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May 1, 2026

Honorable Council President Marqueece Harris-Dawson, Chair
Members of Rules, Elections and Intergovernmental Relations Committee
Office of the City Clerk, Room 395, City Hall
Los Angeles, CA 90012

SUBJECT: COUNCIL FILE 26-0489 - DEPARTMENT OF NEIGHBORHOOD EMPOWERMENT CHARTER REFORM COMMISSION AMENDMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

Dear Council President Harris-Dawson:

On behalf of the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment, I respectfully submit this letter in response to the request for departmental input on the Los Angeles Charter Reform Commission's final report and its proposed amendments. The Department was established to promote civic participation in government and to make the government more responsive to local needs. In carrying out this mission, we support 99 Neighborhood Councils, each with a unique structure of elected and appointed board members representing the diverse interests of their communities and serving in an advisory capacity on local issues.

We wish to express our sincere appreciation to the 54 Neighborhood Councils that agendaized Charter Reform for discussion and formal action, many of which remained engaged throughout the process and submitted 75 individual Community Impact Statements to the Charter Reform Commission. We extend similar gratitude to the Neighborhood Council Alliances for their continued dialogue, engagement, and submission of recommendations throughout the reform process. We are also thankful to the Board of Neighborhood Commissioners (BONC) for convening multiple listening sessions with Neighborhood Councils to better understand their priorities and perspectives on Charter Reform. Most importantly, we recognize and thank the Charter Reform Commission and its staff for their commitment to outreach, engagement, and for prioritizing meaningful input from Neighborhood Councils over the past year.

We appreciate the opportunity to support the Rules, Elections and Intergovernmental Relations Committee (REIR)'s deliberations and respectfully offer the following comments regarding the potential administrative, operational, and financial impacts of the proposed recommendations, which incorporate input from the Department, BONC, the Neighborhood Council Alliances, including the Los Angeles Neighborhood Council Coalition (LANCC) and the South Los Angeles Alliance of Neighborhood Councils (SLAANC). We note that certain recommendations do not directly affect the Department but would instead have implications for other City departments and their staff.

Proposed Charter Reform Recommendation:

Recommendation: CRC 41 - Neighborhood Councils: Expands on Neighborhood Councils' (NCs) authority by outlining their ability to conduct community outreach via stakeholder engagement, and collaboration with City departments, elected officials, and other NCs (Charter Section 908)

Responding Department: Department of Neighborhood Empowerment

Administrative Impact(s): None.

Fiscal Impact(s): None.

Administrative or Charter Amendment Required: Charter Amendment.

A Charter amendment is appropriate as it codifies and enshrines long-standing Neighborhood Council practices related to community outreach, stakeholder engagement, and intergovernmental collaboration. Elevating these activities to the Charter level ensures their continuity, stability, and recognition as core functions of the Neighborhood Council system over the past 26+ years.

Advantages/Disadvantages of Proposal(s): Advantages of this approach include more accurately reflecting the existing work of Neighborhood Councils by formally recognizing their ongoing roles, and providing consistency and clarity across the system.

Additional Concerns: None.

Departmental Liaison Contact: Vanessa Serrano (vanessa.serrano@lacity.org)

Proposed Charter Reform Recommendation:

Recommendation: CRC 42 - Requires that NCs are allowed to provide public comment via telephone or online teleconferencing at all meetings of the Council and its Committees; Requires that NCs be placed in a separate queue for public comment if a Community Impact Statement has been submitted; extends these provisions to City Boards and Commissions (Charter Section 242; and Section 515 [NEW])

Responding Department: This was a recommendation of BONC, LANCC, and SLAANC. The Department defers to the Information Technology Agency (ITA).

Administrative Impact(s): While there are no direct impacts to the Department (we currently support this practice with BONC), ITA and its staff are expected to be impacted, including the allocation of staff time, across the City Clerk and City Departments, to establish and support telephone and online teleconferencing services for meetings.

Fiscal Impact(s): While there are no direct fiscal impacts to the Department, the City Clerk and City Departments may need to include additional funding in their operational accounts. ITA may experience indirect fiscal impacts associated with the setup and support of communication services for meetings.

Administrative or Charter Amendment Required: Charter Amendment.

Advantages/Disadvantages of Proposal(s): A key advantage of this Charter amendment is that it ensures consistent, long-term access to public meetings through telephone and online teleconferencing across the City. Promotes equitable participation for all Angelenos, strengthens transparency, and provides stability by standardizing these practices Citywide rather than leaving them subject to individual adoption or change over time. It also reinforces the specific role of the Neighborhood Council System as a vital forum for community feedback on civic matters, ensuring their input is more accessible, representative, and impactful in City decision-making.

