



Interim Recommendations to the Coral Gables City Commission

City of Coral Gables
Charter Review Committee

Chairperson Donald D. Slesnick, II.
Vice Chairperson Raul Valdes-Fauli
Board Member Annie Betancourt
Board Member Eve Boutsis
Board Member Nestor Menendez
Board Member Jane Moscovitz
Board Member Felix Pardo

The Charter Review Committee was convened in Resolution 2023-267 in September of 2023. In 2025 the City Commission adopted Resolution 2025-89 adding two additional members to the Charter Review Committee.

The Charter Review Committee members include Chairperson Donald D. Slesnick, II., Vice Chairperson Raul Valdes-Fauli, Board Member Annie Betancourt, Board Member Eve Boutsis, Board Member Nestor Menendez, Board Member Jane Moscovitz, and Board Member Felix Pardo.

As requested by the City Commission the Charter Review Committee held two town hall meetings where it heard the public's suggestions for Charter revisions. In addition, the City Commission and Charter Review Committee held a joint meeting where the City Commission provided guidance to the Charter Review Committee. The City also provided all comments received via email and the City website for the Committee's consideration. Following the two town halls, the Charter Review Committee held regular meetings to discuss proposed changes to the Charter and review the existing provisions. The Charter Review Committee has worked methodically through the City Charter and suggestions from the public and Commission. This memo outlines the Charter Review Committee's interim recommendations to the City Commission regarding potential amendments to the Charter. The Charter Review Committee continues to review the City Charter and will make its final recommendations at a later date.



To: Mayor Lago, Vice Mayor Anderson, Commissioner Castro, Commissioner Fernandez, and Commissioner Lara

Cc: Peter Iglesias, City Manager and Billy Urquia, City Clerk

From: Cristina M. Suárez, City Attorney

Re: Charter Review Committee Interim Recommendations

Date: January 6, 2026

Executive Summary

The Charter Review Committee was convened in Resolution No. 2023-267 in September of 2023. As requested by the City Commission, the Charter Review Committee held two town hall meetings where it heard the public's suggestions for Charter revisions. In addition, the City Commission and Charter Review Committee held a joint meeting where the City Commission provided its guidance. The City also provided all comments received via email and the City website for the Committee's consideration. Following the two town halls, the Charter Review Committee held five meetings to discuss proposed changes to the Charter and to review the existing provisions. The Charter Review Committee worked methodically through the City Charter and suggestions from the public and Commission. In May 2025, the City Commission adopted Resolution No. 2025-89 revising the membership of the Charter Review Committee to add two additional members. Since then, the Charter Review Committee has met three additional times.

The City Attorney's Office presents this memorandum summarizing the Charter Review Committee's discussions and recommendations to date to the City Commission for updates to the City Charter. After extensive review of the existing Charter provisions, along with consideration of those amendments suggested by the public and the City Commission, the Charter Review Committee has adopted various recommendations to the City Commission. These recommendations include the Committee's feedback on the ballot items currently scheduled for an April 2026 special election, along with other suggested ballot questions proposing amendments to the City Charter. This interim report also broadly captures the discussions and previous motions

of the Charter Review Committee and summarizes issues that will be further considered by the Charter Review Committee in the new year.

I. ELECTION DATE

The Charter Review Committee reviewed the language adopted by the City Commission in Resolution No. 2025-301 which called for a special mail ballot election to change the City's election and associated dates to coincide with the date of national elections.¹ Following extensive discussion regarding the language of the question as presented in Resolution No. 2025-301, the Charter Review Committee suggested that the final clause of the question be stricken to avoid any challenge to the neutrality of the question's wording.

