city's charter acts as its constitution, establishing the overall structure of its government and outlining the powers, authority, and responsibilities of the city and its officials. Only a vote of the people may amend the charter. While the charter sets the vision and broad direction, cities also have municipal codes that outline specific operations, functions, and responsibilities. Either the regular legislative process or voters may change these codes.

Because a city's charter is intended to be a foundational document, it is generally considered best practice to not include significant detail so that it remains evergreen. The San Francisco City Charter (Charter) is significantly longer than those in peer cities—over 500 pages by some estimations—and includes highly specific operations, processes, and restrictions.

In November 2025, Mayor Daniel Lurie and Board of Supervisors President Rafael Mandelman convened the Charter Reform Working Group to explore ways to make San Francisco's Charter work better for its residents.

BACKGROUND ON SAN FRANCISCO'S CHARTER

San Francisco adopted its first Charter in 1898. It has changed over the years, through both individual ballot measures amending the Charter and more holistic reform efforts. The last major reform effort was in 1996. Proponents sought to give elected officials more oversight responsibility and streamline the Charter. James Haas, who participated in the 1996 Charter reform, evaluated these efforts in a 1999 op-ed. He warned that "unless controls are set up and a mechanism created to purge the charter of poor draftsmanship, the new charter will rapidly become as dense and confusing as the old and perhaps as long."¹ This observation was prescient; the Charter has grown with 153 amendments since the last reform.

In recent years, multiple groups have published reports detailing issues with today's Charter.² Among the issues mentioned are the Charter's length, level of detail, and the number of restrictions it places on the City's organization, budget, and leadership. For example, the Rose Institute of State and Local Government's report highlights that "the City's institutional design undermines the Mayor's ability to govern." It argues that Charter reform is critical for San Francisco to be able to meet current challenges. Two recent reports from SPUR highlight several areas where the Charter impedes the Mayor's ability to lead and San Francisco's ability to effectively serve its residents. Specific recommendations include granting the Mayor more power to organize their office, merge departments, and hire/fire department heads.

COMMISSION STREAMLINING TASK FORCE

The Commission Streamlining Task Force is a recent effort related to broader Charter reform. A November 2024 ballot measure created this Task Force and launched a year-long review process. In January 2026, the Task Force released recommendations to modify, eliminate, or combine the City's boards and commissions to improve the administration of City government. Charter amendments are required to implement many of

¹ "Evaluating the New City Charter: A three-year report card," James Haas, Urbanist Article (October 1, 1999).

² "Designed to Serve," SPUR (August 2024). "Charter for Change," SPUR (November 2025). "Re-Assessing San Francisco's Government Design" the Rose Institute of State and Local Government (August 2023).

these recommendations. The Task Force submitted a proposed Charter amendment to the San Francisco Board the Supervisors (the Board) in February 2026.

Some of the legislation resulting from the Charter reform efforts outlined in this report could overlap with the Commission Streamlining Charter amendment. Policymakers should consider how to bring recommendations from both efforts to the ballot in tandem.

CHARTER REFORM WORKING GROUP

Mayor Daniel Lurie and Board of Supervisors President Rafael Mandelman requested that the Controller's Office convene and facilitate a working group of San Francisco stakeholders. The goal was to assemble a diverse group of San Franciscans to provide feedback on potential Charter reform ideas to enable the City to more efficiently and effectively deliver government services. The Charter Reform Working Group (Working Group) members represented labor, philanthropy, business, nonprofits, and others.

The Working Group met four times, starting December 10, 2025. Meetings were open to the public to observe and provide comment. A webpage provides links to relevant meeting materials and summaries of discussion and public comment.³

This report provides a summary of the key challenges, research, analysis, and potential reform options discussed. It then summarizes the Working Group members' feedback on those options. The Controller's Office then outlines potential considerations for policymakers.

³ <https://www.sf.gov/charter-reform-working-group>

Research and Options

The Working Group discussed four broad areas of reform:

- **Policymaking.** The ballot box is a primary pathway for making policy. This section focuses on ballot measure quantity and quality.
- **Operational Efficiency.** San Francisco's government is comprised of over 50 departments.⁴ Many departments independently manage common internal operations such as technology and purchasing. This section explores approaches to create shared standards, align practices across departments, or centralize some of those operations.
- **City Organization.** Many of San Francisco's structures, functions, and processes are locked in the Charter and cannot be changed. This section evaluates options to increase flexibility to adapt the City's structures as needs change over time.
- **Resource Management.** San Francisco has adopted nearly 30 different funding requirements that restrict policymakers' ability to flexibly allocate resources. While each funds a critical service, these requirements were approved one at a time, sometimes for overlapping issue areas, without a big-picture view of the City's services and budget. This section presents ways to increase budget flexibility or improve administration of those funding requirements.

President Mandelman and the Mayor's Office identified these four areas through conversations with the City Administrator's Office, the Controller's Office, policy experts, and other departments. They selected topic areas that are high impact, cutting across multiple departments and services.

For each topic area, the Controller's Office conducted background research and analysis to develop an initial set of reform options. The goal was to outline the full range of possible reforms; the Controller's Office did not evaluate options based on political feasibility. President Mandelman, the Mayor's Office, and Working Group members then provided input on those options.

This report has four sections corresponding with each of the four topic areas. Each section includes background research, analysis, a summary of the Working Group discussion, and some considerations in determining a path forward.

BENCHMARKING

Research and analysis include benchmarking comparing San Francisco to peer jurisdictions. The goal is to understand how San Francisco's approach to government operations and structures compares to other cities. The Controller's Office selected peer jurisdictions based on the following characteristics:

1. **California Peers:** The five largest California cities and Oakland, another Bay Area peer, are included across all topic areas. States have the power to set laws to govern how its cities may establish some specific policies, such as ballot access. When assessing options in those specific areas, comparison to California peers is most apt.

⁴ The number of departments depends on the definition of "department." There are 50 departments listed in San Francisco's Charter and budget. Other departments, such as the Department of Technology, do not appear in San Francisco's Charter or budget, but are considered as a department in other practical contexts.

2. **National City/County Peers:** San Francisco is a combined city and county, which is an uncommon structure in California. Comparing San Francisco to national city and county peers illustrates whether San Francisco’s approach is aligned with similarly structured cities.
3. **Other National Peers:** In some policy contexts, it makes sense to compare San Francisco’s approach to national peers of similar sizes to San Francisco.

The Controller’s Office selected a common set of peers to compare against. However, because different peers are applicable to different policy topics, each section uses a subset of the total selected peers.

Table 1: Peer Jurisdictions Used in Benchmarking

Jurisdiction	Form of Government	Population ⁵	Included in Topic-Area Benchmarking?			
			Policymaking	Resource Management	Operational Efficiency	City Organization
<i>San Francisco</i>	<i>City/County Mayor-Council</i>	<i>828k</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Los Angeles	City Mayor-Council	3.9m	✓	✓	✓	✓
San Diego	City Mayor-Council	1.4m	✓	✓	✓	✓
San Jose	City Council-Manager	997k	✓	✓	✓	✓ ⁶
Fresno	City Mayor-Council	550k	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sacramento	City Council-Manager	536k	✓	✓	✓	✓ ⁷
Long Beach	City Council-Manager	451k	✓	✓		
Oakland	City Mayor-Council	444k	✓	✓	✓	✓
Bakersfield	City Council-Manager	417k	✓	✓		
Anaheim	City Council-Manager	345k	✓	✓		
New York City	City/County ⁸ Mayor-Council	8.5m	Not applicable	Not applicable	✓	✓
Philadelphia	City/County Mayor-Council	1.6m			✓	✓
Seattle	City Mayor-Council	781k			✓	✓
Denver	City/County Mayor-Council	729k			✓	✓
Washington D.C.	City/County ⁹ Mayor-Council	702k			✓	✓
Boston	City Mayor-Council	674k			✓	✓

⁵ Based on 2024 ACS 1-Year Estimates

⁶ Because San Jose is a Council-Manager form of government, it is not included in benchmarking on Mayor’s Office powers/structure.

⁷ Because Sacramento is a Council-Manager form of government, it is not included in benchmarking around Mayor’s Office powers/structure.

⁸ Each borough has its own county, governed under New York’s City Charter, so is technically a combined city and five counties.

⁹ Considered a city/county equivalent

Limitations of Benchmarking: Benchmarking can illustrate if San Francisco is an outlier among peers and may provide ideas for how to approach certain policy areas. However, benchmarking does not necessarily provide the best practice or identify the exact right approach. Additional analysis of San Francisco's unique context is necessary to understand whether San Francisco should mirror a peer city's structures or processes.

Benchmarking data in this report uses the best information publicly available online. However, some cities may have nuances in their government processes that are not apparent in a review of publicly available information. When possible, this report will discuss any data limitations for each topic area.

Policymaking

The Way It Is Now

Ballot measures are one way to make policy. San Francisco’s Charter establishes how the public, elected officials, and others may place measures on the ballot. It also prescribes how those measures may be amended or withdrawn once submitted.

There are many ways a measure may get on the ballot

Different measures have different pathways to get on the ballot. **Charter amendments, bonds, taxes, and recalls** must go before the voters. State law dictates how these get on the ballot. The Board of Supervisors may pass **ordinances** and **policy declarations** through either the normal legislative process or by placing them before the voters as ballot measures.

There are three primary pathways for placing measures on the ballot:

- The Mayor or a Board of Supervisors minority (four or more Supervisors)
- A Board of Supervisors majority
- Members of the public, by gathering signatures

Examples:

Ballot measures added by a legislative minority or the public in the past 30 years include:

- Shall it be City policy to call for the impeachment of President Bush and Vice President Cheney? (2006)
- Shall the City ordinance prohibiting the sale of flavored tobacco products in San Francisco take effect? (2018)
- Shall all of the City departments that were located in City Hall prior to the 1989 earthquake occupy the same amount of space in City Hall when the renovation is completed? (1998)

Table 2: Pathways for Placing Different Measures on the Ballot

Type of Measure	Legislative Majority	Mayor or Legislative Minority	The Public	Other ¹⁰
Charter Amendments	Yes	No	Yes (10% registered voters)	No
Ordinance or Policy Declaration	Yes	Yes	Yes (2% registered voters)	Yes
Taxes	Yes	Yes	Yes (2% registered voters)	Yes
Bonds	Yes	No	Yes (2% registered voters)	Yes
Recalls	No	No	Yes (10%–20% registered voters) ¹¹	No

¹⁰ Includes the Ethics Commission, which may place ordinances around ethics laws on the ballot, and MTA Board of Directors, which may place bonds on the ballot, among others.

¹¹ The State of California dictates recall thresholds, which differ based on the size of the jurisdiction the elected official represents. In San Francisco, this means there are different thresholds for supervisors (representing a single district) and elected officials representing all San Francisco residents.

Most measures appear on ballots for general municipal or statewide elections. However, in certain cases, proponents or legislators may trigger a special election. A special election is an election outside of normal, planned general elections. It must occur between 105 and 120 days following a request. Initiative petitions trigger a special election if signatures are equivalent to 10% of the number of voters in the most recent Mayoral election and initiative proponents request a special election. Recalls automatically trigger a special election. State law permits legislators to call a special election to vote on any measure.

San Franciscans have voted on 418 ballot measures since 1996; most are Charter amendments or ordinances

Since 1996, San Franciscans have voted on 418 ballot measures. Charter amendments and ordinances are the most common type; each comprise 37% of the total measures in the past 30 years.

A Board majority places most measures on the ballot. However, this shifts when looking just at ordinances and policy declarations, which do not require voter approval.¹² The public are the most likely to place these on the ballot, followed by a Board minority. Of the 186 ordinances and policy declarations voters have weighed in on in the past thirty years, either the public, a legislative minority, or the Mayor brought 74% of them.

Figure 1: Most Ballot Measures Since 1996 are Charter Amendments or Ordinances

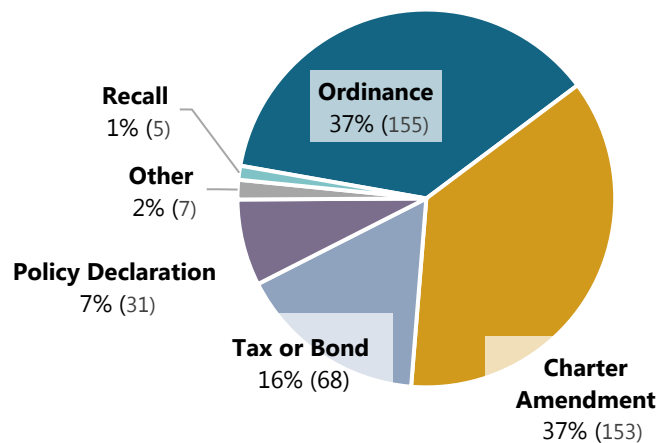
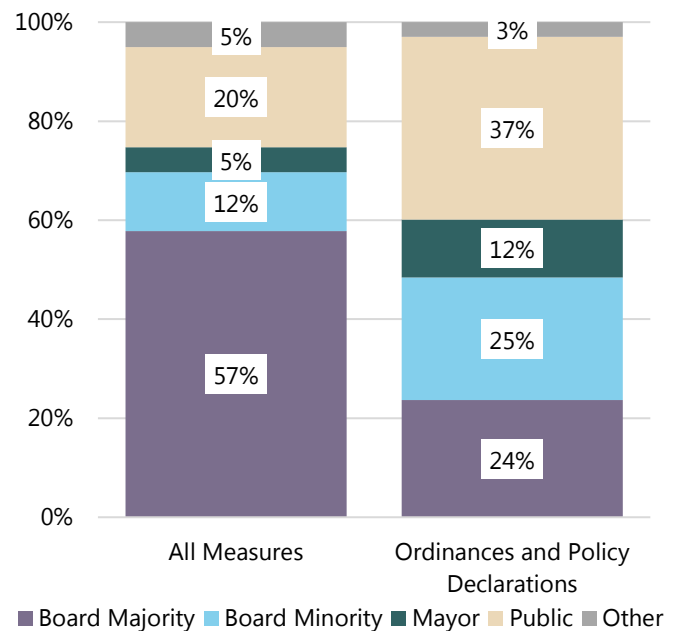


Figure 2: A Board Minority, the Mayor, or the Public Place 3/4 of Ordinances on the Ballot



¹² This excludes tax measures, which are ordinances but must go to voters for approval.

