



## Draft Minutes

Regular Meeting of the  
Commission Streamlining Task Force  
City and County of San Francisco

**Daniel Lurie**  
**Mayor**

**Wednesday, April 16, 2025**  
**1:00 pm**

City Hall, Room 408  
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place  
San Francisco, CA 94102

Meeting will also be broadcast online and remote public comment will be available via WebEx event. To view the online presentation, join the meeting using the link <https://tinyurl.com/4ys6j7p8> and password PropE. Members of the public may use email address [CommissionStreamlining@sfgov.org](mailto:CommissionStreamlining@sfgov.org) to join the WebEx meeting if needed. To join by phone, dial 415-655-0001 and enter access code (webinar ID) 2664 291 5763 followed by ##. See page 3 for additional remote public comment instructions.

### Agenda

---

#### 1. Call to Order

Chair Harrington called the meeting to order at 1:01pm

#### 2. Roll Call

Lily Moser called the roll.

Present:

- Ed Harrington, Chair
- Jean Fraser, Vice Chair
- Andrea Bruss
- Natasha Mihal

Absent:

- Sophie Hayward (planned absence)

With four members present, the Task Force established quorum.

#### 3. Announcements

No announcements were made.

#### 4. General Public Comment

Caryl Ito, one of the longest-serving commissioners on the Commission on the Status of Women, submitted a document from Dr. Emily Murase, its longest-serving Executive Director, summarizing 30+ years of endeavor and stating that, given the controversy over the last month, the previous 3-4 years represent neither the hard work of the women's community nor the commission.



5. **Approve Minutes – April 2, 2025 meeting (Action Item)**

There was no discussion among Task Force members and no members of the public requested to comment. The Task Force unanimously adopted the minutes.

6. **Civil Grand Jury Commission Impossible Presentation (Discussion Item)**

John Monson, a representative from San Francisco's 2023-2024 Civil Grand Jury (CGJ), gave a presentation titled *San Francisco Commission Reform: How to Rationalize and Improve Performance*, based on findings from the CGJ's June 2024 *Commission Impossible* report. Excited that some of the CGJ recommendations may advance, Monson's overarching goal is for San Francisco's commission system to be highly trusted for providing oversight of the City's workings. Three key strategies to achieve this goal are transparency (as opposed to simply complying with rules); persistence (thinking about a longer time horizon rather than what is needed in the short-term); and better management, standards, and training.

San Francisco's city and county governments consolidated in 1897. Around this time, the commission oversight system was established because (1) the city government was perceived as being corrupt, especially as it related to public utilities, and (2) the businesspeople running the county wanted a strong mayor, which would be balanced by formal citizen oversight. This created a three-legged stool of government made up of the Mayor, commissions, and Board of Supervisors.

After briefly touching on the benefits and costs of commissions, Monson described the CGJ's key findings: the City lacks a current and accurate list of active public bodies; there are too many commissions, especially advisory bodies; and the system is poorly managed (performance reviews aren't centralized, annual reports aren't accessible, seats are vacant and meetings cancelled, and the appointment process is opaque).

The CGJ recommended that residents have one place to go to find a complete and current list of all active commissions and key information (including vacancies). A Commission Oversight Board should be created to coherently, persistently, and apolitically manage the commission system; though in response to the CGJ report, the City's politicians seemed more interested in designating a department in charge instead of creating a new, permanent "commission on commissions."

To improve trust in government, the Task Force should continue developing an accurate list which resides in a single place; define effectiveness; and establish a long-term management approach. As extra credit, the Task Force can also demonstrate how to efficiently and effectively get things done. Much has been written lately about how governments run by progressives cannot accomplish much; examples include Jen Pahlka's *Recoding America*, Nick Bagley's "The Procedure Fetish," and *Abundance* by Ezra Klein. What can we do to preserve our progressive values given progressive governments seem to be struggling to get things done? The Task Force has been impressive so far and could demonstrate how to get things done.

Regarding the number of commissions, in 1980 there was a consensus that San Francisco had too few, because many were created. By 2020, the consensus is that there are too many. There isn't one right number; instead, there should be a range between 75 and 90, with the number reducing over time and fluctuating within a narrower range. Constant variation is the nature of systems.



The CGJ identified 15 commissions to be changed. Of the 13 deemed redundant, 6 had another body doing a similar task and 7 had functions that could be performed by departments. For the final two, one could be spun off outside of city government and the other was mostly inactive. Of the commissioners, commission secretaries, and departments, one-third asked the CGJ to “do something” about their commission. People representing at least two of the 15 bodies agreed that the body didn’t need to exist.

Another key CGJ recommendation is to remedy SF’s labyrinthian information system by having one place for the public to access commission information. San Diego City, San Diego County, Los Angeles County, and Sacramento County are excellent peer city examples.

In researching examples of good commissions, the CGJ identified the United States Base Realignment and Closure Commission and the California Redistricting Commission. Keys to effectiveness include multi-partisanship, moderateness, and qualified commissioners. Managing commissions requires multiple perspectives. The legal view (is the body in the code? Is it operating per code?) alone isn't sufficient, there are also operational (how is the commission performing?), relevance (is the commission necessary?), and street (what do constituents think about the commission?) views.

