

City of Santa Clara

Presentation to the Planning Commission Regarding the City’s “Charter Project” [2026] and Planning Commission’s Role as a Stakeholder for Input on Article X and Charter Section 1006

March 11, 2026, 6:00 p.m.
Council Chambers



**City of
Santa Clara**
The Center of What's Possible

City Charter Basics

- A city charter is the legal document that serves as the city’s “constitution” establishing its government structure, powers and responsibilities.
- Charter cities have authority over their “municipal affairs” which generally include
 - Municipal election matters (qualifications, terms, districts, who is elected/appointed)
 - Land use and zoning decisions (subject in recent years to state preemption on housing)
 - Structure of government/city work force
 - Fiscal policy (how we budget, spend and account for our revenues, with a lot of preemption on taxes and fees)
 - How the city awards and implement public works and municipal contracts (also a lot of preemption)
- Charter provisions typically provide a general framework for government structure and operations; ordinances adopted by City Councils then implement these general rules with more detailed regulations.
- Can only be amended by a vote of the people.



The Charter Project Origins

- **Santa Clara Charter is outdated.** Adopted in 1951; amended multiple times since, but has gotten out of line with state law, City’s actual practices, and what are considered “best practices.”
- **Examples.** Annual (vs. two year) budgeting, Public Works and Use of City forces for contracts in excess of \$1,000 require formal bidding and/or Council approval. No provision for design/build procurement. BOLT assigned responsibility to run the City’s library system.
- **CAO Initiated** concept of a comprehensive review and update of the City Charter as part of the Governance and Ethics Committee in early 2025.
- **Approved and activated** by the City Council through the appointment of a Charter Review Committee and approval of Bylaws in October of 2025. Committee consists of 13 members, 7 chosen by appointment, 6 by lottery.



Charter Project Implementation

- **Bylaws provide the stated purpose:** Charter project intended to develop of comprehensive Charter amendment to (1) make corrections, (2) eliminate ambiguities, (3) align Charter with state law/current City/best practices, (4) easier to understand and apply.
- **Process driven by practical/legal considerations:** NOT to implement major restructuring of City operations or change City's election process.
- **CAO staff** will draft proposed modifications based upon input from City staff, impacted “stakeholders” (Boards and Commissions, unions, the public) and, of course, CRC members.
- **Contemplates the creation of Ad Hoc Subcommittees** as “working groups”
- **Comprehensive amendment** to be presented to the Council and ultimately the voters in November 2026.



Ad Hoc Subcommittees

- Charter Review Committee created Six Ad Hoc Subcommittees.
 - **Group One:** Powers and Structure of City Government: Rules/Process for Action
 - **Group Two:** City Council: Elections, Powers and Conduct of Meetings
 - **Group Three:** Senior Officials: Duties and Qualifications
 - **Group Four:** Boards and Commissions: Composition, Powers and Duties
 - **Group Five:** Civil Service: General Rules for Classified and Unclassified Employees; Commission Composition and Duties
 - **Group Six:** Fiscal Administration and Procurement

Group Four Boards and Commissions: Composition, Powers and Duties

- **Meetings so far:**
 - November 13, 2025
 - February 12, 2026
- **Next Meeting:**
 - March 12, 2026 (tomorrow)
 - Board of Library Trustees President, Jonathan Evans to present.

Role of the Planning Commission in the Charter Review Process

- Planning Commission identified as a “stakeholder” who’s input needs to be sought in connection with the review of the **Boards and Commissions Article X** of the Charter.
- Particularly interested in PC input on **Charter Sections 1006 and 1007**, which set forth the composition and “duties and powers” of the Planning Commission.
- Not singled out: Other “Charter Based” Boards and Commissions also identified as stakeholders (Parks and Recreation, Board of Library Trustees and Civil Service Commission) and their input will also be solicited
- Civil Service Commission solicitation already occurred.
- Board of Library Trustees in Process.

Issues to Consider

- Does the seven-member composition comprised of qualified electors of the City still make sense? [Section 1006]
- Does the list of your “powers and duties” properly describe your role and function? [Section 1007]
- Do other elements of the Boards and Commissions Article X of general application create any issues? E.g., process for appointment/filling vacancies, terms, attendance requirements.
- Other issues?

Next Steps

- General discussion tonight on how you might want to proceed
- Agendize for future “in-depth” discussion and action (I will attend if possible)
- Action should include identifying a Planning Commission representative to present the Commission’s recommendations, if possible at a Group Four Ad Hoc Subcommittee meeting.