Additional Concerns: None.

Departmental Liaison Contact: Vanessa Serrano (vanessa.serrano@lacity.org)

Proposed Charter Reform Recommendation:

Recommendation: CRC 43 - Expands the Board of Neighborhood Commissioners from seven to nine commissioners; the two additional commissioners shall be appointed by interested individuals who obtain the approval of a majority of all Neighborhood Councils; authorizes the Board to approve contracts and leases prepared on behalf of NCs or the NC system; requires that all board members complete legally-required training before voting at meetings (Charter Section 902)

Responding Department: This amendment reflects a combination of proposals submitted by the Department, BONC, and alliances, including LANCC and SLAANC.

Administrative Impact(s): Anticipated impact of expanding BONC would be an increase in staff time required to support the expanded Commission, including coordination and onboarding of additional commissioners, ongoing administrative support, and ensuring quorum and related meeting participation requirements are consistently met. The requirement that Commissioners complete legally mandated training would require staff time to facilitate training access, provide technical and administrative support, and ensure members are able to successfully complete all required training components.

For administrative and fiscal impacts on the authorization of the commission to approve contracts and leases prepared on behalf of the NCs or the NC system, we defer to the Office of the City Clerk, Neighborhood Council Funding Division.

Fiscal Impact(s): Anticipated fiscal impact to the Department includes the costs associated with supporting additional commissioners, including the issuance of identification badges, provision of parking passes, and access to the training platform.

Administrative or Charter Amendment Required: Charter Amendment.

Advantages/Disadvantages of Proposal(s): An advantage to expanding the Commission would provide greater representation of Angelenos, broadening perspectives within the decision-making, and strengthening the Commission's ability to reflect the diversity of the City it serves. Amending to have BONC approve contracts and leases on behalf of a Neighborhood Council or the system would be an update that reflects current operations and practice.

Additional Concerns: None.

Departmental Liaison Contact: Vanessa Serrano (vanessa.serrano@lacity.org)

Proposed Charter Reform Recommendation:

Recommendation: CRC 44 - Allows NCs to submit statements with respect to legislation proposed to or pending before a governmental agency (Charter Section 254)

Responding Department: Although this recommendation was not made by the Department, it would have systemwide implications for the Neighborhood Council system, which is why the Department is providing a response. This recommendation was made by LANCC.

Administrative Impact(s): None.

Fiscal Impact(s): None.

Administrative or Charter Amendment Required: Charter Amendment.

Advantages/Disadvantages of Proposal(s): Neighborhood Councils are approached by government agencies and their community members on an array of issues directly affecting their communities. An advantage of this proposal is granting Neighborhood Councils the authority to advocate for their communities at multiple levels of government.

Consideration for the possible disadvantage that Neighborhood Councils would weigh in on a topic that the Mayor and City Council have yet to take on. The department defers to the Office of the City Attorney's Neighborhood Council Advice Division (NCAD) for additional comments.

Additional Concerns: It is important to note that this amendment includes that by ordinance, the City may create and require language in Neighborhood Council statements that indicate they are speaking on behalf of the Neighborhood Council and not the City.

Departmental Liaison Contact: Vanessa Serrano (vanessa.serrano@lacity.org)

Proposed Charter Reform Recommendation:

Recommendation: CRC 45 - Allows NCs via the Chair of the Board of Neighborhood Councils, or another designated Commissioner, to submit to the Mayor their budget requests for the next fiscal year (Charter Section 311)

Responding Department: This recommendation was not made by the Department; it would have an impact on the Board of Neighborhood Commissioners and the Department, which is why the Department is responding. This recommendation was made by the LANCC.

Administrative Impact(s): May create additional administrative responsibilities for the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment. The requirement for the Board of Neighborhood Commissioners to coordinate and consolidate 99 Neighborhood Council budget submissions may, in practice, necessitate staff support to implement, as the Commission is made up of volunteers. Given the Department's limited staffing and existing workload, these duties would place added strain on current resources and impact the Department's ability to carry out core functions.

Fiscal Impact(s): We anticipate a fiscal impact to the Department due to the cost of printing and binding.

Administrative or Charter Amendment Required: Charter Amendment.

Advantages/Disadvantages of Proposal(s): Disadvantages include the coordination and support of 99 Neighborhood Councils to submit their proposals, the time required of the Commission Chair or designee, and the Department to review and prepare to create a single submission to the Mayor while meeting required budgetary deadlines.

