



# AGENDA REPORT

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## STAFF REPORT AND DRAFT RESOLUTION Oakland Charter Reform

Prepared for City Council consideration

To: Oakland City Council

From: Mayor Barbara Lee

Subject: PROPOSED BALLOT MEASURE TO REFORM OAKLAND'S CITY CHARTER

Date: May 7, 2026

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**RECOMMENDATION:** Adopt the attached resolution expressing the City Council's intent to place the Charter Reform measure before the voters, approving the policy framework reflected in the Working Group report, and directing staff to prepare the final ballot language and related materials consistent with the Council's action and applicable law.

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Oakland's current City Charter blends elements of a strong-mayor system and a council-manager system in a manner that diffuses authority, obscures accountability, and makes it difficult for residents to understand who is responsible for delivering services and results. Over time, this hybrid structure has produced overlapping roles, fragmented decision-making, and inconsistent lines of responsibility across City government.

The Mayor's Charter Reform Working Group, co-chaired by the **Oakland League of Women Voters and San Francisco Bay Area Planning and Urban Research Association (SPUR)** concluded that Oakland requires a **coherent, modern governance structure** that clearly aligns authority with responsibility. The Working Group recommends transitioning to a **"strong mayor, strong council" model** that establishes:

- A Mayor who serves as the City's chief executive, accountable for managing operations and delivering services; and
- A City Council that exercises clear legislative authority, robust oversight, and meaningful checks and balances on executive power.

The Working Group's findings are grounded in one of the most extensive recent civic engagement efforts focused on governance reform in Oakland. Over the course of its process, the Working Group:

- Conducted **more than 60 in-depth interviews** with current and former elected officials, department heads, labor leaders, and subject-matter experts;
- Held **14 public community meetings across all Council districts**;
- Administered a survey, and ultimately engaged more than 750 Oakland residents directly, reflecting a wide cross-section of the city.

Across all of these efforts, the Working Group identified a consistent and reinforcing conclusion: **Oaklanders want clear accountability, decisive leadership, and a system that makes it obvious who is responsible for results.**

The report also identifies that structural ambiguity contributes directly to:

- Delays in service delivery,
- Difficulty advancing major policy initiatives,
- Confusion in budget development and implementation, and
- Reduced public trust in government.

The urgency of reform is heightened by Oakland's broader conditions. The Working Group emphasizes that governance reform is occurring in the context of:

- **A structural budget deficit and ongoing fiscal volatility,**
- **Underinvestment in core infrastructure and services,**
- **Deep racial and geographic inequities,** and
- A civic culture in which residents expect **access, responsiveness, and accountability** from their elected officials.

In this context, the Working Group determined that **structural reform is essential** to ensure that the City can meet its obligations to residents today and in the future.

The recommendations are organized around three core goals:

1. **Clarifying roles and responsibilities** so that Oaklanders know who sets policy, who manages operations, and who is accountable for outcomes;
2. **Strengthening financial management** to support transparent, balanced, and sustainable budgeting; and
3. **Increasing accountability and transparency** so residents can clearly understand how decisions are made and how public resources are used.

These are structural changes—but structure shapes performance, and performance shapes public trust, and therefore Charter reform is about building a system that works clearly, effectively, and accountably for Oakland residents—now and for generations to come.

## **BACKGROUND / LEGISLATIVE HISTORY**

The Mayor convened the Charter Reform Working Group in August 2025 as a central component of the Administration's 100-day plan, with the goal of conducting a comprehensive, independent evaluation of Oakland's governance structure and developing recommendations to improve effectiveness, accountability, and public trust.

The Working Group was **co-facilitated by the League of Women Voters of Oakland and SPUR**, two respected nonpartisan organizations with deep expertise in governance, civic engagement, and institutional reform. Their role was to ensure a **transparent, balanced, and evidence-driven process**.

