

April 29, 2026

Councilmember Marqueece Harris-Dawson, Chair
Councilmember Nithya Raman, Vice Chair
Councilmember Katy Yaroslavsky
Councilmember Hugo Soto-Martinez
Councilmember John Lee
Rules, Elections, and Intergovernmental Relations Committee
Los Angeles City Council
200 N. Spring Street, Room 340
Los Angeles, CA 90012

RE: AIAILA Formal Recommendations for Inclusion in the November 2026 Charter Reform Ballot Measure
— [Council File 26-0489](#)

Dear Chair Harris-Dawson, Vice Chair Raman, and Council Members Yaroslavsky, Soto-Martinez, and Lee,

A GENERATIONAL MOMENT — AND A CLEAR OBLIGATION TO ACT

Los Angeles is not failing because its people lack ambition. It is failing because its government lacks the structural capacity to act on ambition. With the 2028 Olympic and Paralympic Games approaching, billions of dollars in unresolved deferred maintenance liabilities compounding across every neighborhood, and the fires of January 2025 still demanding a sustained recovery response, our city cannot afford a government organized around the institutional habits of 1925.

The Charter Reform Commission — which held more than 50 public meetings, visited all 15 council districts, and collected over 14,000 survey responses — transmitted its 301-page [final report](#) to the City Council on April 2, 2026. That report makes a blunt and accurate diagnosis: Los Angeles does not just have a personnel problem. It has a structural one. The Commission’s recommended reforms now sit before this Committee, and the Council must decide by June 2026 which proposals will appear before voters on the November 2026 ballot.

AIAILA urges this Committee to move swiftly and decisively. On behalf of our 4,500+ architects, urban designers, and design professionals who collectively shape the city’s built environment every day, we write to formally endorse the Commission’s core infrastructure and governance recommendations — and to call on this Committee to carry them to the ballot with the strongest possible Charter-level protections. Where the Commission’s recommendations provide a strong foundation, we also identify where AIAILA’s expertise points toward measures that must go further.

WHAT THE COMMISSION FOUND — AND WHY AIAILA AGREES

The Commission’s report confirms what AIAILA has documented through years of direct advocacy: the dysfunctions in Los Angeles’ governmental structure are not isolated failures — they are systemic, compounding, and measurable:

- Eight separate City departments manage the public right-of-way with eight separate agendas, generating duplicative work, last-minute project changes, and costly coordination failures.
- Los Angeles is the only major American city without a multi-year Capital Infrastructure Program (CIP) — a fact confirmed in the Commission’s report and supported by 71% of the 14,000+ survey respondents who backed multiyear budget planning.
- Unsafe streets have generated nearly \$500 million in liability settlements over the past five years — more than half of all City settlement spending — meaning Los Angeles routinely pays more in liability than it would have spent simply fixing the problem.
- The Department of Recreation and Parks operates on a charter funding formula frozen since the 1930s — today set at just 0.0325% of assessed property value — with 40% of its budget now diverted to indirect costs, starving parks in our most underserved communities.
- The Board of Public Works — a politically appointed, multi-member body unique among major American cities — obfuscates accountability and dilutes executive authority over more than \$1 billion in annual infrastructure spending.
- Development permitting remains fragmented across LADBS, LACP, LADOT, LAFD, and BOE, creating serial bottlenecks that delay housing production and increase project costs citywide.

These are not inconveniences. They are structural failures with compounding fiscal, human, and legal consequences. The Commission’s report is a mandate for action. The question before this Committee is not whether to act — it is whether the ballot language will be strong enough to make the reforms durable.

AIAILA’S FIVE STRUCTURAL REFORM RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1 — Adopt and Strengthen the Commission’s Director of Public Works Proposal — and Require a Licensed Architect

The Commission’s April 2 report recommends establishing a Director of Public Works with broader coordinating authority, designating Public Works as the lead agency for the Capital Infrastructure Program, and allocating at least 2% of the City’s general fund budget to Public Works. AIAILA strongly endorses these recommendations. We also urge the Committee to go further in one critical respect: the Charter must require that this Director also serve as the City’s Chief Design Officer (CDO), and that this individual be a California-licensed architect — the only licensed profession that integrates structural engineering, life-safety, accessibility, urban design, and long-range planning into a unified discipline.

AIAILA Connection: AIAILA has formally advocated for a licensed-architect CDO since 2022. Our February 2026 Charter Reform submission called for merging this role with the Director of Public Works, concentrating authority and ending the accountability gap that has plagued infrastructure delivery for decades. The Commission’s report validates this structural argument. Chicago, New York, Houston, and every comparable peer city has a single, empowered Director of Public Works accountable to the Mayor and the public. Los Angeles does not — yet.

Cautionary Precedent: The 1999 Charter created a Director of Public Works position that was subsequently watered down and administratively erased. The new Charter must explicitly protect the role: shielding the Director from arbitrary reassignment, empowering them to set Department-wide policy, and vesting them with authority over

the citywide CIP. The Commission’s report recognizes this risk — but recognition is not protection. The ballot language must be explicit.

Recommendation 2 — Carry the Commission’s CIP Mandate to the Ballot with Full Legal Protections

The Charter Reform Commission’s April 2 report recommends requiring a formal Capital Improvement Program covering at least five fiscal years, with identified funding sources sufficient to build, operate, and maintain projects, administered by the Director of Public Works. AIALA fully supports this recommendation and urges this Committee to ensure it reaches the ballot with Charter-level protections strong enough to survive future administrations.

