CIVIC EXPLAINER
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Charter Amendment LA: City Infrastructure, Budget, Finance, and Contracting

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About this explainer: *Investing in Place supports Charter Amendment LA. Executive Director Jessica Meaney signed the argument in favor published in the City's official voter information pamphlet. This explainer describes the amendment's provisions and the decisions that would remain if it passes.*

A sidewalk someone can safely use. A street where all the streetlights work. A public pool kept in good repair. A working water fountain at your local park. The street by your job repaved. An open and clean public restroom. A bus stop with a shady tree and a place to sit. These everyday places shape our lives and show us, whether we realize it or not, if our local government is working for us.

Managing public infrastructure takes people, funding, and a way to bring the work together across City departments. Your city needs to know what it owns, what condition it is in, what needs attention first, and how to pay for improvements and ongoing maintenance. And you should, too.

Between now and November 3, Los Angeles voters will consider Charter Amendment LA, a bundled group of Charter changes developed through the Charter reform process and approved by the City Council for the ballot. This package would change how Los Angeles budgets, manages infrastructure, awards contracts, and uses City property and business activities to generate revenue.

Why is this coming before voters?

Our research has traced Council motions calling for a Citywide Infrastructure Program back to 2013. Yet Los Angeles still lacks this basic tool for managing its infrastructure. According to the Bureau of Engineering, the City's last program was in the 1990s.

Angelenos experience those gaps every day: broken sidewalks, missing curb ramps, streetlights that don't work, and streets waiting to be repaved.

For decades, the City has needed a way to answer these questions together: What needs fixing? What matters most to Angelenos? What comes first, and what tradeoffs will that require? What will it cost, and who is responsible for following through?

Charter Amendment LA would require the City to establish a Citywide Infrastructure Program to bring those decisions together. Changing the Charter requires voter approval.

What could a citywide infrastructure program make possible?

If Charter Amendment LA passes, the City would be required to have a Capital Infrastructure Program, or CIP. It would no longer depend on whether a Mayor or City Council chooses to make it a priority.

Done well, that program would give Angelenos a say in what gets fixed first and a way to understand what gets funded, what waits, and why. Tradeoffs could be discussed openly. City departments could plan work together over several years and identify the staffing and workforce development needed to get things done.

The Charter amendment intentionally leaves the program's details to an ordinance, so they can be developed through a public process led by the City Council and Mayor. That process will need to establish the scope, timeframe, leadership, project selection criteria, reporting, budgeting, and ways for Angelenos to help shape priorities.

Keeping these details in an ordinance gives current and future elected leaders flexibility to adjust the program as needs change, with public input, without requiring another Charter amendment.

What else is included?

Charter Amendment LA bundles budgeting and infrastructure with other changes. Following its review of recommendations from the Charter Reform Commission, City offices, and Councilmembers, the City Council approved proposed changes in June. The City Attorney's Office grouped those changes into ballot measures, and the Council approved the package now appearing as Charter Amendment LA on June 30.

Charter Amendment LA includes:

- **City budgeting:** Establish a two-year budget cycle, adjustable by ordinance, with annual spending approvals.
- **Citywide infrastructure program:** Require a Capital Infrastructure Program, with its timeframe and details established by City Council ordinance.

- **Public Works Director:** Establish the Director as the department's executive, with authority to direct and coordinate work across all five Public Works bureaus: Contract Administration, Sanitation, Street Services, Engineering, and Street Lighting.
- **Board of Public Works:** Allow changes to the Board's structure and responsibilities to be considered through the City Council's public ordinance process. This authority would include restructuring or eliminating the Board, but the amendment itself would do neither.
- **Critical infrastructure contracts:** Add an exception to the Charter's competitive bidding requirements for qualified vendors working on critical infrastructure. Vendor qualification standards would be established by ordinance.
- **Software contracts:** Expand a competitive bidding exception to software services and maintenance obtained from the manufacturer or its exclusive agent.
- **Contracting disclosure forms:** Allow specified technical or administrative errors to be waived or corrected under rules established by ordinance. Substantive ethics disclosure errors could be corrected before evaluation, but could not be waived.
- **Mortgaging City property:** Remove the Charter prohibition on using City property as security for borrowing. The amendment would not approve a particular mortgage or loan.
- **Commercial and industrial businesses:** Remove the Charter restriction on the City's ability to operate commercial or industrial businesses. Specific proposals would require further City action.

