

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**To:** [commissionstreamlining](#)  
**Subject:** Do NOT Eliminate the Commission on Animal Control and Welfare  
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To Commission Streamlining Task Force Members:

**Do NOT eliminate the Animal Control and Welfare Commission**

I served as Chair of the Animal Control and Welfare Commission from 2008 until 2015. During that time, I saw firsthand the value of and need for the Commission.

San Franciscans are passionate about animals, whether pets, urban wildlife, or zoo animals. When they hear about an issue, they want the City to do something about it. The Animal Control and Welfare Commission is the only public forum where residents can talk about animal issues. The Board of Supervisors doesn't have the background knowledge to know if a proposed solution makes sense or not. Animal Care and Control (ACC) doesn't have the staff time to research issues in depth.

The Commission not only gives people a chance to voice their concerns and opinions, it also arranges for presentations by local and national experts to help everyone – Commissioners and residents alike – better understand the issues. Again, neither the Board of Supervisors nor ACC have the time or will to do this. When the Commission makes a recommendation for an ordinance or a resolution to the Board of Supervisors, the Supervisors can trust that the issue has been discussed in depth at Commission meetings before any recommendation was made. There's no other public forum for these kinds of presentations and discussions.

When I was on the Commission, we held lengthy discussions over multiple meetings on topics such as whether ACC should become a "No Kill" shelter, whether to ban the practice of declawing cats simply to keep them from scratching furniture, how to address animal welfare concerns at the SF Zoo, and figuring out how people and pets can coexist with coyotes in City parks. There is no other public forum where those discussions could have taken place. Our meetings were frequently standing room only and often lasted three or more hours to accommodate all the public comment. The idea that only "the same 1-5 people" show up, as the Task Force report claims, is not representative of Commission meetings in general, and is, frankly, dismissive.

The suggestion that Animal Care and Control could take over the functions of the Commission is, to be honest, laughable. Many of the discussions at the Commission are critical of ACC's policies. The Task Force report mentions that, in recent months, the Commission discussed feral cats. But what the report didn't make clear – and maybe didn't understand – was that the Commission was really discussing changes in ACC's policy on how it deals with feral cats. Many people come to the Commission precisely because they have not gotten satisfactory responses to their concerns from ACC. Residents need a public venue independent of ACC in which to criticize it. The Commission provides that much needed oversight.

In addition, ACC has recently reduced its hours of operation, closing the shelter to the public on Mondays. Clearly, ACC's resources are stretched thin. How can they possibly absorb the Commission's public forum and oversight responsibilities with such limited resources?

The Commission's work occurs at virtually no cost to the City. The Commission has no budget and no staff assigned to assist Commissioners. Indeed, when I was Chair, I paid, out of my own pocket, to make the copies of the agenda (and other Commission materials like the text of proposed resolutions) that we handed out at meetings. There is no overlap with other Commissions or Departments since there is no other forum for the public to discuss animal issues. The idea behind Proposition E was to make government more efficient. Eliminating the Animal Control and Welfare Commission will make government *less* efficient.

The Task Force recommendation appears to be based on a cursory examination of the Commission's website, a one-size-fits-all questionnaire sent to the Commission chair, and comments from ACC staff, some of whom, perhaps unknown to the Task Force, have had an adversarial relationship with the Commission. A credible review must include those involved in the work of the Commission. But the Task Force did not interview any current or former Commissioners, community stakeholders, or members of the public. This limited review produced a flawed conclusion.

San Franciscans want and need an open, public forum to discuss issues and policies that involve pets, urban wildlife, and zoo animals. Eliminating the Animal Control and Welfare Commission removes that forum – something no other commission, department, or agency can do – while providing little financial or organizational improvement.

The City of St. Francis deserves better.

Save the Animal Control and Welfare Commission.

Sally Stephens

Former Chair of the Animal Control and Welfare Commission