



BOSTON CITY COUNCIL

Committee on Government Operations
Gabriela Coletta Zapata, Chair

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REPORT OF COMMITTEE CHAIR

July 9, 2025

Dear Councilors,

The Committee on Government Operations was referred the following docket for consideration:

Docket #1274, Communication was received from Eneida Tavares, Chair of the Board of Election, regarding the Citizen Petition to establish an Independent Municipal Inspector General.

This matter was referred to the Committee on June 25, 2025.

Summary of Legislation

Docket #1274, is a citizen's petition to place a nonbinding public opinion advisory question on the ballot for the November 4, 2025 municipal election. The petition proposes placement on the ballot of the following question:

“In the interest of accountability, transparency, accessibility, and fiscal responsibility, should the City of Boston establish an independent municipal Inspector General to provide governmental oversight?”

Pursuant to **M.G.L. Chapter 53, Section 18A**, a nonbinding public opinion advisory question may be placed on the ballot for a regular municipal election by vote of the governing body no later than thirty-five (35) days before the election, or upon the submission of a citizen-initiated petition that satisfies applicable statutory requirements. In the City of Boston, the “governing body” includes the City Council and the Mayor.

Under the statute, a citizen-initiated petition signed by at least ten (10) registered voters may be submitted to the governing body for consideration and approval. Where such a petition is approved by the governing body at least ninety (90) days before the election (*Wednesday, August 6, 2025*), the question shall be placed on the ballot for the upcoming municipal election. The petition submitted under Docket #1274 was signed by 21 registered voters. The Board of Election Commissioners examined the petition submitted and deemed the signatures sufficient to satisfy the signature requirement of at least 10 registered voters.

If the Council does not act on Docket #1274 by August 6th, petitioners may still seek to qualify the question for ballot placement; however, through an alternate process outlined in **Chapter 53, Section 18A** that requires collecting additional signatures from at least ten percent (10%) of the City’s registered voters. This process would allow the question to be placed on the ballot without approval of the City’s governing body but involves a significantly higher administrative burden. Timely approval by the City Council will support the petitioners in their advocacy for placement of the proposed question on the ballot this November.



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Committee Hearing

The Committee held a hearing on Docket #1274 on June 30, 2025. At the hearing, the Committee discussed the process for placing nonbinding questions on the ballot for municipal elections and how Docket #1274 aligns with other related initiatives currently before the Body.

The Chair created space for open dialogue, invited legal and Elections Department input, and facilitated a productive environment where Councilors could ask critical questions and deepen their understanding. The Chair emphasized that discussion has not been about whether the Body supports oversight, but about how to achieve it in a coherent, legally sound, and durable way that complements ongoing legislative efforts.

Regarding the process, the Committee discussed timeline restraints for passage as well as what it would mean to vote in favor of Docket #1247. It was explained that Docket #1247 was submitted to the Body by City of Boston registered voters under M.G.L. Chapter 53, Section 18A, which provides citizens of the City the opportunity to have a nonbinding question placed on the ballot for the next municipal election. It was further explained that should Docket #1247 be approved by the Council and the Mayor by August 6, 2025, it will be placed on the ballot for the upcoming municipal election in November. If the Council does not advance the Docket, it was explained that the Law outlines an alternative process for placing the question; however, residents would be required to collect signatures from 10% of the City's registered voters to get it on the ballot themselves.

Following discussion of the process, Councilors raised concerns about potential duplication of efforts, highlighting the Council's recent budget vote to increase funding to the Finance Commission and questioning how the ballot question could impact the existing Home Rule Petition to expand/restructure the Finance Commission. The Chair explained how this ballot initiative is a supplement to the existing HRP, demonstrating to the State House that Boston residents care about oversight, accountability, and transparency and would support the HRP. It was stated that, although the question is nonbinding, it remains significant because it demonstrates public support that can strengthen the case for the HRP when it advances to Beacon Hill. Councilors acknowledged that the general public would likely support a ballot measure calling for an Inspector General but emphasized the need for community engagement efforts and cautioned inadvertently undermining the Council's ongoing work on related legislation.

At the close of the hearing, public testimony was given in support of placing the proposed question on the ballot, emphasizing the importance of advancing the will of the voters.

Committee Chair Recommended Action

As Chair of the Committee on Government Operations I recommend moving the listed docket from the Committee to the full Council for discussion and formal action. At this time, my recommendation to the full Council will be that this matter **OUGHT TO PASS**.

Gabriela Coletta Zapata, Chair
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