

September 9, 2025

San Francisco Streamlining Commission

City and County of San Francisco

Re: Support for the San Francisco Arts Commission's Critical Charter and Administrative Code Responsibilities

Dear Members of the Streamlining Commission:

We write as President and Vice President of the San Francisco Arts Commission to emphasize the significant and legally mandated responsibilities our Commission carries under the City Charter and Administrative Code, and to advocate for the preservation and strengthening of these essential functions in any streamlining considerations.

Core Charter and Administrative Code Responsibilities

San Francisco **Charter Section 5.103** establishes the Arts Commission's authority and responsibility for reviewing the design of structures on public property.

Charter Section 5.103 gives authority to the Arts Commission for the "review and approval of the design of all public structures, any private structure which extends over or upon any public property and any yards, courts, setbacks or usable open spaces which are an integral part of any such structure." San Francisco Arts Commission operates under explicit Charter mandates that establish us as the primary civic body responsible for:

Civic Design Review

Our Commission serves as the designated authority for reviewing and approving the aesthetic and cultural dimensions of major civic projects, ensuring that public infrastructure and development align with San Francisco's cultural values and design excellence standards. This responsibility directly impacts the visual character and cultural integrity of our city.

This work is abundantly visible in many of our public buildings including the San Francisco Airport, the Port of San Francisco, Public Libraries, Fire Department firehouses and training facilities, San Francisco General Hospital, Public Works/Water Power Sewer, City College, SFMTA, City Attorney, San Francisco Police Department, San Francisco War Memorial & Performing Art Center, San Francisco Planning, Treasure Island, OCII, Public Health, Superior Courts and more.

Public Art Oversight Managing the Public Art Trust 1% Administration (Planning Code Section 429 and Administrative Code Section 10.100-29) Administering the 2% Art Enrichment Program (Administrative Code Section 3.19)

We oversee the commissioning, installation, maintenance, and curation of San Francisco's extensive public art collection, managing both permanent installations and temporary exhibitions that serve residents and millions of annual visitors. This includes the Percent for Art Programs, which generate significant cultural and economic value.

The Commission serves as the fiduciary administrator of the Public Art Trust, managing dedicated funds for the acquisition, commissioning, conservation, and maintenance of public artworks. This trust administration ensures the long-term sustainability and preservation of San Francisco's public art investments while maintaining proper stewardship of public resources.

Civic Art Collection Stewardship (City Charter Section 5.103 & Administrative Code Section 2A.150)

The Commission manages and preserves the City's invaluable civic art collection, including works housed in our airport, public buildings, libraries, and civic spaces. This stewardship function protects cultural assets worth millions of dollars while ensuring public access to artistic heritage.

Cultural Grants Administration

We administer and distribute millions of dollars annually in cultural grants through the Cultural Equity Endowment, Hotel Tax Fund allocations, and other funding mechanisms. These grants support hundreds of arts organizations, individual artists, and cultural programs that serve diverse communities throughout San Francisco.

Cultural Centers Governance

Our Commission provides policy oversight and strategic direction for four major brick and mortar cultural facilities and centers and four virtual cultural centers, ensuring these vital community resources operate effectively and serve the public interest.

Street Artists and Crafts Examiners Advisory Committee

The San Francisco Street Artist and Crafts Examiners Advisory Committee is governed as a specialized advisory committee under the San Francisco Arts Commission with a specific mandate to review and approve Art Vendor applications for the city's Street Artists Program. There is no undue administrative burden on the Arts Commission in undertaking these responsibilities and provides support for a program that allows resident artists and other craftspersons to have public places to sell their works such as Embarcadero Plaza and the Wharf.

Essential Governance Functions

Our responsibilities are not merely administrative—they represent core governance functions that:

Protect Public Assets: We safeguard significant public investments in art, culture, and civic design.

Maintain Fiduciary Responsibility: We exercise trust administration duties for dedicated public art funds, ensuring proper stewardship and accountability.

Ensure Community Input: Our public hearing processes provide essential community voice in cultural and design decisions.

Maintain Professional Standards: We apply expertise and professional judgment to complex cultural and aesthetic matters.

Advance Equity Goals: Our grant programs and policies actively support cultural equity and community development.

Preserve Cultural Heritage: We protect and celebrate San Francisco's unique cultural identity and artistic legacy.

Recommendation to the Streamlining Commission

While we support efforts to improve government efficiency, we respectfully urge that any streamlining measures recognize the Arts Commission's unique and essential role in city governance. Our functions cannot be consolidated or eliminated without significant loss to public oversight, community engagement, and cultural stewardship.

We recommend that the Streamlining Commission:

Preserve Core Functions: Maintain the Arts Commission's Charter-mandated responsibilities in their current form.

Enhance Coordination: Support improved coordination between the Arts Commission and related departments while preserving our independent governance role.

Strengthen Resources: Consider recommendations that enhance our capacity to fulfill these important public responsibilities.

The Arts Commission's work directly contributes to San Francisco's economic vitality, cultural distinction, and community well-being. We stand ready to work with the Streamlining Commission to identify efficiencies while preserving the essential public functions we are chartered to perform.

Thank you for your consideration of these important matters. We welcome the opportunity to provide additional information or testimony regarding our Commission's vital role in city governance.

Sincerely,

o/s

Charles M. Collins

President, San Francisco Arts Commission

o/s

Janine Shiota

Vice President, San Francisco Arts Commission

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