There are few ways to amend ballot measures

Members of the public may submit a Charter Amendment, Ordinance or Declaration of Policy to the ballot through signature gathering. The San Francisco Department of Elections “Guide to Qualifying San Francisco Initiative Measures” outlines the steps required to submit the measure text and gather signatures.¹³ Measure proponents may withdraw a measure until signatures are submitted. They cannot withdraw after that date, except by court order. No parties may amend an initiative petition measure after signatures are gathered. This means that if any stakeholder discovers issues with the proposed initiative after submission, there are no pathways to improve that legislation.

After a voter-approved initiative passes, only the voters may amend that initiative. This can lead to outdated legislation remaining in the Charter or code. If that legislation causes unforeseen challenges, there is little recourse to make updates.

Example:

The Administrative Code includes a voter-approved mandate, added in the early 1990s, requiring the Board of Supervisors to notice meetings in the official City Newspaper and specifies the maximum dimensions of advertisements (4” x 6”).

Example:

Proponents developed 2022’s “Amazon Tax” to tax large e-commerce businesses and direct that revenue towards safety net programs and smaller businesses. However, later analysis showed that the tax was unlikely to target Amazon, and instead may harm small businesses. Local news sources¹ reported that in light of this new information, proponents suspended the campaign and sought to have the courts remove the proposition from the ballot.

¹³ [“Guide to Qualifying San Francisco Initiative Measures,”](#) San Francisco Department of Elections. The Department of Elections updates the guide for each election. As of publication, the most recent version provides information pertaining to qualifying for the June 2, 2026 election.

How San Francisco Compares to Peers

Each state establishes its own rules for municipal elections. Evaluating San Francisco’s approach against other California cities is the best basis for comparison. California’s ten largest cities are all charter cities, meaning they have their own charter and are empowered to set their own laws about ballot access. Despite this flexibility, many defer to state law around thresholds for ballot access.

San Francisco’s ballots are longer than in peer cities

In November 2024, San Francisco’s ballot had 13 city measures, far more than in peer cities. In the same election, Los Angeles had five and San Diego had three. Long ballots can also increase voter fatigue. This increases the likelihood that voters abstain from voting, only partially complete their ballots, make less informed choices, and even default to voting “no” on more items.¹⁴

San Francisco makes it easier for the public to place measures on the ballot

Among the ten largest cities in California, San Francisco’s signature thresholds for initiatives are the lowest. In 2022, San Francisco amended its threshold to place initiatives on the ballot, from 5% of Mayoral votes to 2% of registered voters. This further widened the gap between San Francisco and its peers. Initially, this change resulted in proponents needing to gather approximately 2,600 fewer signatures. Due to increased turnout in the most recent Mayoral race, the current difference is approximately 9,000 fewer signatures.

Table 3: San Francisco has Lower Signature Thresholds than Peer Cities¹⁵

City	Charter Amendment	Initiative (General Election)	Recall
San Francisco	10% Registered voters	2% Registered voters	10% Registered voters
Anaheim	15% Registered voters	10% Registered voters	10% Registered voters
Bakersfield	15% Registered voters	10% Registered voters	10% Registered voters
Fresno	15% Registered voters	10% Registered voters	10% Registered voters
Long Beach	15% Registered voters	10% Registered voters	10% Registered voters
Los Angeles	15% Registered voters	15% Mayoral votes	15% Registered voters
Oakland	15% Registered voters	10% Registered voters	10% Registered voters
Sacramento	15% Registered voters	10% Registered voters	10% Registered voters
San Diego	15% Registered voters	10% Registered voters	15% Registered voters
San Jose	15% Registered voters	5% Eligible voters	12% Registered voters

¹⁴ Many researchers have studied this phenomenon. A selection of studies include: “[Ballot Position, Choice Fatigue, and Voter Behavior](#),” Augenblick and Nicholson (2015). “[Too much of a good thing? Longer ballots reduce voter participation](#),” Cunow, Desposato, Janusz, and Sells (2022). “[The downballot roll-off effect in action](#),” Spivak (2025). “[Coping with lengthy ballots](#),” Seib (2016).

¹⁵ Table adapted from “[Re-Assessing San Francisco’s Government Design](#),” The Rose Institute of State and Local Government (August 2023).

San Francisco is unique in allowing a legislative minority to access the ballot

Across the 10 largest California cities, San Francisco is the only one that permits a minority of legislators to place an ordinance directly on the ballot.

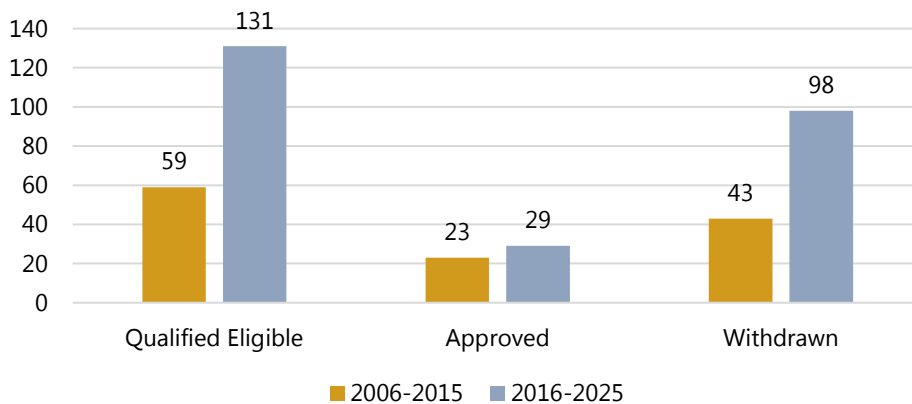
California has a process for proponents to amend or withdraw initiatives

California’s Ballot Initiative Transparency Act (BITA), or SB 1253, passed in 2014. This Act establishes a process by which proponents may amend or withdraw their initiatives. This allows for public input to inform initiatives and for proponents to ensure ballot measures will accomplish the goals intended. It first went into effect for the 2016 election cycle.

The Act established a thirty-day public review period that starts after proponents submit their “intent to circulate” to the Attorney General. Proponents may amend the initiative up to five days following the end of the public review period, provided the amendments are “reasonably germane to the theme, purpose, or subject of the initiative measure as originally proposed.”¹⁶ It also required the legislature to hold a public hearing on the measure, starting no later than 131 days prior to the election. Proponents may withdraw the proposed measure up until it qualifies for the ballot.

In the ten years since the Act went into effect, the impacts are unclear. The Controller’s Office used data from the California Secretary of State to compare initiatives in the past ten years to initiatives in the ten years prior to the reforms being implemented. This data shows that more items have been withdrawn in the past ten years, but also that more items have both qualified for the ballot and been approved.¹⁷

Figure 3: Comparing the Number of Measures Qualified, Approved, and Withdrawn Before and After the Implementation of the Ballot Initiative Transparency Act



Research also shows that the impacts have been unclear. A 2016 article published in CalMatters concluded that the Act had not been successful in reducing the number of measures on the ballot in the first election since its passage.¹⁸ Mark Baldassare, the Survey Director of the Public Policy Institute of California, assessed how proponents are using the new process in a 2022 article he co-wrote. The article notes that the expansion of the ability to withdraw measures, “enable[s] special interests to use ballot measures as

¹⁶ “Senate Bill No. 1253, Legislative Counsel’s Digest,” September 27, 2014.

¹⁷ “Initiative Totals by Summary Year (1912 - July 1, 2025).”

¹⁸ “Ballot of the Bulge: Why a new law isn’t shrinking the ballot much – yet.” Rosenhall (July 20, 2016).

bargaining chips with the Legislature.”¹⁹ A UC Davis California Civic Engagement Project study, published in 2018, indicated that public comment did not appear to be impacting amendments to measures.²⁰ This suggests the process is not surfacing new information that proponents may then use to amend or withdraw measures.

¹⁹ [“California’s Vanishing Ballot Measures,”](#) Baldassare and Katz (October 22, 2024).

²⁰ [“The Ballot Initiative Transparency Act: The Impact on Public Involvement in California’s Initiative Process,”](#) California Civic Engagement Project (May 2018).

Problem Statement and Options for Reform

Problem Statement

Working Group members explored potential options to reform ballot access and measure quality through the lens of the following problem statement:

San Francisco places over twice as many ballot measures before voters as other large California cities. This can overwhelm voters and constrains policymakers’ ability to lead, make decisions, and respond to new challenges.

Working Group members provided mixed feedback on whether or not this problem statement resonated with them. Some comments agreed that ballots are too long and that sometimes ballot measures pass and then are difficult to implement. Others agreed that ballots are long, but noted that San Francisco’s long ballots reflect the culture of activism and that raising signature thresholds may disproportionately impact low-income communities’ ability to shape City policy. Additionally, comments reflected a desire for data to illustrate how potential options would impact the issues raised in the problem statement. This drove some additional analysis, presented in the section above.

Reform Options: Updating Ballot Measure Thresholds

	Option	Potential Benefits
1	Raise signature thresholds for voter initiatives that change Municipal Codes From 2% to 10–12%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Likely to decrease number of measures on the ballot Would align San Francisco with peers
2	Raise signature thresholds for recall elections From 10% to as high as 15%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Likely to decrease the number of special elections
3	Raise thresholds for Board of Supervisors to place measures on the ballot From four Supervisors to higher threshold	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Likely to decrease number of measures on the ballot Would require more consensus to place measures on the ballot, which may increase quality.
4	Remove ability for Mayor to unilaterally place measures on the ballot	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Likely to decrease number of measures on the ballot Would require more consensus to place measures on the ballot, which may increase quality.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Would require more consensus to place measures on the ballot, which may increase quality. May decrease the number of measures on the ballot
6	Modify the Ethics Commission’s ability to place measures on the ballot Require a Board hearing and action on proposed Ethics measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May decrease the number of measures on the ballot May increase measure quality: recent ethics measures were highly complicated and difficult to implement.

Discussion, Feedback, and Considerations

Working Group members provided mixed feedback on options that would amend signature thresholds. Some supported raising thresholds, while others opposed changes due to concerns about consolidation of

power. Several members cited the high cost of signature gathering and cautioned that ballot access should not just be available to those with wealth and power. Other members appreciated that the options included changes to both signature thresholds and legislative access to the ballot, and they supported both.

Working Group members also provided mixed feedback on options to amend legislators’ ballot access. Many supported these options, and one noted that Option 5, which adds a Mayoral veto for Charter amendments, would be the most impactful. Others opposed these changes. One member saw the ability for four supervisors to place measures on the ballot as an important avenue for residents who cannot get a Board majority to support a position and expressed wariness at taking away that pathway. The ability for a legislative minority to place items on the ballot can be a check on the majority when a minority may put forward an idea that voters support, but their colleagues do not.

Two members raised a new reform option, noting that currently, these measures introduced by a legislative minority bypass the full Board process, which includes opportunities for amendments. Requiring the Board minority process to mirror the legislative majority process could improve the ballot measure quality.

“It’s great that it [the options set] is across the board change, not just voters, but the Board of Supervisors and the Mayor that are all giving something up. No individual branch is gaining undue influence.” – Steven Bacio

“Ballot access shouldn’t just be for rich, powerful people because they can fund it... I don’t think the folks standing in front of Safeway gathering signatures are the people hampering the Charter.” – John Doherty

Reform Options: Create Processes that Increase the Quality of Ballot Measures; Allow Amendments to Voter-Approved Ordinances

	Option	Potential Benefits
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Likely to increase measure quality: proponents can update measures based on feedback and correct issues that are identified after submission to Elections.
8	Make it easier for proponents to withdraw initiatives Allow proponents to withdraw initiatives up to 102 days prior to the election	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Likely to increase measure quality: proponents can withdraw measures based on feedback and correct issues that are identified after submission to Elections. May decrease ballot length: the Board may also choose to pass legislation implementing an initiative prior to an election, instead of that initiative going on the ballot.
9	Allow the Board of Supervisors to amend voter-approved ordinances after a certain amount of time after voter approval.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enables easier changes to outdated measures, improving City processes and governance

Discussion, Feedback, and Considerations

Working Group discussion on options to increase ballot measure quality primarily focused on implementation questions. Several members expressed concern about how the amendment process would work, cautioning that without guardrails, amendments could fundamentally change what voters added their signatures to. Others asked about processes for communicating any changes back to signees and voters. Some members supported these options, noting that an amendment process would have been beneficial for specific past measures.

“I want to raise flag on how expensive it is to gather signatures. For people of color, working people, there are great disparities as far as who shows up to ballot. What kind of education would you do if making these changes to let people know their involvement in democratic process is still valued?”
– Shakira Simley

One member asked whether a City Attorney could review initiative petitions prior to qualifying for the ballot. Options 7 and 8 could integrate this, by giving the proponents opportunities to amend or withdraw measures after the City Attorney’s Office review and digest period.

