

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**To:** [commissionstreamlining](#)  
**Subject:** Response to request for suggestions on commission operations  
**Date:** Thursday, October 16, 2025 11:59:11 AM

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Dear Commissioners,

Thank you for your work to recommend an appropriate number of city commissions and boards and to solicit ideas on potential best practices for commissions and boards to serve the people of San Francisco. As President of the Board of Appeals, I have the honor and pleasure to lead a board of five committed commissioners assisted by a dedicated and expert staff to review decisions of certain agencies and challenges to them by the public. Because our board did not collectively discuss or make recommendations in response to your request, I offer the following in my personal capacity informed by my three years of service but not on behalf of the Board of Appeals itself.

Former Mayor Agnos recently told me that the Board of Appeals was his favorite commission because it served as the last chance for the public to be heard on particular permits and matters and that it had an important mission to do justice. By the Board's appellate nature, his description is particularly apt and the philosophy that I bring to our Board of Appeals work.

In that regard, therefore, it is essential for the Board to make legally sound decisions and to promote an understanding, both to the parties before it and to the public in general, about what has occurred, what the law is, what our decision was and how they and others can comport themselves on these matters in the future.

While we welcome advocates to present cases on behalf of the parties, Board procedures and departmental rules and regulations should be accessible to all without the need for paid advocates. In order for people to feel they have been heard, they must first have a knowledge of what is relevant to bringing or defending their case. This requires work on the parts of the agencies whose decisions are appealed and the Board's public information website. Moreover, we should encourage and promote communication among or between the parties and the relevant agencies so that, to the extent possible, the parties and departments can reach agreements on what is legal and suitable in their cases prior to Board action. For our part, once a matter is before us, commissioners should be (and are) prepared and familiar with the underlying record, able to ask relevant questions without scheduling constraints, consider party, department and public comments, and make considered decisions that are understandable to all.

Each commission has its own particular mission but all new commissioners across city government could benefit from onboarding training to include meeting procedures, the underlying legal provisions their relevant agency or agencies carry out and ways to promote public access and understanding of their activities.

I hope my perspective is helpful in your work. Thank you.

John Trasvina

President, Board of Appeals (title for identification, not representation purposes)