

September 30, 2025

Dear Chair Ed Harrington and Members, Commission Streamlining Task Force,

We are writing in response to the proposals put forth by the Commission Streamlining Task Force staff on September 19, 2025 related to the Fine Arts Museums Board of Trustees (FAM). We appreciate the thoughtful approach to the criteria-based outcome and associated analysis presented in your report. **We have reviewed each proposal and offer our views on the staff analysis with the proviso that we are continuing to receive feedback from Trustees and key stakeholders.**

We appreciate that FAM, as a charitable trust department, is considered to hold special fiduciary responsibilities for its Museums. Accordingly, the City Attorney's Office has advised against combining FAM with the Arts Commission or other Charitable Trust Departments. We agree with this finding.

FAM is unusual compared to other City departments in that the City owns the art collections, buildings and land while the day-to-day operations are carried out by a nonprofit partner. FAM acts as a governance board to provide oversight of the charitable trust but the unique fiduciary responsibilities require some exceptions to the typical governance template. We generally agree with many of the staff proposals that utilized the governance commission template but we are continuing to obtain feedback from key stakeholders and Trustees on each proposal.

There are three governance commission components in the staff proposal which we would like to consider further and to adjust.

1. Appointing Authority

The Charter currently allows the FAM Board to both nominate and appoint its own Trustees. The staff proposal would change the appointing authority process by having the FAM Board nominate trustees and the Mayor appoint them. We would like to have the FAM Board continue to both nominate and appoint Trustees as we believe it is in the best interest for fiduciary, institutional and community purposes.

The FAM Board serves as fiduciaries of a 100 plus year legacy. The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco were founded over 100 years ago (de Young Museum in 1895 and Legion of Honor Museum in 1924) with the

buildings and art collections transferred to the City in subsequent years. The building and art collection transfers created the charitable trust departments which have subsequently, received substantial art collection and asset donations over the decades. The FAM Board must take a multi-decade view of the needs of the Museums and should not be impacted by the short-term views of Mayoral administrations.

As an internationally recognized arts institution, it is highly important that the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco are insulated from political pressure or influence on its art exhibitions, programs and acquisitions. It is vital to our mission, and to the public good, that the Museums' curatorial professionals have the latitude to program art installations that encompass diverse viewpoints and histories. A future Mayor could decide to influence or change Museum programming to suit their tastes and viewpoint. The best example of this risk is the ongoing political pressure on the Smithsonian Museums and Kennedy Center in Washington DC.

The FAM Board is meant to represent the Community with expertise in collecting, stewardship and programming. The existing Trustees are uniquely-positioned with expertise, knowledge and connections to perpetuate these types of qualities on behalf of the FAM Board for the long-term benefit of the community. These merits of the FAM board also testify to the capacity of our current nomination and appointment process.

2. Member Removal

The Charter currently requires member removal to be for-cause. The staff proposal recommends that member removal be at-will by the Mayor. We agree that member removal should be changed from for-cause to at-will. However, we would like the FAM Board to hold the member removal power instead of the Mayor.

We believe that the FAM Board is in the best position for at-will member removal due to its unique fiduciary, institutional and community role as was discussed in the Appointing Authority proposal above. Here again, the recent events with Kennedy Center's removal of Trustees speaks to potential future risks.

3. Term Limits

The Charter currently includes no term limits for Trustees. The staff proposal would give the FAM board authority to implement term limits but at a maximum of 12 years. We would like to maintain the Charter's current status of no term limits.

The FAM Board is a governing body that maintains a multi-decade view of the Museums and their unique needs. It is important for the FAM Board to have the flexibility to privilege long-term experience and history when appointing Trustees. Many of the governance responsibilities, such as art accessioning and deaccessioning, require a depth of knowledge and historical legacy from Trustees to properly fulfill their role.

We appreciate this Commission's efforts to improve overall City governance and we are committed to a constructive dialogue on these proposals. We believe that by working together, we can achieve the shared goals of Proposition E that was approved by the voters in November 2024.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Thomas P. Campbell", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Thomas P. Campbell
Director and CEO