COGE Executive Summary

New York is the envy of other cities. Across five boroughs we speak 800 languages. Our metro area is responsible for 9% of the entire U.S. economy. We educate both two-year-olds and PhDs. Babies are born in City-run hospitals and nonagenarians socialize in our senior centers. Every day hundreds of thousands of public servants pick up the trash, put out fires both literal and figurative, teach our children, and captain our ferries. The marvel and miracle that is New York City is possible in part because of City government, and that government structure is laid out in the City Charter.

COGE was charged with reviewing the entire City Charter for ways to modernize City government and improve its efficiency. In some ways, this mandate is not new. In 1934, in the midst of the Charter Revision Process that brought us the modern charter we have today, Mayor LaGuardia discussed his desire to cut red tape: "It's easier to exchange a prisoner of war than it is to transfer a stenographer from the Tax Department to the Water Department."[1] Today the New York City Charter contains neither a Tax Department nor a Water Department, but a government that cannot seem to get out of its own way remains the butt of countless jokes. COGE has heard of internal review processes that take months and bounce from agency to agency and department to department, of burdensome paperwork that stymies small business and cultural institutions, of reporting requirements that gobble up staff time, and of out-of-date rules that make City government challenging to navigate. The Commission listened carefully to all of these concerns as they considered how the Charter could be revised to solve them. While listening to calls to speed up, COGE was also clear: speed cannot come at the cost of workers, safety, or quality. COGE took seriously its commitment to the labor force, both public and private sector, and specifically formulated recommendations that preserve all existing labor standards. True efficiencies are gained not by shortchanging workers, but by listening to their expertise. COGE is proud to have done that listening in every borough.

As government does more and faster, it must also remain stable and strong, which requires strong fiscal controls to prepare for the future. And setting government up for future success requires pivoting government towards innovation, harnessing the creativity of New Yorkers and City workers in new ways. Government cannot innovate without its people, but government can and must provide societal scaffolding for innovation.

This is the final report of the Commission on Government Efficiency (COGE), the 2026 Charter Revision Commission. COGE has heard a wide range of ideas for Charter reform from experts, practitioners, advocates, and New Yorkers across all five boroughs. Through extensive public engagement, thoughtful deliberation, and a review of the entire City Charter, COGE has developed proposed reforms that address key areas of government operations, including contracting, permitting, land use, transportation infrastructure, and the establishment of reserve policies for the City's rainy day fund. While most of these proposals will take the form of ballot

[1] LaGuardia Wants Charter Revision a Separate Issue, New York Times (Feb, 11, 1934) at 25 (available at: https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1934/02/11/93748588.pdf?pdf_redirect=true&ip=0).

questions, COGE additionally recommended, and the City is adopting, a number of internal reforms to agency processes that will make government more efficient.

The ballot questions, together with internal reforms targeted at the inefficiencies that COGE sought to reduce, will:

- Cut the eight-month outdoor dining application process in half
- Save small businesses thousands of dollars
- Cut contracting times for certain nonprofit contractors by more than half from 13 months to six
- Speed up street safety and infrastructure projects including bike and bus lanes by at least 33%
- Reduce time for sale of small plots of City land from seven months to 90 days
- Bring 40 construction permits and approvals from 18 separate offices and agencies into one place
- Establish a reserves target of 12% and service standards for the Office of Management and Budget

This executive summary covers both the ballot questions and the related internal reforms. It also previews the final chapter of the report, in which the commission summarizes issues COGE heard about but is not addressing, and the Appendix, which describes further non-Charter-based improvements that are targeted at the same inefficiencies that the ballot questions seek to address.

Question #1: Streamline Process for Using Public Space for Uses like Outdoor Dining, Ramps, and Benches

→ Cuts the eight-month outdoor dining application process in half
→ Saves small businesses up to $1800 on application requirement costs and thousands of dollars of staff time

New York City is an outdoor city. Our streets and sidewalks are where New Yorkers connect and congregate, escaping small apartments and office buildings for block parties, bike rides, and public concerts. And our public spaces are enhanced by private uses that serve residents and visitors alike. Buildings may install planters to improve streetscapes, restaurants may operate outdoor dining areas, and property owners may construct accessibility ramps, stoops, benches, or other structures within the public right-of-way. However, the process for approving construction of these critical street enhancements is too long. It takes up to eight months for a restaurant to open outdoor dining. Other small businesses and buildings that seek to use public space encounter similar delays.