Additional Concerns: On April 18, 2026, the Board of Neighborhood Commissioners voted to respectfully request removal of this proposed Charter amendment, citing concerns that it exceeds the practical capacity of unpaid Commissioners, creates significant administrative and fiduciary burdens, and lacks majority support from

the Neighborhood Council system. The BONC plans to submit their letter response to the REIR Committee in early May 2026.

Departmental Liaison Contact: Vanessa Serrano (vanessa.serrano@lacity.org)

Proposed Charter Reform Recommendation:

Recommendation: CRC 46 - Allows NCs to submit questions (via a majority vote) to Mayor questions that could be asked during the interview process for the General Manager of the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment (Charter Section 903)

Responding Department: This amendment recommendation was made by the BONC and LANNC.

Administrative Impact(s): We do not anticipate any administrative or fiscal impacts to the Department, and defer to the Personnel Department and the Office of the Mayor for their consideration.

Fiscal Impact(s): None to our Department.

Administrative or Charter Amendment Required: We defer to the Personnel Department.

Advantages/Disadvantages of Proposal(s): This amendment ensures that Neighborhood Councils have a guaranteed voice in selecting the Department's General Manager. We defer to the Office of the Mayor and Personnel Department on the hiring process and practices.

Additional Concerns: None Applicable.

Departmental Liaison Contact: Vanessa Serrano (vanessa.serrano@lacity.org)

Proposed Charter Reform Recommendation:

Recommendation: CRC 47 - Updates the title of Section 905 to “Initial Implementation of the Plan” (Charter Section 905)

Responding Department: Department of Neighborhood Empowerment

Administrative Impact(s): City staff time updating Section 905.

Fiscal Impact(s): None.

Administrative or Charter Amendment Required: Charter Amendment.

Advantages/Disadvantages of Proposal(s): The advantage is bringing this section title up to date and providing clarity.

Additional Concerns: None.

Departmental Liaison Contact: Vanessa Serrano (vanessa.serrano@lacity.org)

Proposed Charter Reform Recommendation:

Recommendation: CRC 48 - Changes the title of Section 907 “Early Warning System” to “Advance Notice and Opportunities for Input” (Charter Section 907)

Responding Department: Department of Neighborhood Empowerment

Administrative Impact(s): City staff time updating Section 905.

Fiscal Impact(s): None.

Administrative or Charter Amendment Required: Charter Amendment.

Advantages/Disadvantages of Proposal(s): Advantage. Changing the title of this section would be a meaningful improvement because it more clearly communicates the purpose of the section to the public. The current title can be confusing and may suggest an emergency or crisis-related function, which may mislead readers about its intent.

Additional Concerns: None.

Departmental Liaison Contact: Vanessa Serrano (vanessa.serrano@lacity.org)

Proposed Charter Reform Recommendation:

Recommendation: CRC 49 - Capitalizes “Neighborhood Council” throughout the Charter (Various Sections in the Charter)

Responding Department: Department of Neighborhood Empowerment

Administrative Impact(s): City staff time updating the charter language.

Fiscal Impact(s): None.

Administrative or Charter Amendment Required: Charter Amendment.

Advantages/Disadvantages of Proposal(s): The advantage is creating consistency across the Charter and identifying Neighborhood Councils as formal entities.

Additional Concerns: None.

Departmental Liaison Contact: Vanessa Serrano (vanessa.serrano@lacity.org)

Proposed Charter Reform Recommendation:

Recommendation: CRC 50 - Replaces the word “Citizen” with “Civic” participation throughout Article IX (Neighborhood Councils) (Charter Sections in Article IX)

Responding Department: Department of Neighborhood Empowerment

Administrative Impact(s): City staff time updating the charter language.

Fiscal Impact(s): None.

Administrative or Charter Amendment Required: Charter Amendment.

Advantages/Disadvantages of Proposal(s): An advantage of replacing the term “citizen” with “civic” participation is that it more accurately and inclusively reflects the intent of the Neighborhood Council system as open to all Angelenos, regardless of immigration status. This change helps ensure clarity and accessibility for the public, reducing potential confusion or discouragement for individuals who may otherwise assume they are ineligible to participate.

Additional Concerns: None.

Departmental Liaison Contact: Vanessa Serrano (vanessa.serrano@lacity.org)

Proposed Charter Reform Recommendation:

Recommendation: CRC 51 - Replaces the word “officers” with Board Members in Department of Neighborhood Charter Empowerment provisions (Charter Section 901)

Responding Department: Department of Neighborhood Empowerment

Administrative Impact(s): City staff time updating charter language.

Fiscal Impact(s): None.

Administrative or Charter Amendment Required: Charter Amendment.