The Working Group's comparative research reviewed 12 U.S. cities, including Seattle, Boston, Cleveland, Portland, San Diego, Fresno, Oakland, Long Beach, El Paso, Phoenix, San Jose, and Sacramento. That analysis helped the Group identify which powers are typically paired with a strong-mayor system and which powers are usually retained by a legislative body in a council-manager system.

The Working Group included Oakland residents with diverse professional backgrounds, including:

- Labor leadership
- Business and economic development
- Municipal finance and budgeting
- Ethics and good governance
- Law and public administration
- Community advocacy and organizing

As emphasized in the report, the Working Group operated independently, without a predetermined outcome. Members were asked to evaluate governance models based on evidence, community input, and best practices from other jurisdictions.

### **I. Scope and Guiding Questions**

The Working Group was tasked with advancing three central objectives:

1. **Clarify the roles and responsibilities of elected officials and City leadership;**
2. **Strengthen financial management and budgeting practices;** and
3. **Improve accountability, transparency, and public access to government.**

### **II. Community Engagement and Research**

The Working Group's process combined **extensive community engagement with comparative research and expert consultation**. Specifically, the Working Group:

- Conducted **60+ structured interviews** with key stakeholders;

- Hosted **14 public meetings across all Council districts** to ensure geographic representation;
- Engaged **750+ residents directly**; and
- Reviewed governance models and best practices from peer cities across California and nationally.

This process ensured that the recommendations were both **community-informed and grounded in real-world governance experience**.

### III. Key Finding: Misalignment Between Authority and Expectations

Across interviews, surveys, and public input, the Working Group identified a central, unifying issue:

There is a persistent misalignment between what Oakland residents expect their government to do and what the Charter actually empowers City leaders to do.

Residents expect:

- The Mayor to be clearly responsible for delivering services;
- The Council to legislate, oversee, and advocate effectively; and
- The system as a whole to function cohesively.

However, the current Charter does not consistently support those expectations, resulting in:

- Diffused accountability,
- Operational inefficiencies, and
- Challenges in delivering timely and effective services.

The Working Group concluded that Oakland’s governance challenges are not solely the result of policy decisions or leadership changes. They are **structural**.

As a result, meaningful and lasting improvement requires **Charter reform that creates a clear, coherent, and accountable system of government aligned with Oakland’s current needs and future goals**.

## ANALYSIS AND PROPOSAL

The Mayor’s Charter Reform Working Group recommends that Oakland adopt a “**strong mayor, strong council**” **governance structure** that clearly defines roles, strengthens accountability, and aligns authority with responsibility.

### A. Core Structural Framework

Under this model:

#### Mayor (Executive Branch)

The Mayor serves as the City's **chief executive**, responsible for:

- Managing City departments and operations;
- Implementing laws and policies adopted by the Council;
- Proposing the City's annual budget; and
- Ensuring delivery of core services to residents.

The Mayor is also granted:

- **General veto authority** over legislation that can be overturned by two thirds of the council ; and
- **Budget line-item veto authority**, enabling targeted adjustments to specific appropriations.

These tools align executive accountability with the authority necessary to manage operations effectively.

### **City Council (Legislative Branch)**

The City Council remains the **legislative body**, with strengthened authority to:

- Adopt ordinances and set City policy;
- Review, amend, and adopt the City budget;
- Conduct oversight hearings and investigations;
- Confirm key mayoral appointments, where applicable;
- Approve contracts and major policy decisions; and
- **Override mayoral vetoes by a two-thirds supermajority**, preserving legislative checks and balances.

The Working Group emphasizes that a strong executive must be paired with a strong, well-resourced city council to ensure accountability.

### **Strengthening Legislative Capacity**

To support the Council's expanded oversight role, the Working Group recommends establishing an **Independent Budget and Legislative Analyst Office**, modeled after offices in peer cities.

This office would provide:

- Independent fiscal analysis of the City budget;
- Policy analysis of proposed legislation;
- Evaluation of implementation feasibility and operational impacts; and
- Ongoing support for Council oversight responsibilities.

### **Clarifying Constituent Services and Section 218 Reform**

- Affirm the Council's role in **constituent services and inquiry**;

- Establish clear, direct communication channels between Councilmembers and City departments; and
- Require **timely and transparent responses** from the executive branch.

