
RESTORING TRUST IN CITY GOVERNMENT:

A New Way Forward for Transparency
and Accountability

By Brandon Scott

Dear Baltimore,

We face a number of challenges as we seek to move Baltimore forward. Crime, substandard education, a lack of affordable housing, and uneven access to opportunity are all different facets of the same structural issues that plague Baltimore and many other cities around the country. Some of these are symptoms of long-standing and systemic issues that go back decades. Our margin for error is small. That's why we must get right the things that are totally up to us. Operating a government that is worthy of the city's trust is our most basic and fundamental responsibility, and it is completely within our ability.

But Baltimore residents have lost faith in their elected officials and their city government, and who can blame them. It seems like not a week goes by without a new story about an elected official facing corruption charges or on the front page due to some other sort of misconduct. In recent years, two Mayors have resigned following shocking revelations of their criminal conduct while in public office. They disgraced themselves, the Office of Mayor, and our entire city. This is unacceptable. We should expect public officials to meet the highest ethical standards and set an example for honesty and integrity; sadly, in our city, too many have met the lowest. This must end and not be repeated.

Part of our city's comeback story must be rebuilding the public trust. As Mayor, I will commit to introducing concrete and measurable initiatives aimed at restoring faith between the city and its leaders. Our political process, as we are seeing right now, is far too reliant on a handful of wealthy donors. This makes every day residents feel like they do not have a say in government, that the city is not working for them. I will put smart guardrails in place to limit the corrosive influence of money in politics while building on the much-needed support I have already sought for public financing of our political campaigns. Our Board of Estimates is one of the most powerful institutions in the city, overseeing the awarding of all the city's contracts. But for that reason, it is also the most vulnerable to improper influence. I will make our Board of Estimates more accountable by ensuring that only elected officials that must answer to voters serve on the BOE. Finally, our government works best when it works in the open and out of the shadows. I will take measures to ensure that the legislative process is more transparent and accessible to Baltimoreans.

Having an honest, transparent government characterized by integrity is not only the right thing to do, it is also the most effective way to run a city. That is why these are just the first steps we must take toward restoring the faith in City Hall. Because the only way out of our current crisis is with all of our residents buying in. I welcome your ideas and suggestions at brandon@brandonforbaltimore.com.

In service,

Brandon Scott

BUILDING ON OUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

In my time on the City Council and in my short time as Council President, I have prioritized transparency and accountability, rooting out corruption, and working every day to create a more ethical city government. I am proud of my record:

- ✓ Introduced the law that created Baltimore City's Open Data program, requiring city government to release more data to the public on a regular basis.
- ✓ Passed the Fair Election Fund, which provides a mechanism for public financing for local elections to get big money out of politics.
- ✓ Passed the Whistleblower Rights and Responsibilities Act, which protects City employees against retaliation for reporting waste, fraud, and abuse.
- ✓ Passed legislation strengthening and improving the City's financial disclosures.
- ✓ Championed legislation that's working its way through the legislative process to properly support and provide funding to the Board of Ethics so that it can serve as the watchdog this city needs.
- ✓ Introduced a bill closing a loophole that allowed lobbyists to give gifts to elected officials, which the City Council is currently considering.

LEGISLATIVE WORK IN PROGRESS

Reform the Board of Estimates to Increase Transparency

As I announced in my Legislative & Policy Proposal released July 2019, I will increase transparency and accountability by changing the makeup of the Board of Estimates to just the elected members. As Council President, I have already introduced a Charter Amendment to reduce the size of the Board of Estimates from five members to three. We will pass that legislation and get it on the November ballot so voters can make their voice heard.

The Board of Estimates approves at over a half a billion in city government contracts for goods and services every year. The Board is currently made up of the City Council President, Mayor, Comptroller, City Solicitor, and Director of the Department of Public Works (DPW). The City Solicitor and DPW Director are both appointed by the Mayor. This has led many to question their independence and objectivity when assessing Mayor-supported proposals.

Changing the makeup of the Board of Estimates is one way to increase transparency and deliberation in how taxpayer dollars are spent. Removing the City Solicitor and Director of DPW from the Board of Estimates would make the BOE process more accountable to the residents of Baltimore because it would give each member of the Board equal weight in approving City contracts. We will increase accountability when the officials who have been elected by the people are voting on how taxpayers' dollars are being sent.