Because outdoor dining and structures like benches and planters are built on City streets, they generally require permission from the Department of Transportation (DOT). This permission takes the form of a 'revocable consent'--a right, revocable by the City, to use public space for certain purposes. While it is essential that the City retain oversight of its property, the Commission received compelling testimony that the Charter provisions governing revocable consents have created an unnecessarily lengthy, expensive, and administratively burdensome process.[2] Administrative requirements delay projects, increase costs for applicants, particularly small businesses, and consume significant City resources without providing commensurate public benefit.[3] In addition to complaints about the complexity of the process, the Commission heard particularly compelling testimony highlighting the substantial fees associated with the publication requirement for revocable consents and the general lack of attendance at the public hearings, despite the aforementioned publication requirements.[4]

In the first ballot question, the Commission proposes an amendment that would streamline the process to use public space for uses like outdoor dining, ramps, benches, and planters. The Commission's proposal would modify the revocable consent process in three ways. First, it would combine the sidewalk café and roadway dining revocable consent process into a single application. This would ensure that a single outdoor dining operation no longer needs to have multiple public hearings (including the doubled expense of public hearing requirements) because currently the two applications frequently proceed on different timelines. Second, the proposal would remove the City Council's little-used authority to put sidewalk café applications to a vote by the full City Council. Over the last decade this power was only used 10 to 15 times per year, with only a handful of applications denied, but adds up to 30 days to the process whether applications are called up or not. Finally, this amendment simplifies and modernizes the public notice requirements by removing the requirement for publishing newspaper advertisements in advance of a hearing, making a public hearing discretionary, and directing DOT to facilitate additional community input through more modern means of notice.

Taken together, the changes in ballot question #1 are anticipated to cut the current process time in half and save small businesses thousands of dollars in combined advertisement costs and staff time per application. Without changing the ability of the City to revoke a consent at any time, ballot question #1 will speed the process of enlivening city streets.

Question #2 and related non-Charter reforms: Reform the Contracting Process to Improve Procurements, including for Small Business and Nonprofits

- → Ballot question reforms will save up to 30 days on procurements
- → Once implemented, non-Charter internal reform to process for City Council non-profit human services discretionary awards is expected to cut timeline from 10 months to six
- → Once implemented, non-Charter internal reform to restructure nonprofit contracting to use umbrella agreements is expected to, once umbrella agreements are established, cut procurement times from 13 months to six months

New York City's lengthy contracting process means everything from housing to after school takes too long to deliver. Procurement – that is, the purchase of goods, services or construction – in the City of New York affects almost every aspect of City government and public life. In Fiscal Year 2025, the City procured goods and services from outside contractors worth $42.3 billion –

[2] Michelle Craven, Associate Deputy Commissioner, Cityscape & Franchises, NYC Department of Transportation, Queens Public Hearing (June 22, 2026) (testimony).
[3] Megan Rickerson, Someday Bar, Queens Hearing (June 22, 2026) (testimony).
[4] Andrew Rigie, Executive Director, New York Hospitality Alliance, Bronx Hearing (June 10, 2026) (testimony); Michelle Craven, Queens hearing (June 22, 2026) (testimony); Tiya Gordon, it's electric, (June 10, 2026) (written testimony).

nearly 40% of the City's budget.[5] The City relies on vendors to provide a wide array of City services, from afterschool programs to landscaping to software development. The City's infrastructure, from wastewater treatment systems to parking garages to solar panels built atop our cultural institutions, are largely built through contracted labor. The City also purchases numerous goods, from pencils to fire hoses to vehicles.

COGE received overwhelming testimony about the City's chronic delays both entering into contracts and paying its contractors. The Commission heard from non-profits, especially those providing human services, decrying the cumbersome process and describing the substantial financial precarity they find themselves in when doing work for the City but not receiving payment for months on end.[6] The solutions to many of these procurement challenges do not lie solely with the Charter, but also with more effective and innovative contract management oversight, as well as State-law changes to authorize a wider array of procurement and project delivery methods. However, the Charter does play a role, and COGE's proposals seek to make meaningful improvements to the procurement process.

Ballot question #2 proposes four changes. First, it proposes an amendment to reduce burdens on small businesses and nonprofits, as well as other categories of City contractors, by simplifying the pre-contracting questionnaire that City contractors must answer. Today, the information required by that questionnaire is extensive and largely immovable.[7] As a result, a hot dog vendor and a large commercial bank must answer the same questions. The Commission proposes to authorize the Procurement Policy Board to adopt rules that may vary the information required based on different categories, including the total dollar amount of the contract and whether the contractor is a small business. In contrast to the current one-size-fits-all approach, this change will allow small businesses, nonprofits, and others to receive questions more suited for them.

