



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

BOARD OF ELECTION COMMISSIONERS

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Dear Cambridge voter,

The Board of Election Commissioners, in accordance with Chapter 630 of the Acts of 1989, submits to the voters of Cambridge the text of Ballot Questions #1 as it will appear on the NOVEMBER 4, 2025, MUNICIPAL ELECTION ballot, as well as the summary of the proposal and the arguments for and against, as required by Chapter 630 of the Acts of 1989.

The City Council has proposed adopting a new City Charter, which is the law that prescribes the structure of the Cambridge government. The Charter sets forth the powers of the City Council, the City Manager, and the School Committee.

The City Council voted on April 14, 2025, that the proposed new City Charter shall be submitted to the voters of the City of Cambridge for acceptance at the next biennial election, being held on November 4, 2025, in the form of the following question:

Question 1 Shall an Act Establishing a Charter for the City of Cambridge be accepted?
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Summary of proposal: The City Council's proposed change would replace the City's current Plan E Charter at General Laws Chapter 43, Section 93 et seq. with a new City Charter.

Under the new City Charter, Cambridge shall continue to be governed under the City Council/City Manager form of government. The City Council, consisting of nine members nominated and elected for two-year terms by the municipal voters at-large by proportional representation, shall exercise the legislative powers of the City. The elected members of the City Council shall, each term, choose from among its members via majority vote a mayor and vice mayor, who shall serve for a 2-year term. Like under the current Plan E Charter, the mayor shall continue to be recognized as the official head of the city for all ceremonial purposes, be the presiding officer of the City Council, be a member of the School Committee, shall have no power of veto, and shall have the same powers as any other members of the council. The City Council shall continue to directly appoint the City Manager, City Auditor, and the City Clerk.

Under the new City Charter, the City Council shall continue to appoint a City Manager, who shall be the chief executive officer of the city and shall be responsible to the City Council for the proper administration of all city affairs placed under the City Manager's charge by or under the charter. The City Manager shall be responsible for the implementation of policies established by the City Council, as reflected in the City Council's votes and resolutions and in ordinances, appropriation orders, and loan authorizations.

Under the new City Charter, Cambridge's School Committee shall continue to consist of six members who shall be nominated and elected for two-year terms by the municipal voters of the city at large, and the mayor, who shall serve as the seventh member. Under the new City Charter, the School Committee members shall now elect amongst their elected members one to serve as chair and one to serve as vice chair. The School Committee shall continue to have all powers which are conferred on school committees by the Massachusetts General Laws, the

charter, and ordinance, including selecting and removing a superintendent of the schools who shall be charged with the administration of the school system, making all reasonable policies, rules, and regulations for the management of the public school system, and adopting and overseeing the administration of an annual operating budget for the school department, subject to appropriation by the City Council.

The new City Charter is organized by articles and uses gender neutral language to make it more understandable and accessible to the public.

The new City Charter establishes new oversight and financial procedures.

The new City Charter codifies the City's ranked choice proportional representation election system and allows the City's Board of Election Commissioners to promulgate regulations and make changes to the ranked choice voting ballot and tabulation process if necessary to ensure the integrity and smooth functioning of the City's municipal elections.

The new City Charter encourages public engagement and codifies public petition measures through initiative and referendum.

According to Chapter 630 of the Acts of 1989, the Election Commission is required to print arguments for and against a question submitted solely to the voters of Cambridge. Below are such arguments:

ARGUMENT IN FAVOR OF THE PROPOSED CHARTER

A charter is the most important legal document in a city, defining the structure and organization of its local government. Cambridge has not reviewed its charter since the Plan E form of government was adopted in 1940, 85 years ago. Our charter has remained static while the city and the world have changed dramatically.

A YES vote on the ballot question would have the City adopt a new charter, developed from the deliberations of the City's Charter Review Committee and City Council over the past two years. The new charter clarifies and modernizes its language with better organization, gender neutral language, and new definitions to make it easier to understand and more accessible to the public. The new charter maintains the City's current City Council/City Manager form of government and codifies new oversight and accountability procedures. The new charter maintains the City's current School Committee but now has its chair chosen from amongst its members. The new charter codifies new budget procedures and policies that promote better fiscal planning and transparency. The new charter codifies the City's ranked choice proportional representation election system for its municipal elections, while giving it the ability to adopt new regulations for modern counting methods, surplus vote transfers, and other procedures.

The new charter modernizes Cambridge's government while furthering our commitment to the City's guiding values of equality, justice, diversity, community engagement, and inclusivity. A YES vote will ensure that the City's governing structure and values carry forward to the 21st Century.

ARGUMENT AGAINST THE PROPOSED CHARTER

Since its adoption in 1940, Cambridge's charter has operated under a "Plan E" form of government, which under state law is structured where the City Council hires a City Manager to serve as the City's chief executive. Our Plan E charter has served the City well by providing effective, professional, and responsive governance, helping to address the needs of our diverse residents and helping to make us one of the Commonwealth's most prosperous cities. Despite this success, certain advocates wish for the City to abandon its current Plan E charter and, through this ballot question, adopt a new charter. Adopting a new charter is unnecessary, as the City's Plan E City Council/City Manager form of government, School Committee, and proportional representation elections will be maintained. Many of the proposed changes, such as its sections on the City's finances and budget, are

likewise unnecessary given the City already follows them via ordinance or policy. Changes to the City's election procedures similarly do not require adopting a new charter. Finally, certain proposed changes break down the barriers between the legislative and executive branches, degrading the separation of powers and harming decision making.

The proposed charter is unnecessary and does nothing to further what the City's Plan E charter already achieves: promoting good governance and furthering the City's commitment to equality, diversity, community engagement, and inclusivity. The City's current Plan E charter works, and a NO vote will ensure that it will continue to effectively serve the City's residents into the 21st Century.

To view multilingual versions of the ballot question summary and the proposed new City Charter in its entirety, please visit www.cambridgema/charterquestion

