

Charter Reform and Public Infrastructure What Los Angeles City Council Is Deciding

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Executive Summary

The City of Los Angeles is considering a significant shift in how it plans for, funds, and maintains public infrastructure. As part of a broader package of Charter Reform recommendations currently under review, City Council is considering whether to place two related governance reforms before voters in November 2026: a five-year Capital Infrastructure Program (CIP) and a Director of Public Works.

The Charter Reform Commission unanimously recommended both reforms. While support appears to be growing around a long-term CIP, important questions remain about how infrastructure priorities would be carried into implementation, what authority a Director of Public Works would have, and what aspects of Public Works governance should be established through Charter versus ordinance.

What Happens Next

June 4, 2026 (date subject to change): City Council Rules Committee expected to continue deliberation on proposed Charter amendments related to the Capital Infrastructure Program and Public Works governance.

June 8, 2026 (expected Council timeline): Target for completing Rules Committee deliberation.

June 17, 2026 (formal City deadline): Last day for City Council to place Charter measures on the November ballot.

How to follow: [Council File 26-0489](#) tracks Charter Reform recommendations currently under review.

Why Los Angeles is Considering Reform

The push for reform stems from decades of deferred maintenance, fragmented responsibility, and unclear accountability. Too often, Los Angeles has managed infrastructure reactively, responding to failures rather than maintaining systems over time. Sidewalks remain in disrepair, streetlight outages persist, curb ramps are not consistently delivered, streets continue to deteriorate, and many parks face aging facilities, deferred maintenance, limited hours, and unequal access.

Underlying these challenges is a broader systems issue: Los Angeles often lacks a shared approach for understanding what it owns, what condition it is in, what it costs to maintain, and how responsibility connects to delivery over time.

The condition of sidewalks, streets, parks, lighting, and transit access shapes safety, accessibility, local economic vitality, and quality of life, influencing how people move through neighborhoods, connect with one another, access opportunity, and experience the city every day. At its core, this Charter Reform discussion is about whether Los Angeles has the systems, accountability, and long-term budgeting needed to better care for public infrastructure and make more informed decisions about limited public resources.

Why the Charter Matters

Capital Infrastructure Programs are standard practice in many cities, but they are typically established through policy and budgeting rather than City Charter. Los Angeles is considering Charter Reform because past efforts have not resulted in a durable citywide system for long-term infrastructure stewardship.

Charter language could help ensure infrastructure priorities, accountability, and long-term budgeting continue across administrations and budget cycles rather than depending on changing political priorities or one-time initiatives.

How We Got Here

Los Angeles has discussed the need for a Capital Infrastructure Program (CIP) for more than a decade through Council motions, reports, and civic research. The current Charter Reform discussion builds on years of work to better understand infrastructure conditions, long-term costs, and accountability for the public realm.

Through years of work on transportation policy, municipal finance, mobility, transit access, public space, and the public realm, Investing in Place increasingly found that many

infrastructure challenges stemmed not from a lack of ideas, but from fragmented systems for funding, maintenance, delivery, and accountability.

Research, workshops, coalition building, and work with City staff, elected offices, and civic leaders repeatedly surfaced a common challenge: Los Angeles often lacked the coordination, leadership, and long-term systems needed to better care for everyday infrastructure and public space.

Questions about how much Los Angeles should invest in sidewalks, curb ramps, lighting, parks, and public space often lacked consistent, citywide answers because the city did not consistently have a shared understanding of infrastructure conditions, long-term costs, or how needs should be prioritized. While efforts such as the Parks Needs Assessment and emerging infrastructure inventories represent important progress, Los Angeles still lacks a coordinated citywide system for long-term stewardship.

Recent Milestones

December 2023 (Mayor Engagement):

Drawing on research of more than 45 Capital Infrastructure Programs, Investing in Place and more than 80 civic, community, labor, business, philanthropic, and individual supporters [submitted a letter to Mayor Bass](#) outlining nine principles for what a Los Angeles Capital Infrastructure Program should include, emphasizing long-term stewardship, transparency, maintenance, equity, and coordination.