As such, the Charter Review Committee recommended in a 7-0 vote that the question posed to the voters during the April 21, 2026 special mail ballot election read as follows:

AMENDING THE CHARTER TO CHANGE THE CITY'S ELECTION AND ASSOCIATED DATES TO COINCIDE WITH NATIONAL ELECTIONS

Shall the City Charter be amended to:

Change the month and day when the City of Coral Gables holds its general elections from April of each odd year to the date of the national election in November of each even year commencing in 2026, resulting in a four-month reduction of current elected officials' terms, and adjusting associated qualifying and run-off dates, ~~with the intention of increasing voter turnout and decreasing election costs?~~

¹ Previously, the Charter Review Committee had adopted two recommendations regarding the election date. The first, to limit election date changes to referendums or by adoption of an ordinance by a 4/5 vote, was later rescinded by a 7-0 vote on December 4, 2025 due to a recent case opinion of the Third District Court of Appeal. The second, a broad policy statement to keep the City election in April of odd-numbered years, was also rescinded on December 4, 2025 by the Charter Review Committee in a 5-2 vote.

II. RUN-OFF ELECTION

The Charter Review Committee discussed the City's current election process which includes a run-off election should no candidate reach over fifty percent in the general election. The City has held a run-off in each election since the change to the Charter was adopted by the voters in 2016.

Should the City's elections be moved to November, the City's run-off election would take place during early December. The City Clerk advised the Charter Review Committee that the Supervisor of Elections has notified the City that should the City's run-off be moved to December of even years, there will be no early voting sites available for the run-off election.

After discussion regarding the turnout in run-off elections, the Charter Review Committee made the following recommendation pursuant to a 5-2 vote:

That the City Commission send to the voters a question on whether to amend the City Charter to remove the run-off election.

III. TERM LIMITS

Previously, the Charter Review Committee adopted a recommendation in a 3-2 vote to add a new limitation on an individual's ability to be elected, chosen, or appointed as mayor or commissioner if they have served as mayor or commissioner for each of the preceding twelve consecutive years.

Currently, the City Code provides that no person shall serve as mayor for more than eight consecutive years, or commissioner for twelve consecutive years.

Ultimately, on December 4, 2025, the Charter Review Committee approved a motion pursuant to a 4-3 vote to rescind this recommendation.

IV. QUALIFICATIONS FOR OFFICE

At the City Attorney's Office suggestion, the Charter Review Committee reviewed the residency requirement for qualification for running for office in the City. Given recent legal disputes in neighboring municipalities regarding interpretations of residency requirements, the City Attorney's Office suggested amending the City Charter to reflect the City's longstanding interpretation of the residency requirement. Currently, Section 3 of the City Charter provides that "To be a candidate for Mayor or Commissioner, an individual must: be a U.S. Citizen and have resided in the City of Coral Gables for at least one year prior to the election for which he or she seeks office." The City Attorney's Office's suggestion was to clarify the City's interpretation that the one year prior to the election, is the one year "immediately" prior to the election in which the candidate seeks office. The Charter Review Committee considered this suggestion and found that this amendment would provide additional clarity regarding the City's interpretation of this provision. This recommendation was adopted by a 5-0 vote of the Charter Review Committee.

Subsequently, on December 4, 2025 the Charter Review Committee reviewed this recommendation and approved a motion by a 7-0 vote to re-adopt the recommendation with the suggestion that the language be changed to "one year prior to the end of the qualifying period to the election for which he or she seeks office". This would result in a requirement that a candidate be a resident earlier than currently called for in the Charter.

V. COMPENSATION OF ELECTED OFFICIALS

In November of 2026, the Charter Review Committee reviewed the language of Resolution No. 2025-160 in which the City Commission adopted a resolution sending a question to voters which, if adopted, would amend the City Charter to require an affirmative vote of the electors prior to any change to the compensation of the City's elected officials, beyond the annual CPI adjustment.

The language of the current proposed question and charter amendment is as follows:

Resolution No. 2025-160:

REQUIRING A VOTE OF THE ELECTORS PRIOR TO ANY CHANGES TO THE COMPENSATION OF THE CITY'S ELECTED OFFICIALS

Shall the City Charter be amended to require:

That any change to the compensation of the City's elected officials, beyond the annual adjustment to compensation based on the Consumer Price Index as set forth in the Code, requires an affirmative vote of the electors prior to adoption by the City Commission.

_____ YES

_____ NO

Proposed Charter Language:

Sec. 7. - Compensation, Commissioners and Mayor.

