

The Charter Reform process presents a critical opportunity to address longstanding structural failures in Los Angeles city government. While we support a comprehensive and thoughtful review of the City Charter, we recognize that the Commission is now operating on a **very compressed timeline**—a direct result of the nearly year-long delay by the Mayor in making the appointments she was required to make. The residents of Los Angeles should not be penalized by having meaningful reform foreclosed due to that delay. We urge the Commission to move boldly, not narrowly.

This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to revisit the assumptions, structures, and power dynamics that shape how our city is governed. We support a broad-ranging and ambitious approach to reform, even within this shortened timeframe, and we believe the Commission's recommendations should be grounded in transparency, accountability, and inclusivity.

At the same time, any proposed Charter changes must be capable of winning broad support across the city's diverse constituencies. Reforms must reflect not only good governance principles, but also the lived experiences of Angelenos in every neighborhood, particularly those who have historically been left out of decision-making.

Nowhere is the City's democratic deficit more visible than in the experience of Neighborhood Councils, which were established by the Charter to provide grassroots guidance to elected leaders. In reality, these Councils often struggle to secure even a meeting with the very officials they were created to advise. This is more than a scheduling issue—it is a structural failure of representation and respect. A system in which community leaders must chase their representatives for a hearing on local issues is not a functioning democracy. That dynamic must be reversed.

Neighborhood Councils were created in the last Charter reform as an afterthought to public demands for local voice. Over time, they have been treated as nuisances—consulted late, denied real influence, and too often ignored when their positions challenge City Hall consensus. Their structure today often mutes dissenting voices rather than elevates them. If Charter reform is to restore trust and equity in city government, it must deliver the role Neighborhood Councils were promised: empowered, respected, and engaged from the start—not the end—of the decision-making process.

1. City Council Size

We support increasing the number of City Councilmembers to **at least 25**.

This change would:

- Improve **representation**, reducing the number of constituents per Councilmember (currently ~260,000) to a level more in line with New York (~170,000), San Francisco

(~80,000), and Chicago (~53,000).

- Increase **accessibility**, allowing more responsive service and engagement with communities.
- Enhance **accountability**, lowering campaign costs and making it easier for new candidates to run viable races.

We recommend a **population-based formula** be embedded in the Charter to update the number of Council seats with each redistricting cycle.

2. Ranked Choice Voting (RCV)

Position: TBD

Supporters of RCV argue that it eliminates costly and low-turnout runoff elections, encourages more civil campaigning, and helps elect candidates with broader support, reducing the influence of money and political machines. They note its successful implementation in cities like San Francisco and New York and its potential to empower underrepresented candidates.

Critics caution that RCV can be confusing for voters unfamiliar with the system, may disadvantage less-educated voters, and has led to delayed results and unintended outcomes in some jurisdictions. Others argue that it does not address the underlying barriers to participation or trust in the electoral system.

3. Neighborhood Councils

We propose a **Charter amendment to elevate and protect the role of Neighborhood Councils**. Key reforms include:

- **Early access** to land use, budget, and policy decisions before actions are finalized by departments or commissions.
- **Standing to appeal** discretionary land use decisions and participate meaningfully in administrative proceedings.
- **Required responses** to Neighborhood Council input, published in a public dashboard or report explaining how feedback was considered or why it was not adopted.

- **Independent budget and staffing** via a strengthened Department of Neighborhood Empowerment, protected from political influence by Councilmembers or the Mayor.
- **Mandatory representation** on all relevant commissions (including those overseeing planning, public safety, ethics, and budgeting), with Neighborhood Council board members or designees included.
- **Guaranteed speaking rights:** Neighborhood Councils must be **allocated a minimum of three minutes** to speak during **general public comment or on any agenda item with an active Community Impact Statement**, both at City Council and its committees. This time **must be scheduled as a separate agenda item and must not be subject to time limits placed on general public participation.**

It is unacceptable that **members of our Council have been barred from speaking publicly at City Council or committee meetings on matters that affect only our own jurisdiction.** This silencing of Neighborhood Council voices directly contradicts the Charter's intent and represents a breach of democratic norms. Neighborhood Councils must no longer be treated as advisory boxes to check, but as **early and essential voices in shaping policy.**

4. Area Planning Commissions (APCs)

We recommend **eliminating Area Planning Commissions.** While intended to localize land use decisions, they have failed to serve the public interest and instead operate as:

- **Extensions of Mayoral control**, with politically appointed commissioners often lacking ties to the communities they serve and taking direction from the Mayor in their decisions.
- **Ineffective appellate bodies**, since APC members are not required to have training in land use law or planning, even when reviewing quasi-judicial decisions.

Los Angeles deserves a land use process that is technically sound, legally defensible, and genuinely responsive to community concerns. APCs do not meet that standard.

5. City Commissions Generally

We call for a **Charter-mandated, case-by-case review** of all City commissions, guided by the following reforms:

- **Clear public interest criteria** to determine whether a commission continues, is restructured, or is sunsetted.
- **Cost transparency:** The Charter Reform Commission should evaluate the **full cost of maintaining each commission**, including administrative support, legal staffing, stipends, and opportunity costs.
- **Mandatory Neighborhood Council representation** on commissions that impact land use, policing, public ethics, and budgeting.
- **Minimum subject-matter expertise requirements** for all commissioners dealing with complex or regulatory issues (e.g., zoning, law enforcement, financial oversight).
- **Appointment transparency:** All nominees should file public statements of qualification and disclose any conflicts of interest.
- **Political reform:** The Charter should prohibit commission seats from being used as rewards for political donors, campaign surrogates, or insiders lacking relevant expertise.
- **Regular reviews or sunset clauses** to prevent outdated or redundant bodies from persisting indefinitely.

Commissions must exist for the public's benefit—not as political currency.

6. Ethics and Accountability

To improve integrity and public confidence in City Hall, we support the following Charter reforms:

- **Automatic suspension** of elected officials indicted for felony corruption or abuse of office, with mechanisms for temporary or interim representation.
- **Clear and enforceable rules** on how and when an elected official can be removed or replaced.
- **Expanded disclosure requirements** for gifts, outside income, contracts, and appointments.
- **Strengthening the Ethics Commission's independence**, funding, and enforcement authority.

- **Mandatory ethics training** for all commissioners and Neighborhood Council board members, tailored to their functional responsibilities.