Among Working Group members, most comments expressed tentative support for allowing the Board to amend voter-approved initiatives, provided there were limits in place to ensure that the Board was not acting to remove measures that remain important to voters. One member suggested that amendments only be permissible after 10 years. Several members noted that a process to assess implementation of a voter-approved measure would help inform potential changes. One member objected, arguing that even flawed measures represent the will of the voters and that, if changes are desired, the correct path is to take the matter back to voters.

“As a former city official, I think everyone should know – everything you vote on isn’t always easy to implement. The idea of amending after something has been implemented makes sense. Figuring out guardrails of that is important.” – Fred Blackwell

Considerations for Policymakers

Based on research and Working Group feedback, there is not a clear path forward for the Mayor and Board of Supervisors. The Controller's Office recommends that policymakers take the following considerations into account:

Balance concerns about raising ballot measure thresholds with the risks of more measures and increased voter fatigue

In determining which pathway to pursue, the Mayor and Board of Supervisors should balance competing considerations about potential impacts to San Franciscans seeking to access the ballot, particularly those without significant wealth or power, with the potential risks to the City having to implement low quality measures and risks of decreasing voter participation. Policymakers should also consider the potential unintended impacts of raising thresholds too high. Under state law, 10% of registered voters may propose a Charter amendment. To avoid incentivizing proponents from pursuing Charter amendments in lieu of changes to the Municipal Codes, the threshold for amending the Municipal Codes should be less than 10%. Similarly, aligning the thresholds for special elections and general elections may incentivize proponents to request more special elections. This would increase both costs to the City and voter fatigue.

One approach is to choose a more modest increase to signature thresholds, such as 5%–8%. Choosing a 5% threshold would align San Francisco with San Jose, the city with the lowest threshold among peers. Choosing 8% would bring San Francisco closer to peers (plurality have 10%), while still being less likely to incentivize the public to pursue Charter amendments instead of ordinances.

Policymakers should also consider raising thresholds for the public, Board minority, and Mayor concurrently.

Consider including specific parameters to ensure amendments to proposed ballot initiatives align with original intent

Based on the Working Group feedback and the State's approach, if policymakers pursue options to amend or withdraw initiatives, they should require amendments to meet the spirit of the intended legislation. Reform options should ensure that those decisions are made as part of a public input process so that amendments or withdrawals are transparent. However, it is important to note that it is not clear that the State's process has had an impact on the number or quality of measures. So, adopting a similar process in San Francisco would also have unclear potential impacts.

When expanding Board of Supervisors' powers to amend voter initiatives, consider which guardrails to put in place to ensure that changes uphold the will of the voters

Policymakers should balance potential impacts to the democratic process with the risks of outdated legislation by establishing clear limits to ensure this power is used appropriately. This could include only permitting amendments after a certain period of time, establishing a higher Board threshold (such as 2/3) to make amendments, or specifying the types of legislation this power could be used on (e.g., only legislation that preserves voters' intent, language around obsolete processes, etc.).

Operational Efficiency

The Way It Is Now

San Francisco's government consists of over 50 departments. The Mayor leads the executive branch, and most City departments fall under their direction. Two key appointed officials, the Controller and the City Administrator, administer the City's finances and administrative services.

Although these officials manage most city operations, departments have varying levels of internal independence and control. This decentralized structure empowers subject-matter experts to make operational decisions but can create inefficiencies in shared processes and services. This section explores whether strengthening the City Administrator's authority over common operational functions could improve government efficiency.

San Francisco has a mayor-council form of government

Most cities use either a mayor-council or council-manager form of government. In a **mayor-council** system, an elected mayor heads the executive branch, while the city council serves as the legislative branch. In a **council-manager** system, the city council appoints a professional administrator to manage daily operations.

San Francisco has a mayor-council form of government with a City Administrator to manage certain administrative services and basic city operations. This system is intended to combine the democratic accountability of an elected mayor with the public administration expertise of a City Administrator.

The City Administrator oversees some citywide operations, but lacks authority

The Charter generally assigns the City Administrator responsibility for five main areas:

1. **Administrative services** within the executive branch, as assigned by the Mayor or by ordinance
2. Coordinating **capital improvement projects** and **bond measures**
3. Awarding some **contracts** and managing some policies and procedures for **procurement**
4. Administering policies and procedures for **building permits and inspections**
5. Control of **publicity and advertising** expenditures

Several Charter responsibilities no longer reflect the duties of the office. For example, the City Administrator has not been responsible for administering building permits and inspections since the Department of Building Inspection was established in 1994.

Today, the City Administrator oversees 25 departments, divisions, and programs that provide a broad range of services to other City departments and the public. These include basic internal administrative functions like technology, contracting, and asset management, as well as public services like 311 customer service. The City Administrator also manages several relatively small departments and programs.

In contrast with council-manager systems, most departments do not report to the City Administrator. While the City Administrator may issue policies and guidance in areas under its purview, in practice, departments exercise significant autonomy over their basic operations. For example, the City Administrator oversees the Department of Technology, which maintains certain critical technology infrastructure, but most other departments have their own IT teams, purchase their own software licenses, and manage and implement most IT and cybersecurity functions themselves. The City Administrator's Office typically relies on persuasion, rather than legal authority, to achieve compliance with policies and procedures. The Charter also grants several departments exclusive authority over their property, assets, and contracting, exempting them from City Administrator oversight.

Example:

Across the City, departments solve the same problems using similar tools, but they do it independently. The City now operates more than 20 learning and training systems, which makes citywide training and compliance tracking very difficult. It supports over 35 different laptop and device models, complicating purchasing, support, and replacement. And the City runs more than 14 document management systems, leading to information silos and inconsistent records practices.

The Mayor appoints the City Administrator to a 5-year term, subject to Board confirmation. This provides some degree of continuity and independence as five years exceeds the 4-year terms of the Mayor and Board of Supervisors. However, this independence is limited, as the City Administrator may be removed by the Mayor for any reason with Board approval. While not an elected position, the City Administrator may also be recalled by San Francisco voters.

From 1932 to 1996, San Francisco had an appointed Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) who served for a 10-year term and could only be removed for cause. The CAO position was the product of a nationwide movement to professionalize government and shift authority away from elected officials. Historically, the Chief Administrative Officer had oversight over most City departments; the 1996 Charter shifted much of this power to the Mayor and reduced the authority of the newly established City Administrator.

Procurement is a citywide administrative process with legal complexity and decentralization

The Board of Supervisors frequently adopts laws impacting City procurement, often leveraging San Francisco's purchasing power to advance social policy goals. For example, the City's 1996 Equal Benefits Ordinance encouraged airlines to offer domestic partner benefits in order to do business with SFO. However, not all purchasing laws achieve measurable benefits, and some add bureaucracy without clear value.

Since 2021 alone, the Board has introduced 22 new pieces of legislation impacting procurement. These laws span multiple Municipal Code Chapters and establish different rules for different types of procurement. In total, the Municipal Codes include nearly 9,000 references to the words "contract" or "procurement," which underscores the complexity of the current legal system.

In addition to its legal complexity, San Francisco's procurement processes are highly decentralized. Procurement laws are administered by 12+ program departments with authority to adopt business processes and create requirements for firms and departments independent of any larger, shared operational frameworks. There is no central authority with a holistic view of procurement who can coordinate across departments, resolve disagreements, and lead in procurement innovation. The City Administrator directly purchases most commodities and general services on behalf of the City, supports departments to procure professional services, and may propose some procurement rules but lacks the authority to compel

consistency in administrative policies. Recognizing inefficiency of current processes, the City has created 39 carve-outs to contracting rules for high priority work, further complicating the system.

This complexity imposes high costs on contractors and grantees who must invest significant time and resources to navigate it. This may particularly impact local firms and nonprofits who are more resource-constrained and may eventually disengage with City opportunities. It also delays service delivery, requires significant staff time, and limits the City's ability to use its buying power to support the San Francisco economy.

In addition to authoring procurement laws, the Board of Supervisors must approve certain transactions:

- Grants and contracts of at least \$10 million or 10 years²¹
- Revenue contracts of at least \$1 million²²
- Leases of at least 10 years
- Sale of any City property

These thresholds were set between 1978 and 1988²³; if updated for inflation, the dollar threshold for most grants and contracts would be \$27 million in 2026 dollars, while revenue contracts would be \$5 million. Board approval adds approximately six weeks to contracting timelines.

²¹ Excluding construction contracts

²² Contracts on which the City is anticipated to earn revenue

²³ The threshold for revenue contracts was set in 1978 and expenditure contracts in 1988.

How San Francisco Compares to Peers

Half of cities with a mayor-council government also appoint a professional CAO

According to the National Civic League, about half of mayor-council cities with populations over 10,000 also employ a chief administrative officer (CAO) to assist the mayor in running the executive branch.²⁴ The CAO may be appointed solely by the mayor or jointly by the mayor and council; if the mayor has sole authority to appoint the CAO, the nominee may still sometimes require confirmation from the council. A CAO brings professional city management experience that an elected mayor may lack and helps manage nuts-and-bolts operations that the mayor may not have sufficient bandwidth for. Some research suggests that having an appointed CAO or city manager is associated with higher levels of government innovation.²⁵

Among 12 peer jurisdictions, five have a mayor-council form of government with an elected mayor and an appointed CAO like San Francisco. These are bolded in the table below. Five cities have a mayor-council government but do not appoint a CAO to assist the Mayor in governing, and two cities have a different form of government from San Francisco.

Table 4: Comparing Peer Jurisdictions Form of Government and CAO/City Manager

City	Population	Form of Government	Has a CAO or City Manager?
San Francisco	828k	Mayor-Council	Yes
California Peers			
Fresno	550k	Mayor-Council	Yes
Los Angeles	3.9m	Mayor-Council	Yes
Oakland	444k	Mayor-Council	Yes
Sacramento	536k	Council-Manager	Yes
San Diego	1.4m	Mayor-Council	No
San Jose	997k	Council-Manager	Yes
National Peers			
Boston	674k	Mayor-Council	No
Denver	729k	Mayor-Council	No
New York	8.5m	Mayor-Council	No
Philadelphia	1.6m	Mayor-Council	Yes
Seattle	781k	Mayor-Council	No
Washington	702k	Mayor-Council	Yes

CAO authority varies from limited to expansive oversight of government operations

The responsibilities of peer city CAOs vary from a more limited role of oversight of internal city services to the expansive role of full responsibility for day-to-day government operations.

²⁴ "Model City Charter—9th Edition: Appendix 1: Options for Mayor-Council Cities."

²⁵ Nelson, Kimberly & Svara, James. (2012). Form of Government Still Matters: Fostering Innovation in U.S. Municipal Governments. American Review of Public Administration - AMER REV PUBLIC ADM. 42. 257-281. 10.1177/0275074011399898.

Fresno, Oakland, and Washington, DC have a CAO in the expansive role. These CAOs oversee city departments and hire and fire key personnel. In these cities, the Mayor provides goals and policy direction while the CAO implements them.

San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Philadelphia have a CAO in the limited role. These CAOs have oversight of some internal city services such as procurement, risk management, technology, and asset management, but generally do not oversee most city departments. It's unclear what level of authority the Los Angeles and Philadelphia CAOs have over internal services, or whether city departments retain independence and decision-making authority like they do in San Francisco. In addition to a City Administrator, Philadelphia also has a "Managing Director" who oversees most city departments and functions similarly to a City Manager.

In mayor-council cities without a CAO, the mayor is responsible for managing all government operations, including internal city services such as IT and procurement. Often, they delegate authority to deputy mayors or similar positions that serve at the pleasure of the mayor.

Appointment, Removal, and Term Length of CAOs

In each peer city, the CAO functions as an extension of the mayor, or of the mayor and the city council, and may be removed at any time. Moreover, none of the peer city CAOs serve for a set term like San Francisco's City Administrator.

Table 5: Comparing CAOs Across Peer Jurisdictions

City	CAO Responsibilities	Appointment	Term	Removal
San Francisco	Internal city services	Mayor, subject to Board confirmation	5 years	Mayor, with Board approval. Subject to recall
Fresno	All day-to-day government operations	Mayor	No fixed term	Mayor
Los Angeles	Internal city services	Mayor, subject to City Council confirmation	No fixed term	Mayor. Subject to recall
Oakland	All day-to-day government operations	Mayor, subject to City Council confirmation	No fixed term	Mayor
Philadelphia	Internal city services	Mayor	No fixed term	Mayor
Washington, D.C.	All day-to-day government operations	Mayor	No fixed term	Mayor

Problem Statement and Options for Reform

Problem Statement

The City's 50 departments generally manage their own operations and administrative policies. This can sometimes create redundancies, delay service delivery, and increase costs.

Working Group members generally agreed that this was a challenge for the City.

Reform Options: City Administrator

	Option	Potential Benefits
1	Grant the City Administrator authority to issue citywide rules and regulations For technology, procurement, real estate, fleet, and capital project delivery, especially where there are interdependencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greater consistency in City operations
2	Grant the City Administrator authority to directly manage some citywide functions Such as technology, procurement, real estate, fleet, and capital project delivery, especially where there are interdependencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greater consistency in City operations
3	Increase the term of the City Administrator From 5 to 10 years, consistent with the Controller	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greater continuity across political administrations Greater ability to implement long-term operational improvements
4	Raise the threshold to remove the City Administrator from office From at-will to for-cause, subject to 2/3 Board approval	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increases independence and insulation from day-to-day politics

Discussion, Feedback, and Considerations

Generally, Working Group members supported giving more authority to the City Administrator to oversee internal City functions, but cautioned that any increases in power should be paired with accountability mechanisms. Members did not want to make it more difficult to remove the City Administrator from office, noting that the Mayor and Board should be able to hold them accountable for results. One member pointed out that just five years ago the City Administrator resigned amid a corruption scandal, so guardrails and accountability are important.