The Commission may, by ordinance, provide for the compensation of its members, including the Mayor, and for the allowance of travel and office expenses. Any changes to the compensation of the Commission after November 3, 2026, beyond the annual increases in compensation for elected officials tied to the annual increase in the CPI-W for urban wage earners and clerical workers from the preceding July as set forth in the City Code, shall require a vote of the electors prior to adoption by the City Commission.

The Charter Review Committee reviewed the language and the intent of the Charter amendment and had a lengthy discussion regarding the history of the compensation changes in the City, the ability for the voters to remove elected officials in subsequent elections, and how similar amendments have been applied in neighboring local governments.

The Charter Review Committee discussed that, if voters were unhappy with salaries given to elected officials, they could express that sentiment in the subsequent elections or during the public meetings in which the salary changes were approved.

As a result of such discussions, the Charter Review Committee voted 7-0 to recommend that the City Commission **not** place this question to the voters in the upcoming special mail ballot election.

VI. INITIATIVE AND REFERENDUM

On March 18, 2025, the Charter Review Committee adopted a recommendation that the City Commission put forth a ballot question on whether to amend the City Charter to revise the calculation for the number of signatures required for the initiative process in the City. The proposed change would require the signatures of twenty percent of the average number of voters who voted in the last three regular local elections, rather than the current requirement of twenty percent of registered voters. That recommendation was adopted 3-2. A similar recommendation to amend the calculation for the referendum process failed 2-3.

The power of referendum is the power of the votes to, within thirty days after the Commission adopts an ordinance, request that such ordinance, or a part thereof, be repealed or submitted to a vote of the electors. The power of initiative is the power of the voters to propose ordinances and to have them be adopted by the voters. The City Commission can act on initiated ordinances prior to submission of the proposed ordinance to a vote of the electors.

On December 4, 2025, the Charter Review Committee revisited this recommendation, and, after discussing the inconsistency between the initiative and referendum processes resulting from that prior recommendation, the Charter Review Committee had an extensive discussion regarding the process in neighboring municipalities, the number of registered voters in the City, and the parallel process at the State for constitutional amendments.

Ultimately, the Charter Review Committee voted 7-0 to rescind the previous recommendation regarding the calculation of required signatures in the initiative process. Simultaneously, the Charter Review Committee has requested that the City Attorney's Office to further research the initiative and referendum processes in neighboring municipalities and present that information, along with the Office's suggested cleanups to the initiative and referendum sections of the Charter, at a future meeting of the Charter Review Committee.

The Charter Review Committee requested that the City Commission be made aware that they are continuing to review and research this section of the Charter and will bring their final recommendations, if any, at a later date.

VII. ESTIMATED REVENUES

The Charter Review Committee previously reviewed the section of the Charter requiring that estimated revenues and expenditures be included in the budget estimate provided by City staff to the City Commission in July of each year. On [date], the Charter Review Committee ultimately adopted, by a 5-0 vote, a recommendation to the City Commission to include a question on the ballot on whether to amend the Charter to state that the budget estimate include estimated expenses as well as estimated revenues from non-tax sources.

On December 4, 2025 the Charter Review Committee reviewed the prior recommendation and revised the recommendation to recommend instead that the City Code be amended to incorporate the proposed requirement, rather than send a question to the voters on whether the requirement should be included in the City Charter.

As such, the Charter Review Commission recommended in a 7-0 vote that the City Commission adopt an ordinance including this requirement in the City Code rather than amend the City Charter to include this requirement.

VIII. RESERVE POLICY

On December 4, 2025, the Charter Review Committee reviewed the language of the proposed question set forth in Resolution No. 2022-161. This Resolution calls for a special election to consider a question to amend the Charter to incorporate the City's fund balance and reserve policy and require that expenditure of the general fund reserves (except in certain emergency situations) or amendments to the general fund policy, require an affirmative vote of the electors.

