

LA CITY'S CHARTER COMMISSION MAKES ITS RECOMMENDATIONS: FIVE THINGS TO KEEP OUR EYES ON

By Raphael J. Sonenshein

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The LA Charter Reform Commission will this week submit its recommendations to the City Council for the first makeover of the city's constitution since the 1990s. These reform moments don't come around very often. Having worked on that last round, here's my advice for what to keep in mind:

1. This is only the beginning

The Commission's recommendations are just step one. The City Council has the lead role on what makes it onto the November ballot. Nothing changes without voter approval.

2. The City Council has options

What ultimately reaches voters may look different from what the Charter Commission proposed. The Council can adopt, amend, or ignore the Commission's proposals. It can also introduce its own measures, sometimes with little public awareness.

3. The attention-grabbing ideas aren't the only important ones

Proposals like expanding the City Council from 15 to 25 members, adopting ranked-choice voting, or even lowering the voting age to 16 will draw headlines. But they're only part of the story.

4. Save some time for the less visible proposals that were vigorously debated in the last round of reform

I'm closely watching three in particular: Changes to how infrastructure and public works projects are managed, altering the city attorney from an elected position to an appointed one, and giving the City Council greater power over decisions by the Police Commission. These issues could have far-reaching impacts, pro or con, on how the city functions day-to-day.

5. This charter reform continues the longstanding work of aligning roles and authorities in the city government

Los Angeles is a very different city since the 1925 charter and the revised one in 1999. But the questions then and now have much in common. How can we best design how authority is allocated among the mayor, council, and other elected and appointed offices to make governance more efficient, effective, and accountable? How can we improve what has long seemed like a scattered, dispersed system to improve the lives of Angelenos? How can we implement reforms not with an eye on today's office holders but for those to come? These broad questions hold the key to making the right choices today.

Raphael J. Sonenshein, executive director of the John Randolph Haynes and Dora Haynes Foundation, served as executive director of the City of Los Angeles Appointed Charter Commission, 1997-99. Dr. Haynes played a principal role in the creation of the 1925 city charter and remained a dedicated charter reformer throughout his life.