At the same time, the revised framework preserves a clear boundary:

- Councilmembers **may not direct or coerce staff** in administrative matters, protecting the integrity of executive operations.

This approach shifts Section 218 from a primarily prohibitive framework to one that **enables effective service delivery while maintaining appropriate separation of powers**.

### **Full-Time Council and Compensation Reform**

The Working Group finds that Oakland’s Charter currently lacks clarity regarding whether Council service is full-time, despite expectations that it functions as such.

The measure:

- Explicitly defines the Council as a **full-time legislative body**;
- Prohibits outside employment to ensure independence and focus; and
- Aligns compensation with **all elected officials** through regular review by the Public Ethics Commission.

This recommendation is grounded in both governance best practices and an **equity rationale**: ensuring that public service is accessible to individuals from all backgrounds, not only those with independent financial means.

### **Mayoral Veto and Budget Line-Item Veto**

The Working Group strongly supports the inclusion of:

- A **general mayoral veto**, and
- A **budget line-item veto**,

as core components of a balanced system.

The report emphasizes that:

- These tools are **checks and balances**, not unilateral powers;
- The Council retains final authority through **supermajority override**; and
- The budget line-item veto functions as a **“scalpel, not a hatchet,”** allowing targeted corrections rather than all-or-nothing budget conflicts.

The existence of these tools is expected to:

- Improve fiscal discipline;

- Reduce high-stakes budget standoffs; and
- Encourage earlier collaboration between the branches.

## **B. Rejection of Alternative Governance Models**

The Working Group explicitly evaluated and rejected alternative proposals, other than the ones specifically mentioned in the report, including models that attempt to blend council-manager and strong-mayor features.

The report concludes that such models:

- Are not widely used or recognized as best practice;
- Introduce additional complexity and confusion; and
- Fail to resolve the underlying problem of **unclear authority and accountability**.

Instead, the Working Group determined that Oakland should adopt a **coherent, widely understood governance model** aligned with established best practices.

## **C. Charter Reform Working Group Detailed Descriptions**

The Working Group's recommendations reflect a comprehensive, evidence-based conclusion:

Oakland's current challenges are rooted in structural ambiguity. A clear, balanced system featuring a strong executive and a strengthened legislative branch is necessary to improve performance, accountability, and public trust.

By aligning authority with responsibility, strengthening oversight, and modernizing key provisions of the Charter, the proposed reforms establish a governance framework capable of meeting Oakland's current needs and future challenges.

**The following recommendations below are incorporated into the measure**

### **Section 218: Constituent Affairs and Non-Interference**

The proposed replacement for Section 218 is intended to protect Councilmembers' ability to serve as accessible points of contact for residents, while preserving the prohibition on directing, ordering, or coercing City staff. The revised structure: (1) requires each department under the Mayor's or City Administrator's jurisdiction to maintain at least one designated Council liaison; (2) allow Councilmembers to still broadly communicate with city staff to request information, report constituent complaints, submit and follow up on service requests, and obtain status updates; (3) requires timely and reasonable responses; and (4) preserve the prohibition on Council interference with administrative affairs and staff-level decision-making.

This approach moves the city away from prohibitory language in the charter and toward a balanced framework that highlights Council's ability to advocate and solve constituents requests while keeping staff protected from undue pressure. It also modernizes a decades-old provision

that was framed for a different era of municipal governance and better reflects today's expectations for transparency, responsiveness, and service delivery.

### **Full-Time Council and Compensation Alignment**

The Working Group recommends making explicit in the Charter that City Council service is a **full-time legislative role**, accompanied by a prohibition on outside employment. While Oakland has long operated with the expectation of full-time Council service, the Charter does not currently codify this standard—creating ambiguity that is inconsistent with the expectations for other elected officials and with practices in comparable strong-mayor, strong council cities.