Second, to ensure consistent and transparent regulation of the City's procurement system, ballot question #2 proposes to require quarterly meetings of the Procurement Policy Board (PPB). The PPB, comprised of three members appointed by the Mayor and two members appointed by the Comptroller, is an important policy-making body for contracting, setting the key rules that govern the conduct of procurement in the City. Yet, the Charter establishes no requirements for how often the PPB must meet. Testimony received by the Commission has highlighted that some issues affecting the City's contractors could be addressed through changes to the PPB's rules, but their inconsistent meetings make it difficult to address these important issues.

Third, to speed up the procurement process, the Commission proposes amendments to allow the Mayor to delegate certain contract approvals to the contracting agencies, to make permanent a public comment period instead of a public hearing for contract awards, and to authorize the PPB to determine the threshold for contracts subject to the public comment period. Together, these changes could reduce a procurement's cycle time by roughly a month.

Finally, to help free up staff time to focus on more substantive issues, the Commission is proposing an amendment to streamline the issuance of the client services plan, a plan that

[5] Mayor's Office of Contract Services, *Citywide Indicators Report* (2025), Section 2: "How the City Spends its Money" (available at: https://home4.nyc.gov/site/mocs/resources/citywide-indicator-reports.page#HowCitySpends).
[6] Michelle Jackson, Executive Director, Human Services Council, Queens Hearing (July 13, 2026) (testimony); Elizabeth Brantl, Center for Justice Innovation, Staten Island Hearing (July 6, 2026) (testimony).
[6] Aneesa Waheed, Tara Kitchen, Bronx Hearing (June 10, 2026) (testimony).

explains how City agencies plan to procure social services. Today, the Charter requires the issuance of a draft plan, followed by a public hearing, followed by a final report.[8] To save hundreds of hours of staff time across the City while preserving the useful information contained in the report, the amendment would require the issuance of only a single report without a public hearing.

In reviewing the Charter and listening to testimony, especially from human services contractors who are owed money on City contracts, the Commission determined that many solutions to the issues affecting City procurements also lie outside the Charter. The proposed Charter amendments described in Chapter 2 should be understood as one piece of a multi-part solution to begin fixing issues with slow procurements and delayed payments. Together with other components of City government, COGE sought to find innovations in the City's procurement methods. To that end, the Commission is pleased to recognize that the City is committed to reforming its procurement process in several concrete ways. The City will roll out, over a period of time, a change intended to move nonprofit Council discretionary awards from procurements to grants, an approach that in pilot stage has shown to cut time to payment from 10 months to six months. The City will also begin to competitively procure umbrella agreements with nonprofits to create pools of qualified, pre-vetted nonprofit providers eligible to receive future project-specific task orders. Once the umbrella agreement is established, the time from agency articulating specific project to service delivery is expected to save as much as seven months off of a currently 13-month process.

Question #3: Fast-Track Street Safety Infrastructure Including Bike Lanes and Bus Lanes, Acquisition of Office Space, and Activation of City Land

- → Speeds up street safety projects, including bike lanes, by at least 33%
- → Reduces time to obtain authorization to sell certain small, unused plots of City land from seven months to 90 days
- → Reduces time to lease office space by up to 50 days
- → Unlocks more than $200 million in revenue for the City from sale of small surplus lots and transferable development rights

The third ballot question would amend the charter to simplify the process for the City to both use and dispose of the land it owns. First, it would simplify the review of street safety projects with the goal of reducing construction timelines. Second, it would also fast-track the sale or lease of small City properties, the air rights above landmarked City properties, and lease of office space for City workers.

Street projects to make dangerous intersections safer are too often stalled by unnecessary process requirements. The result is a government bureaucracy that stands in the way of saving New Yorkers' lives. Across all five boroughs, COGE heard that New Yorkers, not complex internal documentation processes, must be our first priority.

Today, the Charter defines a "major transportation project" as any project affecting 1,000 consecutive feet of roadway or four consecutive blocks, whichever is less, or any bike lane

[8] Charter § 325.

regardless of length.[9] The Department of Transportation is required to consult with four separate agencies.[10] The Department must then certify that all these consultations were conducted. These additional processes have delayed some critical lifesaving street safety projects by nearly a year.[11] To ensure that New Yorkers' lives are prioritized, the Commission's proposal would implement two critical efficiencies. First, when local law requires inter-agency consultation before implementation of a street-safety project, such consultation may not require that multiple sub-units *within* an agency be required to sign-off on a given project before construction can begin. Instead, any consultation would be done at the commissioner level, with each agency determining who in their own agency is best positioned to provide recommendations. Additionally, this proposal would ensure that inadvertent failure to comply with inter-agency consultation requirements does not serve to invalidate the underlying project. Second, the Commissioner of the Department of Transportation would be able to fast-track critical safe street improvements when there is an identified immediate need for improvements. This fast track would allow the agency to move forward with construction in conjunction with required public notification processes.