How would budgeting and Public Works change?

A two-year budget cycle would give the City a longer horizon for its financial and work planning decisions, while retaining annual spending approvals. The citywide infrastructure program could cover a longer period.

The Director of Public Works would move from a largely administrative role to an executive role with authority over the five bureaus: Engineering, Street Services, Sanitation, Street Lighting, and Contract Administration.

The Director would manage the department's operations, while the Board of Public Works would provide oversight, approve contracts, and hold public hearings. Charter Amendment LA would allow the Council, with public input, to consider how the Board's role could help Public Works function better. Those changes could be made by ordinance rather than another Charter amendment.

The amendment would not automatically eliminate the Board. Restructuring or eliminating it would require a two-thirds Council vote, subject to Mayoral approval or veto.

What about mortgages and City businesses?

Mortgaging City property means using it as collateral for borrowing, but would not approve a particular mortgage or loan. The City would still have to comply with state laws limiting municipal borrowing.

The commercial enterprise provision would remove the Charter restriction on City business activities. It would not establish a particular business.

Specific proposals would require further City action, with opportunities for public review through City Council and committee proceedings to examine their costs, risks, and benefits.

Would Charter Amendment LA provide money for repairs?

Charter Amendment LA creates no new tax or dedicated infrastructure revenue. The City estimates $4 million to $6 million in one-time costs to establish the infrastructure program and two-year budget cycle, including systems upgrades and staff training.

A Citywide Infrastructure Program could give Angelenos a role in identifying needs and setting priorities. It could also provide a public accounting of what repairs and ongoing maintenance would cost, what funding is available, and what remains unfunded.

That work could make the City more competitive for state and federal funding by showing why a project is a shared City priority, how it was selected, and what early preparation has been completed. Instead of starting with a grant opportunity and asking what to apply for, the City could identify needs and priorities first, then pursue funding that fits.

Done well, that process could also help develop a future infrastructure revenue proposal from the ground up—with community priorities shaping what the money would pay for, clear costs, and responsibility for getting the work done. Any revenue proposal would be a separate decision.

Who supports it, and who opposes it?

Councilmembers Katy Yaroslavsky and Bob Blumenfield, City Controller Kenneth Mejia, and former Controller Ron Galperin signed the official argument supporting Charter Amendment LA, along with leaders of Investing in Place, LA Forward, and Streets for All. The argument emphasizes planning ahead, longer-term budgeting, and clearer responsibility for getting projects done.

We have reached out to both mayoral candidates and every sitting Councilmember to confirm their positions. Councilmember Tim McOsker has also confirmed his support. (We will update this explainer as additional positions are confirmed.)

Councilmember Monica Rodriguez signed the opposing argument, citing concerns about public oversight and allowing the Council to change the Board of Public Works by ordinance rather than through a voter-approved Charter amendment.

Central City Association (CCA), the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce, and the Los Angeles County Business Federation (BizFed) also oppose the amendment.

These business groups have expressed support for a Citywide Infrastructure Program. Their objections to the bundled amendment concern broader City business authority and potential competition with private businesses.

Groups that call for government efficiency and support infrastructure planning are now opposing a package containing those reforms because it also permits activities that could compete with their members' businesses.

Specific business concerns could be addressed through subsequent legislation. But because the provisions are bundled, a no vote also rejects the requirement for infrastructure planning and the move to longer-term budgeting.

What does your vote mean?

A yes vote adopts the full package of Charter changes. Further City decisions would establish how the infrastructure program and other provisions operate.

A no vote keeps the current Charter rules in place: annual budgeting, the existing Public Works structure, and no Charter requirement for a citywide infrastructure program. It also rejects the proposed contracting and financial authority changes.

Los Angeles should be able to explain what needs fixing, what comes first, how it will pay for the work, and who is responsible. These are basic questions residents should be able to ask—and get answers to.

Read the official voter information pamphlet, including the full Charter Amendment, financial analysis, and arguments for and against.