Some members raised concerns about longer terms reducing accountability, while others argued term length and removal processes should be considered separately. One member suggested that regular performance reviews and accountability mechanisms could accompany a longer term. Several members acknowledged that institutional change takes time and a longer term may be useful in seeing change through. However, one member questioned why, if that's true, the Mayor and Board of Supervisors shouldn't also have longer terms.

"Centralizing some of these functions with the City Administrator makes sense... but making their term 10 years and removing the Mayor's ability to remove them makes the role unaccountable. You theoretically could have someone go rogue. It would be concerning if there's no accountability." – Andres Power

One member agreed with the spirit of the reform ideas but proposed drafting any Charter amendment in a way that preserves flexibility for the Mayor and Board to govern as they see fit. This may include flexibility to assign additional oversight/responsibilities to the City Administrator.

Several members acknowledged that the Mayor could already affect many of these changes without a Charter amendment. The City Administrator already has Charter authority over administrative services, as assigned by the Mayor or via ordinance.

“We need to make it easier to work with the City, and having an accountable leader seems like an appropriate step.” – Missy Narula

Some members argued that the Mayor’s office could provide leadership to streamline operations, while others noted that the Mayor’s Office is designed for high-level policy direction, not for overseeing highly technical and specialized operational issues.

Reform Options: Procurement

	Option	Potential Benefits
5	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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Laws proposed by a central authority with a holistic view of procurement
6	Clarify that all departments must comply with citywide purchasing rules Including departments with special authorities listed in the Charter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allows departments to retain their special authorities while still ensuring a pathway to greater consistency
7	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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allows the City to modernize certain procurement requirements through the regular legislative process
8	Increase the threshold for contracts requiring Board approval From \$10 million to \$25 million, and adjust automatically with inflation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Speeds up contract execution by approximately six weeks for \$10–\$25 million contracts no longer requiring BOS approval
9	Re-define the universe of contracts that require Board approval For example, exempt certain commodities contracts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Speed up contract execution timelines for commodities contracts

Discussion, Feedback, and Considerations

Working Group members agreed that the City’s procurement processes need improvement. They noted the difficulty a complex and lengthy process poses for contractors and the potential benefits of improving it. One member drew a distinction between contracts for goods and services, noting that service provision is more complex and requires departmental expertise. Another suggested a periodic review process to ensure that procurement-related laws continue to remain relevant, citing the prohibition on the use of tropical hardwood as one example.

“When companies streamline procurement, they often save 10-15%, which is money the City could reinvest in better services.” – Katherine August-deWilde

Considerations for Policymakers

Based on research and Working Group feedback, policymakers should take the following considerations into account:

Common sense procurement Charter reforms could save the City time and money

The City should take common sense steps to reduce contracting timelines in order to save time and money. The most straightforward step is to increase the Board of Supervisors' contract approval threshold in Charter § 9.118, which has not been adjusted for inflation in several decades. This should be raised and the Charter should allow for an ongoing inflation adjustment.

The Mayor and Board of Supervisors should also consider changes to outdated sections of code that no longer reflect today's realities, such as those relating to the City's official newspaper or the physical posting of solicitations.

Consider changing how the City adopts procurement laws

The Board of Supervisors frequently adopts laws affecting procurement, creating a complex and fragmented legal landscape that results in lengthy processes for both departments and contractors. Delegating authority to the City Administrator to propose new purchasing laws could help address these inefficiencies by creating a clearer legal framework that is easier for departments and contractors to navigate.

Streamlining procurement laws would support the City's core goal of obtaining the best value for residents through an open, fair, and transparent process. For routine, apolitical purchases such as commodities needed for daily operations, the question is not whether to procure these items, but whether the City is getting the best price. Simplifying requirements and reducing barriers to entry would support this goal.

There is also precedent for delegating rulemaking authority in areas considered apolitical. For example, the Controller proposes long-range financial policies, and the General Manager of the Public Utilities Commission adopts rules regulations within the PUC's jurisdiction. Granting similar authority to the City Administrator could result in a more strategic and centralized legal framework for procurement.

However, there are important arguments against such a shift. Some procurement laws are inherently political, such as those governing fair wages and benefits for City contractors, workplace health and safety requirements, or project labor agreements. The Board of Supervisors has also historically used procurement laws to advance social goals, such as equity and sustainability. Transferring this authority to the City Administrator would reduce legislative involvement and alter the balance of power between branches of government. While efficiency and simplification are compelling goals, policymakers must weigh them against the need for democratic accountability and the Board's role in shaping policy through procurement.

The City Administrator's Charter authority has not been updated in thirty years. Policymakers should modernize and clarify it

At a minimum, the City Administrator's Charter duties should be updated to reflect the current responsibilities of the office. For example, the City Administrator no longer oversees public works or building inspection, yet the Charter still assigns them responsibility for those functions. Similarly, the Department of Administrative Services no longer exists and should be deleted from the Charter.

Any amendments should balance flexibility with consistency. Some responsibilities assigned decades ago are no longer relevant; the City can avoid repeating this problem by crafting flexible, high-level language that allows the Mayor and Board of Supervisors to revise the City Administrator's responsibilities over time. On the other hand, some operational responsibilities may benefit from consistent, Charter-defined ownership rather than shifting with mayoral administrations. Policymakers should carefully consider which responsibilities warrant permanence and define these in the Charter. In considering potential reforms, policymakers should keep in mind that centralizing authority for internal services like City technology also centralizes accountability.

If policymakers intend for departments with special Charter authority to comply with City Administrator rules and regulations, this requirement should be made explicit in the Charter.

If increasing the City Administrator's term length, balance continuity with accountability

There is a strong argument for housing long-range, cross-departmental work in a single office to ensure consistency and follow-through. For example, capital projects often span multiple mayoral administrations and require coordination across several departments. These efforts may benefit from professional, apolitical leadership by an office with a citywide focus, such as the City Administrator. To reinforce this long-term perspective, policymakers should consider extending the City Administrator's term beyond five years. However, as referenced by Working Group members, any increases in authority and term length should be paired with accountability mechanisms. Policymakers may wish to preserve the Mayor's ability to remove the City Administrator with Board approval.

City departments should continue working to improve operational efficiency, with or without Charter reforms

The Charter assigns the City Administrator authority over administrative services as assigned by the Mayor or by ordinance, but this language is vague, and the City Administrator's Office has historically relied more on persuasion than clear legal authority to ensure compliance with its rules and regulations. Charter reform is an effective tool to clarify this authority, but it is not the only one. Regardless of how the City Administrator's authority is clarified, the most difficult work lies in interdepartmental coordination, process improvement, and change management. This work is already underway in areas such as procurement and should be expanded to other basic government operations.

City Organization

The Way It Is Now

San Francisco has 50 departments, depending on the definition of a department used.²⁶ Among others, these departments include those that:

- Perform city oversight and administration, such as the City Administrator’s Office
- Provide core city services such as the Fire Department
- Deliver direct services to the public, such as the Department of Public Health

Most of San Francisco’s departments are in the Charter

San Francisco’s Charter establishes 45 departments, or 90% of the City’s total departments. Having these departments in the Charter means that the majority of San Francisco’s structures are inflexible. This restricts City leadership’s ability to adapt structures to changing needs or challenges. It also means that voters have to approve even minor changes to Charter department names, functions, or structures. For example, voters had to approve changing the name of the “Department of Aging and Adult Services” to the “Department of Disability and Aging Services.”

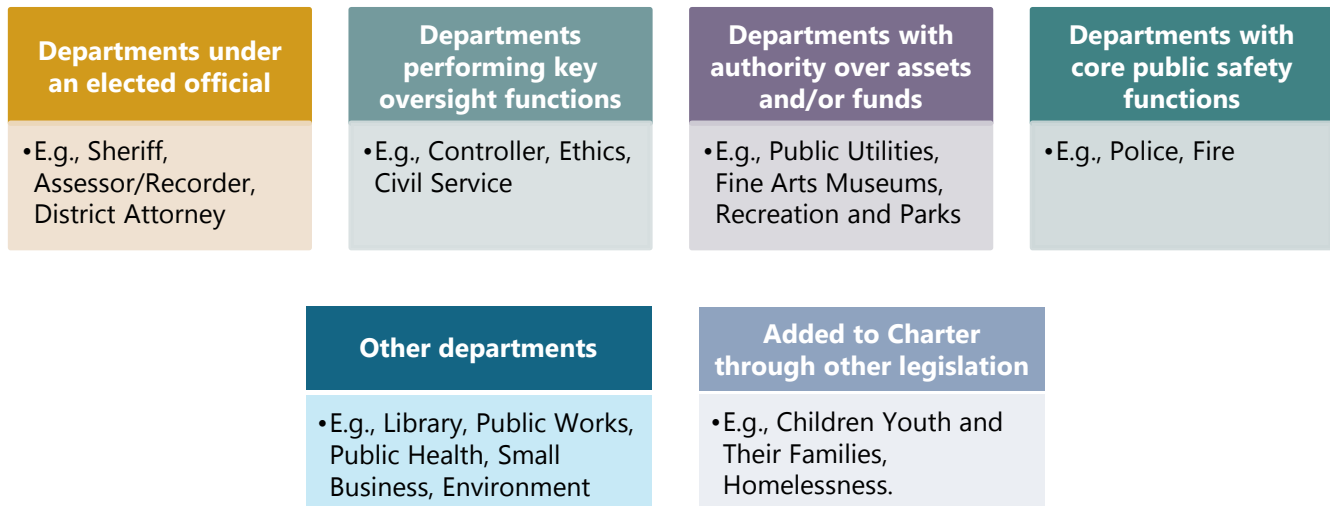
Some departments should be established in the Charter. These include (1) departments under elected officials, (2) departments that have oversight over assets or functions that the Board or Mayor would otherwise hold, and (3) departments that play an independent oversight role.

Other departments may not need to remain in the Charter. While some have existed in the Charter for a long time, others were established as recently as 2022. Some departments existed in the Municipal Codes prior to their inclusion in the Charter. Some were incidentally added through the introduction of related Charter amendments, such as establishing a baseline or a commission. For a detailed list of departments, please see Appendix A.

Example: Permitting in San Francisco

Permitting has long been a pain point in San Francisco. Residents and businesses express frustration at having to navigate multiple departments with different processes and standards to get approval for projects. While the Mayor launched PermitSF, an initiative to streamline permitting, some structures are locked in the Charter, limiting the ability to create a truly integrated permitting process.

²⁶ There are multiple definitions of a department. This report includes any department mentioned in the Charter and departments defined in the [City’s budget](#). This excludes any offices under the Mayor’s Office (such as MOHCD) or under the City Administrator’s Office (e.g., Office of the Chief Medical Examiner). Other definitions of a department could include: 1) A Charter or Code section states that a unit of government is a department. 2) The head of a unit has certain obligations of a department head as specified in code. 3) Other characteristics a unit has, such who has budget or hiring/firing authority over that unit and unit’s director.

Figure 5: Examples of Departments in the Charter

The establishing language has different levels of detail and can be overly specific

The level of detail establishing these departments in the Charter varies widely. Charter sections may outline their purposes, general functions, and/or specific operations and processes. Some departments are only established through a reference in establishing a commission, department head, or baseline. On the other end of the spectrum, some departments' language is extremely detailed, mandating specific processes and operations. While some of these detailed functions must be in the Charter for a department to own them²⁷, in most cases, this level of detail is not appropriate for the Charter. It locks the City into functions, operations, processes, or reporting that may not be the best use of resources.

Example:

The SFMTA's Charter section includes requirements such as the Director must receive an additional four hours of training annually, at least 85% of vehicles should run on time, and cable car schedules must match what they were in 1971. The SFMTA found that customer satisfaction is primarily driven by having equal time between vehicles rather than vehicles that arrive on time (e.g. residents care whether the bus arrives every 10 minutes, rather than whether the bus arrives at 8:51). However, the Charter specifies that the SFMTA must target 85% of vehicles having "on time performance" so SFMTA must expend resources reporting on standards that are no longer the best way to assess performance.

²⁷ Examples include the SFMTA's exclusive authority over its property, the Fine Arts Museums' exclusive charge over the trusts and assets (including arts collections) under its jurisdiction, or the Controller's audit authority.

Figure 6: Examples of Level of Department Detail in San Francisco's Charter

Minimal Detail	General Role or Purpose	General Functions	Detailed processes or operations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "...the Library Department shall be a part of the executive branch." 	<p>"The Assessor-Recorder shall equitably and effectively administer the property assessment system of the City and County."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "...the Department shall manage and control the City and County hospitals, emergency medical services, and in general provide for the preservation, promotion and protection of the physical and mental health of the inhabitants of the City and County." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "The staff of [the Department of Police Accountability] shall consist of no fewer than one line investigator for every 150 sworn members."

The Charter limits the Mayor's authority to organize and oversee departments

San Franciscans generally expect to hold the Mayor accountable for the City's performance. In many cases, however, the Charter limits the Mayor's ability to hire or fire the department heads charged with delivering services. It also limits their authority to organize functions across City departments.