The current proposed ballot question and charter amendment are as follows:

Resolution No. 2025-161

AMENDING THE CHARTER TO INCLUDE A CITY FUND BALANCE AND RESERVE POLICY REQUIREMENT AND APPROVAL OF THE ELECTORS PRIOR TO EXPENDING FUNDS FROM THE GENERAL FUND RESERVE OR AMENDING THAT POLICY

Shall the City Charter be amended to require:

That the City maintain a twenty-five percent general fund reserve requirement and other fund requirements as adopted by the Commission in Ordinance 2025-05, and require that expending funds from the General Fund Reserve, except in those emergency situations outlined in the Ordinance, or amending the City's fund balance and reserve policy, require an affirmative vote of the electors.

_____ YES

_____ NO

Proposed amended charter language:

Sec. 20. Unappropriated Accruing Revenue, Unexpended Balances, General Fund Reserve.

The Commission may, from time to time, appropriate for such uses as it determines any unappropriated accruing revenue of the City as well as the balance remaining for an appropriation after the purpose of the said appropriation has been accomplished or abandoned. The City shall maintain the classifications of Fund Balance adopted in Ordinance 2025-05 which codified the City's Fund Balance and Reserve Policy. The General Fund Reserve shall be maintained at twenty-five percent (25%) of the City's total Operating Expense and Debt Service budgets as outlined in that Ordinance. Any change to the Fund Balance and Reserve Policy, or any expenditure of the General Fund Reserve, other than those funds authorized to be spent pursuant to the emergency powers of the City as authorized in the Charter, City Code, a declaration of emergency or other applicable law, shall be submitted to the electors of the City for approval.

The Charter Review Committee held a lengthy discussion regarding the effect of the proposed Charter change on the City's operations. The Committee discussed in depth the concerns that proposed changes at the State regarding property taxes may have an effect on the City's reserves and reserve policies. Given the possibility of a significant change to the City's tax revenues, along with the current City Code provision, adopted pursuant to Ordinance No. 2025-05, which requires a four-fifths vote of the City Commission to amend the fund balance and reserve policy, or expend those funds, the Charter Review Committee voted 7-0 to recommend that the City Commission **not** present this question to the voters in the April 2026 election.

The Charter Review Committee discussed that because of the concern regarding property taxes, and the changes the City Commission may need to implement to the reserve policy if there is a significant loss of property taxes, that now is not the time to send this question to the voters. The Charter Review Committee found that given the safeguards of the four-fifths vote requirement adopted in Ordinance 2025-05 that this question need not go to the voters at this time. There was also discussion that if there are no significant changes to the collection of property taxes or significant changes in the sources of revenue to the City, that the City Commission may want to consider sending this question to the voters at a later date.

IX. PUBLIC WORKS CONTRACTS

The City Charter currently provides that all contracts for the performance of public works projects or improvements over \$25,000 shall be awarded to the lowest and most responsive bidder, after public advertising and receipt of bids as may be prescribed by ordinance. This results in most public works projects complying with the City's formal solicitation procedure requirements as few public works projects are estimated to cost under \$25,000 in today's economic climate. The then-City Manager suggested increasing this to \$100,000. The Charter Review Committee adopted this recommendation in a 5-0 vote.

On December 4, 2025, the Charter Review Committee revisited this recommendation. Based on discussions with City staff regarding the application of relevant state statutes, the Charter Review Committee amended their recommendation to amend the Charter to only require formal solicitation for those projects over \$300,000 (or as amended by relevant provision of Florida Statutes).

The Charter Review Committee voted 7-0 to recommend that the City Commission send a question to the voters amending Section 24 of the Charter to require all contracts for the performance of public works projects or improvements valued at more than \$300,000 (or as amended by state law) to be awarded the lowest and most responsive bidder after public advertising and receipt of bids.

X. BOARDS AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS

On December 4, 2025 the Charter Review Committee reviewed the proposed language in Resolution No. 2025-211 calling for a special election on the question of whether the Charter should be amended to allow the appointing commissioner or appointed official to remove a board member from that position prior to the expiration of their term for any reason, in so far as that removal is not in conflict with state law.

