

Bernalillo County Commission Observer Report for September 2026

An Experiment in Advocacy

August 11, 2026 meeting

Present: Barbara Baca, District 1 Commissioner; Frank Baca, District 2 Commissioner; Adriann Barboa, District 3 Commissioner; Walt Benson, District 4 Commissioner; Eric Olivas, District 5 Commissioner

The Bernalillo County Commission introduced a charter amendment in June to allow the county to publicly finance campaigns for qualifying candidates. The League strongly supports public financing as a way to reduce the influence of private donations in campaigns, but this charter amendment seemed backwards.

It would have allowed the charter change, but there was no information available to tell voters how much it might cost. A resolution accompanying the charter amendment proposal set up a committee to examine the potential cost to the county and report back in August 2027, months after voters had to make a decision. That process didn't give voters the information they needed to make a considered decision. So Starlyn Brown and I worked on a letter to the commission asking them to withdraw the proposal until the financial repercussion study could be complete. Starlyn sent it to all commissioners and the county manager.

Starlyn didn't receive feedback on the letter from the four democratic commissioners or the county manager, but the republican member of the commission Walt Benson, used the letter as a springboard for an op-ed he sent to The Paper and the Albuquerque Journal, noting how the county was forced to limit raises for county employees because of tight finances, but wanted to give money to politicians with this charter amendment. He noted the League's concerns in his opinion editorial.

We didn't think the commission would react, but to our surprise Commissioner Eric Olivas, who introduced the proposed amendment, emailed Starlyn that he would withdraw the amendment.

Starlyn went to the commission on August 11 to publicly thank Olivas for his decision to withdraw the amendment from the ballot. It's not often that public officials decide to reverse a course they have set, but we are grateful that the commissioners rethought this particular issue. We may see the amendment proposal on the 2028 ballot, but by then voters will at least know the financial implications of their vote.'=

Relevant League Position:

“The LWVNM supports a fair, equitable and reasonable combination of public/private funding of campaigns for New Mexico state elective offices. Participation in public/private financing should be voluntary. Participants should agree to voluntary spending limits. The legislation should provide for a source of revenue to fund the program.”