AIALA Connection: In our March 17, 2026 letter to Council Members Blumenfield and Yaroslavsky, AIALA documented the compounding costs of Los Angeles’ CIP vacuum: a \$1.37 billion Willits sidewalk settlement, a Bureau of Street Services that did not repave a single street after mid-2024, and a pavement condition index falling 4% annually. New York, Chicago, San Francisco, San Diego, Long Beach, and Seattle all publish rolling multi-year capital plans. Los Angeles has been identified as the only major U.S. city without one for over a decade.

Legal Imperative: Following the U.S. Supreme Court’s ruling in *Sheetz v. County of El Dorado* (2024), municipalities must demonstrate a documented nexus between development impact fees and specific infrastructure needs. Without a publicly vetted CIP, Los Angeles’ impact fee revenues are legally vulnerable. Mayor Bass’ Executive Directive 9 established a foundation, but an Executive Directive can be rescinded by any future administration. Only Charter-level language makes this reform permanent.

Recommendation 3 — Consolidate and Streamline Development Services

The Charter must reorganize fragmented development and public-realm functions by: (a) consolidating LADOT into the Department of Public Works to unify right-of-way project delivery; and (b) establishing a Department of Business Services as a centralized “concierge” for development permits and small business support — officially shifting city personnel from regulatory gatekeepers to active solution-providers.

AIALA Connection: AIALA’s 2025–2026 Advocacy Platform calls explicitly for a permanent, cross-departmental Expedited Review Unit and a citywide “Zoning Certainty” program. Our members encounter the direct consequences of this fragmentation daily — in projects stalled across serial agency queues, in housing developments delayed by uncoordinated plan-check processes, and in public realm projects redesigned mid-construction because transportation and public works were not coordinated from the start.

Precedent: Boston’s Inspectional Services Department and Denver’s Development Services function as coordinated “one-stop” permitting entities. Los Angeles’ serial, multi-agency model is an outlier that imposes real economic costs on housing production, small businesses, and public projects alike.

Recommendation 4 — Empower a Department of Real Estate to Optimize Civic Assets

The Charter must empower a professionalized Department of Real Estate with the authority and mandate to strategically manage and generate revenue from the City’s publicly owned properties — transforming underutilized civic assets from budget liabilities into community keystones and revenue generators.

AIALA Connection: AIALA’s advocacy consistently emphasizes that fiscal sustainability must be built on value creation, not perpetual tax increases. Empty civic center retail spaces, underutilized public parcels, and government-induced blight represent billions of dollars in latent value. Design-led activation of these assets can generate new revenue streams that directly offset the deferred maintenance liabilities accumulating across the

city's streets, sidewalks, parks, and public facilities — a uniquely architectural perspective that the Charter Reform process must not overlook.

Precedent: Washington D.C.'s Office of Public-Private Partnerships and Chicago's Department of Assets, Information, and Services both demonstrate that disciplined, design-aware management of public real estate can generate meaningful civic dividends.

Recommendation 5 — Carry the Commission's Parks Funding Proposal to the Ballot and Protect It

The Charter Reform Commission recommends doubling the Recreation and Parks (RAP) funding formula — which has remained frozen since the 1930s — from 0.0325% to 0.065% of assessed property value. AIALA strongly endorses this recommendation and urges the Committee to ensure the ballot language also explicitly protects this allocation from the indirect cost diversions that currently consume 40% of RAP's budget.

AIALA Connection: Los Angeles has plummeted to 90th in the national ParkScore rankings — a direct consequence of a Depression-era formula that was never updated to reflect the city's growth or its equity obligations. AIALA's advocacy platform includes equitable access to parks and civic infrastructure as a core design justice principle. Our members design the community spaces that depend on this funding, and we have witnessed firsthand how park deterioration compounds inequity in our most underserved neighborhoods.

Precedent: San Francisco's Recreation and Parks Department operates under a dedicated property tax set-aside enshrined in its city charter — enabling consistent capital investment and programming. The Commission's recommendation puts Los Angeles on this path. The Committee must ensure the ballot language carries it there with durability.

A SPECIFIC AND URGENT CALL TO ACTION

The Charter Reform Commission has done its work. The 301-page report transmitted on April 2, 2026 reflects more than 50 public meetings, 14,000+ resident responses, and months of rigorous deliberation. The Commission's recommendations on the CIP, the Director of Public Works, infrastructure funding, and parks are sound, urgent, and supported by the public. The question now before this Committee is whether those recommendations will reach voters with the protective Charter language they deserve — or whether they will be diluted, deferred, or left vulnerable to the same administrative erosion that undid the 1999 reforms.

AIALA respectfully and urgently requests that this Committee take the following actions before the June 2026 ballot submission deadline:

1. Place the Commission's CIP mandate, Director of Public Works, 2% Public Works budget floor, and RAP funding doubling on the November 2026 ballot with explicit Charter-level protections — drafted to prevent administrative erosion by any future administration.
2. Strengthen the Director of Public Works language to require that this individual hold a California architectural license and serve concurrently as the City's Chief Design Officer — ensuring that design quality, fiscal stewardship, and long-range infrastructure planning are unified under a single, accountable leader.
3. Include the development services consolidation and real estate optimization measures as additional ballot items, reflecting the breadth of structural reform Los Angeles needs to become genuinely functional.

4. Invite AIALA to participate as a formal technical resource and drafting partner in the Committee's working sessions between now and the June deadline.

The Commission has handed this Committee a remarkable document. The residents of Los Angeles — including the 71% who told the Commission they support multiyear budget planning — are counting on this Committee to deliver it to the ballot intact and with strength. AIALA is prepared to help you do exactly that.

If you have any questions, you may contact me at will@aialosangeles.org

Thank you for your time, leadership, and dedication to our city.

Truly yours,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Will Wright', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Will Wright, Hon. AIALA
Director, Government & Public Affairs