The third ballot question would also make a number of changes to the way the City disposes of property it owns and acquires leases for the City workforce. Today, dispositions – that is, sales or leases – of City-owned property are subject to a process known as the Uniform Land Use Review Procedure ("ULURP"). This involves a seven-month review process in which the affected Community Board and Borough President provide recommendation; the City Planning Commission (CPC) reviews and issues either an approval or disapproval, followed by review by the City Council.[12] The length, cost, and uncertainty of proceeding through the approval process means that these properties remain trapped — sitting fallow and generating neither public benefit nor tax revenue, because it is simply not worth the ULURP required to authorize their sale. In order to bring these lots back into productive use sooner the Commission proposes that the City be able to sell small properties via the shortened Expedited Land Use Review Procedure ("ELURP"). Under ELURP, final decision is made by the City Planning Commission, while maintaining robust public review by the Community Board and Borough President. This would cut the current process time in half, while preserving public transparency and community input. In a similar vein, the ballot question proposes making permanent a program that authorizes the sale without public auction of extremely small sliver lots that are undevelopable and only of value to neighboring property owners.

A similar situation exists with the unused development rights ("air rights") of New York City's landmarked properties, with the City sitting on valuable assets it cannot monetize. Since 1968, New York City has had a zoning mechanism to transfer the unused development rights of a landmarked building to a nearby property owner for their use.[13] However, even with the City

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[9] Ad. Code § 19-101.2

[10] Eric Beaton, Deputy Commissioner for Transportation Planning and Management, New York City Department of Transportation, Queens Hearing (June 22,2026) (testimony).

[11] Eric Beaton, Deputy Commissioner for Transportation Planning and Management, New York City Department of Transportation, Queens Hearing (June 22,2026) (testimony).

[12] PJ Berg, Deputy Commissioner for Real Estate Services, Department of Citywide Administrative Services, Brooklyn Hearing (June 30, 2026) (testimony).

[13] New York City Department of City Planning, *Zoning Resolution of the City of New York, § 75-42 (Transfer of Development Rights From Landmarks)* (adopted 1968, as amended) (available at: https://zoningresolution.planning.nyc.gov/article-vii/chapter-5/75-42).

Council's recent "City for All" modifications to the Zoning Resolution (which created a simpler process for such transfers for all landowners except the City), the City itself is still hamstrung.

COGE proposes to facilitate the transfer of landmark development rights from City-owned sites by making them eligible for ELURP.   Any transfer from a landmarked property would still be required to meet the additional terms of the landmark transfer program including requirements for the landmarked property to have a continuing maintenance plan.

The Charter also imposes a number of requirements for when the City seeks out office spaces as a tenant for the City workforce. Unlike the private sector, the City is required to go through a multi-step approval process before it can lease office space.[14] This slows down the City compared to private sector counterparts by imposing additional layers of review even when there is no meaningful land use impact (as changing the lessee of existing office space does not alter land use). In turn, this slow-down often causes the City to lose out on properties that would have been financially or programmatically advantageous to the City and for public use.

COGE proposes to simplify the office leasing process by removing a public hearing before the City Planning Commission and final review by the City Council. It would also remove a subsequent hearing that is required before the City may enter into a lease. To ensure adequate oversight, the Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS) would be required to file a notice of intent to acquire with the Councilmember in whose district the office is proposed to be located, as well as the relevant community board and Borough President. Once the lease is entered into, DCAS would also be required to file a copy of the notice with the Comptroller. Doing so will eliminate approximately two months from the process, allowing the City to be nimbler when leasing office space in an ever evolving and competitive real estate market while maintaining strong public oversight.

Question #4: Simplify Building Permitting

→ Brings 40 approvals from 18 separate offices and agencies into one place, saving builders time and frustration

In the fourth ballot question, COGE proposes to amend the Charter to simplify construction permitting.

