Strengthening Oakland's Governance Structure

Recommendations for a clearer, more accountable, and more effective city government

Submitted by the Mayor's Working Group on Charter Reform

January 29, 2026

Dear Mayor Barbara Lee:

As members of the Mayor's Working Group on Charter Reform, we are honored to present to you our final report. Thank you for entrusting us with this critical work and for your vision in recognizing that Oakland's future depends on a governance structure that matches the scale of our challenges and the aspirations of our residents.

Over the past five months, more than 750 Oakland residents have participated in our public meetings to learn about the Charter and provide feedback for our deliberations. Dozens of current and former city staff, elected officials, and community organizations provided one-on-one interviews to share their experience and expertise. Additionally, we reviewed 433 survey responses and conducted extensive research on governance models across the country. Thank you for your support of this public outreach and your ongoing encouragement to seek as much public input as was possible. We deeply appreciate the generosity of all who have given their time to inform our efforts.

Throughout this process, one message emerged consistently: Oakland's current Charter assigns powers and responsibilities in ways that create confusion, undermine accountability, and impede the city from addressing its most pressing challenges effectively. Residents hold the Mayor accountable for citywide outcomes, yet the Mayor lacks sufficient authority to deliver results. Meanwhile, the City Council struggles to provide effective oversight without clear lines of responsibility or adequate analytical capacity. This misalignment particularly harms residents who lack the time, resources, or political capital to navigate a fragmented system, perpetuating inequities across neighborhoods.

We unanimously recommend that Oakland modify its Charter to adopt a coherent governance model. Specifically, we recommend strengthening the Mayor's powers to establish clear executive authority and empowering the City Council in ways that support rigorous legislative and budget analysis and oversight. Under this framework, the Mayor would serve as chief executive with veto power over legislation and budget decisions, while retaining a City Administrator to oversee core internal functions. The City Council would gain independent analytical capacity through a permanent budget and legislative analyst office.

These recommendations respond directly to what we heard from Oakland residents: there is a need for clear accountability, decisive leadership, and a governance structure that enables effective action.

Oakland stands at a critical juncture. The city faces a severe structural budget deficit and persistent inequities that demand coordinated, citywide solutions. Charter reform alone cannot solve these problems, but it can create the conditions that make solutions possible by clarifying who is responsible, aligning authority with accountability, and ensuring that, when change is necessary, the path forward is clear.

Thank you again for this opportunity to serve Oakland.

Respectfully submitted,

The Mayor's Working Group on Charter Reform

Facilitated by the League of Women Voters of Oakland and the San Francisco Bay Area Planning and Urban Research Association (SPUR)

Introduction

Under the California Constitution, cities in California may be organized as either general law cities or charter cities. As a charter city, Oakland has the authority to define its own governmental structure through a voter-approved charter. While powers are limited by the U.S. and California constitutions, federal laws, and state laws, charter cities are authorized to set the terms of local governance, including the powers of the mayor, city council, city administrator , and other key officials. Charter cities can also amend their charters as they grow or as community needs evolve.

Oakland faces significant challenges that require clear and decisive leadership, including a severe structural budget deficit, underfunded infrastructure, widening racial and wealth disparities across neighborhoods, and high public expectations for transparency and responsiveness.

This report examines how revising the Oakland City Charter can help address these challenges. Proposed changes would achieve several goals:

- Eliminate the pervading confusion about who holds ultimate responsibility for running the city and delivering services
- Clarify Charter powers so that elected officials can deliver services and be accountable for implementing the policies and programs promised during campaigns
- Resolve operational inefficiencies that result from inadequate or overlapping authorities

About the Mayor's Working Group on Charter Reform

Mayor Barbara Lee convened the Mayor's Working Group on Charter Reform to review and provide recommendations for reforming Oakland's Charter. Recognizing that Oakland's governance structure shapes everything from budget decisions to service delivery, Mayor Lee charged the Working Group with examining how the Charter could better support effective leadership and public accountability to strengthen public trust.

Mayor Lee asked the Working Group to focus on three goals:

- Better define the role of elected officials
- Address responsible city financial planning
- Improve government accountability and transparency

To support this work, Mayor Lee asked the League of Women Voters of Oakland (LWVO) and the San Francisco Bay Area Planning and Urban Research Association (SPUR) to co-facilitate the Working Group. Appointees to the Working Group brought backgrounds in labor, business, city finance, management, ethics and municipal law. (See Appendix A for information on the Working Group members.) Together, the facilitators have focused on three goals:

- **Educate the community** about what the Charter is and why it matters for daily governance and service delivery
- **Gather community input** from residents, community organizations, labor groups, businesses, and people with extensive knowledge of government operations and reform

- **Support the Working Group in producing this report**, which outlines options for improving the Charter and recommends specific changes that would help Oakland better meet the challenges of today and tomorrow.

Between August and December 2025, the Working Group engaged more than 750 residents through public meetings and listening sessions and conducted extensive interviews with current and former city staff, elected officials, and community-based organizations. The Working Group has solicited additional input through a survey and reviewed the 433 responses received. (See Appendix B for a list of interviewees and Appendix C for a summary of community input.)

Key Findings

Community input consistently emphasized that Oakland's governance challenges cannot be separated from the city's broader context. Several factors make it especially important that Oakland clarify the governing authority of each city official:

- **Severe fiscal stress**, including recurring structural budget deficits and the resulting need for greater efficiency to meet service needs
- **Deep racial, wealth, and geographic inequities**, with historical disinvestment in neighborhoods and inequitable service delivery and infrastructure conditions
- A history of mayors and professional administrators who have **lacked sufficient authority to lead decisively** under the current Charter

- **A highly engaged civic culture**, characterized by a desire for direct access to decision-makers, strong activism around racial and economic justice, accountability, transparency, and the influence of money in elections

Participants in community meetings and interviews repeatedly noted that the absence of clear governing authority fosters informal workarounds and a reliance on personal relationships. Residents with the least time, resources, or political capital bear the burden of figuring out the resulting systems. Clarity about roles and responsibilities can not only cut through the confusion and set the stage for more effective and responsive government, but support the achievement of greater equity across Oakland's neighborhoods.

Oakland's Current Charter

Municipal charters establish the framework for how cities govern themselves. Most U.S. cities adopt one of two well-established governance models:

- **Strong mayor:** the mayor is elected citywide and serves as the chief executive who manages city operations, proposes budgets, and exercises a veto power over legislation and the final budget.
- **Council-manager:** the city council acts as the unified legislative authority and appoints a city manager who directs city operations and often proposes a city budget which the city council may amend before adopting.

Most cities adopt versions of these two models to suit their local context. Oakland is unusual in that it merges elements of both models in a unique way which creates severe ambiguity about authority and responsibility.

- The Mayor doesn't serve on the council but lacks the powers of a strong mayor. They can't vote on the council (except for breaking ties) or veto its decisions, leaving them unable to shape city policy directly.
- The City Administrator manages city agencies and operations, like in a council-manager system. But unlike a typical city manager who answers to the council, Oakland's Administrator serves at the Mayor's pleasure, meaning the Mayor can fire them at will.
- While the Mayor has no formal power to appoint department heads, they exert significant influence over the Administrator who does. This complicates the City Council's oversight of how the City Administrator is implementing the policies they legislate.

