Governance Committee Interim Report

Oct 13, 2026

The Governance Committee is composed [] of Commissioners Gould, Perez, Ray, and Villarreal. Between the four of us, we bring a wealth of experience in the workings of government from various different perspectives. Commissioner Gould is an experienced City Manager, and brings a pragmatic administrative lens to our conversation. Commissioner Perez works with local officials, both elected (councilors and mayors), and administrators (City Managers, etc) from across the country, and has [] perspectives on how different forms of governance work in different locations. Commissioner Ray worked for decades [in NM state government] as an attorney for the New Mexico Legislature, drafting law and helping to resolve conflicts in the legislative - executive context.[] She has a deep understanding of governance. Commissioner Villarreal is a former City Councilor, served under two administrations, and has first hand experience of Santa Fe governance and how things worked or did not work during her tenure.

Collectively, we have researched and deliberated the questions we set out to find answers to. We have looked at publications and reports, including the National Civic League's Model Charter City, 9th edition, the ICMA (International City/County Management Association), the US Conference of Mayors, the New Mexico Municipal League, and we looked into the Albuquerque governance model. Additionally, we conducted several interviews with people around the state and country, including Las Cruces City Councilors, former Sante Fe Mayor [] Coss, Roswell Mayor Jennings, Alison [] Nichols of the New Mexico [] Municipal League, and current council members from Denver, Nashville, Portland ME and OR.

Overall, the Committee was unable to come to a consensus on what to propose to the Commission. Below is a table which summarizes our positions and thoughts on the issues. On most issues, there is agreement between Commissioners Gould, Perez, and Villarreal, and disagreement from Commissioner Ray. We invite the full Commission to engage in further discussion. Our hope is that bringing all the Commissioners into the conversation will help us find a broader consensus as to what recommendations to bring regarding these issues.

Issue	Where we agree	Why	Where we Disagree	Why
On Governing Philosophy	Commissioners Gould, Villarreal and	Incentivizing collaboration between the executive and the legislative branches	Commissioner Ray believes in a	The voters in 2025 clearly expressed a desire for more

	Perez believe in a balance of power, where there are areas where both the executive and the legislative branches work together. This includes collaborating on a legislative agenda and a budget, and appointments of the key administrative officials	supports power sharing, creates a more democratic culture in the city government, and ultimately makes better policy. The budget should be worked on over a span of months by both branches collaboratively, with input from Departments and staff. Same for the legislative agenda. In this model, both the mayor and the councilors can introduce legislation, but only the council votes on it. Commissioner Gould recommends that the elected leaders - mayor and councilors - make policy and the professional staff carry out that policy.	separation of powers, where the powers of the executive and the legislative are clearly delineated, with discreet areas of overlap.	separate executive and legislative branches. The mayor is responsible for proposing a legislative agenda. The councilors both propose and introduce legislation. The mayor also can introduce legislation through a sponsor in the council. The mayor proposes a budget, and the Council can also propose one. The final budget can be negotiated between the two, to be approved by the council
On the Mayor's Role	Commissioners Ray, Villarreal and Perez believe the mayor should not get a vote on the council.	The very recent vote in 2025, in which the voters by a large margin decided to take away the mayor's vote on the council, outside of ties and lack of quorum.	Commissioner Gould believes the mayor should get a vote on the council. He favors a unitary governing body composed of both the mayor and an appointed professional city manager as the executive.	The mayor not having a vote on the Council is at odds with other Charter requirements that the mayor set the legislative agenda and propose an annual budget. Having the mayor on the council incentivizes all parties to work together. Not all parties interviewed have the same take.
On a Mayor's Veto Power	Commissioners Gould, Villarreal, and Perez believe	If a vote is passed by the council with a majority or more of the vote, the mayor's veto can just over power all those votes.	Commissioner Ray believes the mayor should have veto	Since the mayor does not have a vote on the council, this gives the executive

	the mayor should not get veto power.	The voters decided that they did not want the mayor voting on the council. This gives the mayor a super charged vote.	powers, including line item veto power on budget items only. This power should be coupled with an override vote by the council, with a super majority.	power to stop legislation that they oppose.
On Accountability for the 3 top Administrative Positions	Commissioners Gould, Villarreal and Perez believe the hiring, management, and firing of the top 3 positions should be shared by the mayor and the council.	Both the executive and the legislative branches should be involved in the vetting of applicants, participating in the interview process, and providing recommendations of their top candidates. Ultimately a vote would be held by the full governing body to officially hire and fire the three administrative positions. In this model, a professional City Manager oversees the organization, but works for all the elected representatives of the city. When the mayor alone is responsible for the recruitment and vetting for these positions, and their management, this creates a dynamic where the key appointed officials don't have an incentive to support councilors who don't agree with the mayor's agenda. This is considered to be best practice, and is by far the most common model in	Commissioner Ray believes the mayor should be in charge of hiring and firing, with consent of the council, and solely responsible for management of the top 3 positions.	As the executive and only full time elected official in the city, the mayor should be responsible and accountable for the administration of the city. The councilors only work part time, and can't be expected to manage the three key administrators in addition to their legislative roles. The City Manager (and the other positions) should be a member of the mayor's administrative team, and they should work very closely together to carry out the administrative vision of the mayor in the interest of the voters. Having a City Manager that doesn't report to one person creates a situation where

		American cities today (over 10,00000 cities, out of a total of more than 19,500 municipalities nationwide). The subcommittee did not find any studies, data, or expert opinions that support a strong mayor form of government in this respect. In our local context this means that the mayor would also get a vote on the matter of firing and hiring these positions.		one unelected employee has no actual oversight and has no accountability to the voting public, and performs like the CEO of a corporation.