Many departments in the Charter have commissions that oversee their work. These include the Police Commission, Homelessness Oversight Commission, Arts Commission, and many more. In most cases, these commissions have the authority to nominate three candidates for department head, for the Mayor to appoint, and the sole authority to remove a department head. Currently, 14 commissions directly appoint a department head while another 23 nominate three candidates. Thirty-six have sole authority to remove a department head. This means the Mayor has limited recourse to ensure a department head is supporting the Mayor's policy agenda.

As highlighted above, many departments' Charter sections task them with specific functions. The Mayor currently has the power to re-organize executive branch functions, but this power does not extend to Charter-mandated functions.

The Charter restricts Mayor's Office organization

The Charter also restricts the Mayor's ability to structure their own office. In 1991, voters passed Proposition H. This introduced a ban on employing Deputy Mayors, assigning duties to Mayor's Office staff that include supervising any department head, and paying any Mayor's Office staff a salary greater than 70% of the Mayor's. The Mayor cannot provide adequate day-to-day oversight of 50 department heads. These restrictions inhibit the Mayor's ability to assemble an office that may best help achieve their goals.

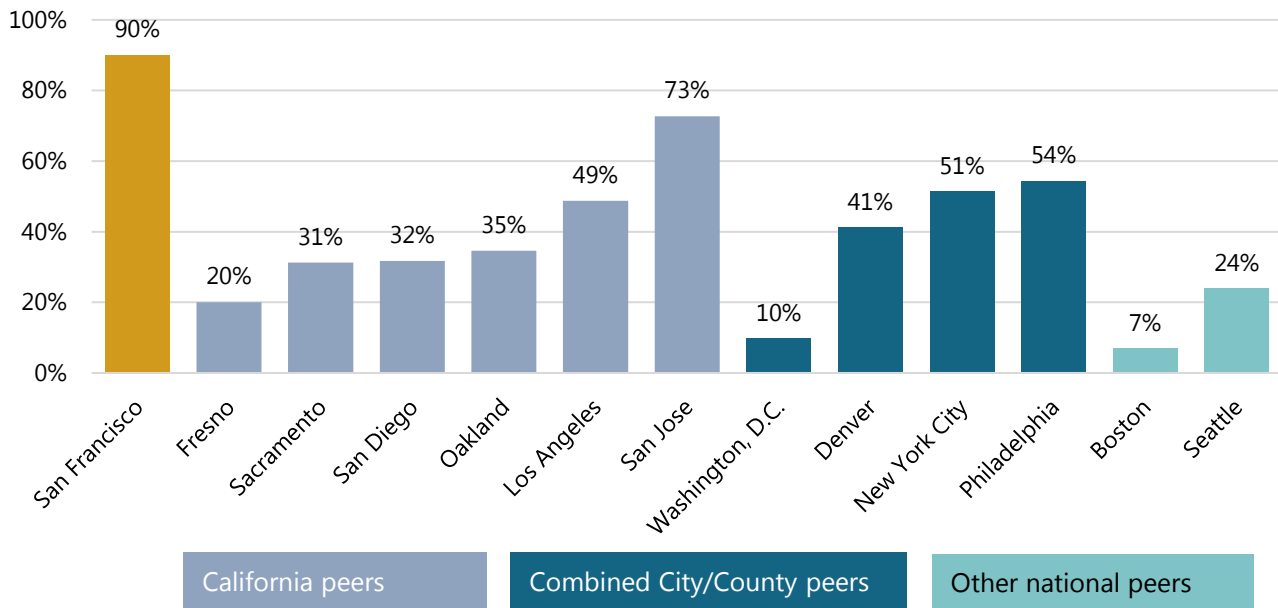
How San Francisco Compares to Peers

San Francisco has a higher proportion of departments in the Charter than peer cities do

Peer cities reviewed have a smaller proportion of departments in their Charters than San Francisco does.²⁸ With the exception of San Jose, peers consistently have approximately half or fewer of their departments in the Charter.

Working Group members asked if San Francisco’s structure as a combined city and county impacted the comparisons to other cities. There are certain agencies and functions that counties typically own instead of cities. Examples include a Sheriff’s Office or administration of social safety net programs such as SNAP. This means that combined city-counties in our peer group tend to have more departments than cities. However, this does not appear to impact the proportion of departments in the Charter. Comparing San Francisco to peers with combined city-county structures shows that San Francisco still has the highest proportion of departments in its Charter.

Figure 7: Peer Cities Have a Smaller Percentage of Departments Fixed in the Charter Compared to San Francisco



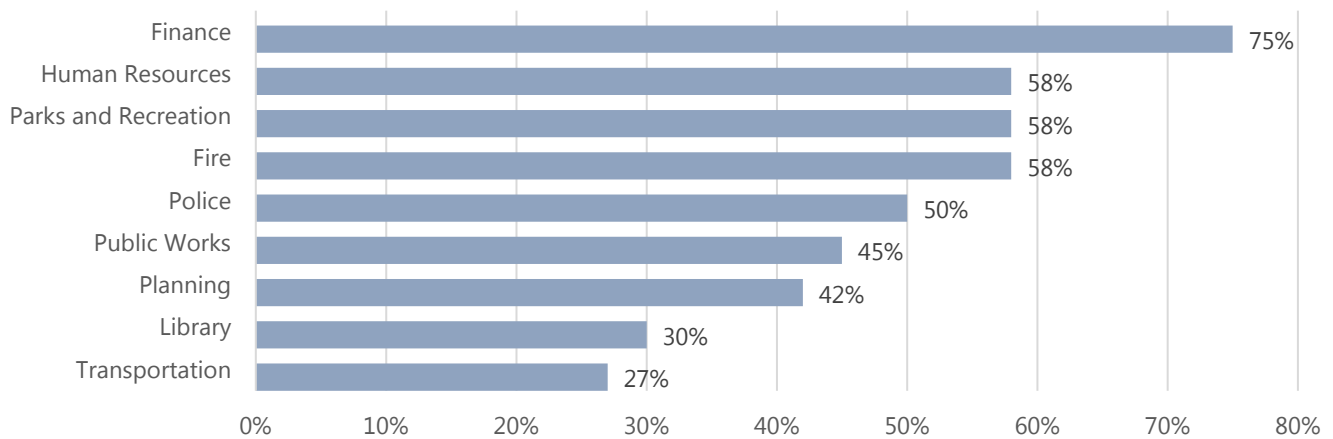
²⁸ As noted in the “The Way it is Now” section above, there are multiple definitions of a department. To take a consistent approach, this report developed data for peer cities by reviewing the departments in the budget for each city and reviewing the charter to add any departments reflected in the charter but not in the budget. Note that this approach may inadvertently exclude departments mentioned in other cities charters but not explicitly established in its own section.

City organization differs across peers, but San Francisco has an high number of common departments in its Charter

Comparing the proportion of charter-established departments in peer cities can help show how San Francisco's approach differs from others. However, this comparison has limits because cities organize their governments differently. One difference is the wide range in number of departments, as mentioned above. For example, Sacramento has only 16 departments while Washington D.C. has 72. This variation happens despite cities being similar sizes or providing similar services. For example, most cities or counties offer social services to low-income residents, older adults, people with disabilities, children, and people experiencing homelessness. Some cities consolidate these functions into a single Human Services Agency, while others establish separate departments for each population. These differences make it hard to use the percentage of charter-established departments across cities to understand differences in how much a city's charter dictates its structure.

Some departments are common across cities and counties, such as police, planning, or libraries. Evaluating whether peer cities include these typical departments in their charters helps illustrate how typical San Francisco's approach is. All twelve peers have a police department, for instance, but only six establish that department in their charter. The chart below illustrates how common it is to have some typical departments in a city's charter.²⁹ San Francisco has each of these departments in its Charter.

Figure 4: Percentage of Peer Cities with Common Departments Established in the Charter



San Francisco's Charter also establishes several departments that peer cities either lack entirely or have but do not appear their charters. For example, five peer cities also have human rights-related departments, but only New York and San Francisco include them in their charters.

Overall, this underscores that San Francisco's approach is uncommon.

²⁹ Note that some peer cities reviewed do not have public works, library, or transportation departments, because the county performs that function instead.

San Francisco is unique in restricting mayoral authority to hire and fire department heads and delegate oversight

San Francisco has a mayor-council system of government. Peer cities reviewed include national and California peers with mayor-council structures. Most peer cities have charters that grant the Mayor authority to hire and fire most department heads, although many cities require council confirmation of appointments. Most peers have some exceptions to this rule and may have a limited number of department heads hired or fired by a board or commission. Many, but not all, peers permit either the Mayor or Council to re-organize departments and city functions.

San Francisco's ban on deputy mayors and delegation of oversight is also unusual. All peers reviewed permit the Mayor to delegate oversight in some form.

Table 6: Comparing Mayoral Authority In Peer Cities

Peer City	Mayor Has Hire/Fire Authority Over Most Heads	Mayor Reorganization Authority	Mayor's Office Has Cabinet or Deputies?
Boston City	✓	X Council, with Mayoral approval.	✓
Denver City/County	✓ Some require Council approval	N/A No mention in Charter	✓
New York City City/County	✓	✓ Limited to executive branch. Some require Council approval.	✓
Philadelphia City/County	✓ Some require Council approval	N/A No mention in Charter	✓
Seattle City	✓	✓ Mayor and Council have authority	✓
Washington D.C. City/County Equivalent	✓ Subject to Council approval	✓ Limited to executive branch. Council may disapprove.	✓
Fresno City	X City Administrator has most hire/fire authority	✓ Council and Mayor have authority	N/A City Administrator oversees departments
Los Angeles City	✓ Subject to Council approval	✓ Subject to Council approval	✓
Oakland City	X City Administrator has most hire/fire authority	X Council may reorganize, by ordinance	✓
San Diego City	✓	X Council may reorganize	✓

Problem Statement and Options for Reform

Problem Statement

Working Group members explored potential options to reform City organization and Mayoral powers to re-organize through the lens of the following problem statement:

San Francisco’s Charter authority is spread out and is overly prescriptive, dictating specific structures and functions. This leads to residents having difficulty holding officials accountable and leadership having difficulty responding to new needs quickly and efficiently.

Working Group members provided feedback on whether or not the problem statement resonated with them. Some comments reflected agreement that yes, the Charter seems to restrict the Mayor’s ability to lead. Several Working Group members felt it made sense to remove overly detailed processes or structures from the Charter. Working Group members also cautioned that change should be made thoughtfully, so that there is continued oversight and transparency when moving details out of the Charter or giving the Mayor more power.

Reform Options: Create Ongoing Flexibility in the Charter by Moving Some Details from Charter to Code

	Option	Potential Benefits
1	Move some departments from the Charter to the Municipal Codes Allow the City to flexibly re-organize more departments through the regular legislative process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creates additional flexibility to ensure City structures effectively meet current needs. Legislative process provides checks and balances on this power.
2	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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creates additional flexibility to ensure functions are able to be created, eliminated, or re-assigned as the needs of the City change.
3	Move detailed operational requirements from the Charter to Municipal Codes Create more flexibility to adjust operations as needs change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increases flexibility to determine which operations make most sense as needs and constraints change.
4	Create a process to regularly review the Charter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pre-planned maintenance of Charter should help Charter remain flexible over time and continues to support City’s goals.

Discussion, Feedback, and Considerations

Working Group members wanted to better understand why most departments are in the Charter and what the benefits are of being in the Charter. After discussion, some agreed it likely made sense to move operational details out of the Charter, provided that general responsibilities and services are preserved. One member suggested that if departments or their operations move to the Administrative Code, there

“I fully support a regular review process but want to hear how this would not be a political exercise and be more technical and evidence based.” – Natalie Sandoval

should be a higher threshold to amend sections establishing those departments. Another member noted the basic purpose and responsibilities of each department were more important to the public than the actual structure of those departments. Overall, members generally did not express strong feelings for retaining any specific department in the Charter, as long as each department’s responsibilities and services continue. Some members noted the connection between having too much detail in the Charter and low ballot thresholds, observing that it is relatively easy for the public to add detail to the Charter that may not belong there.

It is important to note that while many support the idea of moving operational requirements out of the Charter in theory, in practice it could be more challenging. Many operational requirements, such as cable car schedules and library service hours, are tied to beloved institutions that the public may be wary of changing.

Working Group members briefly discussed creating a process to regularly review the Charter.

Reform Options: Enable the Mayor to Manage More Effectively

	Option	Potential Benefits
5	Allow the Mayor to move Charter-assigned functions between departments Among some executive branch departments, unless vetoed by the Board of Supervisors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creates additional flexibility to ensure effective administration of City government.
6	Grant the Mayor broader authority to re-organize reporting relationships between department heads Among some executive branch departments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creates more efficiency from the agency model, by allowing Mayor to assign one department head to report to another. Creates additional flexibility to consolidate departments or shift functions to ensure City structures effectively meet current needs.
7	Remove restrictions on Mayor’s Office staffing Allow the Mayor to hire deputies and delegate oversight of departments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allows Mayor to develop structures that facilitate their vision. Improves department oversight.
8	Allow the Mayor to appoint and remove most departments heads* Instead of their commissions, with a few exceptions (e.g., Ethics, Elections, Civil Service)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allows Mayor more authority to accomplish policy goals.

Discussion, Feedback, and Considerations

Working Group members generally supported options to increase the Mayor’s ability to organize and oversee government. Several members noted that the Mayor should have the authority to lead once they are elected. One member noted the importance of balancing an increase to Mayoral power with the addition of guardrails to increase transparency and accountability. Another member highlighted the importance of balancing creating more flexibility with the benefits of continuity, but noted that the electoral process is a check on too much disruption.