Clarifying full-time service in the Charter will align Oakland with peer jurisdictions and ensure that the City Council is fully equipped to function as a co-equal branch of government. In strong-mayor systems, full-time councils are the norm, reflecting the significant responsibilities associated with legislative decision-making, budget approval, and oversight of executive operations. A full-time Council is essential to providing robust policy analysis, conducting effective oversight, and serving as a meaningful check and balance on executive authority.

To support this structure, the Charter amendment would:

- **Specify full-time Council service**, making explicit what is currently assumed and bringing consistency to how Oakland defines the roles and expectations of its elected officials. Establishing Council service as explicitly full-time is also an equity imperative: when the role is functionally full-time but not clearly defined or compensated as such, it can exclude individuals who cannot afford to subsidize public service with outside income or personal wealth—disproportionately impacting working-class residents and communities of color and limiting who is able to serve.
- **Prohibit outside employment for Councilmembers**, ensuring independence, reducing potential conflicts of interest, and reinforcing a full-time focus on legislative and oversight responsibilities. This prohibition further advances equity by ensuring that all Councilmembers, regardless of personal financial circumstances, are able to dedicate their full time and attention to public service, rather than balancing competing employment demands.
- **Strengthen the Council's capacity to serve constituents**, including affirming its role in constituent services and inquiry, establishing clear and direct communication channels with the Mayor, City Administrator, and City departments, and requiring timely and transparent responses to Council requests for information and service updates. These improvements help ensure that all Oakland residents, particularly those in historically underserved communities can receive responsive, accessible, and equitable City services.
- **Preserve appropriate boundaries between branches of government**, maintaining prohibitions on directing or coercing City staff in administrative matters while supporting effective communication and accountability. By pairing clear boundaries with strong communication channels will support a governance model that is both accountable and

equitable, ensuring that residents can access services through their elected representatives without compromising the integrity of executive operations.

In parallel, the Working Group recommended aligning salary-setting provisions for Councilmembers with those applicable to all City of Oakland elected officials, including the Mayor, City Attorney, and City Auditor. A comprehensive salary survey of similarly sized strong mayor, strong council cities should be conducted to ensure that compensation reflects the scope and demands of full-time legislative service.

The proposal to align salaries to ensure that Oakland remains a leader in ethical governance and responsive to the city's evolving needs was initially recommended by the Public Ethics Commission subcommittee (PEC) in 2024, where they recommended transferring the mayoral salary setting to the PEC.

Moving to a transparent and clear process would ensure fairness, transparency, and consistency across all elected offices. Any changes with fiscal implications can then be considered within the City's broader budgetary process.

Establishing a full-time Council and aligning compensation is also fundamentally an **equity issue**. Under the current structure where expectations are effectively full-time but not formally defined or compensated accordingly, the role of city council may be inaccessible to individuals who cannot afford to subsidize public service with outside income or personal resources. This dynamic creates barriers that disproportionately impact working-class residents and communities of color, limiting who is able to serve and whose perspectives are represented in City governance.

By explicitly establishing full-time service, prohibiting outside employment, and aligning compensation with peer cities, Oakland can help ensure that Council service is accessible to a broader and more representative cross-section of residents. Equitable compensation enables Councilmembers to fully dedicate their time and attention to legislative work, oversight, and constituent services without financial strain or competing obligations. This, in turn, strengthens the quality of policymaking and oversight, particularly on issues that most impact underserved communities, and advances a governance model that is more inclusive, accountable, and responsive.

When Councilmembers have the time, compensation, and institutional support necessary to govern effectively, the entire system benefits: legislative quality improves, oversight becomes more rigorous, fiscal decisions are more informed, and the Council can fully perform its role as a co-equal branch in a strong-mayor system.

### **Independent Budget and Legislative Analyst**

To strengthen legislative capacity, the Working Group recommends reestablishing a permanent Budget and Legislative Analyst office, similar to the offices used in Los Angeles, San Diego, and the California Legislature. The office would provide independent analysis of budgets, fiscal

impacts, policy interactions, staffing implications, and operational capacity. The Council's independent analytical capacity is essential to oversight and better budget decision-making.

