

Offered by City Councilors Julia Mejia, Breadon, Coletta Zapata, Culpepper, FitzGerald, Flynn, Louijeune, Murphy, Pepén, Weber, and Worrell



CITY OF BOSTON IN CITY COUNCIL

IN THE YEAR TWO THOUSAND TWENTY-SIX

ORDER FOR A HEARING TO EXAMINE AND MODERNIZE THE BOSTON CITY CHARTER IN ADVANCE OF THE CITY'S 400TH ANNIVERSARY

- WHEREAS,** The City of Boston approaches the 400th anniversary of its founding, presenting a critical opportunity to reflect on how the City governs itself and whether its governing framework continues to meet the needs of its residents; *and*
- WHEREAS,** Boston transitioned from a town to a city on March 4, 1822, when residents voted to adopt the City's first charter following authorization by the Massachusetts General Court, formally establishing a municipal government distinct from the prior town-meeting and board of selectmen model; *and*
- WHEREAS,** While Boston's original charter dates to 1822, the City's current governing structure is not contained in a single modern document but instead reflects a patchwork of statutes, amendments, and home rule petitions developed over more than a century; *and*
- WHEREAS,** A major revision to the Boston City Charter in 1909 fundamentally reshaped City government by abolishing the bicameral council, creating a unicameral legislative body, and significantly expanding mayoral authority; *and*
- WHEREAS,** Additional charter amendments enacted between 1948 and 1951 further solidified the present mayor-council system, establishing the framework under which Boston continues to operate today; *and*
- WHEREAS,** Boston currently functions under what is commonly referred to as a "Modified Plan A" charter, which relies on state legislation and piecemeal revisions rather than a consolidated, voter-ratified governing document; *and*

WHEREAS, Since the adoption of Home Rule, many core aspects of City governance—including executive authority, legislative powers, appointments, oversight mechanisms, and administrative structure—have been altered through individual legislative actions without a comprehensive charter review; *and*

WHEREAS, Residents, advocates, and policymakers have raised ongoing concerns about transparency, accountability, checks and balances, civic participation, and accessibility within Boston’s current governance structure; *and*

WHEREAS, As Boston prepares to mark four centuries as a city, there is a timely and generational opportunity to assess whether the City Charter reflects contemporary democratic values, equity goals, and the lived realities of Boston’s communities; ***NOW THEREFORE BE IT***

ORDERED: That the appropriate committee of the Boston City Council hold a hearing to examine the history, structure, and future of the Boston City Charter, including opportunities for modernization, consolidation, and reform; that such hearing include, but not be limited to, a review of the historical evolution of the Charter from 1822 to the present, the distribution of powers between the executive and legislative branches, the clarity, accessibility, and transparency of the current charter framework, the role of Home Rule petitions in shaping City governance, comparative charter models from other major U.S. cities, opportunities for public participation, accountability, and democratic reform, and potential pathways for a comprehensive charter review or revision process; and that representatives from City departments, constitutional and municipal law experts, historians, government organizations, community advocates, and members of the public be invited to testify.

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