Community members and city staff described this system as difficult to navigate, hard to explain, and ill-suited to Oakland's current challenges.

Key Finding 1: Misaligned authority creates a disconnect between public expectations and actual powers.

Oakland residents elect a Mayor to set a vision for the city and to lead the work of making that vision real. Yet even when a Mayor establishes clear priorities, the public often sees a gap between campaign promises and actual outcomes. At the same time, Councilmembers are responsible for adopting budgets and policies but lack the tools to ensure those decisions are carried out.

The Charter calls for the Mayor to "give direction" to the City Administrator and for the City Council to direct the City Administrator. This becomes a source of confusion because the Mayor and the City Council often deliver competing directives and send unclear signals about priorities. City staff particularly underscored the need for a system that prevents conflicting instructions from multiple elected and appointed officials. Residents, too, want more clarity about who is responsible, how decisions are made, and where to go to report problems. Both residents and city employees described escalating issues through multiple offices, relying on informal relationships, or turning to their Councilmembers to resolve administrative problems — regardless of whether those officials have the official authority to act.

Key Finding 2: Weak institutional alignment undermines long-term planning, fiscal discipline, and effective oversight.

The lack of clear authority and responsibility echoes through the City's financial management practices. The Mayor proposes the city's budget but has no authority to push back when the Council changes it. The Council depends largely on the Mayor's own staff to analyze the budget, since they lack consistent and ongoing access to independent financial experts. The City Administrator is caught in the middle, forced to implement a budget that often relies on unrealistic assumptions or includes programs without funding to pay for them. Without clear authority or a process to settle disputes, the Mayor, City Council, and City Administrator struggle to trust each other. This makes it nearly impossible for the city to agree on a sustainable financial plan.

As a result, the public has also lost confidence. Many people interviewed worry that Oakland is trying to solve complex problems while running chronic budget deficits and lacking coordinated financial oversight. A recent survey by the Oakland Budget Advisory Commission found that 78% of respondents disapprove of how the city is performing, with many citing growing distrust in the city's budget management.[1]

Key Finding 3: Organizational complexity undermines accountability, transparency, and long-term effectiveness.

The misalignment of roles and responsibilities in the Charter has created an environment in which multiple actors share partial authority, but no single leader or body is ultimately responsible for administrative outcomes. Many current and former city officers commented that "everyone is in charge, and therefore no one is in charge." This complexity pulls Councilmembers out of their intended policymaking roles, incentivizing them to intervene in administrative matters to address constituent concerns that they fear will otherwise go unresolved. Staff, meanwhile, are caught between conflicting directives and insufficient resources, leading to improvised workarounds that increase organizational risk and reduce transparency. Critical processes often live in people's heads rather than in organizational systems, and frequent leadership changes make it difficult to build and sustain institutional knowledge.

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[1] City of Oakland Budget Advisory Commission. *2025 City of Oakland Resident Budget Priorities Survey*. City of Oakland, 2025. https://cao-94612.s3.us-west-2.amazonaws.com/documents/Oakland-FY-25-27-Budget-Resident-Survey-FULL.pdf. Accessed 22 Jan. 2026.

Both staff and elected officials reported being routinely pulled into short-term problem-solving rather than long-term strategy. Community members emphasized that this complexity disproportionately harms residents who lack the capacity to navigate a fragmented system. Without a coherent governance structure that clearly assigns authority and supports stable administrative leadership, Oakland cannot build the institutional capacity required to improve government operations and performance.

Policy Options

Oakland has experimented with two major governance models over the past century: council-manager and strong-mayor systems. (See Appendix D for a history of Oakland's governance models.) Currently, Oakland's structure blends both systems without securing the benefits of either, creating structural ambiguity and competing lines of authority. Shifting decisively to either model would eliminate this structural ambiguity, establish a clean line of authority, and create an accountability framework that aligns with best practices nationwide.

Two Approaches, Two Distinct Models

Although models of municipal government are often framed simply as "council manager" versus "strong mayor," these labels can mask the deeper institutional logic behind each system. Viewed more precisely, the two models reflect fundamentally different theories of governance.

Policy Option A
Strong Mayor: A Balanced Separation of Powers

In this model, the mayor is elected citywide to serve as the city's chief executive. The mayor provides unified administrative direction, proposes the budget, and holds veto authority over the council's legislation. The city council serves as the legislative branch, passing laws and the budget while overseeing the mayor's administration. ***This system aims for executive accountability and separated powers, with a clear boundary between legislative and administrative authority.***
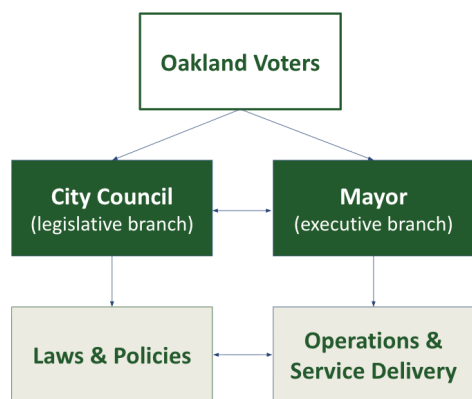
This model is used in Los Angeles, San Diego, Fresno and San Francisco, as well as in large U.S. cities like Boston, Cleveland, Seattle, and Minneapolis. The Mayor has authority over administrative departments, budget preparation, and enforcement of laws and ordinances. Key Charter amendments grant the Mayor veto power (with a two-thirds council override), strengthen the council's budgeting and oversight functions, clarify appointment and removal authority for department heads, and realign accountability by making the Mayor directly responsible for city operations and enforcing laws and policies.

Benefits of a strong-mayor system

A strong-mayor structure offers clear, direct accountability: the public knows exactly who is responsible for executive performance, and every voter participates equally in selecting the city's

leader. With unified executive authority, department heads receive consistent priorities from one leader rather than navigating competing directives from multiple officials. This clarity strengthens coordination, enhances administrative focus, and enables more decisive responses to crises or cross-departmental challenges. The model also creates a structured framework for collaboration between branches; veto powers, while rarely used, encourage negotiation and prevent either branch from advancing major policies without mutual engagement. Importantly, strong-mayor systems give cities a single authoritative voice in regional, state, and federal contexts—an increasingly important asset for complex urban areas.

Tradeoffs of a strong-mayor system

The strong-mayor model concentrates power in a single elected individual, which can heighten risks of politicization, misuse of authority, or governance driven by short-term electoral incentives. The model's success depends heavily on the competence of the mayor; an able campaigner is not necessarily an able administrator. In Oakland's past, few candidates for mayor have had government administrative experience, though elected mayors have hired experienced city administrators. A weak executive can hinder performance even with strong institutional tools. Electoral pressures may drive mayors toward visible quick wins rather than long-term investments in operational and structural improvements.