### **Mayor Veto and Budget Line-Item Veto**

The report supports giving the Mayor a general veto and budget line-item veto so that the executive branch has a targeted, accountable tool to promote negotiation and coordination with key decision makers. The key policy rationale is precision: a budget line-item veto is less disruptive than forcing the Mayor into an all-or-nothing choice on the full budget. Council would retain the power to override vetoes by supermajority, preserving the balance of power.

The proposed budget line-item veto framework is intended to reduce crisis governance, encourage negotiation before final adoption, and improve public clarity about exactly which items are in dispute. It is not designed to diminish Council's budget role, but to make the budget process more transparent and collaborative.

### **Strong Mayor, Strong Council**

The Working Group's conclusion is that Oakland should not choose between executive clarity and legislative strength. It should have both. A strong Mayor with authority to manage city operations and veto legislation is paired with a strong Council that sets policy, controls the legislative process, confirms appointments where required, conducts hearings, and exercises independent oversight supported by its own analytical staff. In the Working Group's view, a strong executive and a strengthened legislature are not competing ideas; they are two halves of a coherent, accountable system.

### **Department Head Confirmation Framework**

The proposed Charter amendment establishes a targeted confirmation process for a limited set of senior department leadership positions central to city operations, fiscal management, workforce administration, and infrastructure delivery. At the same time, the proposal preserves the core principle of a strong-mayor system by recognizing the Mayor as the City's chief executive responsible for managing operations and leading the executive branch. To balance oversight with operational efficiency, the proposal requires the Council to act on nominations within 30 calendar days or the nominee is deemed confirmed. This framework supports accountability while allowing Oakland to remain competitive in recruiting and retaining highly qualified department leadership and avoiding prolonged vacancies in critical operational roles.

### **Fiscal Impact**

The immediate fiscal impact of forwarding charter amendments to the voters is expected to be limited to standard election-related and administrative costs associated with ballot placement and public notice.

Potential ongoing fiscal impacts may include salary adjustments for elected officials if the compensation framework is updated by the Ethics Commission and any resources associated with a Council budget and legislative analyst office.

The Working Group's report frames these changes as investments in better governance: stronger budget discipline, clearer accountability, better oversight, and more effective service delivery can reduce downstream costs associated with confusion, duplication, delays, and workarounds.

### **Public Outreach and Interest**

The Working Group's community engagement was extensive and was central to the recommendations. The report states that the process included more than 750 residents engaged through public meetings and listening sessions, more than 60 interviews with current and former city leaders and subject-matter experts, 14 community sessions across Oakland, and one session focused on current city staff. The facilitators also compiled research and community input for review by the Working Group.

The Working Group letter and report further explains that the process was designed to be inclusive, nonpartisan, and Oakland-focused, with SPUR and the League of Women Voters of Oakland co-facilitating the work. The letter emphasizes that the recommendations emerged from direct conversations with everyday Oaklanders and from comparative study of other municipal models.

### **Coordination**

Staff worked with the Office of the City Attorney in drafting the Charter Reform legislation, along with coordination with the Mayor's Charter Reform Working Group, the League of Women Voters of Oakland, and SPUR throughout the process. City staff also coordinated with relevant internal policy, budget, and communications functions to align the report, resolution, and proposed Charter language with the Working Group's recommendations.

### **Sustainable Opportunities**

**Economic:** The proposal supports a more stable and predictable fiscal environment by clarifying authority, strengthening budget oversight, and improving executive-legislative coordination. Those changes can reduce delay, improve capital and operating planning, and make it easier for the City to deliver services that support business activity, neighborhood investment, and long-term economic resilience.

**Infrastructure:** A more coherent governance structure can improve the City's ability to plan, approve, and implement infrastructure, transportation, climate, and sustainability priorities. Better coordination between the executive and legislative branches can also help Oakland make more reliable decisions about capital projects, maintenance, permitting, and service delivery that affect environmental quality and hazard resilience.