October 2024 (ED9):

Mayor Bass launched [Executive Directive No. 9](#) and the Capital Planning Steering Committee to improve coordination and centralize aspects of infrastructure budgeting, delivery, and management across 14 departments.

July 2025 (Commission Testimony):

Investing in Place presented its foundational research, [A City That Works: Public Space as a Civic Promise](#), developed with members of the Public Space Leadership Council, to the Charter Reform Commission, helping inform discussion around a five-year CIP and stronger Public Works leadership.

April 2026 (Commission Recommendations):

After nearly a year of public meetings and deliberation, [the Charter Reform Commission submitted 36 final recommendations to City Council](#), including unanimous support for both a five-year Capital Infrastructure Program and a Director of Public Works.

May 2026 (CIP Framework Release):

The Mayor's Office released a [citywide Capital Infrastructure Program framework](#), supporting Charter Reform efforts for a five-year CIP and stronger Public Works leadership.

May–June 2026 (Council Deliberation):

The City Council Rules Committee began formal review of proposed Charter amendments related to the Capital Infrastructure Program and Director of Public Works.

What Is a CIP? And What Would It Change?

A Capital Infrastructure Program (CIP) is a standard best practice used by cities to better understand what they own, what condition it is in, what it costs to maintain, and how to make longer-term decisions about public infrastructure. At its best, a CIP connects budgets, maintenance, and capital investments over multiple years, helping cities move beyond reactive fixes and one-year decision-making.

Los Angeles is unusual among major cities in not having a citywide, multi-year CIP. Instead, infrastructure decisions are often shaped through one-year budgets and fragmented processes that make it difficult to understand long-term needs, prioritize investments, and connect capital spending with ongoing maintenance and operations.

A CIP could support a more citywide and transparent approach to infrastructure decision-making by making needs, priorities, tradeoffs, and long-term costs easier to understand across neighborhoods and over time.

In practice, a CIP could help Los Angeles:

Support More Citywide and Equitable Priorities

Better prioritize infrastructure needs across the city rather than through fragmented, one-off decisions, helping make tradeoffs and long-term needs clearer.

Better Coordinate Infrastructure Delivery

Better sequence resurfacing, curb ramps, lighting, shade, transit access, and accessibility improvements so they happen together rather than years apart.

Improve Stewardship of Public Dollars

Better balance new investments with deferred maintenance needs while aligning budgets with long-term infrastructure priorities.

Support Better Work Planning and Delivery

Provide departments and bureaus with clearer multi-year work plans for staffing, contracting, budgeting, and maintenance, reducing reliance on reactive decision-making and one-off motions.

Strengthen Neighborhood Quality of Life

Better care of sidewalks, parks, lighting, shade, accessibility, and transit access can support local businesses and make neighborhoods safer, more connected, and easier to navigate.

What Is Currently Before City Council

Through Charter Reform, City Council is currently considering two closely related recommendations:

1. **A Five-Year Capital Infrastructure Program (CIP):** A Charter amendment establishing an ongoing, five-year Capital Infrastructure Program to better understand infrastructure conditions, connect long-term needs with budgeting, and improve how Los Angeles plans for maintenance and capital investment over time.
2. **A Director of Public Works:** A Charter amendment establishing a Director of Public Works with clearer authority and responsibility to help support implementation, coordination, and accountability for city infrastructure systems.

The Key Governance Question: What Authority and Accountability Would Be Needed?

As discussions move forward, an important implementation question remains: what authority, governance structure, and organizational flexibility would be needed to help a Director of Public Works carry long-term infrastructure priorities into delivery?

Recent Rules Committee discussions suggest broad support for establishing a Director of Public Works. The key question now is what authority the role should have, how responsibilities currently held by the Board of Public Works would be handled, and what aspects of Public Works governance should be fixed in the Charter versus remain flexible over time.