Policy Option B
Council-Manager: A Council-Dominant Legislative Government

In this model, policy and administrative authority flow from the mayor and city council collectively, acting as a single legislative body. The mayor serves as a member of the council. The council sets policy, passes the budget, and appoints a professional city manager to run day-to-day operations.

The city manager implements the council's policies and manages staff. ***This system aims for professional administration and unified legislative power, with a clear boundary between policy setting and management.***
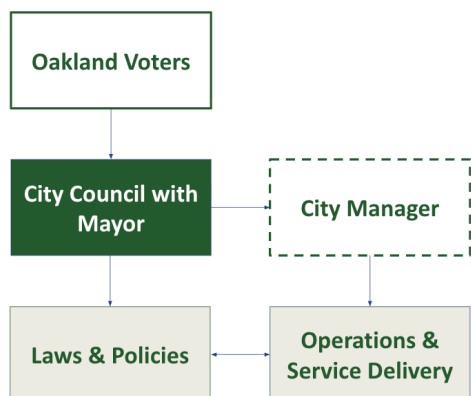
This approach is used in most California cities, including Berkeley, Sacramento, Long Beach, and San José, as well as larger U.S. cities like El Paso and Phoenix. In larger cities with an elected city-wide Mayor, the Mayor typically serves as the Council President. Sometimes, the Mayor is given additional powers, such as proposing the budget, or even given a veto power over legislation, as is the case in Long Beach.

Benefits of a council-manager system

A council-manager structure offers several advantages. It lays a foundation for professional management, insulating administrative decisions from short-term political pressures and enabling the city manager to make technically sound but politically unpopular decisions regarding resource allocation or organizational restructuring.[2] Because city managers often serve longer tenures than elected mayors, this model can provide continuity, stability, and institutional memory, helping

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[2] Local Governmental Structures And Its Effects On Public Services
https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1aGn9pRXgxcUxeIwWONV_XATL09nbgX8C

maintain administrative consistency across election cycles.[3] It also distributes political power across the council, ensuring that district representatives, who are seen as more connected to local neighborhoods, have equal standing in shaping policy and advocating for community needs.

Tradeoffs of a council-manager system

However, these benefits come with notable tradeoffs. Without a single elected executive, accountability becomes diffuse, and voters may struggle to know whom to hold accountable for the city's performance. A dysfunctional or divided council can paralyze administrative action, as the City Manager relies on unified direction to set priorities and govern effectively. While the model strengthens professional management, it can weaken political leadership, reducing responsiveness to community concerns and empowering an unelected Administrator to shape priorities and influence policy feasibility without direct voter input.

Strengths of Each System — and the Problems They Are Designed to Solve

Virtually all cities in the U.S. use one of these models with some adaptations reflective of their needs, culture and history.

Strong mayor systems tend to work best when:

- Voters expect visible, accountable executive leadership
- There are racial, wealth and geographic disparities across neighborhoods that require a citywide approach
- Complex intergovernmental challenges require a single, authoritative voice
- Fiscal and administrative decisions require unified direction
- Political fragmentation makes collective accountability difficult

Council–manager systems tend to work best when:

- Professional administration is prioritized
- There are fewer disparities across neighborhoods
- Political conflict is relatively low-intensity
- Councils are cohesive and capable of unified direction
- Residents expect collective, rather than individualized, political leadership

These distinctions matter for Oakland. In a council–manager structure, the effective "executive" is the Council's majority coalition. Residents whose district representatives fall outside that majority may find their priorities marginalized or absent from administrative decision-making. In contrast, a strong-mayor system ensures that all residents—regardless of district—have an equal vote in selecting the city's executive leader.

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[3] Rose Institute of State and Local Government. "2023 California City Managers Survey: A Profile of the Profession." Rose Institute of State and Local Government, 21 June 2023, roseinstitute.org/2023-california-city-manager-survey-a-profile-of-the-profession/

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Choose One Coherent Model

A decisive shift to either a coherent strong mayor system or a coherent council-manager system would resolve Oakland's long-standing structural ambiguities. Both models are widely used across U.S. cities and represent nationally recognized best practices in municipal governance. (See Appendix E for a cross-city comparison of different governance models.)

The Choices

The Working Group evaluated two distinct options:

Option A: Strong Mayor

- The Mayor serves as the city's chief executive responsible for administration and delivery of services.
- The City Council serves as the legislative body responsible for policymaking, budgeting, and oversight.
- Executive authority is unified, and accountability for citywide outcomes is clearly vested in a single, elected leader.

Under a strong-mayor system, Oakland has two viable structural design options that retain professional administration:

- The Mayor appoints a City Administrator to oversee **internal service functions only** — such as finance, human resources, information technology, and procurement — to ensure operational consistency, but otherwise, cabinet-level officials or heads of departments are appointed by, and report directly to, the Mayor; or
- The Mayor appoints a City Administrator to oversee **all departments**, with clear authority delegated from the Mayor.

Under either design choice, this system emphasizes political leadership vested in a Mayor elected citywide. Professional expertise comes from the City Administrator or heads of departments and other officials to whom the Mayor delegates authority while retaining complete accountability.

Option B: Council-Manager

- The City Council acts as the unified legislative authority.
- A City Manager is appointed to run city operations.
- The Mayor serves as head of the City Council, either with one vote or with veto authority over legislative decisions, as is the case in Long Beach.

This structure emphasizes professional expertise and collective governance. Executive authority is vested in an appointed manager rather than an elected official. The National League of Cities has

developed a model city charter that outlines recommendations about the ideal features to include when using this form.[4]

Community Input

While Oaklanders expressed a wide range of views about the city's future governance structure, they consistently emphasized that, regardless of the system, they wanted:

- Clear accountability for citywide outcomes;
- Fewer layers of bureaucracy, including eliminating duplicative roles in the Mayor's office and the City Administrator's office, which slow down decisions and confuse responsibility;
- Stronger mayoral authority to ensure a citywide approach to service delivery; and
- A structure that can allocate resources across districts with very different needs to reduce disparities rather than reinforce them.

Many participants voiced a preference for a council-manager model, valuing professional administration, continuity, and reduced political influence. Others supported a strong-mayor system, emphasizing clear lines of authority, unified executive direction, and electoral accountability. Still others were indifferent to the specific model, but unanimous on one point: Oakland must choose a coherent structure. The current hybrid approach — fragmented, confusing, and difficult to navigate — was seen as untenable.

Recommendation 2: Establish a Clear Executive Structure and Give the Mayor the Authority to Lead

Of the two options, it is the Working Group's recommendation that Oakland adopt a strong-mayor system with a clearly defined executive structure. Under this model, there should be no ambiguity about who leads the administrative branch of city government. It should be the Mayor.