“It’s important to give elected officials the ability to lead. Can we set up something that gives more power to the Mayor and Board while setting up oversight processes?” – Tim Omi

Members generally supported changes to hiring and firing authority. One member stated that permitting the Mayor to hire and fire most department heads likely made sense, but wanted to ensure that public input was

still considered. Members raised the question of transparency into these changes as well. One comment noted it was difficult to provide feedback on the options to increase Mayoral powers without knowing how the Commission Streamlining recommendations would be implemented. As an example, the member would not support both eliminating a department's oversight commission and giving the Mayor hiring and firing power over that department head.

"At the end of the day, we want balance. If we want to increase mayoral authority over a department head and are also getting rid of an oversight commission, then that's an issue." – Sherilyn Adams

Finally, the discussion did not focus on removing restrictions on Mayor's office staffing.

Considerations for Policymakers

When assessing pathways to implement these options, policymakers should consider how to address the concerns Working Group members raised above.

Consider putting values in the Charter instead of structures or operational details

As highlighted above, the Working Group discussion was more conceptual rather than focused on any specific departments and functions. Many departments and functions are closely tied to issue areas with passionate advocates, such as public libraries, homelessness, and children's services. As a result, there is likely to be more pushback to proposals to move specific departments out of the Charter and into code.³⁰ Similarly, some members of the public may see Charter language around departments and department functions as indicative of the City's commitment to specific policies/services. Examples include the Department on the Environment or SFMTA's transit-first policy. One approach to address potential concerns is to replace some of these structures or functions in the Charter with the values behind those structures or functions.

Example: Department of the Environment

Current Charter language:

"The Department of the Environment shall regularly produce an assessment of San Francisco's environmental condition... shall also produce and regularly update plans for the long-term environmental sustainability of San Francisco... [and] shall manage the environmental programs, duties and functions assigned to it."



Potential replacement language:

"The City and County of San Francisco shall steward the long-term environmental sustainability of San Francisco. This shall include regular assessments of San Francisco's environmental condition and promotion of policies and programs to ensure that San Francisco remains a leader in sustainable practices."

Department and specific functions would shift to the Administrative Code.

Explore ways to increase flexibility while minimizing unnecessary disruption to City operations

While flexibility is an important principle of this Charter reform work, the overarching goal is to improve service delivery for San Franciscans. Policymakers should consider how to balance increased flexibility with the potential for frequent disruption to existing practices and operations. Recent efforts to create and re-organize departments have illustrated how challenging large, institutional change can be. Merging departments requires integrating multiple sets of administrative staff, different systems for core operations such as contract management or client tracking, and more. These types of changes may take years to fully implement. As a result, even if the long-term benefits of these changes are clear, there may be increased costs and impacted services in the short term.

³⁰ Feedback on the Commission Streamlining Task Force illustrates additional potential arguments pushing back against these proposals. Advocates argued that being in the Charter is an indicator of importance. Moving departments out of the Charter could appear to be devaluing certain City functions.

Policymakers should consider adding limits to ensure changes are made thoughtfully and intentionally. In many jurisdictions, this comes in the form of requiring council approval. Granting the Board of Supervisors veto power over changes would match the approach of peer cities.

Consider how to facilitate public input and transparency if increasing Mayoral authority

Similarly, policymakers should consider how to enable public oversight and input into the Mayor's actions if pursuing options to give the Mayor broader authority. If the Board holds veto power, policymakers could consider adding requirements for a Board hearing prior to changes taking effect, in order to facilitate transparent decision-making and introduce opportunities for public input. Other options could include involving commissions in discussions on hiring and firing, even if the Mayor holds the sole power to hire and fire department heads. Another option is providing organizational charts and transparent hiring and salary information on the Mayor's Office structures. This type of operational detail does not belong in the Charter, but could be part of an implementation plan if these options go forward.

Evaluate options in conjunction with the Commission Streamlining Task Force decisions

Department structures and functions are closely tied to commissions and their functions. This, along with some of the Working Group members' concerns highlighted above, speaks to the need to consider broader Charter reform alongside the Commission Streamlining recommendations.

Consider how to communicate potential changes to voters

Policymakers should consider how to frame potential changes in light of ongoing budget constraints. For example, option 5 above enables re-organization of the Mayor's office rather than explicitly adding staff, but comments above illustrate that some may interpret this option as increasing staffing.

Resource Management

The Way It Is Now

The Constitution of the State of California requires all cities to adopt a balanced budget where revenues match expenditures. To ensure that San Francisco can meet its immediate needs while planning for long-term growth, the City operates on a two-year budget cycle. San Francisco adopted a \$16 billion budget in Fiscal Year 2025–2026 (FY25–26) and a \$16.2 billion budget in FY26–27.

Most of the City’s revenue is restricted for specific uses

Like other municipalities, the City and County of San Francisco is funded by various sources including charges for services, taxes, intergovernmental payments, rents and concessions, and other sources. More than half of these sources have restrictions on their uses.

Some City departments are partially or fully **self-supporting** through fee revenue. Under state law they must use this revenue to pay for the cost of services they provide to fee payers. These funds cannot pay for other City services provided by different departments. For example, water fees charged by the Public Utilities Commission cannot be used to pay for homelessness services, and terminal rental fees assessed by San Francisco International Airport cannot be used to fund the City’s public libraries.

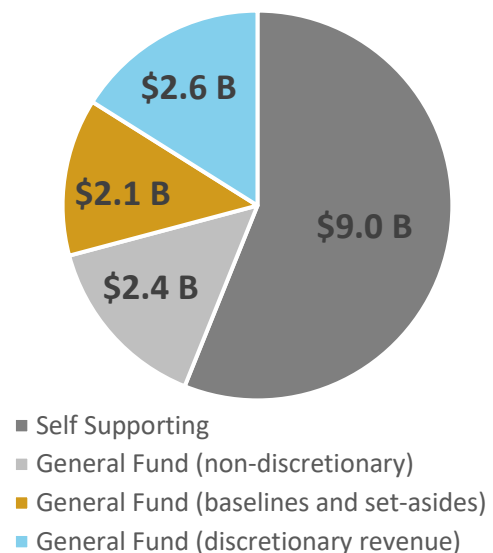
Some General Fund dollars come with restrictions on how the City may spend them. These funds are **non-discretionary**. The state and federal government set some of these restrictions. For example, revenue received from the state to pay for In-Home Supportive Services cannot be reallocated to fund other programs.

Voters set other restrictions locally. Budget **baselines and set-asides** are legal requirements to allocate a certain share of the City’s budget toward a particular purpose. As of FY25–26, voters have adopted 23 baselines and set-asides totaling \$2.1 billion.³¹

In FY25–26, just \$2.6 billion, or approximately 16% of the City’s \$16 billion budget is truly discretionary, meaning the Mayor and Board of Supervisors may allocate it toward any purpose.

Voters have also adopted five special taxes which generate \$574 million of revenue annually. Special taxes restrict revenue for a specific purpose, unlike general taxes which may be used to pay for any City service. Much like baselines and set-asides, special taxes protect funding for important purposes like

Figure 8: FY25–26 Budget by General Fund and Self-Supporting Revenues



³¹ The Controller’s Office recently issued a report on voter-mandated funding requirements in San Francisco. For more information, review the report at https://media.api.sf.gov/documents/2026_Baseline_Report_FINAL.pdf.

homelessness services or childcare. Unlike baselines and set-asides, they generate revenue, rather than sequestering General Fund dollars. However, special purpose taxes are not available for emerging needs and may prevent future tax increases for other purposes.

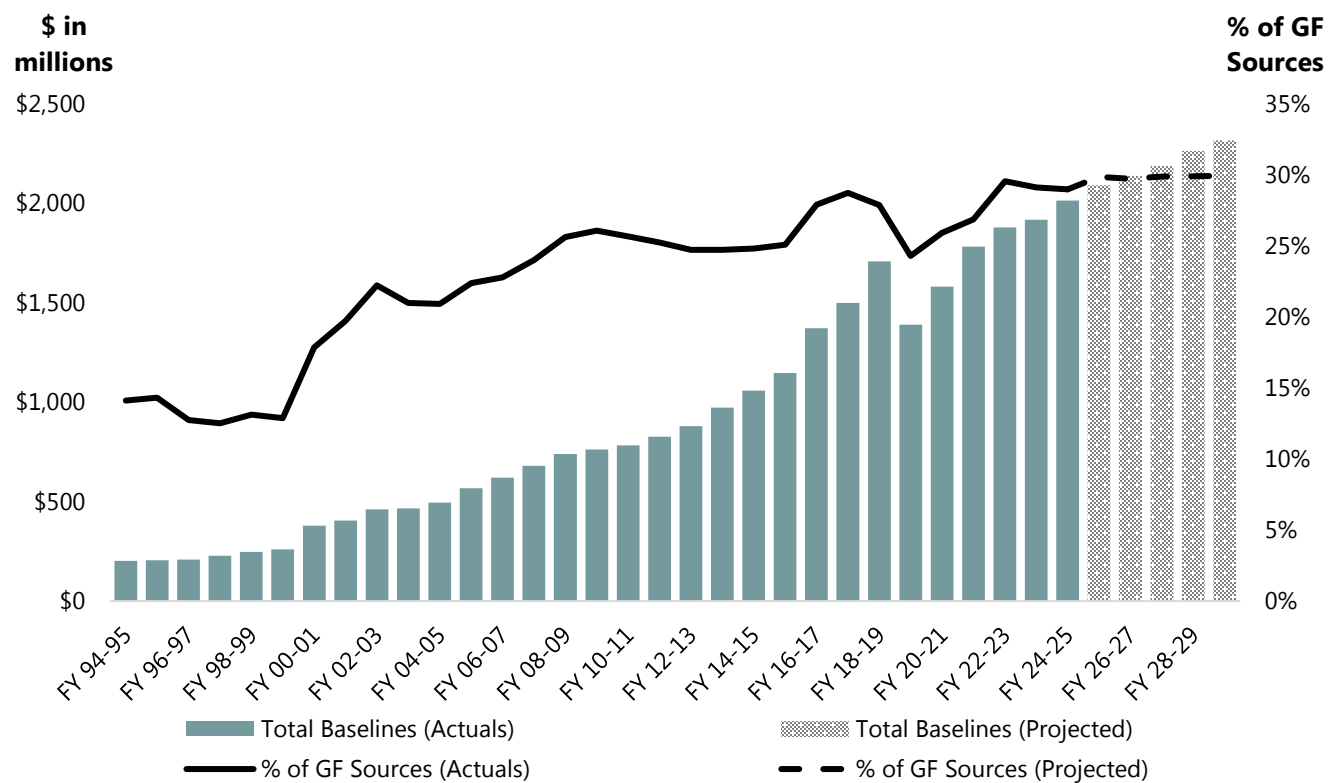
Baselines Guarantee Funding for Some Services and Shift Financial Pressures Elsewhere in the Budget

Individually, each baseline funds an important service. They guarantee funding for services like parks, libraries, children’s services, and public transit. Collectively, baselines significantly reduce budget flexibility to respond to emerging needs and priorities. As requirements have grown, financial pressures, such as whether to respond to a new service need or an economic slowdown, fall on a shrinking portion of the budget. For example, given projected shortfalls, FY26 budget instructions told departments to permanently reduce General Fund spending by 15%.³² That reduction did not apply to most baseline-funded services.

Voter-mandated spending requirements have multiplied over time

In FY96–97, San Francisco had seven spending requirements totaling \$208 million, or about 15% of the City’s discretionary revenue. Thirty years later, approximately 30% of San Francisco’s discretionary revenue is allocated toward baselines each year. This growth was primarily driven by the addition of new baselines and set-asides adopted by voters.

Figure 9: Actual and Projected Baseline Funding Requirements Between FY94–95 and FY29–30



³² City and County of San Francisco, Mayor’s Office of Public Policy and Finance. (2024, December 3). *Fiscal Outlook & Department Budget Instructions*. [https://media.api.sf.gov/documents/Budget Instructions Final 12.03.24 gYnhaSq.pdf](https://media.api.sf.gov/documents/Budget%20Instructions%20Final%2012.03.24%20gYnhaSq.pdf)

Approximately half of baselines have sunset dates

Only 15 of the City's 28 baselines, set-asides, or special taxes have sunset provisions. Without sunset provisions, these funding requirements will continue in perpetuity, without meaningful opportunities to review or evaluate whether they are funding the correct services, at the correct levels, to achieve what voters intended. For example, in 1935 San Francisco voters decided to set aside a portion of property tax revenues to maintain a symphony orchestra. While the arts remain essential, voters have not revisited this funding decision in over ninety years.

Those baselines that do have sunset provisions have all been re-authorized by voters before they expired. Some have been re-authorized at higher funding levels.

Baselines lack standardization

As new baselines have been adopted over time, they have included different calculation methodologies, growth mechanisms, and other features. This lack of standardization makes administration difficult. For example:

- **Deficit triggers:** some baselines include a provision that allows the City to suspend scheduled increases in years when the City projects a budget deficit over a certain amount. However, that deficit threshold varies from \$250 to \$350 million, meaning that some may be triggered in one year but not others.
- **General Fund return:** some baselines return unspent dollars to the City's General Fund at the end of the fiscal year, while others carry forward a fund balance into the next fiscal year.
- **Growth caps:** generally, baselines grow in proportion to the City's aggregate discretionary revenue (ADR). As ADR increases, baseline contributions increase by the same percentage. Two baselines include provisions that cap growth at 3% per year. Adding a similar growth cap to all baselines would yield meaningful savings over time.






