



San Francisco Ethics Commission

25 Van Ness Avenue, STE 220
San Francisco, CA 94102-6053
ethics.commission@sfgov.org
415-252-3100 | sfethics.org

January 16, 2026

Honorable Members of the San Francisco Commission Streamlining Task Force

Re: Amendments to Ethics Commission Ballot Measure Authority

Dear Task Force members:

Thank you for your robust discussion on Wednesday of the Ethics Commission's ballot measure authority. The Commission shares the goals articulated by Task Force members, including that of ensuring extensive discussion and implementation planning with City departments for all ethics-related ballot measures prior to such measures being placed on the ballot. The Commission is open to the Board of Supervisors being a formal part of the process so that the Board's broader legislative process can help garner attention and discussion for ethics measures. At the same time, we continue to believe it is vital for the Commission to maintain its ability to make final amendments to any measures it seeks to place on the ballot.

The approach that the Task Force approved on Wednesday would allow the Board of Supervisors to amend Ethics Commission ballot measures within a proscribed timeframe. The Ethics Commission would have the opportunity to withdraw or approve the amended measure but would have no authority to amend the measure itself before it went before voters. This change would limit the Commission ability to put measures on the ballot that reflect the Commission's goals; that ultimate decision-making power would instead rest with the Board of Supervisors. This change would hinder the City's ability to promote meaningful ethics, campaign finance, and lobbying laws because the elected officials subject to those very laws would have the opportunity to effectively veto reforms by having the final say on what Ethics Commission ballot measures would contain.

I would like to propose a revised approach for the Task Force to consider at its January 21st meeting that largely reflects the approach approved on January 14th. Taking that process as its starting point, this proposal would make two changes. First, it adds additional room and requirements for implementation planning. Second, it proposes a unique answer to the question of which body has "final authority" over the contents of a ballot measure: the Task Force could allow the Ethics Commission to amend a measure only through a unanimous vote. We believe this approach preserves the Commission's independence and simultaneously ensures that Board amendments will be adhered to unless the Commission is unanimous in its desire to further amend.

The bold language below indicates the main elements of our proposed approach that differ from what the Task Force voted to pursue on January 14th.

1. The Ethics Commission holds a hearing to consider a proposed ballot measure and can vote to place it on the ballot with a 4/5 vote. **Prior to voting, the Ethics Commission must:**
 - notice the hearing to the Clerk of the Board and all City departments at least 30 days prior to the hearing, and
 - for rules impacting City officials and departments (ethics rules), conduct two separate Interested Persons Meetings for City Department Heads or their designees to discuss the measure and its implementation.
2. The Ethics Commission refers the ballot measure to the Clerk of the Board and sends a notice to all City departments.
3. The Board has **90 days** in which it may hold hearings, consider amendments, and vote (6 votes) to amend the measure. If the Board does not vote to amend, then the measure goes to the ballot.
4. If the Board amends the measure, and Commission may vote to:
 - adopt the Board's amendments; or withdraw the measure entirely (3/5 vote), or
 - make further amendments (4/5 or unanimous vote – **both are options for the Task Force to consider**).
5. If the Commission does not vote **within 90 days**, the Board's amendments will be adopted, and the measure will be placed on the ballot.

These proposed changes would build in more opportunities for discussion, collaboration, and planning, by requiring the Commission to notify departments about proposed ballot measures prior to the Commission taking action on them, requiring meetings with departmental leadership, and extending the timelines for the Board of Supervisors and Commission to act. And, crucially, this approach would preserve the Commission's independence by allowing it to amend a measure after the Board of Supervisors has amended it and before the measure goes before voters. We believe this approach strikes the right balance between ensuring robust collaboration on measures with the Commission's unique and critical role as an independent Charter oversight department.

Thank you for your consideration of this proposal and for your work to improve City government.

Sincerely,



Patrick Ford
Executive Director
San Francisco Ethics Commission