

November 22, 2025

Comments for the Commission Streamlining Task Force Regarding Operational Improvements

From John Monson, co-author of the 2024 SF Civil Grand Jury report Commission Impossible.

I recommend that you propose legislation for the creation of a Commission Oversight Body (COB) and investigate the benefits of implementing a simple qualitative performance evaluation program.

Up to now the focus of the Task Force has been on rationalizing the list (sorting, evaluating, etc.), simplifying “components” and unraveling overlapping authorities (recent discussion regarding the Police Commission/DPA is proof of the complexities!). You have also constructively integrated standards setting (i.e. templates) from the beginning. With Operational Improvements you are addressing what happens when the task force sunsets. Given that the commission system is a core and dynamic part of the San Francisco governing structure it is key that it has supports for continuing to improve. I believe that Operational Improvements can be the changes that contribute the most to commission effectiveness over time.

I enjoyed your research (and commitment to doing it). It’s congruent with what the Grand Jury found - commission and commissioner mission and jurisdiction focus, commissioner support, standards and performance transparency. My comments are about performance review and who should manage it. You will find the Grand Jury recommendations in Commission Impossible Findings 2, 7 and 9.

Commission Oversight

As your documents point out, the Grand Jury recommended a Commission Oversight Body (COB). Given the irony of a commission report recommending another commission we gave this much consideration. In the end we found the value from neutrality, focus, public access and a long term commitment to continuous improvement to outweigh the required staff and extra overhead costs. In the absence of a COB, we recommended the Controller’s Office, but worried that it lacked resources and urgency (they struggled to produce annual commission lists annually). We didn’t seriously consider the appointing bodies, even though the Mayor’s Office and the Clerk of the Board do produce lists for different reasons. Those efforts were/are in support of specific reporting requirements or goals that are very different from a serious oversight capacity. And, both had meaningful data gaps.

As I think about the continuation of the work you have done, it’s going to take a dedicated and serious effort to provide commission system oversight and continue to build on what you have done. In the end, I expect that a COB with some resources from the City Administrator’s Office is likely to be the least costly way to sustain and develop a well governed system.

Performance Reviews

There are at least two functions of performance reviews, transparency and continuous improvement. Your support document focuses on transparency including reports (annual, etc.), meeting minutes and the like. Very important and in need of improvement. There is less on how well commissions and commissioners are performing or doing their work. There is good governing body (boards of many kinds) research showing the value of qualitative performance reviews. The lack of such a system in San Francisco likely contributes to less than optimal commission effectiveness. The research we found showed that very simple approaches like self and peer evaluations of both the bodies and their members contributed to improved performance. Here are the references for the studies we referenced in the report.

²⁶ Georgia City-County Management Association, "[Resources](#)," GCMA, Accessed May 21, 2024.

²⁷ Jeffrey A. Sonnenfeld, "[What Makes Great Boards Great](#)," *Harvard Business Review* (September 2002).

²⁸ Jamie Smith, "[How Boards are Strengthening Their Self-Assessments and Related Disclosures](#)," *Board Matters* (November 2021).