The current proposed ballot question and charter amendment are as follows:

Resolution No. 2025-211

Proposing the following language for referendum:

AMENDING THE CHARTER TO ALLOW THE APPOINTING COMMISSIONER OR APPOINTED OFFICIAL TO REMOVE A BOARD MEMBER FROM THAT POSITION PRIOR TO THE EXPIRATION OF THAT TERM

Shall the City Charter be amended to:

Allow the City Commissioner, or appointed official, who appointed a member to a City board or committee, to remove that member from that position prior to the expiration of their term , for any reason, in so far as that removal is not in conflict with state law.

_____ YES

_____ NO

Proposed amendment:

Sec. 26. - Advisory Boards, Authority of Commission to Appoint.

The Commission may appoint boards or commissions, composed of such number of City residents as the Commission may deem expedient, consistent with exceptions authorized by law, to act in an advisory capacity in conjunction with any one or more City departments. The members of all such boards and commissions shall serve without compensation and may be removed at any time by a majority vote of the Commission, or by the appointing elected or appointed official, with or without cause, subject to any state requirements for particular boards or committees.

The Charter Review Committee discussed the effect this proposed Charter amendment would have on board and committee members and ultimately, after discussing the relationship between appointing officials and board members, and the requirement that the Commission approve the appointment of board and committee members, voted 4-2 to recommend that the City Commission **not** send this question to the voters in the upcoming special election.

XI. CHARTER REVIEW COMMITTEE

On December 4, 2025, the Charter Review Committee reviewed the proposed language in Resolution No. 2025-87 which sends to the voters a question on whether the Charter should be amended to require a decennial review of the City Charter and requiring that the Charter Review Committee consist of seven members.

The current proposed ballot question and charter amendment are as follows:

Resolution No. 2025-87:

REQUIRING A DECENNIAL REVIEW OF THE CITY CHARTER

Shall the City Charter be amended to require:

That the City Commission convene a Charter Review Committee every ten (10) years beginning in 2035, to review the City Charter and provide recommendations to the City Commission on potential amendments. The Charter Review Committee shall consist of seven members. The Commissioners and City Manager will each appoint one member who is a resident of the City. The City Attorney's appointee shall be a current or former municipal or county attorney.

_____ YES

_____ NO

Adding the proposed language:

Sec. 26. Advisory Boards, Authority of Commission to Appoint.

The Commission may appoint boards or commissions, composed of such number of City residents as the Commission may deem expedient, consistent with exceptions authorized by law, to act in an advisory capacity in conjunction with any one or more City departments. The members of all such boards and commissions shall serve without compensation and may be removed at any time by a majority vote of the Commission.

Beginning in 2035, the City Commission shall convene a Charter Review Committee every ten years in order to provide recommendations to the City Commission on potential amendments to the City Charter. The Committee shall consist of seven members. Each City Commissioner and the City Manager shall appoint one member who is a resident of the City. The City Attorney shall appoint one member who shall be a current or former municipal or county attorney.

The Charter Review Committee discussed that the language, as proposed, requires that each Commissioner and the City Manager appoint a member who is a resident of the City. As proposed,

the City Attorney is required to appoint one member who shall be a current or former municipal or county attorney, though that member is not required to be a resident of the City.

The Charter Review Committee discussed whether the City Attorney's appointee need be a resident, and what would happen if there were no qualified residents, and, after a failed vote, made no recommendation to the City Commission as to this question.

XII. INSPECTOR GENERAL

The City Commission requested in Resolution No. 2024-142 that the Charter Review Committee consider whether the City Charter should be amended to establish an office of Inspector General. After an extensive discussion, including presentations by then-City Managers Amos Rojas, and then-Deputy City Manager Alberto Parjus, the Charter Review Committee adopted a motion, later amended, addressing the need for an Independent Inspector General in the City.

As evidenced by the robust and lengthy discussion on this topic, this item was a particular focus of the Committee. During the presentations by the City Manager's Office and City staff, the Charter Review Committee was presented with detailed explanations of the City's current processes and procedures for internal and external audits, internal affairs investigations, and information regarding the Miami -Dade County Inspector General's ability to assist with allegations of fraud, waste, or abuse.