Under this design:

- **The Mayor runs the city**
  - The Mayor serves as chief executive, responsible for city operations and service delivery.
  - All executive authority ultimately rests with the Mayor to ensure unified direction and accountability.
- **The Mayor can veto the council's decisions**
  - The Mayor has veto power over all legislation, including laws, policies and budget decisions. This ensures the council doesn't pass policies that are unrealistic, unfunded, or not possible to implement.
  - The council can override a mayoral veto with a two-thirds vote, preserving the balance of power between branches.
- **The Mayor retains a City Administrator to oversee core internal functions**
  - The Mayor nominates a City Administrator, who must be confirmed by the City Council.

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[4] "Model City Charter, 9th Edition." National Civic League,
https://www.nationalcivicleague.org/model-city-charter-9th-edition/

- - The City Administrator oversees essential administrative functions and appoints the leaders of departments and citywide functions including:
    - Finance
    - Human resources
    - Information technology
    - Procurement
    - Citywide systems such as permitting
- **The Mayor can assign additional responsibilities to the City Administrator**
  - Beyond these core internal functions, the Mayor has discretion to delegate other responsibilities to the City Administrator as needed.
- **Deputy mayors or cabinet officials oversee policy departments**
  - Deputy mayors or cabinet-level officials lead departments organized by policy focus such as public safety, public works, economic development, and housing.

The rationale:

The Working Group believes this approach best fits Oakland for multiple reasons. One of the most significant reasons, stressed throughout by both the public and interviewees, is that a strong mayor system offers a way to establish clear accountability for how the city is run in a way that aligns with public expectations. In particular, the responsibility for service delivery rests with the Mayor who organizes and coordinates departments and provides mechanisms to process requests for services efficiently and transparently.

In addition, to creating clear accountability aligned with public expectations, we believe the strong mayor model will achieve the following objectives:

- Promote fiscal discipline by improving the coordination of budget decisions between the Mayor and City Council through the addition of veto power
- Enable citywide leadership to address racial, geographic, and wealth disparities
- Respond to Oakland's high level of civic engagement and demand for visible, effective leadership
- Simplify the administrative chain of command while preserving professional management where it is most effective.

Community Input

Community members repeatedly expressed that when things go wrong, whether related to public safety, homelessness, street conditions, or service delivery, they put the accountability on the Mayor. Yet under the current structure, the Mayor lacks sufficient authority to ensure implementation.

Residents emphasized that Charter changes should provide:

- Decisive leadership in the face of a major budget deficit
- A citywide approach to addressing disparities across neighborhoods
- A direct connection between advocacy, decision-making, and implementation

At the same time, residents also expressed these priorities:

- Maintaining professional administrative expertise
- Securing continuity and institutional knowledge
- Protecting long-term projects from short-term political pressures

Establishing a clear executive structure would empower leadership to deliver equitable outcomes informed by community participation citywide. This is especially critical right now, given Oakland's current fiscal challenges. With a growing structural budget deficit and limited margin for inefficiency, the city cannot afford diffuse authority or fragmented implementation. Oakland requires leadership that is both empowered and accountable.

Recommendation 3: Strengthen the Council's Legislative Capacity to Improve Accountability and Oversight

A strong executive requires a legislative branch that is structurally sound and adequately empowered. To achieve a true balance of power under a strong-mayor system and ensure accountability, Oakland must strengthen the City Council's legislative capacity and clarify its role as the city's primary policymaking and oversight body.

Strengthening Legislative Capacity

A strong executive branch requires an equally strong legislative branch to provide oversight, accountability, and checks and balances. As noted above, in the proposed system, responsibility for running the city and providing services rests with the Mayor. Responsibility to set policy and oversee that the city is run optimally and services are provided in a timely and efficient manner, rests with the Council. Clarifying roles and strengthening both constituent services in the executive branch and legislative capacity on the council will enable Councilmembers to focus on their policy and oversight responsibilities while ensuring that residents receive the responsive service they deserve, ultimately improving city governance for everyone.

To strengthen the council's legislative capacity, the Working Group recommends:

Building independent legislative analysis capacity

The council should reallocate funds to reestablish a permanent budget and legislative analyst office, similar to those in Los Angeles, San Diego, and the California legislature. This office would provide independent analysis of:

- Budgets and fiscal impacts
- How proposed policies may interact or conflict with existing policies
- Staffing implications of proposed policies and legislation to ensure what is proposed can be implemented within a specific timeframe
- Operational capacity to manage changes and additions to existing operations

Clarifying and strengthening oversight authority

The council's oversight powers should be clearly articulated in the Charter to allow for stronger powers of inquiry, including:

- The ability to conduct legislative hearings
- The authority to summon testimony and subpoena witnesses

These powers are common in other strong mayor cities and are already granted to other city officers. These changes elevate the council from a hybrid legislative/constituent-services body to a professional legislative branch with clear authority. They will achieve the following goals:

- Clarify the council's role as head of the legislative branch
- Strengthen oversight and transparency
- Improve budget accountability
- Establish a durable system of checks and balances
- Enable better constituent service through the executive branch (see above)

Structural Changes to the Council

Prior to 1998, there were nine council-members, seven elected by district and two elected at-large, including the Mayor who also served as the President of the Council. (See appendix D.) This was useful to help balance citywide interests with district interests. When the Mayor was removed from the City Council in 1998, the council was left with eight members. Because this even number of council members increases the likelihood of tie votes on critical legislation, the current Charter allows the Mayor to cast tie-breaking votes. This arrangement is unique among strong-mayor cities, where mayors typically do not participate in legislative voting.

To restore a functional legislative body with an odd number of members, the Working Group considered two approaches: phasing out the at-large council seat or adding a ninth councilmember (a second at-large representative). The Working Group recommends the first option, phasing out the at-large seat, for the following reasons:

- Because a strong Mayor with veto power to influence citywide priorities makes the role of at-large Councilmembers to provide citywide representation less significant.
- Having both a strong Mayor and one at-large Councilmember confuses voters as to the Councilmember's role.
- Phasing out the at-large position would reduce cost for salary and staff support, while the alternative of adding a ninth member would increase costs.

This change would create a seven-member council, an odd number that eliminates the need for mayoral tie-breaking and thereby maintains clear separation between legislative and executive functions.

Establishing a Full-Time City Council

Most strong-mayor cities have full-time councils, while council-manager cities often have part-time councils. Oakland's Charter does not specify whether council service is full-time or part-time, though full-time service is generally assumed. This ambiguity is inconsistent with how Oakland defines expectations for other elected officials and with the practices of comparable strong-mayor cities. (See Appendix E.)

The working group recommends making it explicit in the Charter that the council serves as a full-time legislative body. The council should be capable of providing robust oversight, conducting thorough policy analysis, and serving as an effective check on executive power. To establish this clearly, the Charter should:

- **Specify full-time council service.** Make explicit what is currently only assumed, bringing consistency to how Oakland defines the role and compensation of all its elected officials and aligning with other comparable strong-mayor cities.
- **Prohibit outside employment for council members.** A clear prohibition on outside employment ensures independence, eliminates conflicts of interest, and reinforces the council's full-time focus on legislative work, consistent with expectations in other strong-mayor cities.