Most cities do not use a Board of Estimates to approve city contracts. Over my tenure, I will investigate alternatives to the Board of Estimates with the intention to make the decision making process more transparent and democratic. This amendment proposal will begin that conversation.

Establish a City Administrator to More Efficiently and Effectively Deliver Services

In many cities and counties, the roles of the elected executive and chief administrator are separate. Mayors and County Executives focus on the challenges and needs facing the city, while administrators play a politically-neutral role and focus on maintaining the smooth operation of the city. A city administrator will help professionalize the operations of city government by insulating the day-to-day operations from politics. As residents, you should have faith that city services will be delivered efficiently and competently, regardless of political dynamics.

Baltimore is one of very few counties in the state that does not employ this model. Baltimore County, Howard County, Anne Arundel County, Montgomery County, and Prince George's County all have an executive and an administrator. Cities like D.C., Atlanta, GA, Charlotte, NC, and San Francisco, CA all have an executive and an administrator.

In April 2019, I introduced [Bill 19-0382: Charter Amendment — City Administrator](#), which would establish the position of City Administrator as the Chief Administrative Officer in Baltimore. Considering our budget, Baltimore is essentially a \$3 billion company with no Chief Financial Officer. As Council President, I will pass [Bill 19-0382](#), a Charter Amendment I introduced as a Councilmember to establish the position of City Administrator in Baltimore City. As Mayor, I will hire a strong city administrator who will bring professionalism and management expertise to city government.

A NEW WAY FORWARD FOR TRANSPARENCY IN BALTIMORE

Strengthen Baltimore City's Open Data Policies

For the entire time I've been on the City Council, I have been focused on making city government data open and available to the public. In 2016, I introduced and passed the bill that created the Baltimore City Open Data program. This bill requires the regular release of salary information and crime statistics to the public in order to make city government more transparent and accountable to the people of Baltimore.

The open data system has existed for the past 8 years, however, according to their most recent [annual report](#) it is deeply underfunded. Only a handful of datasets are automatically updated, and the site contains less than 100 unique datasets. Moreover, the City's Law Department enforces onerous requirements to enter into data sharing agreements.

As Mayor, I will build upon our initial open data successes by investing in data infrastructure. In 2020, Baltimore City should be treating and managing data as an asset, just like we manage our infrastructure as an asset. First, I will invest more financial and staffing resources into our open data portal to automatically update every single dataset, maintain metadata dictionaries, and create a staff that can respond to external requests for data in a timely fashion. Second, I will build on the success of my first piece of open data legislation by codifying a formal data sharing agreement. This will create a secure data sharing infrastructure that will improve inter-agency coordination and grant external research partners to access sensitive datasets. For example, both the Health and Housing Departments provide lead exposure remediation services to families and households across the city. But currently, there is no sharing of data that allows these agencies to better coordinate the implementation of these programs.

Mandate All City Agencies Establish a Performance Management Office

As Mayor, I am committed to creating a data-driven administration. Too often, our core city services are unreliable and inequitably distributed. While all agencies are resource- and personnel-strapped, our agencies could operate better if they were regularly making data-informed programmatic and operational decisions.

Here is a perfect example: As Chair of the Public Safety Committee, I investigated why gun cases were getting dropped. I discovered neither the State's Attorney's Office nor BPD was even tracking or analyzing this data. As a result, I fought to

secure funding for a data analyst position within the State's Attorney's Office to track cases and identify why charges are being dropped. This data will help the State's Attorney better prepare her attorneys and BPD strengthen its training and investigative practices.

As Mayor, I will take a data-driven and analytical approach to not just criminal justice issues, but all city operations. I will require that every agency establish their own citistat team and publish real-time performance data to their respective websites. We know that when our agency leaders have better information, they can make better decisions about how to deploy their resources.

Establish a Funding Stream for the Fair Election Fund

Baltimore City government and its elected officials must be held accountable to the people they serve. Too often, special interests, developers, and agents of the status quo believe they can buy influence over politicians and policy. We have seen very recently that [some candidates in this race are bringing in tens of thousands of dollars from special interests and powerful media families](#). We must get money out of politics. As Council President, I have been proud to partner with Councilman Kristerfer Burnett on the [Fair Election Fund](#), which will provide a means to provide public financing to candidates for local office. But we need to identify a funding source.