The Charter includes specific requirements for how some baseline funds must be spent

Many baselines, set-asides, and special taxes include detailed spending requirements. On one hand, these provisions act as guardrails to ensure revenue is allocated in line with voters' intentions. On the other hand, they significantly limit flexibility to address emerging needs or priorities—even when those priorities align with voters' values. Because these restrictions are embedded in the Charter, they cannot be revisited or amended without subsequent voter approval. As a result, priorities established decades ago continue to shape today's budget decisions.

Many spending requirements overlap, creating administrative complexity

As dedicated funding streams have multiplied, their programmatic and administrative requirements overlap in multiple ways, making both administration and clear communication much more complex. For example, there are eight different spending requirements for children and youth, often for the same programs and age groups. Of these, three requirements directly fund the San Francisco Unified School District. Similarly, the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency is supported by five different baselines or set-asides.

Figure 10: Baselines and Set-Asides by Policy Area

 MTA	 Library	 Children	 Housing & Homelessness	 Other
Municipal Railway Baseline	Library Baseline	Children's Services Baseline	Our City, Our Home (OCOH) Baseline	City Services Auditor
Parking & Traffic Baseline	Library Property Tax	Transitional Aged Youth	Housing Trust Fund	Street Trees Maintenance Fund Baseline
Population Adjustment		Early Care and Education Baseline (OECE)	Affordable Housing Opportunity Fund	Dignity Fund Baseline
80% Parking Tax		Public Education Services Baseline	Homelessness Gross Receipts Tax	Recreation & Park MOE
Traffic Congestion Mitigation Tax		Public Education Enrichment Fund (PEEF)	Empty Homes Tax	Hotel Tax for the Arts
		Student Success Fund		Municipal Symphony
		Children & Youth Property Tax		Open Space Property Tax
		Commercial Rents Tax		Commercial Vacancy Tax

Legend:

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 (<i>e.g.</i> , \$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 (<i>e.g.</i> , Commercial Rents Tax for the Babies and Families First Fund).
--	--	---	---

A single voter-approved funding requirement is relatively straightforward to administer. When all 28 baselines, set-asides, and special taxes are taken together, technical, administrative, and legal challenges arise. Programmatic and policy areas intersect, causing voter-mandated funding requirements to overlap. This raises a critical question about whether one requirement can satisfy another. For instance, could a portion of a new special tax for homelessness count toward the Transitional Aged Youth (TAY) Baseline if that portion funds TAY homelessness services? The answer depends on the specifics of each requirement, and tracking these overlaps is challenging.

The City tracks dollars, not outcomes

A risk of this administrative complexity is that the City, service providers, and advocates spend significant time ensuring compliance with spending requirements and not enough time focusing on policy goals and how best to achieve them. Moreover, baselines and set-asides do not include concrete and measurable goals. This raises an important question: How should policymakers and the public evaluate whether a baseline provides the right level of funding for the right set of services to achieve desired outcomes?

The City cannot prohibit or regulate future baselines

There is no mechanism to set binding policy for future baselines established in the Charter. Because the Charter is the City's foundational legal document, there is no higher law that can constrain new baselines. Any future Charter amendment creating a new baseline could simply ignore or exempt itself from these requirements.

Example:

In 2008, San Francisco voters approved Proposition S, which made it City policy not to approve any new set-aside of City revenue unless it identifies a new funding source, includes a 2% limit on annual increases, and automatically expires after 10 years. However, this policy was non-binding and no set-asides approved since 2008 have adhered to all these requirements.

How San Francisco Compares to Peers

Voters in Charter cities can amend their Charters to adopt binding baseline initiatives because a Charter derives authority over its "municipal affairs" from the California Constitution, which includes the rules and procedures for a city's budget.

In contrast, the budgetary authority of General Law cities and counties is governed by California's Government Code, which empowers the governing body to adopt an annual budget, but not tie the hands of future councils and boards by dictating future spending. Voters in General Law cities and counties through initiative have the same law-making power as the governing body; they can require spending by ordinance for the specific year in which they adopt the initiative ordinance. Since voters' power of initiative to adopt ordinances is no greater than the governing body's, voters may not require future spending like a baseline requirement.

For every city and county in California, the Controller's Office reviewed all ballot questions from 1996 to 2024 to find any measures that appeared to be baselines or set-asides. During this timeframe, San Francisco adopted 17 new baselines and set-asides. All other cities and counties in California adopted 16 baselines during the same time period.

The table below lists the ten largest cities.

Table 7: Baselines And Set-Asides Adopted Between 1996–2024

City	Services	Year Approved
San Francisco	Affordable Housing Opportunity Fund	2024
	Student Success Fund	2022
	Early Care and Education (OECE) Baseline	2018
	Hotel Tax Dedication for Arts	2018
	Our City, Our Home (OCOH) Baseline	2018
	Recreation & Park Maintenance of Effort	2016
	Dignity Fund	2016
	Street Trees Maintenance Fund	2016
	MTA Population Adjustment Baseline	2014
	Transitional Aged Youth Baseline	2014
	Housing Trust Fund	2012
	MTA 80% Parking Tax In-Lieu	2007
	Public Education Enrichment Fund Baseline	2004
	Public Education Enrichment Fund	2004
	City Services Auditor	2003
	MTA - Municipal Railway Baseline	1999
MTA - Parking & Traffic Baseline	1999	
Anaheim	None	
Bakersfield	None	
Fresno	None	
Long Beach	None	
Los Angeles	Library services	2011
	Recreation and parks	1999
Oakland	Children's services	1996

City	Services	Year Approved
Sacramento	Youth development and violence prevention	2022
San Diego	Infrastructure	2016
San Jose	None	

The Controller's Office also reviewed ballot questions from 2017 to 2024 for special taxes. For special taxes, out of 540 counties and incorporated cities in California, our research identified 55 new special taxes outside San Francisco—38 sales taxes, 10 hotel taxes, and 7 others. San Francisco adopted five in the same period. Parcel taxes and other special property tax assessments were excluded.

Problem Statement and Options for Reform

Problem Statement

San Francisco voters have adopted nearly 30 different funding requirements that restrict policymakers' ability to flexibly allocate resources. While each funds a critical service, these requirements were approved one at a time, sometimes for overlapping issue areas, without a big-picture view of the City's services and budget.

Working Group members provided mixed feedback on whether this problem statement resonated with them. Some agreed that there should be more budget flexibility to respond to new and emerging needs, while others emphasized that baselines reflect San Franciscans' priorities and protect key services from budget cuts.

Reform Option: Sunset Baselines

	Option	Potential Benefits
1	Sunset baselines To give policymakers more flexibility to make budget choices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$2.1 billion per year in additional budget flexibility if baselines are not re-authorized

Discussion, Feedback, and Considerations

Working Group members noted that all baselines are important priorities with strong political support and did not seriously entertain the idea of eliminating them. Generally, conversation focused on collaborative and incremental approaches to reforming baselines, rather than sunseting them. However, one member suggested that, as part of a comprehensive review, it may be worth re-evaluating whether certain baselines are still necessary and are accomplishing their goals.

"There's a lot of benefit you can get without touching the question of whether we should invest in this or not. Standardize things so they function the same way, have the same flexibility to adjust in an emergency. Don't ask if we should stop funding kids or libraries." – Andres Power

Reform Options: Reform Baselines

	Option	Potential Benefits
2	Cap baseline contributions At a fixed dollar value or as a percentage of the overall budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will yield savings as budget grows About \$300 million in savings in FY29–30 if contributions had been capped at FY24–25 dollar value
3	Cap the amount that baseline contributions can grow each year For example, limit growth to 2% per year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will yield savings when budget growth exceeds baseline growth About \$150 million savings in FY29–30 if growth had been capped at 2% starting in FY24–25
4	Standardize and add suspension triggers to all baselines To suspend growth during difficult budget years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> About \$80 million in savings in FY26–27 assuming deficit trigger is met
5	Allow the City to reduce baseline contributions in certain years Through the regular budget process involving Mayor and Board approval	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> About \$21 million savings for each 1% reduction
6	Return unspent funds to the General Fund Instead of rolling over to the following fiscal year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> About \$10 million per year, but highly variable Common sense reform
7	Allow broader discretion within baselines So that funds for a particular population or policy area can go toward the most pressing needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficult to estimate budget impacts
8	Consolidate related baselines To simplify administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More rational and transparent to the public

Discussion, Feedback, and Considerations

Several members highlighted the benefits of pursuing common-sense technical adjustments such as standardizing deficit triggers. Others suggested convening stakeholders to negotiate larger changes, particularly around consolidating overlapping baselines and reducing overly specific constraints on spending. Members stressed the importance of understanding the historical context and politics around each baseline and involving the relevant stakeholders and advocates in discussion. One member suggested treating existing baselines differently from future ones, with stricter rules for any new baselines going forward.

“We’ve layered so many requirements across service areas; it feels like the constituencies who ran those measures should get together and decide whether all those strings on spending still make sense.” – Ben Rosenfield

“It’s better to do this right than to be overly expeditious. Voters may be willing to work on some of this, but it takes two-way conversation” – Kim Tavaglione

Finally, one member urged a re-examination of the \$8.8 billion in enterprise funds to assess whether greater flexibility could be achieved within this much larger portion of the budget.

Considerations for Policymakers

Given the comments and considerations above, policymakers should consider the following possible actions:

Common-sense, technical reforms can simplify administration and provide more budget flexibility

The Mayor and Board of Supervisors could begin by taking incremental steps toward improving resource management by adopting common-sense, technical reforms to existing baselines. Some of the City's voter-adopted funding mandates include features that provide policymakers with some flexibility during difficult financial times, while others do not. Where these features are included in the Charter, they are often described and administered differently. For example, seven baselines allow the City to suspend scheduled increases in years when the projected budget deficit exceeds a certain amount, but the deficit threshold varies. This threshold could be standardized and added to all baselines.

Similarly, all but four baselines retain unspent funds, allowing them to build fund balances. Unspent dollars could instead be returned to the General Fund at the close of each fiscal year, providing the City with more budget flexibility without impacting the baseline amount budgeted to each service.

Several Working Group members expressed an openness to and interest in pursuing technical reforms like these. While each baseline has an involved political constituency, these good government reforms are the least likely to draw serious opposition and would bring tangible benefits to the City.

Convene stakeholders to discuss more substantive changes to overlapping baselines

Over the years, new requirements have been layered on top of existing ones, without a holistic evaluation of the ways the City funds particular services or populations. Additionally, many baselines limit or prescribe how funding can be used. These overlapping requirements have created technical, administrative, and legal complexity, without clear benefits to the populations they are intended to serve.

The City could convene advocates for round-table discussions to develop a viable path forward to consolidate related baselines and increase flexibility of their uses. These conversations should prioritize improving outcomes for service recipients, increasing public transparency, and simplifying administration.

Three sets of baselines overlap substantially, making them good candidates for consideration:

1. **Public schools** are supported by three baselines—the Student Success Fund (SSF), the Public Education Enrichment Fund (PEEF), and the Public Education Services Baseline. The two largest sources, SSF and PEEF, impose requirements on how the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) may spend the funds. At a time when SFUSD faces a historic budget deficit, consolidating these funding streams and providing greater flexibility could help the District allocate City dollars more effectively.
2. **Children's services** are supported by five baselines in addition to those that fund SFUSD. Several target the same populations or services. For example, the Early Care and Education Baseline mandates spending on children aged 0–5, while the Children's Services Baseline requires spending on children and youth aged 0–24. It is unclear whether these requirements are intended to overlap or whether funding for early childhood services can count toward both. These baselines could be adjusted to provide clear and consistent budget guidelines and increased public transparency.

3. **SFMTA** receives funding from five baselines, set-asides, and special taxes, each with different calculation methodologies and other features. Because these funding streams all support the same department, consolidating them could simplify administration and improve transparency.

While all baselines fund important services, voters may still find periodic re-evaluation healthy and worthwhile

Approximately half of all baselines include sunset provisions, typically 20 or more years in the future, which prompt voters to periodically re-evaluate their utility and performance. Working Group members generally expressed a reluctance to eliminate baselines, noting that each exists for a reason and has a strong base of political support. Additionally, no baseline has ever been allowed to sunset; all have been re-authorized by voters.³³ Some have been re-authorized at higher funding levels.

However, many baselines do not have sunset dates, and some have existed for decades without review or evaluation of their efficacy. When baselines have been re-authorized by voters, City leaders and advocates have sometimes included amendments to strengthen their administration and oversight. While many baseline services are timeless, periodic re-evaluation by the voters may be a healthy and worthwhile endeavor. The Mayor and Board of Supervisors may consider adding sunset dates a decade or more in the future to those baselines that do not currently have them. This would also be consistent with 2008 Proposition S, which established a non-binding policy that all new baselines should automatically expire 10 years after taking effect.

Explore ways to limit growth over time to generate long-run budget flexibility

Capping or slowing the rate of growth could generate significant financial flexibility. Currently, as the City's budget grows, most baselines grow at the same rate. In some cases, they grow by a fixed annual amount that may exceed the percent change in discretionary revenues. Implementing a cap on growth would maintain baseline spending on a steady trajectory while allowing additional discretionary revenue to be allocated in years when revenues grow at a higher percentage.

Two recent baselines limit growth to no more than three percent per year. The Mayor and Board of Supervisors could consider a Charter amendment that limits the growth of existing baselines to a reasonable rate, such as two to three percent annually. Because baselines establish a funding floor rather than a ceiling, policymakers would retain the ability to allocate discretionary revenue above the baseline amount.