In parallel, salary setting provisions for councilmembers should be aligned with those for other elected city officials including establishing a metric or benchmark to establish base salaries and cost of living increases. There should be a comprehensive salary survey of similarly sized strong-mayor cities to establish market-appropriate compensation for full-time legislative work. Other cities use clear benchmarks: for example, Los Angeles ties council salaries to municipal judges' pay. By contrast, the current Charter only authorizes an increase for City Council members by up to five percent annually, but provides no means to reset the salary base even when existing compensation levels fall below market standards. Oakland should adopt a similar approach to other cities that provide objective standards and regular recalibration, moving away from the current system where council salaries only receive cost-of-living adjustments whereas the Mayor, City Attorney, and City Auditor have salaries reset biennially through market comparisons. Any proposed changes that will impact the budget will need to be deliberated and decided on in the larger budgetary context.

When council members have the time, compensation, and institutional support needed to govern, the entire system benefits: legislative quality improves, oversight becomes more rigorous, fiscal decisions become more informed, and the council can fully play its role as a check and balance in a strong-mayor system.

Community Input

Throughout the engagement process, council members, staff, and community members described a council that is asked to do too much with too little support. Councilmembers are held accountable for constituent concerns without the ability to hold the administration responsible for performance. Meanwhile, their key functions of policy making and oversight are under-resourced.

A stronger council will create a healthier balance of power. Clear executive leadership must be paired with a legislative body capable of rigorous oversight and informed decision-making. This balance is essential in a city with high levels of civic engagement and expectations for transparency, where residents want both decisive leadership and meaningful democratic accountability.

Future Considerations

The Working Group deliberately limited its scope to focus on core structural reforms where clear, unified recommendations could be made. Given the complexity of Oakland's governance challenges

and the limited time available, the group prioritized establishing fundamental clarity on the city's form of government and essential accountability mechanisms. This intentional restraint allows Oakland to address foundational questions first before tackling secondary issues that require deeper analysis or depend on decisions about the basic structure.

Some issues raised fell outside the recommendations that the Working Group chose to make but warrant additional review and analysis. The Working Group recommends re-examining these questions as part of a future phase of Charter review.

Determine whether the City Attorney and City Auditor Should Continue to Be Elected or Be Appointed
Throughout the Working Group process, many interviewees and community members questioned whether the positions of City Attorney and/or the City Auditor should be appointed rather than elected. While this merits exploration (especially if moving back to a council-manager system), the Working Group is not recommending changes at this time. The City Attorney and City Auditor should retain independent, impartial voices regardless of whether they are elected or appointed. Many expressed concern that retaining this focus can be challenging when someone must campaign for office. Others shared concern that by making these roles appointed, they may have a hard time maintaining their independence. In either event, clarifying the roles and responsibilities of the positions would be helpful.

Assess Rules Regarding the City's Oversight Bodies
Several people encouraged the Working Group to evaluate Charter rules regarding the city's various oversight bodies. For example:

- Several interviewees favored revising the responsibilities of the Mayor and the Police Commission in relation to the hiring of the Chief of Police.
- Others advocated the importance of adequate resources for the Public Ethics Commission and the City Auditor's office to ensure they are fully empowered to address concerns of corruption and malfeasance.
- Some suggested empowering the Public Ethics Commissioners to hire their own Executive Director to ensure independence.

The Working Group determined that these issues were outside the scope of its review and would require more time and analysis. The group is therefore not recommending changes at this time.

Strengthen Financial Decision-Making
The Working Group discussed several ideas to improve trust in the city's financial management and address concerns about long-term fiscal stability. Currently, the city lacks an independent entity with the power to certify revenue projections, which allows the City Council to pass budgets or legislation based on revenue assumptions that differ from those provided by the Finance Department. This undermines confidence in the city's financial planning.

Several possibilities were raised for consideration in future Charter review:

- **Independent City Controller**: Establishing an independent controller with authority to certify revenue projections could provide a neutral arbiter of financial forecasts and prevent the adoption of budgets based on unrealistic assumptions.
- **Long-Range Financial and Capital Planning Requirements**: Some city charters mandate the adoption of multi-year financial plans or capital plans. Given Oakland's structural budget

deficit and deferred infrastructure maintenance, such requirements could encourage more disciplined long-term planning.

The Working Group determined that these complex financial governance questions require deeper analysis beyond the scope of this review. However, they merit serious consideration in a future phase of Charter reform focused on fiscal sustainability and transparency.

Next Steps

Together, Recommendations 1 through 3 form a coherent governance framework: a clear executive structure, a strengthened legislative branch, and accountability aligned with public expectations. Any changes to Oakland's Charter must be approved by Oakland voters.

Path to the Ballot

The Working Group's charge was to analyze Oakland's governance challenges, evaluate alternative models, and identify the Charter changes that could better define the roles of elected officials, strengthen financial management, and improve accountability and transparency. (See Appendix F for the full list of changes proposed.) With this report, that work is complete. The next stage — determining what ultimately appears before voters — rests with the Mayor and the City Council.

Mayor Lee will work with the City Council will determine which elements of the Working Group's recommendations to advance in a ballot measure. Any ballot measure will require public education and robust outreach regardless of whether it proceeds through a public legislative process with opportunities for public input or through a signature-gathering campaign. Ultimately, Oakland voters will assess whether any proposal reflects a coherent design that merits their affirmative vote.

Implementation

Any Charter amendment adopted by voters will require a thoughtful implementation period. Major governance transitions, particularly those involving organizational structure, budgeting authority, or shifts in executive leadership, must be carefully phased to ensure continuity of services and to minimize disruption. Oakland should prepare for multiple stages of implementation, including administrative restructuring, updating ordinances to align with the new Charter, and ensuring that staff have the tools, training, and resources needed to operate under a clarified system of authority. True Charter reform is not simply a vote; it is a transition that demands coordination, planning, and clear communication.

Keeping the Charter a Living Document

One of the lessons from this process is that the Charter must be treated as a living document, not a static set of rules. Oakland's last major Charter revision in 1998 attempted a structural shift that left unresolved inconsistencies and created the hybrid system the city struggles with today. A Charter should evolve as governance needs change, new challenges emerge, and public expectations shift.

To ensure continued alignment, the Working Group recommends a more regular, formalized process for Charter review. This may include establishing a Charter Review Commission every 10 years, similar to models used in other cities, with a clearly defined mandate: to assess how the

governance system is performing, evaluate whether amendments are needed, and engage residents in a transparent process. A commission would prevent the accumulation of structural contradictions, ensure the Charter remains aligned with best practices, and allow Oakland to correct course as conditions evolve.

In addition, Oakland could build on the community education and engagement opportunities that were piloted in this process to explore incorporating a Civic Assembly or other resident-centered deliberative bodies into future Charter review efforts. These assemblies, composed of randomly selected residents reflective of the city's diversity, can provide a powerful, independent perspective and strengthen public legitimacy while building civic literacy, muscle, and trust. Civic assemblies are increasingly used in cities worldwide to bring community members into complex policy conversations in an informed, constructive way.