### **Race and Equity**

Improving functionality and access for historically marginalized communities has the universal benefit of lowering barriers and advancing good governance for all residents of Oakland. This is described by Angela Glover Blackwell, founder of Policy Link as the curb-cut effect.

The Working Group repeatedly noted that ambiguity in governance disproportionately burdens residents with the least time, resources, or political capital to navigate City Hall. Clarifying roles, strengthening direct service pathways, and expanding Council capacity can reduce reliance on personal relationships and informal workarounds. Making Council service explicitly full-time and aligning compensation with the role's demands also broadens who can realistically serve, which supports a more representative and equitable democracy.

Darlene Flynn, Director, Department of Race and Equity: Embedding fairness and justice (equity) in everything the City does is a policy by ordinance passed by City Council action in 2015, with strong community support. Advancing equity requires City system change calibrated to close outcome disparities and improve service effectiveness to uplift conditions in underserved communities in Oakland. Institutional change is a challenging proposition, and it is complicated by unclear executive accountability for its implementation across departments. Strong, cohesive commitment to data driven analysis and outcome focused action from the top would expedite installation of solutions that serve Oaklanders equitably. Conversely, the current arrangement delays progress in advancing life, giving change that is on the critical path to the City of Oakland becoming a thriving, healthy place for all.

**ACTION REQUESTED OF THE CITY COUNCIL**

Adopt the attached resolution expressing the City Council's intent to place the Charter Reform measure before the voters, approving the policy framework reflected in the Working Group report, and directing staff to prepare the final ballot language and related materials consistent with the Council's action and applicable law.

For questions, contact Preston Kilgore, Deputy Chief of Staff, [pkilgore@oaklandca.gov](mailto:pkilgore@oaklandca.gov)

This memo was prepared by Preston Kilgore, Deputy Chief of Staff.

**APPENDIX A - MEMBERS OF THE MAYOR'S WORKING GROUP ON CHARTER REFORM**

Fred Blackwell - CEO, San Francisco Foundation.

Hon. Barbara J. Parker - former Oakland City Attorney.

Corey Cook - Vice President and CEO, Cal Poly Solano Campus.

Ben Rosenfield - Public Finance Expert.

Zach Goldman - Policy and Labor Leader.

Ahmed Ali Bob - Board Chair, Oakland Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce.

Mark Morodomi - former Counsel, Oakland Public Ethics Commission.

Richard Fuentes - Manager of Special Projects, Executive Office of Performance and Budget, BART.

## **APPENDIX B - WORKING GROUP LETTER (VERBATIM)**

April 9th, 2026

RE: Referral of Charter reform to the ballot

Honorable Councilmembers,

We are Oakland residents, community advocates, labor leaders, and business representatives who were honored to serve on the Charter Reform Working Group, and we stand behind the community engagement process and the final recommendations of our report. While we all have different backgrounds and life experiences, and don't agree on everything, we unanimously concluded that Oakland needs structural change, and the City Council has an opportunity right now to make it happen.

**We Worked Independently with a Laser Focus on Oakland, Our City**

Our process was designed to be inclusive of community feedback, combined with comprehensive study of other successful models, both of which led to our recommendations. Mayor Lee, in partnership with Council President Jenkins and Councilmember Ramachandran, convened the Working Group, set the initial goals, and then stepped back. This process was not engineered to reach a predetermined conclusion. SPUR and the League of Women Voters of Oakland, two nonpartisan organizations with a focus on good government, co-facilitated the work. We examined the pros and cons of both models for city governance without any prior ideological commitment to either.

Over five months, the Working Group conducted more than 60 one-on-one interviews with current and former city council members, city administrators, department heads, labor leaders, business representatives, and policy experts. We held 14 public community sessions across all council districts and administered a survey, ultimately engaging more than 750 Oakland residents. We were part of that process. We showed up. We listened and learned from everyday Oaklanders from all walks of life. The recommendations that emerged reflect what Oaklanders believe is needed to address the city's pressing needs.

