



BOSTON CITY COUNCIL

Committee of the Whole
Liz Breadon, Chair

One City Hall Square 5th Floor, Boston, MA 02201 ♦ Phone: (617) 635-3040 ♦ city.council@boston.gov

REPORT OF COMMITTEE CHAIR

February 4, 2026

Dear Councilors,

The Committee of the Whole was referred the following docket for consideration:

Docket #0157, Order to adopt Rules for the Boston City Council for Municipal Years 2026-2027.

This matter was sponsored by Council President Liz Breadon and was referred to the Committee on January 28, 2026.

Summary of Legislation

Docket #0157, is an Order to adopt Rules proposed for the Boston City Council for Municipal Years 2026-2027, filed in accordance with Rule 47 of the Temporary Rules of the Body, which states that the Rules of the City Council shall be adopted for a two-year term and shall be adopted by a majority roll call vote no later than the first regular meeting in February.

Information Discussed at the Meeting

The Committee held a meeting on Friday, January 30, 2026, to discuss Docket #0157. The purpose of the meeting was to provide Councilors with an opportunity to ask questions, seek clarification, and discuss the proposed rule changes prior to consideration by the Body.

At the outset of the meeting, Councilors identified several overarching goals and concerns that framed the discussion, including a desire to understand the intent behind proposed rule and committee structure changes; to ensure that procedural revisions would strengthen the Council as a deliberative body; and to clarify how the rules would operate in practice.

During the meeting, the Committee engaged in a detailed discussion of several proposed rule revisions and how those revisions interact with other rules that would remain unchanged. The discussion focused primarily on Rules 7, 12, 40A, 46, 48, and 39, as well as proposed changes to committee descriptions under Rule 36.

With respect to Rule 7, Councilors questioned whether removing language requiring motions involving the largest sum or longest term to be taken first could potentially weaken the Council's leverage in budgetary or spending-related motions. It was explained that the removal of such language was intended to clarify procedures and would not alter how motions are taken in practice.

With respect to Rule 12, Councilors raised questions regarding the removal of the Friday 4:00 p.m. deadline for Committee reports and questioned whether this change would impact the Body's time for review prior to a weekly meeting. It was explained that the language removed was an expression of an internal workflow "best practice", intended to support the coordination and preparation of Committee report materials between Chairs, Central Staff, and the Clerk's Office in advance of the Monday filing



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deadline. It was further explained that the removal of such language will not change or govern when Committee reports are made available for review.

With respect to Rule 40A, Councilors sought clarification on revisions made to voting language. It was explained that the revisions were made to clarify that any action taken by the Council in response to a referral would require a two-thirds vote of all members of the Council, not merely those present. In light of the seriousness of actions taken under Rule 40A, Councilors proposed re-adding language to require and ensure that any such action be taken by roll call vote.

With respect to Rule 46, Councilors asked whether the revised emergency language narrowed the ability to introduce late-filed matters or expanded discretion in determining what qualifies as an emergency, particularly with respect to the language about whether the matter could reasonably have been anticipated more than 48 hours in advance. It was explained that the language in question was revised to reflect the spirit of the Open Meeting Law and directly tracks standards applied by the Attorney General in Open Meeting Law determinations. Further discussion emphasized limiting late filings to true emergencies in order to maintain compliance with the Open Meeting Law.

With respect to Rule 48, Councilors expressed concern that removing explicit majority-vote language could introduce ambiguity or expand discretion. It was explained that the revision was intended to eliminate ambiguity and promote language consistency with respect to voting requirements across all rules. It was stated that, as revised, the Rules identify where a two-thirds vote is required and that, by nature of Rule 28, unless specified otherwise, all other questions put, such as the Motion to Lay on the Table, shall, by default, require a majority vote.

With respect to Rule 39, Councilors asked whether unused speaking time could be carried forward and how time would be tracked when a Councilor speaks more than once. It was explained that, as permitted under the rule, unused time would not be forfeited and that Councilors may use their allotted time in segments once all Councilors wishing to speak have had an opportunity to do so. Further, it was clarified that the Clerk's Office is responsible for timekeeping.