The Historical Precedent: The 1999 Charter Reform

This is not the first time Los Angeles has attempted Public Works reform. During the 1999 Charter Reform process, the city created the title of Director of Public Works while retaining separate bureau leadership and the Board of Public Works. In practice, the role was created without clear authority or an operational mandate across bureaus, leaving responsibility and accountability fragmented.

Why Section 507 Matters

Central to the current discussion is Charter Section 507, which requires separate chief administrative officers for individual Public Works bureaus, including Engineering, Street Services, Street Lighting, Sanitation, and Contract Administration.

At a high level, two approaches are emerging:

Director of Public Works Under the Current Charter Structure (No Section 507 Changes): Section 507 could remain largely unchanged. A Director would help organize the Capital Infrastructure Program process, convene bureaus, improve communication, and support long-term budgeting, while bureau leadership would continue to hold primary responsibility for day-to-day operations.

Director of Public Works with Section 507 Changes: Section 507 would likely need to be amended to establish the Director of Public Works as the chief administrative officer for the Department, more closely aligning authority with responsibility. A Director could carry clearer responsibility for aligning staffing, maintenance, budgets, and implementation across infrastructure systems over time, while bureaus would continue to function as operational units within a unified Department of Public Works.

At its core, the Section 507 discussion is about accountability: who is responsible for carrying long-term infrastructure priorities into implementation, and whether authority and responsibility are sufficiently aligned to support delivery over time.

A broader question underlying the discussion is how Charter-level governance reforms would connect to day-to-day operations. Past reform efforts have sometimes changed governance structures without fully addressing how work is coordinated or delivered in practice. Recent Council discussions suggest an interest in avoiding that disconnect by considering how authority, responsibilities, and operational systems would align over time.

Councilmembers are also considering how a Director of Public Works would relate to the Board of Public Works, bureau leadership, the Mayor's executive authority, City Council's budgeting and policy role, and departments outside of Public Works. In practice, the discussion is not simply about creating a Director, but about how leadership, oversight, and accountability should be balanced across the system.

A Related Charter Question: Section 580

Recent Charter Reform and Rules Committee discussions have also raised whether Los Angeles should update Section 580, which currently hard-codes Public Works bureau structures and responsibilities into the Charter.

One proposal advanced during Charter Reform deliberations would remove Section 580 to allow future adjustments to Public Works and transportation functions through City Council ordinance, rather than requiring future Charter amendments and citywide elections. This could create greater flexibility to improve coordination and adapt infrastructure systems over time as a Capital Infrastructure Program evolves, while still requiring public deliberation and

City Council approval.

This is not about predetermining future departmental structures or merging agencies. Rather, it raises a broader governance question: what aspects of Public Works governance should be fixed in the City Charter, and what should remain flexible through ordinance so Los Angeles can adapt infrastructure systems, responsibilities, and coordination over time?

Why This Moment Matters

Public infrastructure shapes daily life. Sidewalks, streets, parks, lighting, shade, and transit access shape how people move through neighborhoods, access daily needs, support local businesses, spend time in public, and experience connection and belonging in the city.

This is a moment of opportunity for Los Angeles. At a time of fiscal pressure, aging infrastructure, climate impacts, and federal uncertainty, the city is reconsidering how it plans for and takes care of the public realm through the first Charter Reform process since 1999. While many challenges facing cities feel increasingly beyond local control, how Los Angeles cares for sidewalks, streets, parks, and public space is still something local government can shape.

Public infrastructure also shapes equity, influencing which neighborhoods have sidewalks in good condition, shade, reliable lighting, accessible public spaces, and investment over time. In a time when many people feel increasingly isolated or uncertain, public spaces and everyday infrastructure can help communities feel more connected, supported, and resilient.

At its core, this discussion is about how Los Angeles takes care of the places and systems people rely on every day. Done well, these reforms could help neighborhoods function better, support City staff, and create a city that is more connected, equitable, and better cared for over time.