

Frequently Asked Questions about the Transforming Public Safety Charter Amendment

What would the Transforming Public Safety Charter Amendment do?

The Transforming Public Safety Charter Amendment would establish in the City Charter a new Department of Public Safety, mirroring the structure of the Minnesota Department of Public Safety. This new City department would oversee and lead a continuum of public safety efforts that prevent, intervene in, and reduce crime and violence to create safer communities for everyone in Minneapolis. The amendment would remove the Police Department as a charter department, and establish in its place a Division of Law Enforcement within the Department of Public Safety made up of sworn peace officers (police) responsible for the core functions of law enforcement.

What is the problem the Transforming Public Safety Charter Amendment would solve?

The Transforming Public Safety Charter Amendment would create a more accountable and expansive public safety system. It would combine the City's many public safety functions into one department for improved coordination and outcomes. In addition, it supports good government by increasing oversight and accountability for police.

The proposed amendment would ensure that the Police Department can be held to the very same standards of service and professionalism as every other City department. Currently, the Minneapolis Police Department is the only City department for which the Charter exclusively assigns oversight to the Mayor. All other departments that provide urgent, emergency services (such as the Minneapolis Fire Department and Public Works) have joint oversight between the Mayor and City Council. This joint oversight ensures maximum accountability. It is also consistent with residents' clear expectation that their City Council representatives take responsibility for improving policing in Minneapolis.

We have seen the tragic consequences of reduced accountability for the police. We continue to pay the price -- both in terms of violence in our communities involving police, broken trust in our systems, and the multimillion-dollar payouts taxpayers routinely pay out for police misconduct. It is time to bring law enforcement into alignment with every other City department, to ensure officers are more accountable to the people through their City Council representatives. In addition, it is important to incorporate police into a broader Public Safety Department to ensure traditional law enforcement is complementary to and supportive of our other critical public safety strategies.

Does the Transforming Public Safety Charter Amendment get rid of police?

No. State law requires us to respond to many types of incidents with licensed peace officers (police). The Transforming Public Safety Charter Amendment would unify law enforcement with other current public safety strategies -- like violence prevention and intervention programs -- under a more expansive Public Safety Department. The new department would oversee and lead a continuum of public safety efforts that prevent, intervene in, and reduce crime and violence to create safer communities for everyone in Minneapolis. It would include a Division of Law Enforcement made up of sworn peace officers responsible for the core functions of law enforcement.

Rather than rely on a one-size-fits-all system that relies on police to simply respond to crime after it happens, this improved approach would more proactively and holistically address the causes of crime before harm is done -- and ensure police response is complementary to the City's proven prevention and intervention approaches.

While we are required by state law to have police who carry out law enforcement duties, the proposed amendment would eliminate an outdated provision that requires an arbitrary minimum number of officers in Minneapolis. The decades-old mandate, added to our charter after lobbying by the Minneapolis Police Federation, limits our ability to invest in proven strategies to reduce crime rather than simply respond after it occurs. Minneapolis residents demand efficient, specialized emergency response. A one-size-fits-all approach can't fulfill that standard. The proposed amendment does not get rid of police, but rather gives us the same freedom other cities and counties have to decide how to best meet our urgent needs of preventing, reducing, and responding to crime.

Do community members get a say on this?

Absolutely. In fact, community members will get *the* say on this proposal. Ballot measures empower Minneapolis residents to make the final decision on whether to proceed with a given proposal or not. Provided the City Council allows this measure to be placed on the November ballot, Minneapolis voters will have the opportunity to vote yes or no on the proposal. Minneapolis voters will decide whether to stick with the status quo or proceed with a more expansive public safety system better equipped to prevent harm and keep all Minneapolis residents safe.

There will also be a public hearing, yet to be scheduled but expected in February, as part of the City Council's consideration. This will provide another opportunity for community members to weigh in on the proposal to include the Transforming Public Safety Charter Amendment on the November ballot.

What is the Charter Commission and what role does it play in this process?

The Charter Commission serves as a kind of “standing constitutional convention” and is the body that holds the city charter in trust for the people of Minneapolis. By state law, any proposal to amend the charter must involve the Charter Commission. There are 15 unelected members of the Charter Commission, who are appointed by the Chief Judge of the Hennepin County District Court. The City Council does not decide who serves on the Charter Commission.

When the City Council proposes a charter amendment, the Charter Commission has up to 150 days to review and submit its recommendation(s) on the proposal. As part of its mandatory review, the Charter Commission may do one of three things:

- Accept the proposed charter amendment and recommend it be referred as a ballot question to voters;
- Reject the proposed charter amendment and recommend that it not be referred as a ballot question to voters; or
- Offer a “substitute” proposal — an alternative to the City Council’s proposal — which could be referred as a ballot question to voters instead.

While the Charter Commission may offer guidance, it does not ultimately decide whether the Transforming Public Safety Charter Amendment will appear on the 2021 ballot. Ultimately, the City Council will decide whether to allow voters to decide on this proposal. State law requires any proposed ballot question to be submitted no later than 74 days prior to the election when it would be presented as a ballot question to be decided by voters. Because this year’s election is on Nov. 2, the City Council must finalize its decision by Aug. 20.

Finally, Charter Commission meetings are open to the public. You can find upcoming meeting dates, agendas, and additional meeting materials using [the City’s Legislative Information Management System](#).

How does this fit with other City efforts to promote public safety?

We’ve started a community engagement process to ask all of our residents what makes them feel safe, and design a better system together. What we’re hearing back is a broad, bold vision. Changing the charter alone doesn’t implement that vision, but it makes it possible for us to continue working together to realize it. The Transforming Public Safety Charter Amendment aligns with the resolution unanimously passed by the City Council in June, then signed by Mayor Frey, that committed us to transforming our public safety system to ensure it keeps everyone in Minneapolis safe. The resolution also committed us to seek input from community members, and there is no more direct or transparent way for the people of our city to participate than in an election. You can learn more about the City’s dynamic, ongoing efforts to improve public safety and prevent violence [here](#).

How is the Transforming Public Safety Charter Amendment different from last year's proposed charter amendment?

The Transforming Public Safety Charter Amendment reflects wide-ranging feedback from community members citywide over the past year. In addition to creating a more accountable and expansive public safety system, this proposal clarifies that the City will retain traditional law enforcement. Further, it includes the flexibility to combine other City public safety functions under one department for improved coordination and outcomes.

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