Currently, the City Commission may, by majority vote, direct the City Manager, City Attorney, or other party to investigate allegations of fraud, waste, or abuse. The Miami-Dade County Inspector General has the ability, after approval of the Board of County Commissioners, to contract services with the City of Coral Gables, however, concerns were raised about the Miami-Dade County Inspector General's capacity to provide those services to the City, and the feasibility of entering into such an agreement.

The Charter Review Committee and then- City Manager Rojas discussed the need for a permanent Office of the Inspector General in the City, and based on the information provided by City staff, including the ongoing costs to the City to create such an office, the Charter Review Committee did not find that a permanent independent Inspector General in the City was warranted.

However, the Charter Review Committee continued to discuss the ability of the City Commission and City Attorney to appoint an ad hoc independent special counsel to investigate particular allegations of fraud, waste, or abuse in the City at two separate meetings, and after amending the initial motion, the final recommendation of the Charter Review Committee was adopted by a 4-1 vote.

Subsequently, on December 4, 2025, the Charter Review Committee reconsidered its previous recommendation and added language about subpoena powers to its recommendation. The final recommendation of the Charter Review Committee was adopted 6-0 as follows:

That the following addition to the City Charter be presented to the electors for consideration or if possible, adopted via Ordinance:

The City Attorney has the independent power to designate ad hoc special counsel to investigate specific allegations of fraud, waste, or abuse in the City and that special counsel shall have the power to subpoena persons or documents.

INSPECTOR GENERAL CONTINUED

The Charter Review Committee reviewed the language in Resolution No. 2025-88 which calls for a special election regarding adding authorization of an inspector general for the City of Coral Gables to the City Charter. The proposed Charter language and ballot question allow for the City Commission to, as needed, appoint through contract with the Miami-Dade County Inspector General, or with a private entity an Inspector General with certain duties and powers to be further established by ordinance.

The current proposed ballot question and charter amendment read as follows:

Resolution No. 2025-88:

AUTHORIZING AN INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR THE CITY OF CORAL GABLES

Shall the City Charter be amended to authorize a contract with Miami-Dade County or a private entity to provide inspector general services, as needed, to the City to investigate, audit, and oversee municipal matters in order to identify efficiencies and investigate and prevent fraud, waste, mismanagement and abuse of power, and who can subpoena witnesses and require production of documents, and whose appointment, term, functions, and powers shall be established by ordinance?

_____ YES

_____ NO

Adding the following section to the Charter:

Section 34h.- Inspector General

The Commission is authorized, as needed, to appoint, through contract with the Miami-Dade County Inspector General or with a private entity, through a process further established by Ordinance, an Inspector General. The Inspector General shall have the power to investigate, audit, review, and oversee municipal matters in order to identify efficiencies, and investigate and prevent fraud, waste, mismanagement, and abuse of power and subpoena witnesses and require the production of documents. The Inspector General's appointment, term, functions, authority, and powers shall be further established by ordinance and in an executed agreement with the Miami-Dade County Office of Inspector General or private entity as approved by the City Commission.

The Charter Review Committee voted to recommend that the City Commission amend the title of the ballot question to read as follows, in order to make clear to the voters that this change, if adopted, would not be a permanent inspector general, but rather allows for the appointment of an inspector general as needed:

AUTHORIZING ~~AN~~ INSPECTOR GENERAL SERVICES, AS NEEDED, FOR THE CITY OF CORAL GABLES

BUDGET TRANSPARENCY

The Charter Review Committee spent a significant amount of time discussing transparency in City budgeting and expenditures. Following discussions with the City Manager's office and Finance Department staff the City committed to publicly posting the quarterly budget updates that are currently provided to the City's Budget Advisory Board. The Charter Review Committee wanted to clearly recommend to the City Commission that though inclusion of a specific charter provision may not be necessary or appropriate, its recommendation is for more transparency regarding budget updates throughout each fiscal year, particularly as related to capital improvement projects. The recommendation was adopted by a 5-0 vote of the Charter Review Committee.

On December 4, 2025, the Charter Review Committee voted 6-0 to bring this item back to the Committee for further consideration at a later date.