Right now, someone renovating their house or building affordable housing must navigate more than a dozen agencies to get the construction permits they need. The burden of the complexities of city agencies ought to be on government—not on New Yorkers. The Commission's proposed amendment would authorize the establishment of a centralized permitting hub through which applicants could access and manage construction-related permits and approvals across City agencies. While individual agencies would retain their existing statutory and regulatory authority to review applications and enforce applicable laws, the amendment would facilitate a more coordinated, transparent, and user-friendly permitting process. A centralized permitting hub would provide a single point of entry for applicants, improve coordination among agencies, increase transparency into the permitting process, and help identify opportunities to resolve interagency issues more efficiently.

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[14] Charter § 195

This question will also allow additional divisions at the Department of Buildings to approve certificates of occupancy, rather than limiting that authority under the existing borough-based DOB structure dictated by the Charter which currently leaves only five borough commissioners and one deputy commissioner, and those working directly under them, to approve certificates of occupancy. This change would provide the Commissioner with greater flexibility to organize the Department in a manner that reflects modern permitting practices and operational needs.

This proposed amendment would also centralize the City's waterfront permitting process within the Department of Buildings (DOB). This change would not affect how the City determines the use of waterfront land; rather, it would streamline the process for ensuring compliance with building safety regulations governing existing and future waterfront structures. By consolidating waterfront permitting responsibilities within DOB, the amendment would simplify and rationalize the City's regulatory framework. It would align these responsibilities with the agency that already administers the City's construction permitting, inspection, and code enforcement programs, reducing the need for interagency coordination and creating a more efficient and predictable review process for applicants.

Question #5 and related internal reforms: Set Contributions Goals for Rainy Day Fund to Ensure Sufficient Budgetary Reserves

- → Ballot question establishes, for the first time, reserves target of 12%, aimed at ensuring fiscal stability
- → Internal reforms commit to reviewing standard hires and promotions within 14 days and capital project initiation applications within 40 days

New York City's economy is the largest in the State and among the largest in the world. Its budget is, correspondingly, larger than almost every state's. From housing to childcare, from public safety to public libraries, the annual budget reflects the City's core mission: that government care for its people. As the City spends taxpayer dollars for the benefit of its residents, it is imperative that we ensure sound fiscal management and remain on a sure fiscal footing. This is meant to ensure that during the next recession, natural disaster or other economic downturn, the City can weather that storm by using its reserves.

An economic recession and other unexpected events can cause a revenue decline that makes it challenging for the City to meet its spending obligations. In order to avoid managing such a crisis through spending reductions and layoffs, which would exacerbate an economic downturn and undermine the integrity of public services, fiscal reserves allow a state or city to cover short-term funding needs during a crisis.

Recent changes to State law and the Charter authorized the creation of the revenue stabilization fund, or "rainy day fund."[15] Yet, the City lacks any specific target amount for such reserve or a contribution formula governing deposits in the fund. Instead, deposits are entirely discretionary and are negotiated as part of the annual budget adoption process.

[15] 2020 N.Y. Laws ch. 406; NYC Charter § 1528.

COGE proposes three core elements to the City's reserve policy. First, the proposed Charter amendment would set a target amount of funds held in reserve — 12% percent of the City's total tax revenues. Second, it would require the Mayor's Office of Management and Budget (OMB), in consultation with the Comptroller, to establish a deposit formula that would govern mandatory contributions to the rainy day fund. Finally, it would impose the same withdrawal limitations as those set forth in State law, ensuring that the City retains flexibility to withdraw, but requiring the Mayor certify that an immediate fiscal need warrants a withdrawal above 50% of the fund.

Separate from the ballot question, COGE also explored ways to streamline the City's internal processes for capital project delivery and hiring. While the Commission concluded that these issues are best resolved through solutions outside the Charter, it is pleased that the City has committed to begin implementation of OMB service standards, for the first time, for review of hirings and promotions, as well as review of capital project initiation applications. For personnel actions, OMB will review and make a decision on a standard action within 14 days and a complex action within 29 days, counting the OMB time only. Similarly, OMB will review and make a decision on certificates to proceed, which initiate capital projects, within 40 days, also counting OMB time only.

Additional actions considered

COGE also heard about a number of additional ideas which warrant further discussion. In the final report, the Commission's summation of ideas it heard but did not pursue are elaborated in Chapter six. These include changes to the following: the election system, the civil service system, the franchise and concession review process, the construction code amendment process, the structure of oversight bodies, duplicative reporting requirements, and antiquated public officer bond requirements.

Appendix

The report also includes an Appendix, which covers additional areas that were the subject of testimony before COGE. The appendix includes details about the internal reforms to procurement, the internal reforms to hiring and capital processes, work being undertaken in the areas of long-term capital and workforce planning, and ongoing work in technology and innovation that the City is undertaking.