



Lessons and Recommendations for the 2027-2028 Charter Review Preparation Process

Community Involvement Committee

Introduction and Background

At our September retreat, the Community Involvement Committee (CIC) identified the importance of reviewing and preparing for the county's charter review process and voted to create a subcommittee to focus on this topic. The Charter Review Subcommittee met sixteen times between October 2025 and June 2026. We dubbed this period of foundational work, before the charter review process began in earnest, "Phase 0." During this time we worked closely with the Office of Community Involvement (OCI) to educate ourselves, provide feedback, and discuss potential ways to improve the process. We began by learning about the Multnomah County Home Rule Charter and gathering information about previous iterations of the charter review. We also met with staff and participants in the City of Portland's recent charter review to hear from them about the lessons they learned. We took this data and developed ideal attributes of a Charter Review Committee (CRC) member which would align with the county's core values. These attributes, along with examples from charter review processes in other jurisdictions, guided our creation of CRC application questions and the criteria upon which they would be reviewed. Another focus of our work was public education. We reviewed many other charter review websites and recommended content and material updates for the county website to assist the public in learning about the process. Furthermore, we have produced a recommended list of public outreach priorities to expand the access to information about the charter review to Multnomah County residents.

As the charter review process has now entered "Phase 1" of its work, we believed it a good time to reflect on what we have learned so far and report out our findings. Through this process, we identified several opportunities to strengthen future charter review efforts. These recommendations are intended to improve continuity, increase community participation, and build a more sustainable and effective charter review process. Recommendations are organized by those requiring Board of County Commissioner funding or policy direction and those that can be implemented administratively by the OCI and the CIC.

Recommendations to the Board of County Commissioners

1. Invest in Early Planning and Cross-County Coordination

The success of the charter review process depends on beginning planning well before recruitment begins. Multnomah County should begin planning at least 18 months before the first Committee meeting and include funding to ensure sufficient staffing, leadership, and cross-departmental coordination throughout the process.

Implementation considerations:

- Approve resources for OCI to begin planning and carrying out key activities at least 18 months before the first Charter Review Committee general meeting (or earlier if future timelines allow).
- Approve resources for OCI to conduct voter and public education about the charter review at least 12 months before the first Charter Review Committee general meeting.

2. Build Long-Term Institutional Capacity for Charter Review

Rather than treating charter review as a temporary project every six years, Multnomah County should establish sustainable organizational capacity to support charter review planning, public awareness, civic education, and community engagement on an ongoing basis.

Implementation considerations:

- Approve resources for a permanent, full time, Charter Review Coordinator (or Civic Involvement/Education Coordinator) in the OCI who is responsible for:
 - Charter education,
 - community outreach,
 - year-round civic education,
 - voter education,
 - leadership development, and
 - future planning and research.
- Explore stable funding mechanisms, including whether long-term staffing should be established, including through County Code or Charter.

3. Evaluate Charter and Governance Changes to Strengthen Future Reviews

In addition, we would recommend the Board or Charter Review Committee should consider evaluating whether changes to the Charter or governing processes would improve continuity, transparency, and overall effectiveness of future charter reviews.

Potential areas for consideration:

- Whether charter review should occur every six years or every ten years.
- Whether the County's review cycle should be staggered from the City of Portland's charter review process.
- Whether Charter language regarding appointments should be clarified or changed to avoid uncertainty during leadership transitions.
- Whether other governance or structural changes would improve continuity and long-term success.
- Explore stable funding mechanisms including whether long-term staffing should be established through County Code or Charter.

Recommendations to the Office of Community Involvement (OCI) and the Community Involvement Committee (CIC)

4. Conduct Early Planning and Cross-County Coordination

The success of the charter review process depends on beginning planning well before recruitment begins. OCI should begin planning at least 18 months before the first Committee meeting and ensure sufficient staffing, leadership, and cross-departmental coordination throughout the process.

- Incorporate charter review planning, education, and support into the OCI's annual planning as a strategic focus area.
- Assign dedicated staff and project management resources early, at least one year before recruitment.
- Designate clear leadership responsible for driving the process.
- Convene a cross-departmental planning team that includes OCI, Elections, Communications, County Attorney, and other relevant offices.
- Document a formal "Phase 0" planning process that can be replicated in future charter review cycles.
- Preserve lessons learned and planning materials for future Charter Review teams.

5. Continue Leveraging the CIC as a Planning Partner

The CIC's Phase 0 Charter Review Subcommittee added a meaningful community perspective to the planning process and models a community-centered approach to designing a community-centered project. For these reasons this partnership should continue to serve in an advisory capacity for future charter reviews.

Suggested responsibilities include:

- Reviewing application materials.
- Reviewing interview questions.
- Reviewing educational materials and FAQs.
- Providing feedback on outreach and recruitment strategies.
- Helping identify opportunities to improve equitable community engagement.
- Supporting the ongoing work of the charter review process and Charter Review Committee, beyond Phase 0. Including but not limited to assisting with public engagement and outreach, meeting with CRC members, and providing feedback and support to staff and elected officials.

The CIC may also wish to consider updating its bylaws or annual work planning process to formally invite participation in future charter review planning when appropriate.

6. Standardize Public Education, CRC Recruitment and Selection Resources

Future charter reviews should build upon the work completed during this planning cycle rather than recreating materials each time.

Suggested actions:

- Update public education tools and resources.
- Maintain updated application materials.
- Develop standardized interview questions.
- Establish consistent evaluation criteria.
- Identify and prepare application reviewers early.
- Document characteristics of an effective Charter Review Committee member while preserving flexibility to recruit a diverse committee.

7. Maintain a Charter Review Planning Best Practices and Lessons Learned

OCI should preserve and regularly update planning documents and best practices developed during this charter review cycle.

We recommend OCI create a charter toolkit that could include, but is not limited to:

- Phase 0 planning timeline
- CRC outreach strategies
- Communications materials
- FAQs and other website and outreach pages
- Recruitment plans
- Lessons learned
- Sample project and outreach plans
- Community engagement resources
- Learnings and connections to peer jurisdictions regarding staffing models, outreach strategies, committee recruitment, public education, and overall governance.

This documentation would reduce duplicated effort and improve continuity between charter review cycles.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we hope that current and future County Commissioners, County Staff, and Charter Review Committee members take the lessons learned during this planning phase under advisement as they plan and execute future charter reviews.

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