

From: [REDACTED]
To: [commissionstreamlining](#)
Subject: Public Comments from 10/1/25 Streamlining Commission Task Force Meeting
Date: Wednesday, October 1, 2025 7:46:32 PM
Attachments: [Talking Points 10.1.25 Task Force.pdf](#)

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Dear Chair Harrington, Vice Chair Bruss, and Streamlining Commission Task Force Members Hayward, Mihal and Kittler:

Thank you for your extensive time today convening the Streamlining Commission Task Force.

I am attaching (and pasting below) the public comments I presented today, as well as those I did not have time to share. I was hoping I had three minutes to speak (even then I may not have hit all my points!), so I am happy to submit them in full in writing.

I worked at the Arts Commission for 21 years (first as the Arts Education Funders Collaborative Director; then as Development Director; Director of Public & Private Partnerships; and Interim Communications Director), so I have an understanding of the extensive breadth of impact of its many programs, the complicated budgeting structure it maintains, and the authorities of the commission and its committees. I am happy to answer any questions you may have about its inner workings. I'm at your service.

PLEASE CONFIRM I HAVE SENT THIS TO THE CORRECT EMAIL ADDRESS.

With thanks again,
Rachelle Axel

- My name is Rachelle Axel
- worked at the Arts Commission for 21 years, first as a program staffer, then later in three different leadership roles
- I also served under 5 mayoral administrations and I'd estimate during my tenure, the department rotated through some 50-70 different commissioners.
- I'd like to speak in strong support of maintaining the Arts Commission. And at the very least today, PER YOUR OWN TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION NOTES

deferring the decision until the City's new arts agency is formed.

- 1) As you know that new Super Arts agency (as the community is calling it), is comprised of the Arts Commission, the Film Commission and Grants for the Arts, which has no commission.
- 2) These three entities have very different functions, and making decisions about a governing body of a new combined entity overseeing the vast majority of the City's public art funds and resources before its structure and functions have been determined is putting the cart before the horse.
- 3) I'll add that the while both the Arts Commission and Grants for the Arts are the primary distributors of municipal arts grants, the processes by which they make these awards is vastly different. The Arts Commission staff convenes multiple peer review panels, has an open public process, and the commissioners approve of the funding recommendations in public.
- 4) I call out this detail to illustrate that there's a lot of work that needs to happen to determine the structure and processes of this new City arts agency. And therefore, how it will have oversight.
- 5) The commissioners I worked with over more than two decades were incredibly passionate about the arts and about community, and devoted thousands of volunteer hours to the oversight of the Arts Commission's many functions.
- 6) Over 21 years, there were very few commission meetings canceled. This is a very committed group of commissioners.
- 7) People who care about the arts, care **very deeply** about the arts—no Arts Commissioners are clocking time in their service. They engage with community (and they are frequently seen at cultural events around the city), the staff, the Director of Cultural Affairs, the Mayor's office, other City commissions, and other City legislators.
- 8) And this intense interest extends to the public—the San Francisco arts community is **very focused** on commission business, appearing at public meetings frequently, and is constantly engaged with staff. Eliminating this oversight body will eliminate transparency and will foment distrust of a 93-year-old entity that has helped make San Francisco a global destination for arts and culture, bringing in billions of dollars to our local economy. (\$1.7B annually per the Bay Council.)

9) Moreover, the Arts Commissioners bring unique and highly valued expertise – as artists themselves, architects (for some of the biggest architecture and design firms in the nation), landscape architects, curators, gallery owners, museum board members – expertise not found on Arts Commission staff. The staff is an incredible group of talented arts administrators—but they do not bring the collective knowledge of the Arts Commissioners to the work done on behalf of the department.

10) There is expertise on the commission's Civic Design Review committee, overseers of strong public design, and close partners with the departments presenting the architectural and landscaping designs to the committee for review. This is one of the best examples of cross-agency partnerships improving public outcomes.

11) Also, the Visual Arts Committee makes final approval on Public Art projects being managed by staff. This expertise helps preserve a strong aesthetic in public space. AND protects the MO from potentially controversial public art designs or placements.

12) Public art is almost always political, contentious and controversial; this committee helps mitigate many of the problems that would otherwise land in the MO, while ensuring equity in the public art realm.

13) I also want to call out that the San Francisco Arts Commission is the City and County's Local Arts Agency (or LAA), a designation determined and granted by the federal government and the state government. In the nonprofit and municipal arts sector (across the nation) this is an important distinction that makes SFAC the only entity eligible for certain State and Federal dollars. One of the requirements of being an approved LAA, is that it has a governing body, appointed at least in part by the mayor or the highest-ranking County official, and designated as such by the Board of Supervisors.

14) LAAs serve as satellite entities for the California Arts Council and the NEA. In addition to being uniquely eligible for certain funding, LAAs partner with the State on policy and program decisions. Only an arts agency with a functioning commission is eligible to play that role. San Francisco would be leaving state and federal money on the table if it loses its Arts Commission.

15) At a time in our City's history where we are extremely and justly concerned about the appropriate, legal and transparent use of public dollars, eliminating an oversight body of public art dollars that the voters are heavily invested in is a bad choice. It's antithetical to the City's goals of transparency and accountability. And

this is the role of a governance body more than an advisory body.

16) Prop D – which the voters resoundingly rejected – called for a hatchet job. They did not want to just get rid of a bunch of commissions as a numbers exercise. Prop E by contrast called for a scalpel when examining the commissions. The Task Force's charge is to understand the details and functions of commissions before making decisions. Eliminating the Arts Commission before a deep forensic dive is conducted on a new arts agency is reckless. Prop E calls for a scalpel enabling the Task Force to understand the complicated layers of the many, many Arts Commission authorities and its complicated budget structure. Please take the time necessary to do a serious examination of the agency's functions; this Task Force will be forwarding recommendations that may end up on the November 2026 ballot and lock in place for generations the role of this important commission. PLEASE do not eliminate this commission, and keep its governing authorities intact.

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17) In addition, I am in favor of reducing the number of commissioners, having 75-80% be mayoral appointees, and 20-25% being appointed by the BoS. But 100% must have a better understanding of their own authorities and purviews, and mandatory trainings in their fiduciary and oversight obligations; they must also conduct regular annual reviews of the DCA.

18) To help reduce the number of commissioners, I believe that the Community Investment Committee (the committee that approves grant awards) could be eliminated; I'd propose instead having the Full Commission approve the (publicly) peer-reviewed and scored grant applications. All commissioners should know what arts organizations and individual artists are being funded as reps for the Mayor and the community. The expertise to manage a granting process lives with the staff and the panelists; there's no real discussion or actual proposal review or deliberation at the commission level.

19) As previously stated, the Civic Design Review Committee and the Visual Art Committee are vital functions and are heavily involved in the deliberation and decisions about what gets funded, commissioned and approved. Art on public land must be determined by field experts. Besides being quality control agents, their service helps to inoculate the MO from the typical contentious nature of this work, and they keep an eye on the department's success meeting its equity goals.

20) Much like a board of trustees wouldn't do a strategic plan before a new director is hired, it would be ideal if the new agency director was part of the discussion about commission structure, helping to make the best

cultural policy decisions for San Francisco.

21) The SFAC has the broadest reach of any of the arts and culture commissions: it covers all disciplines, it oversees City-owned venues (should it?), it is a presenter (SFAC Gallery, events, and award ceremonies), it's a critical funder, it oversees permitting functions (for Street Artists), manages public art, and has the highest racial equity profile than the other entities, having served as a leader in the City's racial equity efforts beginning well before 2020.