**There is Consensus on the Root Cause of Oakland's Governance Problems**

Interviews, surveys, and direct conversations revealed a broad consensus. The core problem is that there is a misalignment between public expectations and the Charter-defined authority of the City Council, Mayor, and City Administrator. This is the formal root of Oakland's dysfunction. We have for many years operated with separate legislative and executive branches. However, we have lost the tools to ensure they work together effectively.

Aligning the Charter language with the right tools to support the already established system solves the problem. A system that establishes a truly strong mayor in charge of operations and a city council that legislates and provides effective oversight would create a balance of powers and the foundation for clear lines of authority and accountability. The mayor and the council would be set up to succeed in the roles they were elected to accomplish. A strong executive and

a strengthened legislature are not competing ideas; they are two halves of a coherent, accountable system.

### The Proposed “Third Option” is a Confusing and Unique System That Doesn’t Solve the Underlying Problems

We also want to speak plainly about the supposed “third option” that former proponents of the council-manager model have put forth as an alternative. First, it is not really a third option. It keeps the core elements of council manager systems - placing the mayor back on the council and appointing a city manager to run the city. It creates a hybrid by giving the mayor a veto power.

This “third-option” is a negotiated local compromise that only exists in one city, Long Beach. It is not a replicable design standard recognized in scholarly research or advocated for by practitioners. It directly contradicts the advocates' arguments that the City should adopt a model used by many other cities.

Veto power exists to balance authority between two distinct branches of government. The “third option” obscures the fact that giving a veto power to a mayor who is a member of the city council is fundamentally different. In a strong-mayor system, the mayor operates independently - fully empowered to run the city and deliver services - and uses the veto to ensure that policy decisions reflect real operational constraints. The council, in turn, holds override power as a counterbalance. Together, these checks create incentives for both sides to collaborate and align budgets and policies around shared goals.

Giving the veto to a mayor sitting as head of council does not foster that same productive interaction. Instead it creates an imbalance that is difficult to justify and harder to explain to the public. When the mayor supports a measure, that support counts as one vote. When the mayor opposes a measure, the veto raises the threshold for passage. That is not a balanced structure; it gives the mayor a tool for obstruction.

The Working Group’s recommendations were carefully tailored to develop a coherent system that balances operational realities, budget decisions, and policy. Diluting the proposal or substituting a unique system would repeat exactly the samekind of confusing structure that led to the dysfunctional governance system that exists today.

### Polling Data Indicates that Voters Support Our Recommendations

Importantly, whatever moves forward must have the support of voters. The polling data affirms the conclusions reached by the Working Group after extensive dialogue and engagement with residents. Three independent polls, conducted by different organizations, at different times, with different methodologies, have reached the same conclusion. A February 2026 poll by the East Bay Polling Institute found 64% of voters support amending the city charter to adopt a strong-mayor system. The 2025 Oakland Chamber of Commerce Pulse of Oakland Poll found 61% of likely voters in support, with half actively opposing a council-manager alternative, and only 13% choosing it as their first choice. A March 2026 poll released by SPUR and conducted by David Binder Research found 63% of likely November 2026 voters prefer a strong-mayor

system, with 73% supporting mayoral veto power subject to a two-thirds Council override, and 72% supporting an independent Budget and Legislative Analyst Office. These show unequivocal support for the Working Group's recommendations.

### Conclusion

More than 750 Oaklanders participated in this process. We were among them. We are asking you to respect the process and honor our commitment to a better Oakland for all. We urge you to advance a ballot measure that reflects the Working Group's recommendations and the will of Oakland voters.

Oakland has a real opportunity to get this right. The process was credible. The community showed up. The evidence is clear and the public is ready.

We urge you not to let this moment pass.

Sincerely,

Fred Blackwell  
Barbara J. Parker  
Corey Cook  
Ben Rosenfield  
Zach Goldman  
Ahmed Ali Bob  
Mark Morodomi  
Richard Fuentes

## **APPENDIX C - FAQ ADDENDUM**

The FAQ can be found [here](#) and will be included as part of the file.