Charter Review Commission Opposes Petition to Create a Single-Person Veto for the County Budget and Proposes an Alternative

The Montgomery County Charter Review Commission on June 10, 2026, voted unanimously to oppose the Charter amendment being proposed by a citizens' petition. The petition seeks a Charter amendment that essentially would allow a single member of the Council to veto any County operating budget that increases the previous year's spending by more than the inflation rate.[1] The petition's proposed amendment would require a unanimous vote of all sitting Council members to approve any operating budget that increases spending from the previous year by more than the inflation rate even if no tax increase is needed and the budget can be funded by current revenue streams. Today, such a budget needs to be approved by a supermajority of seven votes on the eleven-member Council.

The proposed Charter amendment is the initiative of a citizens' petition supported by the minority party that is seeking the signatures needed to put the amendment on the ballot this November for voters' approval. They refer to their proposal as "Stop the Spend" and claim it will limit spending increases to the inflation rate. However, the only change it would make is requiring a unanimous Council vote instead of approval by seven of the eleven Council members.

Petitioners seem to believe that unanimous approval would be so unlikely that, as a practical matter, Council would always be forced to hold spending to the amount spent the previous year (adjusted for inflation). However as recently as May, 2025, the Council's vote on the Fiscal Year 2026 operating budget was unanimous. What petitioners' amendment actually does is give veto power and leverage over the budget to any one Council member who could use that leverage to override the other 10 members and establish extreme minority rule. The risks of ending majority rule in a legislative body are evident.

The Commission's Recommendation for an Alternative Charter Amendment

After rejecting the petitioners' proposed amendment to require a unanimous vote for budget approvals, the Commission considered whether an alternative amendment would improve the process specified in Charter section 305. The Commission then voted to recommend to the Council a different Charter amendment aimed at broadening the support needed to enact spending increases and encouraging compromise without creating single-member vetoes and minority rule.

Specifically, the Commission has voted to recommend that the Charter instead be amended to require approval by two-thirds of the sitting members for a budget that increases

[1] The Commission voted 8 to 0 in favor of the motion to oppose the citizens' petition to amend the Charter to require the affirmative vote of all sitting Council members to approve an operating budget that increases the previous year's spending by more than the inflation rate. Voting in favor: Chair Michaels and Commissioners Brett-Major, Denis, Nachtsheim, Naftal, Persh, Quintana, and Wilson. Absent and not voting: Commissioners Figueroa, Lynch, and Presman. Commissioners Figueroa and Lynch both stated in advance of the vote that if they were present they would vote with the majority to oppose the petitioners' proposed Charter amendment.

spending by more than the inflation rate. That would require eight votes on the eleven-member Council for approving such a budget instead of seven votes.[2] The Commission made the same recommendation in 2024.

The Commission's 2024 Report to the Council recommended that Council create a uniform two-thirds or eight-vote requirement for all three budget actions listed in Section 305, including the vote to approve a budget that increases spending more than the inflation rate (which now requires only seven votes). If so amended, that provision would then match the eight votes needed for the Council to exceed the spending affordability guidelines it previously established. The Commission stated that a uniform eight-vote requirement was preferable to having three different voting levels specified in Section 305. The Council did not act on that recommendation in 2024.[3]

The petitioners' campaign asserts that their proposed amendment limits spending increases to the inflation rate. But the literal wording of their amendment would not do that. Their claim is based on a political calculation that the unanimous vote that will be required would not be achieved on an eleven-member Council. Their proposal is supported by the minority political party that hopes to gain representatives on the Council and lessen the chances for achieving unanimity. Of course, in a multi-party legislative body, a requirement for unanimity increases the prospect for a non-majority party member to use that leverage to dictate what concessions must be made to adopt the budget unanimously.

Increasing the requirement from seven votes to eight votes would encourage fuller cooperation among Council members to reach budget compromises that result in a budget plan that receives broad support from a full two-thirds of the Council. Recently, that level of consensus occurred this year when the budget was approved with nine votes.

A two-thirds vote would be a far superior approach for building a consensus than the petition's proposal to require unanimous votes. The requirement for a unanimous vote would encourage hold-outs, single-member vetoes, and back-room deals to break inevitable deadlocks. With an eight-vote requirement, the other three Council members could vocalize

---

[2] The Commission voted 8 to 0 in favor of the motion to recommend that the council adopt a Charter amendment to require a vote by two-thirds of the sitting Council members to approve an operating budget that increases the previous year's spending by more than the inflation rate. Voting in favor: Chair Michaels and Commissioners Brett-Major, Denis, Nachtsheim, Naftal, Persh, Quintana, and Wilson. Absent and not voting: Commissioners Figueroa, Lynch, and Presman. Commissioners Figueroa and Lynch both stated in advance of the vote that if they were present they would vote with the majority to recommend the Council adopt a Charter amendment to require a vote by two-thirds of the sitting Council members.

[3] The Council did, however, introduce a resolution in 2024 to change the vote requirement for increasing the property tax rate under section 305, which the Commission also recommended. The resolution would have changed the Charter to require 8 votes to increase the property tax rate instead of requiring a unanimous vote. That resolution was narrowly defeated by a vote of 5 to 6. Some Council members who voted against the change noted that a requirement in Maryland's state law usually overrode the unanimous vote requirement for tax rate decisions.

their reasons for dissenting without obstructing the budget approval process or allowing the preferences of a very few to override the majority.

A ballot question that proposes to increase the number of approval votes from seven to eight can also serve to frame voters' choices in clear terms that are presently being obscured by the campaign slogan claiming that the petitioners' amendment will automatically limit spending increases to the inflation rate. The alternative proposal can be expected to generate a public discussion that focuses attention on the actual issue by clarifying the choices represented by both options.

With such high stakes, voters deserve a better and clearer choice on the ballot. Instead of holding a referendum on the credibility of petitioners' promise to "stop spending," the voters should simply vote on whether higher budget spending should be approved by seven members, eight members or only by a unanimous Council vote.