Regarding Committee structures outlined under Rule 36, Councilors expressed their thoughts and concerns about the descriptions and oversight abilities of each Committee, particularly with respect to the creation of the Committee on Census, Redistricting, and Elections, the subject matter jurisdiction of the Committee on Education, and the intersection of subject matter oversight between the Committees that address Public Health, Housing, and Human Services.

Councilors questioned why a new committee was created to focus on elections and whether those matters should instead fall under existing Committees, such as the Committee on City Services, noting the operational and service-delivery aspects of election administration. Discussion emphasized the importance of election integrity and readiness for redistricting. It was explained that a Committee dedicated to focusing on census, redistricting, and elections would be a valuable tool for the Body as preparation for the next census has already begun, to address concerns about census accuracy and election readiness.



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Councilors also discussed the scope of the Education Committee and whether education-related budget dockets, including components of the Boston Public Schools budget, should be included within the Committee’s jurisdiction. Discussion supported expanding the Education Committee’s role to provide focused oversight on education policy; however highlighted concerns against fragmenting budget oversight. Concerns were raised that assigning budget matters to multiple committees could create procedural confusion or inconsistencies with the matters addressed by the Committee on Ways and Means.

Regarding the intersection of subject matter oversight between the Committees on Public Health, Housing, and Human Services, Councilors questioned the reassignment of reproductive health, LGBTQ+ health, and trauma-related matters from the Committee on Public Health to the Committee on Human Services, as well as the potential overlap with the Committee on Housing with respect to matters of homelessness. It was explained that the intent of such language revisions was to broaden the scope of certain Committees while clarifying distinctions between matters like housing-focused solutions vs. public health approaches.

Before adjourning the meeting, the Committee also discussed procedures for summoning members when votes require a two-thirds vote of the full Council; the role of Robert’s Rules of Order when Council rules are silent; Rule 38 and questions regarding enforceability and free-speech considerations; and the value of future Committee of the Whole meetings to address concerns of the Body.

Summary of Amendments

The Rules as proposed have been amended to include gender neutral language throughout; a new committee event type known as “public testimony sessions” under Rule 35A; revised Committee descriptions for the Committee on Human Services and the Committee on Public Health, Homelessness, and Recovery under Rule 36; and language that would explicitly require a roll-call vote under Rule 40A.

Rule 35A was amended to incorporate the following language regarding “public testimony sessions”:

“Committee public testimony sessions refer to formal sessions of a committee at which members of the public are invited to testify regarding a particular docket or subject matter as articulated in the docket assigned to that committee. Committee chairs may schedule public testimony sessions for the exclusive purpose of allowing Councilors to hear statements from the public and focusing on the public’s positions on a particular docket or subject matter. Councilors may provide opening and closing remarks.”

Under Rule 36, the Committee description for the Committee on Human Services was amended to incorporate the following language to reflect the previous name of the Committee and its focus on strong women, families, and girls:

“The Committee shall focus on stabilizing and strengthening communities with a particular focus on girls and women.”

Under Rule 36, the Committee description for the Committee on Public Health, Homelessness, and Recovery was amended to re-incorporate the following language regarding the Committee’s oversight beyond COVID-19 pandemic, HIV, and other infectious diseases:



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“The Committee shall concern itself with all public health matters including, but not limited to, the COVID-19 pandemic, HIV, and other infectious diseases, trauma, sexual and reproductive health, LGBTQ+ health services, and public health policies and interventions aimed at addressing structural inequalities in health outcomes.”

Rule 40A was amended to re-incorporate the following language requiring a roll call vote:

“Any action by the Council taken in response to any referral shall require a roll call vote of two-thirds (2/3) majority of all members of the Council and shall be in accordance with local, state and federal law.”

Committee Chair Recommended Action

As Chair of the Committee of the Whole, 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 IN A NEW DRAFT.**

Liz Breadon, Chair
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