What Charter Reform Can't Do

Finally, it is essential to recognize what Charter reform cannot solve on its own. Even a well-designed governance structure cannot guarantee strong leadership, resolve political conflict, eliminate resource constraints, or substitute for effective management systems. Community members repeatedly raised issues such as the need for a functional 311 system, stronger performance management, and more consistent service delivery. These operational challenges require investment, capacity, and leadership. What a coherent Charter can do is create the conditions in which those improvements become possible, by clarifying who is responsible, aligning authority with accountability, and ensuring that when change is necessary, the path for making it is clear.

Appendix A

Members of the Mayor's Working Group on Charter Reform

Mayor Barbara Lee asked the League of Women Voters of Oakland and the San Francisco Bay Area Planning and Urban Research Association (SPUR) to co-facilitate the Working Group. The following members were selected to participate:

Fred Blackwell, CEO of the San Francisco Foundation. An Oakland native, Mr. Blackwell has extensive government experience, including serving as Interim City Administrator and Assistant City Manager for the City of Oakland, and as Executive Director of the Oakland Redevelopment Agency and Director of the Mayor's Office of Community Development in San Francisco.

Hon. Barbara J. Parker, former Oakland City Attorney. A graduate of Harvard Law School and resident of Haddon Hill, Ms. Parker was Oakland's City Attorney from 2011 to 2024, advising the City Council extensively on matters pertaining to good governance. A practicing attorney for more than 40 years in the private and public sectors, she also served previously as an Assistant U.S. Attorney.

Corey Cook, Vice President and CEO of Cal Poly Solano Campus. A former Saint Mary's College professor, Mr. Cook has taught classes on environmental politics and policy, urban politics and policy, and data analysis and visualization with policy research expertise on electoral reform, alternative voting systems, political geography, and political representation.

Ben Rosenfield, Public Finance Expert. Mr. Rosenfield has 25 years of experience in local government, including 16 years as San Francisco's City Controller, where he managed the City's $14 billion budget through some of its most challenging periods, including the Great Recession, the COVID-19 pandemic, and multiple leadership transitions.

Zach Goldman, Policy and Labor Leader. Mr. Goldman is an Oakland resident, policy advocate, and labor leader with two decades of experience working in local government and community and labor advocacy. He currently serves as a staff director of SEIU Local 1021, an organization representing 60,000 public sector and nonprofit workers, many of whom provide direct services to Oaklanders.

Ahmed Ali Bob, Board Chair, Oakland Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce. Mr. Bob has dedicated his career to reducing barriers to opportunity for underserved communities through work in local government, the nonprofit sector, and the tech industry. As Director of Social Impact at Block, Inc., he directs efforts to increase economic empowerment and expand opportunities for vulnerable populations.

Mark Morodomi, former Counsel, Oakland Public Ethics Commission. Mr. Morodomi, former Supervising Deputy City Attorney at the Oakland City Attorney's Office, has served as counsel to the Oakland Public Ethics Commission, the Oakland City Auditor, and the San Francisco Ethics Commission and as Chief of Enforcement for California's Fair Political Practices Commission..

Richard Fuentes, Manager of Special Projects, Executive Office of Performance and Budget, San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART). At BART, Richard leads federal and state grants advocacy efforts. He also serves on the Executive Board of AFSCME Local 3993 and is a small business owner in

Oakland. In the past, he was Legislative Director for former Oakland Councilmember Ignacio De La Fuente.

About the Facilitators

League of Women Voters of Oakland is a nonpartisan, grassroots organization working to protect and expand voting rights and ensure everyone is represented in our democracy. The league empowers voters and defends democracy through advocacy, education, and litigation at the local, state, and national levels.

San Francisco Bay Area Planning and Urban Research Association (SPUR) is a nonprofit public policy organization in San Francisco, San José, and Oakland. SPUR brings people together to address the big challenges that cities in the Bay Area face. Through research, education, and advocacy, SPUR works across areas of governance, housing, planning, transportation, sustainability, and hazard resilience to create an equitable, sustainable, and prosperous region for all.

Appendix B
Interviewees

Isaac Abid, Revitalize East Bay

Derek Barnes, Chief Executive Officer, East Bay Rental Housing Association

John Bauters, Revitalize East Bay

Leo Bazile, Former Oakland City Councilmember

Jeff Bellisario, Bay Area Council

Justin Bibb, Mayor of Cleveland

Rowena Brown, At-large Councilmember, City of Oakland

Paul Buddenhagen, City Manager, City of Berkeley

Keith Carson, Former Alameda County Supervisor

Tiffany Chu, Chief of Staff to Mayor Michelle Wu, City of Boston

Andreas Cluver, Vice President, Port of Oakland

Niccolò De Luca, Vice President and Chief Advocacy Officer, Townsend Public Affairs

Monica Davis, Deputy City Administrator, City of Oakland

Pamala Drake, Drake Talk Oakland

Lori Droste, Former Berkeley City Councilmember; Housing and Planning Policy Director, SPUR

Suzanne Doran, Director of the Public Ethics Commission, City of Oakland

Deborah Edgerly, Former City Administrator, City of Oakland

Nancy Falk, Oakland Charter Reform Project

Steven Falk, Oakland Charter Reform Project

Carroll Fife, District 3 Councilmember, City of Oakland

Darlene Flynn, Director of the Department of Race and Equity, City of Oakland

Nikki Fortunato-Bas, District 5 Supervisor, Alameda County

Noel Gallo, District 5 Councilmember, City of Oakland

Henry Gardner, Former City Manager, City of Oakland

Ben Gould, Oakland Charter Reform Project

Stasia Hansen, Policy and Research Director, East Bay Alliance for a Sustainable Economy

Elihu Harris, Former Oakland Mayor

Nicholas Heidorn, Former Executive Director of the Public Ethics Commission, City of Oakland

Laura Hill, Vice President of Public Policy, Bay Area Council

Ken Houston, District 7 Councilmember, City of Oakland

Michael Houston, City Auditor, City of Oakland

Mike Hutchinson, District 4 Director, Oakland School Board

Kevin Jenkins, City Council President and District 6 Councilmember, City of Oakland

Bradley Johnson, Finance Director, City of Oakland

Jestin Johnson, City Administrator, City of Oakland

Sarah Karlinsky, Director of Research and Policy, Terner Center

Preston Kilgore, Deputy Chief of Staff, Mayor Barbara Lee

Barb Leslie, President & CEO, Oakland Chamber of Commerce

Dan Lindheim, Goldman School of Public Policy, UC Berkeley

Pat Martel, West Coast Regional Director, ICMA

Lynette Gibson McElhaney, Former Councilmember, City of Oakland

Ryan Micik, Former Chair of the Public Ethics Commission, City of Oakland

Huy Nguyen, President, Oakland Police Officer's Association

Shereda Noshakare, Managing Partner Oakland and East Bay, Lighthouse Public Affairs

Karely Ordaz Salto, Director of CEO Affairs, San Francisco Foundation

Jean Quan, Former Mayor of Oakland

Yvette Radford, Regional Vice President for External & Community Affairs, Kaiser Permanente

