

Charter Revision Commission

BOL Meeting Minutes - Published Draft



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Tuesday, April 29, 2025

6:00 PM

Committee Room

CALL TO ORDER

With a quorum present, Chairman Williams called the meeting to order at 6:05 PM. Guests: Budget Department, Lawrence Sole, Budget Director; Finance Department: Karin E. Hablow, Commissioner ; Mario Arena, Deputy Commissioner Cesar Vargas, First Deputy Commissioner and Harry Brussel, County Executive's Office. Also Present: Committee Coordinator Althema Goodson, Legislative Director Marcello Figueroa, and Charter Commission Legal Counsel Mondaire Jones.

Present Timothy S. Warn , Harry P. Bittker, Eric Morrissey, Carolyn B. Stevens , Beth N. Smayda, Shauna Rae Long , Gary J. Zuckerman, Ken Jones Esq., Shurla Tukuru, Mark Semer, Nancy Kaboolian, Dwayne Murray, David Alpert, Bruce Donnelly, Terry Holmes-Nelson, Ruth Montgomery, Howard Permut, Nancy Seligson, Lyndon Williams, Heather Lackey, Toni Kollarmail, and Lou Sanchez

MINUTES APPROVAL

Tuesday, March 11, 2025 - 6PM

On motion of Alpert, seconded by Zuckerman, the minutes were approved. The motion carried unanimously.

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

Budget Department Presentation:

Lawrence Sole, Budget Director

Finance Department:

Karin E. Hablow, Commissioner

Mario Arena, Deputy Commissioner

Cesar Vargas, First Deputy Commissioner

Chairman Williams welcomed Budget Director Lawrence Soule, who presented an overview of the Budget Department's mission and current practices. Vice Chair Zuckerman inquired about the operating budget timeline, which Mr. Soule affirmed was functioning effectively. In regard to the capital budget, Soule acknowledged ongoing issues that would need to be addressed at a future date. When asked by Commission Member Harry Bitker about the separation of

additions and deletions in the capital budget, Mr. Soule explained that this structure allows for meaningful public input, with Chairman Williams noting that the public hearing takes place between these stages. Commission Member Heather Lackey asked if there were any challenges with the public hearing deadline, to which Mr. Soule responded that he was not aware of any.

The discussion then turned to the Westchester Community College (WCC) budget. Commission Member Howard Permut asked whether there was a formal review process; Mr. Soule explained that while forecasting is done, no formal review is held. Bitker followed up by asking how the fiscal year for WCC is determined. Mr. Soule stated that it is set by SUNY or the state, with Chairman Williams noting that it aligns with the academic calendar. Mr. Soule also mentioned a recommendation to revise the budget timeline between March and May, potentially beginning in 2026.

Commission Member Beth Smayda recommended stronger reporting on capital projects, which Mr. Soule supported. Vice Chair Zuckerman asked about the amendment process for capital projects, and Mr. Soule noted that amendments typically occur no more than twice per year and are governed by the County Charter. Zuckerman also confirmed with Mr. Soule that the process is outlined in the charter. Chairman Williams requested that Mr. Soule submit a letter with potential charter recommendations based on the discussion. The Commission also considered additional charter mandates, including the inclusion of fiscal performance goals and a suggestion from Member Shaunae Rae Long to introduce a materiality threshold for budget items that would not require board approval.

Legislator Emiljana Ulaj, attending remotely, asked several questions. She inquired about sales tax authority, to which Mr. Soule responded that it is governed by state law and cannot be modified through the charter. Ulaj also asked whether other counties have alternate revenue streams. Mr. Soule confirmed they do, and Chairman Williams added that retail expansion is one potential source. Commission Member Permut raised a question about whether budgeted figures reflect cash or commitments, which was noted for follow-up.

Chairman Williams then invited Commissioner Karin Hablow of the Department of Finance and her team — Deputy Commissioner Mario Arena and First Deputy Commissioner Cesar Vargas — to present. Commissioner Hablow reviewed the major responsibilities of the Finance Department under Charter Sections 119 and 229. She proposed amending Section 119.41 to explicitly allow for electronic approvals to improve efficiency. She also spoke about ongoing discussions regarding a formal fund balance policy, emphasizing the importance of crafting language that would endure over time. Commission Member Permut asked about who audits capital budgets and tracks project status. Member Mark Cremer raised the question of whether the County should establish an Inspector General position. In response to a question from Bitker about improving the County's credit rating, Commissioner Hablow cited the importance of budgetary controls and appropriation freezes as outlined in the charter. She also highlighted recent updates to the procurement policy from November 2023, including the addition of a "Best Value" criterion, which provides greater flexibility in vendor selection beyond choosing the lowest bid.

Chairman Williams thanked Commissioner Hablow, her team, and Budget Director Soule for their presentations and valuable input. The Commission will follow up on several items.

ADJOURNMENT

Moved by Alpert, seconded by Zuckerman, the Committee adjourned at 8:49PM

DRAFT