Because we know this Administration is unlikely to do so, as Mayor I will provide the necessary funding to create a robust public financing system. This is how we can give a fair shot to candidates who aren't the choice of big money and help more working class Baltimoreans pursue a career in public service. By providing a mechanism for public financing, we can make elected officials more accountable to the people they serve and amplify the concerns of the Baltimore grassroots.

Tax Large Campaign Self-Donations to Fund the Fair Election Fund

You should not be able to buy an election. Nationally and locally we have seen candidates who think they can just pay whatever it takes in the form of donations to their own campaign. We'll fight against lobbyists' and special interests' attempts to infiltrate politics, too. But this is an obvious loophole that needs to be closed.

In order to ensure that the wealthy and well-connected do not have a disproportionate ability to win elected office, I will work to establish a 50% excise tax on all self-donations above \$50,000. This tax will go toward funding the Fair Election Fund.

Establish a Procurement Policy Committee to Provide Community Oversight in the Procurement Process

The City of Baltimore spends more than \$500 million dollars every year on the procurement of goods and services. Anyone who has tried to track how those dollars are being spent — by whom, on what, where, and whether they're being used well — knows how hard it can be to track this basic information. Our procurement laws are outdated and difficult to navigate, especially for those businesses we should be doing most to nurture: small, local businesses.

As Mayor, I will establish a Procurement Policy Committee to make our rules easier to navigate and more transparent. To ensure our procurement rules are practical and conducive to business, the Committee will include representatives from the minority- and women-owned business community, local small businesses, and Baltimore residents committed to transparency and accountability in government. The group will be tasked with reviewing laws, regulation, contract awards, and other relevant information so we can implement changes, streamline the process, increase transparency, and ensure City dollars are supporting homegrown businesses wherever possible.

Host Public Town Halls to Inform the Creation of the City Budget

We must provide residents opportunities to provide meaningful input into how their dollars will be spent. Currently there are only two so-called Taxpayers' Nights where residents can voice their opinions about budget priorities and provide feedback. Generally, these meetings are held towards the end of the budget process.

This is inadequate and does not provide taxpayers the opportunity to be informed about the budget, nor influence its priorities. As Mayor, I will direct my Finance Department to host additional public forums before finalizing the budget. These forums will take place across the city and will be advertised well in advance.

Respond to Maryland Public Information Act Requests More Quickly

When our local government receives a Maryland Public Information Act request, it can take a long time for records to be produced. Preserving and sharing information with the public is a critical component of a democratic government and necessary for rebuilding trust with our communities.

As Mayor, I will direct my office and our agencies to respond to Maryland Public Information Act requests more quickly, with a goal of increasing transparency and accountability in city government. I pledge to minimize the use of exemptions to the statute and operate from an initial posture of openness. We will re-train City Hall staff on the workings of the MPIA so they can be best prepared to comply with requests that arise. Additionally, I will develop a web portal so that members of the press and public can see the MPIA requests received by the City of Baltimore and by when a response can be expected. [Cities like Chicago already do this](#) and it will hold our local government accountable to delivering information more quickly and transparently.

Utilize CharmTV, the City's Television Channel, to Increase Public Engagement with the Policy Process

As Mayor, I will expand access to CharmTV, the City's cable television channel. In 2020, residents should not have to attend a meeting in person to make their voice heard. The people's channel should highlight the work of our city government, as opposed to using CharmTV simply for public relations.

I will expand CharmTV's budget and ensure all official government meetings are recorded so a high quality archive exists and more residents can be a part of the process. Right now, CharmTV does an admirable job covering the City's many public meetings on a shoestring budget. Yet, this critical service for resident engagement is not properly funded. I am proud of the work I have done thus far to livestream many of the public hearings and meetings that CharmTV is unable to cover. With an expanded budget, CharmTV can make our government more accessible to the needs of different communities as well. I will direct CharmTV to provide closed captioning services, as well as access for residents who speak a language other than English. Additionally, I will direct CharmTV to incorporate a mechanism for residents watching livestreamed hearings and meetings to engage in real time when public input is solicited.

By making the workings of government more transparent to our residents, I hope to inspire civic engagement and a more robust exchange of ideas. Expanding access to City business increases transparency and makes elected officials more accountable to residents.

**BRANDON
SCOTT
FOR MAYOR**

BY AUTHORITY: PEOPLE FOR BRANDON SCOTT, ALICIA WILSON, TREASURER.