Janani Ramachandran, District 4 Councilmember, City of Oakland

Asha Reed, City Clerk, City of Oakland

Louise Renne, Renne Public Law Group

Ryan Richardson, City Attorney, City of Oakland

Suzanne Robinson, Bay Area Council

John Russo, Former City Attorney, City of Oakland

Libby Schaaf, Former Mayor of Oakland

Loren Taylor, Former Councilmember, City of Oakland

Danny Wan, Former Executive Director, Port of Oakland

Charlene Wang, District 2 Councilmember, City of Oakland

Zac Wasserman, Partner and Lawyer, Wendel, Rosen, Black & Dean LLP

Dee Williams-Ridley, Former Berkeley City Manager

Zachary Unger, District 1 Councilmember, City of Oakland

Francis Upton, Public Ethics Commission Chair, City of Oakland

Appendix C
Summary of Community Input

Interviews

The League of Women Voters and SPUR conducted more than 60 interviews with current and former city leaders and officials, as well as other subject matter experts from different cities and educational institutions. The interviews focused on three main areas: defining roles, improving financial management, and strengthening accountability/transparency. The most common topics from the discussions have been summarized here: 📄 Interviews - Summary

"Talk of the Town" Community Conversations

The Working Group hosted 14 community sessions throughout Oakland in November and December of 2025, including one focused on current city staff. A summary of the input received can be found here: 📄 Community Sessions - Summary . The archive of physical worksheets that were collected at the events can be found at: 🖼 Talk of the Town Worksheets

Survey

The Working Group issued a community survey that received 433 responses. The survey responses can be viewed here: 📄 Oakland Charter Reform Working Group Survey Results .

Research Repository

The Working Group compiled research that was reviewed to inform this work. In addition, a number of community members shared resources as well. The articles and reports that were reviewed, outside of what has been cited in this report can be found here:
🖼 Charter Reform Academic Research Review

Appendix D
Oakland's History with Different Models of Municipal Government

Oakland has experimented with two major governance models over the past century: council-manager and strong-mayor systems.

1931–1998: The Council-Manager Era In 1931, Oakland adopted a council-manager model to bring professional management and reduce corruption. Authority rested with the City Council as a collective body.[5]

1980: District Representation After decades of community activism to increase representation on the City Council, voters passed Measure H, which tied Oakland City Council elections to individual districts, ushering in greater racial and political diversity on the council.[6]

1984–1996: Failed Attempts at Reform By the 1980s, dissatisfaction with weak mayoral authority led to reform efforts. Mayor Lionel Wilson, the first Black mayor in Oakland, was the first to seek executive power after discovering he couldn't achieve his goals with a City Manager who did not share his vision.[7] His 1984 ballot measure fell short at 48%. Another attempt in 1996, backed by Mayor Elihu Harris, also failed with 47% support.[8]

1998–2004: The Provisional Strong-Mayor System In 1998, Jerry Brown successfully championed Measure X, which passed with 75% of the vote and created a trial strong-mayor system for six years. The Mayor gained direct administrative authority while the City Council retained legislative powers.[9]

2005–Present: The Hybrid System Brown's 2002 effort to make the strong-mayor system permanent failed.[10] A Charter Review Commission then crafted a compromise: the Mayor leads the executive branch but lacks full operational authority or veto power. This hybrid model, adopted in 2004, gives Oakland a structure that blends both systems without securing the benefits of either, creating structural ambiguity and competing lines of authority.[11]

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[7] Svara, James H., and Douglas J. Watson, editors. *More than Mayor or Manager: Campaigns to Change Form of Government in America's Large Cities.* Georgetown University Press, 2010. https://dokumen.pub/more-than-mayor-or-manager-campaigns-to-change-form-of-government-in-americas-large-cities-1nbsped-9781589016200-9781589017092.html

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[9] Measure X Victory for Jerry Brown Strong-mayor." San Francisco Chronicle, November 4, 1998, www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/Measure-X-Victory-for-Jerry-Brown-Strong-mayor-2981070.php

[10] Brent McDonald, Oakland's "Strong Mayor" Reconsidered, 92 Nat'l Civic Rev. 57 (Fall 2003) https://drive.google.com/file/d/1p3XeSX9A6FDWy_Kz6hm5r8FeTZGqRmKy/view?usp=sharing

[11] Measure X Related Charter Amendments & Resolution, City Council's Legislative Analyst Office, December 2, 2003, https://drive.google.com/file/d/1eaOQodSIHAhQ-BpQXp4mxfCBgdM8Es0F/view?usp=sharing

Appendix E
Forms of Government and Powers in 12 U.S. Cities

The following cross-city analysis was provided to the working group for their analysis.

	Seattle	Boston	Cleveland	Portland	San Diego	Fresno	Oakland	Long Beach	El Paso	Phoenix	San Jose	Sacramento
Population	780,995	673,458	365,379	635,749	1,404,452	550,105	443,554	450,901	681,723	1,673,164	997,368	535,798
Form of Government	Strong Mayor-Council	Strong Mayor-Council	Strong Mayor-Council	Mayor-Council (NEW as of Jan 2025)	Strong Mayor-Council (since 2006)	Strong Mayor-Council	Mayor-Council	Council-Manager	Council-Manager (adopted 2004)	Council-Manager	Council-Manager	Council-Manager
Executive Authority	Mayor serves as Chief Executive	Mayor serves as Chief Executive	Mayor serves as Chief Executive	Mayor has administrative authority	Mayor serves as Chief Executive	Mayor serves as Chief Executive	Executive power rests with City Admin	Vested in Council as a whole	Vested in Council as a whole	All powers vested in Council	Vested in Council	Council retains executive/legislative authority
Legislative Authority	City Council is primary legislative body	City Council is primary legislative body	City Council is primary legislative body	City Council is primary legislative body	City Council is primary legislative body	City Council is primary legislative body	City Council is primary legislative body	Mayor is Chief Legislative Officer; Council is legislative body	All power concentrated in Council	All power concentrated in Council	All power concentrated in Council	All power concentrated in Council
Mayoral veto	Mayor can veto legislation; Council can override with 2/3 vote	Mayor can veto legislation; Council can override with 2/3 vote	Mayor can veto legislation; Council can override with 2/3 vote	Mayor can veto legislation and break ties on non-emergency ordinances; 9 of 12 votes needed for emergency ordinances	Mayor can veto legislation; Council can override with 6 of 9 votes	Mayor can veto legislation; Council can override with 5 of 7 votes	No mayoral veto	Mayor can veto any action of City Council; Council can override with 2/3 vote	Mayor can veto and break ties; Council can override with 3/4 vote	Mayor has no veto power	Mayor has no veto power	Mayor has no veto power
Hires/fires department directors	Mayor directly appoints department heads; many appointments require Council confirmation	Mayor directly appoints department heads	Mayor directly appoints department heads; Some appointments require Council	Mayor through City Admin	Sole authority through City Manager, though City Manager was let go in 2025	Mayor through City Manager	City Admin	City Manager	City Manager	City Manager	City Manager	City Manager

