

Mount Vernon Charter Review Commission

Minutes of the Meeting

Date: June 4, 2025

Time: 6pm

Location: City Hall, Mayor's Conference Room

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by the Chair.

II. Roll Call

Commission Members Present (15 of 15) - *Quorum*:

- Kareen Bell
- Rosa Blackwell Lawrence
- Brian Dwyer
- Anitra Hadley
- Mary Kingsley
- Susan Lally
- Eileen Lambert
- Dolores Lopes
- Erin McGarry
- Geeta Morris
- Kevin Morrison
- Haley Pilgrim (arrived late)
- David Rogers
- Monica Whiting Hogans
- Tamala Boyd

Advisory Board Members Present:

- Axel Eberman
- Vince Ferrandino
- Michael Justino
- Gabriel Thompson
- Stephen Vazquez
- Donna Wemple

Others Noted in Attendance:

- Brian Johnson, Corporation Counsel
- David Wilson, Journal News
- Other names unclear

III. Presentation from National Civic League

- Doug Linkhart presented survey findings and engagement feedback

IV. Vote on Ballot Initiatives

Proposals Discussed:

- Electing City Council by wards
- Adopting a City Manager form of government
- Changing Comptroller from elected to appointed

Discussion Summary:

- Subcommittee ideas were shared
- Debate centered on readiness of proposals, clarity, timeline, and cost
- Some commissioners emphasized the need for final implementation details before ballot
- Others stressed urgency and letting voters decide
- Legal counsel noted that outside professionals would assist in preparing final ballot wording

V. Motions and Votes

Motion 1: Council Wards

Commissioner Delores Lopes read the following into the record:

I move that the Mount Vernon Charter Review Commission adopt the proposed ballot initiative

titled: “Proposal to Change the Method of Electing City Council Members and Define the Role

of Mayor in Mount Vernon,” which would implement a hybrid at-large/ward-based election

system for City Council members.

- Second by Kareen Bell

Roll Call Vote:

- Kareen Bell - No
- Rosa Blackwell Lawrence - No
- Brian Dwyer - Yes
- Anitra Hadley - No
- Mary Kingsley - No
- Susan Lally - Yes
- Eileen Lambert - No
- Dolores Lopes - Yes
- Erin McGarry - Yes
- Geeta Morris - No
- Kevin Morrison - No
- Haley Pilgrim - No
- David Rogers - Yes
- Monica Whiting Hogans - Yes

- Tamala Boyd – Yes

Yes: 7; No: 8; Motion Fails

Motion 2: City Manager

Commissioner Brian Dwyer read the following into the record:

This initiative would appear on the November 4, 2025 general election ballot and, if passed,

would amend the City Charter to:

- Establish a professionally trained City Manager to oversee daily administration, appointed by and accountable to the City Council.
- Reassign the Mayor’s role to a voting member of the City Council with ceremonial duties and policy-setting responsibilities.
- Dissolve the Board of Estimate and Contract and assign budget and contract oversight to the City Manager and City Council.

The proposal aims to professionalize financial management, reduce political interference, and increase accountability.

I move that the Mount Vernon Charter Commission adopt the proposed ballot initiative titled:

“Proposal to Change the Form of Government in the City of Mount Vernon,” which would

transition the City of Mount Vernon from a Mayor-Council system to a City Manager-Council

system, effective January 1, 2028.

- Second by Kareen Bell

Roll Call Vote:

- Kareen Bell - Yes
- Rosa Blackwell Lawrence - No
- Brian Dwyer - Yes
- Anitra Hadley - No
- Mary Kingsley - No
- Susan Lally - Yes
- Eileen Lambert - No
- Dolores Lopes - Yes
- Erin McGarry - Yes
- Geeta Morris - No
- Kevin Morrison - No
- Haley Pilgrim - No

- David Rogers - Yes
- Monica Whiting Hogans - Yes
- Tamala Boyd – Yes

Yes: 8; No: 7; Motion Passes

Motion 3: Appointed Commission of Finance

Commissioner Erin McGarry read the following into the record:

This initiative would appear on the November 4, 2025 general election ballot and, if approved, would:

- Eliminate the elected Comptroller position from the City Charter.
- Create an appointed Finance Professional position requiring professional qualifications in public finance or accounting.
- Dissolve the Board of Estimate and Contract and assign financial oversight responsibilities to this professional under the City Manager (if adopted) or Mayor (if the current form of government is retained).

The proposal aims to professionalize financial management, reduce political interference, and increase accountability.

I move that the Mount Vernon Charter Review Commission adopt the proposed ballot initiative titled: “Proposal to Convert the Office of Elected Comptroller to an Appointed Finance Professional,” which would replace the elected Comptroller with an appointed Finance Professional upon expiration of the current Comptroller’s term on January 1, 2030.

Includes advise and consent of City Council.

- Second by David Rogers

Roll Call Vote:

- Kareen Bell - Yes
- Rosa Blackwell Lawrence - No
- Brian Dwyer - Yes
- Anitra Hadley - Abstain
- Mary Kingsley - No
- Susan Lally - Yes
- Eileen Lambert - No
- Dolores Lopes - Yes
- Erin McGarry - Yes
- Geeta Morris - No

- Kevin Morrison - No
- Haley Pilgrim - Abstain
- David Rogers - Yes
- Monica Whiting Hogans - Yes
- Tamala Boyd – Yes

Yes: 7 (with Chair 8); No: 5; Abstain: 2; Motion Passes

Motion 4: Motion by Commissioner Anitra Hadley – another vote following review of Ballot Questions as drafted by attorneys, before the Questions are presented to the Clerk for submission to the Board of Elections. Vote date July 16, 2025.

Second: Mary Kingsley

Roll Call Vote:

- Kareen Bell - No
- Rosa Blackwell Lawrence - Yes
- Brian Dwyer - No
- Anitra Hadley - Yes
- Mary Kingsley - Yes
- Susan Lally - No
- Eileen Lambert - Yes
- Dolores Lopes - Yes
- Erin McGarry - No
- Geeta Morris - Yes
- Kevin Morrison - Yes
- Haley Pilgrim - Abstain
- David Rogers - No
- Monica Whiting Hogans - Yes
- Tamala Boyd – No

Yes: 8; No: 5 (with Chair 6); Abstain: 1; Motion Passes¹

Motion 5: Motion by Commissioner Eileen Lambert to bring any requests for any additional funds, going forward, before the full Commission for a majority vote before request goes to the Comptroller (unclear who seconded).

Roll Call Vote:

- Kareen Bell - Yes
- Rosa Blackwell Lawrence - Yes

¹ This motion was later reviewed by Counsel to the Commission and determined to be invalid. See attached memo.

- Brian Dwyer - No
- Anitra Hadley - Yes
- Mary Kingsley - Yes
- Susan Lally - Abstain
- Eileen Lambert - Yes
- Dolores Lopes - Yes
- Erin McGarry - Yes
- Geeta Morris - Yes
- Kevin Morrison - Yes
- Haley Pilgrim – Not Present (already left the meeting)
- David Rogers - Yes
- Monica Whiting Hogans - Yes
- Tamala Boyd

Yes: 11; No: 1; Abstain: 1; Motion Passes

VI. Adjournment

- Meeting adjourned.