Additional flexibility could also be introduced through the regular budget process. For example, Oakland's Charter allows the city to reduce contributions to certain voter-mandated funding requirements upon a finding of "fiscal necessity." San Francisco could adopt a similar approach, allowing policymakers to reduce contributions under defined fiscal conditions. Such a policy could include parameters to maintain accountability, such as limiting the percent reduction or restricting the frequency of use.

³³ The Police minimum staffing requirement did not include a sunset date but was repealed by voters in 2020.

Conclusion

The Charter Reform Working Group’s goal was to provide early feedback to inform future decision-making. The resulting discussions underscored both the importance and complexity of modernizing San Francisco’s Charter. As the document that guides how San Francisco’s government functions and serves residents, it is critical that the Charter is equipped to meet today’s challenges.

This effort highlighted opportunities, challenges, and trade-offs for policymakers to consider as they evaluate potential measures for the November 2026 ballot. While the report highlights these considerations within each topic area, any legislation resulting from this group’s work will likely be more expansive. Policymakers will have to evaluate reform packages holistically, considering how legislation may impact how the Charter reflects San Francisco’s values, establishes the balances of power, and enables democratic participation.

Consider how the Charter should reflect San Francisco’s values

San Francisco’s Charter reflects the City’s values. This includes explicit values statements, such as tasking the Department of Public Health with providing for “the preservation, promotion and protection of the physical and mental health of the inhabitants of the City and County.” It also reflects voters’ values more implicitly, such as by allocating funding towards specific sources, such as children’s services, or outlining specific policies or functions, like the Municipal Transportation Agency’s Transit First Policy.

Policymakers should consider how reform may impact how the Charter reflects San Francisco’s values. Some Working Group members raised that Charter reform should be grounded in San Francisco’s values. To support this, members completed two written exercises. In the first, members brainstormed potential values and in the second, they ranked those values from most to least important. The values, themes, and rankings are listed in the table below.

Theme	What Working Group Members Said	How Members 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

Theme	What Working Group Members Said	How Members Rated It
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)

In the final Working Group meeting, members briefly discussed the results of these exercises. Some expressed surprise or disagreement with the rankings, while others were pleased to see particular values rated highly. The survey results showed a wide variation in responses for most values, particularly those in the middle of the list. Members also cautioned that people may have interpreted the task differently, with some responding in the context of this Working Group and others thinking about values more broadly.

Given the limited discussion and wide variation in responses, these rankings should not be viewed as definitive. However, every value was suggested and rated highly by at least one member. Policymakers may use these values as a starting point for a broader conversation about how Charter reform efforts should reflect San Francisco's values.

Based on the values exercise and good government best practices, policymakers may consider the following guiding principles when developing Charter reform legislation:

San Francisco's Charter Should:

- ✓ Outline fundamental principles
- ✓ Define the City's core powers, responsibilities, and duties
- ✓ Establish the balance of power
- ✓ Outline the City's broad structure
- ✓ Guarantee certain rights to the people
- ✓ Be timeless

San Francisco's Charter Should Not:

- ✗ Prescribe operations
- ✗ Prescribe processes
- ✗ Require specific structures, unless necessary
- ✗ Dictate specific dates, thresholds, or requirements that will quickly be outdated

Consider cross-cutting trade-offs and balance of power when developing a combined Charter reform proposal

While the Working Group discussions and this report consider each topic area independently, any reform package will need to consider how proposed reforms interact across topics. Policymakers should also consider reform ideas alongside recommendations of the Commission Streamlining Task Force and assess the total impact of all changes together. Some considerations include:

- Consider impacts to the balance of power across branches and units of government. For example, granting the City Administrator the power to introduce procurement legislation would grant some

legislative power to a part of the executive branch. Should this be paired with other reform options that strengthen the legislative branch's power in other ways?

- Balance adjustments in executive or legislative authority with strong accountability mechanisms, public oversight, and meaningful democratic participation. For example, some options increase Mayoral authority around re-organization or department head hiring and firing authority. Should policymakers balance this increase in power with more minimal amendments to public ballot access, or empower a commission to provide oversight and accountability in other ways?

Additionally, if policymakers move forward with multiple ballot measures, they must consider the impact on balance of power and democratic participation if some pass and others fail.

Considerations for future reform

The Working Group discussed several high-impact topics, but did not address many sections of the more than 500-page document. Future efforts could evaluate additional sections of the Charter, applying the same values and principles to simplify language and shift operational details to the Municipal Codes. This will help ensure that San Francisco's governing framework is durable, coherent, and more responsive to residents' evolving needs. The findings of this Working Group provide a foundation for continued dialogue, analysis, and engagement as the City considers future reforms.

Appendix A: Detailed Department List

This lists departments included in this report's analysis. This includes any department mentioned in the Charter and departments defined in the City's budget. This excludes any offices under the Mayor's Office (such as MOHCD) or under the City Administrator's Office (e.g., Office of the Chief Medical Examiner).

Legend: Amount of Detail

Minimal: Department only referenced; may not be explicitly established in the Charter.

Low: Department or department head typically explicitly established in Charter; includes high-level responsibilities or purpose.

Medium: Charter outlines some specific department functions

High: Charter includes several pages of highly detailed operations, processes, and functions.

Charter Departments

Department	Oversight Body and Commission Streamlining Task Force Recommendation	Amount of Detail
Academy of Sciences*		Low
Adult Probation		Low
Airport	Airport Commission (Keep in Charter)	Minimal
Arts Commission	Arts Commission (Keep mission in Charter, move functions to Code. Convert to advisory.)	Medium
Asian Arts	Asian Art Commission (Keep in Charter)	Medium
Assessor-Recorder		Minimal
Board of Appeals	Board of Appeals (Keep in Charter)	Minimal
Building Inspection	Building Inspection Commission (Keep as governance in Charter)	Medium
Children, Youth, and Their Families	DCYF Oversight and Advisory Committee (Move to Admin Code, keep as governance)	Minimal
City Administrator		Medium
City Attorney		High
Civil Service Commission	Civil Service Commission (Keep in Charter)	Medium
Controller		High
Disability and Aging Services	Disability and Aging Commission (Move to Admin Code, keep as governance)	Minimal
District Attorney		Low
Elections	Elections Commission (Keep in Charter)	Medium
Entertainment	Entertainment Commission (Move to Admin Code, keep as governance)	Minimal

Department	Oversight Body and Commission Streamlining Task Force Recommendation	Amount of Detail
Environment	Environment Commission (Move to Admin Code, convert to advisory)	Medium
Ethics	Ethics Commission (Keep in Charter)	Medium
Fine Arts	Fine Arts Board of Trustees (Keep in Charter)	Medium
Fire	Fire Commission (Keep in Charter)	Minimal
Health Service System	Health Services Board (Keep in Charter)	Low
Homelessness	Homelessness Oversight Commission (Move to Admin Code, Convert to advisory)	Low
Human Resources		Medium
Human Rights	Human Rights Commission (Move to Admin Code, Convert to advisory)	Medium
Human Services Agency	Human Services Commission (Move to Admin Code, keep as governance)	Minimal
Juvenile Probation	Juvenile Probation Commission (Keep in Charter)	Minimal
Law Library*	Law Library Board of Trustees (remove from Charter, but State-required)	Low
Library	Library Commission (Move to Admin Code, keep as governance)	Low
MTA	MTA Board of Directors (Keep in Charter)	High
Office of Sheriff's Inspector General	Sheriff's Department Oversight Board (Move to Admin Code)	Medium
Planning	Planning Commission (Keep in Charter)	Medium
Police	Police Commission (Keep in Charter)	Minimal
Police Accountability		High
Port	Port Commission (Keep in Charter)	High
Public Defender		Low
Public Health	Health Commission (Keep in Charter.)	Low
Public Utilities	Public Utilities Commission (Keep in Charter)	High
Public Works	Public Works Commission (eliminate)	Medium
Recreation and Parks	Rec Parks Commission (Keep in Charter)	Medium
Retirement	Retirement Commission (Keep in Charter)	Medium
Sheriff		Low
Small Business	Small Business Commission (Move to Admin Code, Convert to advisory)	Minimal
Status of Women	Commission on the Status of Women (Move to Admin Code, Convert to advisory)	Low
Treasurer		Low
War Memorial	War Memorial Board (Keep in Charter)	Low

**Not technically a department, but considered as one in the budget*

Non-Charter Departments

Department	Oversight Body
Child Support Services	
Department of Early Childhood	
Office of Economic and Workforce Development	
Department of Emergency Management	
Rent Board	Rent Board

Appendix B: San Francisco's Baselines and Set-asides

Month	Year	Prop	Voter-Mandated Funding Requirement	Code Authorization	Category	Ballot Placement	Sunset	General Fund Return	Suspension Trigger	Growth Cap
NOV	2024	G	Affordable Housing Opportunity Fund	Charter Sec. 16.132	GF Mandate	Citizen	2046	✗	✓	✓
NOV	2022	J	Student Success Fund	Charter Sec. 16.131	GF Mandate	Board	2038	✓	✓	✓
NOV	2022	M	Empty Homes Tax (Housing Activation Fund)	Bus. and Tax Code, Article 29A	Special Tax	Citizen	2053	✗	✗	✗
MAR	2020	D	Commercial Vacancy Tax (Small Business Assistance Fund)	Bus. and Tax Code, Article 29	Special Tax	Board	✗	✗	✗	✗
NOV	2019	D	Traffic Congestion Mitigation Tax (TCM Fund)	Bus. and Tax Code, Article 32	Special Tax	Board	2045	✗	✗	✗
NOV	2018	C	Our City, Our Home (OCOH) Baseline	Bus. and Tax Code, Article 28	Exp Req	Citizen	✗	✗	✗	✗
NOV	2018	C	Homelessness Gross Receipts Tax (Our City Our Home Fund)	Bus. and Tax Code, Article 28	Special Tax	Citizen	✗	✗	✗	✗
NOV	2018	E	Hotel Tax Dedication for Arts	Bus. and Tax Code, Article 7	Tax Dedication	Board	✗	✗	✗	✗
JUN	2018	C	Early Care and Education (OECE) Baseline	Bus. and Tax Code, Article 21	Exp Req	Citizen	✗	✗	✓	✗
JUN	2018	C	Commercial Rents Tax (Babies and Families First Fund)	Bus. and Tax Code, Article 21	Special Tax	Citizen	✗	✗	✗	✗
JUN	2016	B	Recreation & Park Maintenance of Effort	Charter Sec.16.107	GF Mandate	Board	2046	✓	✓	✗

Month	Year	Prop	Voter-Mandated Funding Requirement	Code Authorization	Category	Ballot Placement	Sunset	General Fund Return	Suspension Trigger	Growth Cap
NOV	2016	I	Dignity Fund	Charter Sec. 16-128-3	GF Mandate	Board	2037	✗	✓	✗
NOV	2016	E	Street Trees Maintenance Fund	Charter Sec. 16.129	GF Mandate	Board	✗	✗	✓	✗
NOV	2014	C	Transitional Aged Youth Baseline	Charter Sec. 16.108	Exp Req	Board	2041	✗	✗	✗
NOV	2014	B	MTA Population Adjustment Baseline	Charter Sec. 8A.105	GF Mandate	Board	✗	✗	✗	✗
NOV	2012	C	Housing Trust Fund	Charter Sec. 16.110	GF Mandate	Board	2043	✗	✗	✗
NOV	2007	A	MTA 80% Parking Tax In-Lieu	Charter Sec. 8A.105	Tax Dedication	Board	✗	✗	✗	✗
MAR	2004	H	Public Education Enrichment Fund Baseline (renewed 2014)	Charter Sec. 16.123-2	GF Mandate	Board	2041	✗	✗	✗
MAR	2004	H	Public Education Enrichment Fund (renewed 2014)	Charter Sec. 16.123-2	GF Mandate	Board	2041	✗	✗	✗
NOV	2003	C	City Services Auditor	Charter Appendix F1.113	Exp Req	Board	✗	✓	✗	✗
NOV	1999	E	MTA - Municipal Railway Baseline	Charter Sec. 8A.105	GF Mandate	Board	✗	✗	✗	✗
NOV	1999	E	MTA - Parking & Traffic Baseline	Charter Sec. 8A.105	GF Mandate	Board	✗	✗	✗	✗
JUN	1994	E	Library Preservation Fund Baseline (renewed 2007, 2022)	Charter Sec. 16.109	GF Mandate	Board	2048	✓	✓	✗
JUN	1994	D	Police Minimum Staffing (repealed 2020)	Charter Sec. 4.127 (repealed)	Other	Board	Repealed	✗	✗	✗

Month	Year	Prop	Voter-Mandated Funding Requirement	Code Authorization	Category	Ballot Placement	Sunset	General Fund Return	Suspension Trigger	Growth Cap
JUN	1994	E	Library Preservation Fund Property Tax Set-Aside (renewed 2007, 2022)	Charter Sec. 16.109	Tax Dedication	Citizen	2048	×	×	×
NOV	1991	J	Children's Services Baseline (renewed 2000, 2014)	Charter Sec. 16.108	Exp Req	Citizen	2041	×	×	×
NOV	1991	J	Children's Fund Property Tax Set-Aside (renewed 2000, 2014)	Charter Sec. 16.108	Tax Dedication	Citizen	2041	×	×	×
NOV	1974	J	Open Space Property Tax Set-Aside (renewed 1988, 2000)	Charter Sec. 16.107	Tax Dedication	Board	2046	×	×	×
-	1935	-	Municipal Symphony Property Tax Set-Aside	Charter Sec. 16.106	Tax Dedication	Board	×	×	×	×