			confirmatio n									
Votes on Legislation	Only Council can vote on legislation	Only Council can vote on legislation	Only Council can vote on legislation	Council votes on legislation, Mayor can break ties	Only Council can vote on legislation	Only Council can vote on legislation	Council votes on legislation, Mayor can break ties	Mayor presides but has no vote; council votes	Mayor is a member of Council, can break ties; Council votes	Mayor is a member of the Council; Council votes on legislation	Mayor serves as Council President; Council votes on legislation	Mayor is a member of the Council; Council votes on legislation
Introduces Policy	Mayor can propose legislation; only Council can introduce	Mayor or Council can introduce; only Council votes	Mayor or Council can introduce; only Council votes	Mayor or Council can introduce	Mayor can recommend legislation; only Council can introduce	Mayor or Council can introduce	Only Council can introduce	Mayor or Council can introduce	Mayor or Council can introduce	Mayor or Council can introduce	Mayor recommends priorities; Mayor or council can introduce	Mayor or Council can introduce
Places measures on the ballot	Council can refer measures; citizens can initiate via petition	Council can refer measures; citizens can initiate via petition	Council can refer measures; citizens can initiate via petition	Mayor or Council can refer measures; citizens can initiate via petition	Council can refer measures; citizens can initiate via petition	Council can refer measures; citizens can initiate via petition	Council can refer measures; citizens can initiate via petition	Council can refer measures; citizens can initiate via petition	Council can refer measures; citizens can initiate via petition	Council can refer measures	Council can refer measures; citizens can initiate via petition	Council can refer measures
Appoints City Attorney	Voters elect	Mayor appoints Corporation Counsel	Mayor appoints Director of Law	Mayor appoints; Council confirms	Voters elect	Council appoints	Voters elect	Voters elect	Council appoints	Council appoints	Council appoints	Council appoints
Appoints City Auditor	Council appoints	No City Auditor; State Auditor oversees	No City Auditor; State Auditor oversees; Bureau of Internal Audit reports to Mayor	Voters elect	No City Auditor; Independen t Budget Analyst appointed by Council	No City Auditor; City Manager appoints City Controller, Council confirms	Voters elect	Voters elect	Council appoints and manages Internal Auditor	Council appoints	Council appoints	Council appoints
Proposes budget	Mayor submits budget proposal	Mayor submits budget proposal	Mayor submits budget proposal	Mayor proposes with City Admin	Mayor submits budget proposal	Mayor submits budget proposal	Mayor proposes with support of City Admin	City Manager proposes	City Manager develops	City Manager prepares and submits	City Manager drafts; Mayor recommend s priorities	City Manager develops
Approves budget	Council amends and adopts	Council amends and adopts	Council amends and adopts	Council amends and adopts	Council amends and adopts	Council amends and adopts	Council amends and adopts	Council amends and adopts	Council amends and adopts	Council amends and adopts	Council amends and adopts; public hearing required	Council amends and adopts

Has a City Manager/Administrator	No City Manager, Mayor serves role	No City Manager, Mayor serves role	No City Manager, Mayor serves role	Mayor appoints City Admin	Mayor appoints and removes City Manager	Mayor appoints City Manager	Mayor appoints City Admin, Council confirms	Mayor appoints City Manager	Council appoints City Manager; 2/3 vote to remove	Council appoints City Manager; 2/3 vote to remove	Council appoints City Manager	Mayor appoints City Manager; serves at pleasure of Council, 2/3 vote to remove
Oversees day-to-day operations	Mayor directs city departments	Mayor directs city departments	Mayor directs city departments	Mayor directs through City Admin	Mayor directs through City Manager	Mayor directs through City Manager	City Admin	City Manager	City Manager	City Manager	City Manager	City Manager
Council structure	9 members: 7 districts, 2 at-large	13 members: 9 districts, 4 at-large	15 members / wards (recently redrawn from 17)	12 members: 4 districts, 3 per district	9 members / districts	7 members / districts	8 members: 7 districts, 1 at-large	9 members / districts	9 members: 8 districts, 1 Mayor	9 members: 8 districts, 1 Mayor	11 members: 10, 1 Mayor	9 members: 8 districts, 1 Mayor
Council subpoena power	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Council staffing	Each member has Legislative Assistant	Each council office has staff	Each member has Executive Assistant	Unknown, new structure evolving	Each council office has staff	Each council office has staff	Each council office has staff	Each council office has staff	Each council office has staff	Each council office has staff	Each council office has staff	Each council office has staff
Council full-time or part-time	Full-time	Full-time	Not clearly defined	Not clearly defined	Full-time	Not clearly defined	Not clearly defined	Part-time	Part-time	Part-time	Full-time	Full-time

Appendix F
Charter Changes

All Charter changes in any proposed ballot measure will be made pursuant to legal advice of the City Attorney or other Charter law experts. The table below indicates, informally and unofficially, Charter amendments that might be required or considered should the recommendations of the Working Group be incorporated into a ballot measure.

Charter Section	Proposed Changes
ARTICLE II: City Council	
Section 200: Composition of the Council Section 202: Council Salaries Section 203: Nomination and Election of Councilmembers Section 204: Terms of Office, Term Limits Section 209: Quorum Section 210: Council Action Section 213: Emergency Ordinances	● Remove references to "Councilmember at-large" and reduce the number of council members ● Remove the Mayor's power to break ties ● Revise compensation provisions ● Change quorum, affirmative vote, and emergency vote requirements to align with the reduced size of City Council
ARTICLE III: The Mayor	
Section 305: Functions, Powers and Duties	Generally, modify the powers and functions of the mayor to reflect the role of a strong mayor. Specifically: ● Add line-item veto power over budget and legislation ● Add that Mayor shall be the Chief Executive Officer responsible for the proper and efficient administration of all affairs of the city and for enforcing all laws ● Modify language of powers vis-à-vis the City Administrator regarding oversight and city administration
ARTICLE V: The City Manager	
Section 503. Powers of Appointment and Removal Section 504. Duties	● Change the title to City Administrator or move into Article IV on City Officers ● Revise to limit powers and duties in line with enhanced powers of the Mayor and limited scope
ARTICLE VI: Administrative Organization	
Section 600: Administrative Organization Authorized	● Revise to reflect that the Mayor will organize the administration and apportion powers and responsibilities among the City Administrator and other members of the administration

Appendix G
Acknowledgements

We extend our sincere gratitude to the San Francisco Foundation for their generous support, which enabled the robust community engagement that made this work possible.

We are also grateful to the City of Oakland Parks and Recreation Department, the Oakland Public Library, the East Bay Regional Parks District, and St. Mary's Center for providing access to their gathering spaces.

We thank Evitarus for their support in developing the survey, Together Pictures for developing an informative and fun educational video, Change Consulting for their communications support, and Sean Dugar for his vision and support in ensuring that the working group received broad community input.

Finally, we are deeply grateful to everyone who participated and dedicated their time, expertise, experience, and knowledge to this effort.