Advantages/Disadvantages of Proposal(s): An advantage of replacing the term “Officers” with “Board Members” is that it more accurately reflects current practice. Our Department's work is not limited to Executive Officers alone, and the term “Officers” can be misinterpreted as referring only to that subset. Using “Board Members” provides greater clarity by making it clear that our support and engagement extend to all members of the Board.

Additional Concerns: None.

Departmental Liaison Contact: Vanessa Serrano (vanessa.serrano@lacity.org)

Proposed Charter Reform Recommendation:

Recommendation: CRC 52 - Updates the title of Section 904 to “Development and Maintenance of the Neighborhood Council Plan” (Charter Section 904)

Responding Department: Department of Neighborhood Empowerment

Administrative Impact(s): City staff time updating charter language.

Fiscal Impact(s): None.

Administrative or Charter Amendment Required: Charter Amendment.

Advantages/Disadvantages of Proposal(s): Adding the word “maintenance” clarifies that the Neighborhood Council Plan may be further amended to better reflect the evolving work of Neighborhood Councils and the Department’s ongoing support.

Additional Concerns: None

Departmental Liaison Contact: Vanessa Serrano (vanessa.serrano@lacity.org)

Proposed Charter Reform Recommendation:

Recommendation: CRC 53 - Updates certification and bylaws requirements for NCs by removing provision stating that NC membership is open to “everyone who lives, works or owns property in the area”; indicates that “stakeholders” will be further defined by ordinance (Charter Section 906)

Responding Department: Department of Neighborhood Empowerment

Administrative Impact(s): City staff time updating the charter.

Fiscal Impact(s): None.

Administrative or Charter Amendment Required: Charter Amendment.

Advantages/Disadvantages of Proposal(s): Neighborhood Council membership is open to all stakeholders. The definition of “stakeholders” would reside in the City Ordinance; it would be updated through amendments to the Ordinance as community needs evolve, without requiring a Charter amendment process.

Additional Concerns: None.

Departmental Liaison Contact: Vanessa Serrano (vanessa.serrano@lacity.org)

Proposed Charter Reform Recommendation:

Recommendation: CRC 39 - includes language throughout the Charter that strengthens language access requirements to ensure that the City adopts and maintains policies that are accessible to the language spoken by its residents.

Responding Department: Department of Neighborhood Empowerment. Although this is not an amendment we proposed, we fully support this recommendation.

Administrative Impact(s): City staff time updating the charter.

Fiscal Impact(s): None.

Administrative or Charter Amendment Required: Charter Amendment.

Advantages/Disadvantages of Proposal(s): This amendment advances our Department's mission to promote inclusive and equitable access to civic participation. It helps ensure that all Angelenos can meaningfully engage with City processes and the Neighborhood Council system, regardless of the language they speak. This change reduces barriers to participation by improving access to information, fostering greater understanding of City policies, and supporting more informed community involvement in local decision-making.

Additional Concerns: None.

Departmental Liaison Contact: Vanessa Serrano (vanessa.serrano@lacity.org)

We appreciate the opportunity to provide input on the Charter Reform Commission's recommendations and to support the Rules, Elections, and Intergovernmental Relations Committee in its deliberations. We remain committed to strengthening civic engagement through the Neighborhood Council system and to working collaboratively with the City and stakeholders to ensure the system continues to serve its intended purpose.

Thank you,



Carmen Chang (May 1, 2026 10:58:28 PDT)

Carmen Chang
General Manager
Department of Neighborhood Empowerment






Department Comment: Charter Reform Commission Recommendations (C.F. 26-0489)

Final Audit Report

2026-05-01

Created:	2026-05-01
By:	Joanna Alvarez (joanna.alvarez@lacity.org)
Status:	Signed
Transaction ID:	CBJCHBCAABAATWBgBjdy7d90Aoxcl14scBEshATAN6v5

"Department Comment: Charter Reform Commission Recommendations (C.F. 26-0489)" History

-  Document created by Joanna Alvarez (joanna.alvarez@lacity.org)
2026-05-01 - 5:56:10 PM GMT
-  Document emailed to Carmen Chang (carmen.chang@lacity.org) for signature
2026-05-01 - 5:56:14 PM GMT
-  Email viewed by Carmen Chang (carmen.chang@lacity.org)
2026-05-01 - 5:57:32 PM GMT
-  Document e-signed by Carmen Chang (carmen.chang@lacity.org)
Signature Date: 2026-05-01 - 5:58:28 PM GMT - Time Source: server
-  Agreement completed.
2026-05-01 - 5:58:28 PM GMT