The City’s processes around commissions vary greatly, which is a red flag and indicative of poor management. The following standards are needed:

- While **annual reports** are required, compliance is poor. Monson recommended the Task Force produce a “minimum viable report” template outlining information that would be useful but not onerous; details can be found in the CGJ’s recommendation 7.1 and Appendix D.
- **Annual reviews** should be conducted by an oversight body and be more comprehensive when a sunset date is nearing (per CGJ recommendation 2.4).
- The **number of appointees** should also be standardized to between 5 and 11 members, with evidence supporting odd numbers; San Francisco’s current 1,200 commissioners should be reduced to 800.
- Overly strict **seat requirements** increase the cost of recruiting and increase vacancies. There is an opportunity for trust; specifically that good people will be picked as commissioners and that they will reach out to the right constituents.
- **Names** are messy and should have meaning
- Publish **best practices for key functions** (purview clarity, financial, citizen engagement)

Monson then spoke of the City’s appointment process, describing it as opaque and lacking in requirements for publicizing commissioners’ backgrounds. The exemplary public bodies mentioned earlier have thorough applications which are made public and identify partisanship. The CGJ recommended that San Francisco publish appointees’ previous commission experience, political activity, and political contributions. CGJ research clearly demonstrated that commissioners contributed more money to political campaigns than the average citizen. Finally, the convoluted nature of the mayoral and Board of Supervisors (BOS) approval streams does not lead to having the best possible commissioners, as potential appointees may be turned off by the lack of consistency, gaming, administrative jockeying, and distrust that permeate the process.



While many of San Francisco's public bodies lack sunset dates, Monson recommended all should, with advisory bodies lasting for three years and charter bodies having a longer duration. San Francisco should follow the academic evidence that regular evaluations improve commission performance and develop a formal evaluation process. It could start out simply with self- and peer evaluations. Finally, training should expand beyond compliance with the Sunshine Ordinance and ethics laws. Appointees should be trained on how to be a good commissioner.

Monson concluded that rather than episodic commission oversight, which is unlikely to increase trust in government, the City should establish persistent oversight. Unfortunately, it's difficult to create an oversight body that is effective, highly efficient, apolitical, and trusted by citizens. The Commission Streamlining Task Force could be a model, given its expertise, independence, and expedited legislative authority.

Considering the goal is to make the San Francisco's commission system highly trusted for providing oversight, Vice Chair Fraser asked whether citizens should hold commissions or the Mayor accountable for City performance. Since the topic was not discussed extensively by the CGJ, Monson responded that personally, he feels the Mayor should be held accountable for the City's performance. However, some oversight is necessary to have confidence that the Mayor is doing the right things. Public bodies allow residents to see an additional level of detail into what the Mayor and City are doing. Furthermore, commissions are an avenue or a vehicle by which people can learn more or talk about things that aren't working.

Noting that commissions are one option, Vice Chair Fraser inquired whether it would be a good idea for departments to publish monthly or quarterly key performance indicators (KPIs). Monson considers better, more granular, and readily available data to be a good idea but not the full solution. The CGJ found three levels of public engagement when talking to departments and different types of public bodies. While initially skeptical of advisory boards, the CGJ came to appreciate their value by the end. Advisory bodies reach out to different people than department and governance body outreach efforts, which tend to be window dressing, unserious, and uncaring.

Vice Chair Fraser noted that she shared Monson's concerns with the effectiveness of public bodies to gather public input. She asked whether the CGJ analyzed or compared commissions with other ways of gathering input, especially given the tools that are now available. Commissions require people to show up and sit through meetings, but many members of the public are unwilling to wait three hours to provide three minutes of public comment. Monson agreed with the criticism, noting that the CGJ watched hours of commission meetings which often had low attendance of only the same few people who may not share relevant comments. He sees room for improvement to make it easier to gather input and did not mean to imply that the current commission meeting structure is the best way. However, he does see value in having public bodies, especially since many of the people participating in advisory bodies attend because they are in commissioners' networks.

Beyond direct costs and department management time, Vice Chair Fraser inquired whether the CGJ identified non-financial costs of commissions, such as how staff feel their time is spent or the experiences staff have with public comment or commissioners. Monson shared that the time staff spend sitting in commission meetings is less significant than the time spent preparing for the meeting; people are frustrated that it distracts them from doing their job delivering services and requires duplicative efforts.



Given the downsides discussed, Vice Chair Fraser concluded by asking for what specifically commissions are a good idea. Monson believes in the progressive era vision that having an effective, strong mayor requires oversight. Situating all oversight in the BOS creates unhealthy political tensions with the Mayor. Some of the City's better-run departments reported that having to present to commissions holds them accountable; the standard for public engagement improves their efforts. The CGJ also heard sporadic examples that experts on commissions contributed significantly to departments. Going over contracts with a fine-tooth comb is less essential; commissions should not exist to prevent fraud, but to generally ensure departments are delivering on-mission and that residents are happy.

Andrea Bruss inquired about the role of the BOS vis-à-vis commissions, accountability, and public engagement. Examples include planning code changes seen by both BOS and the City Planning Commission (CPC), BOS contract approvals that many department commissions also review and approve, and at least one instance where BOS confirms the hiring of a department head nominated by a commission. Monson noted that the CGJ is supposed to avoid politics, so they attempted to steer clear of things like that. However, there seems to be too much variation; BOS should be confined to a particular role. Personally, he sees BOS as a conduit for constituent engagement, which is why advisory bodies are mostly BOS creations. The charter says BOS shouldn't be involved in day-to-day operations, but they have been getting around that via commissions, especially through having the majority of advisory board appointments. Monson is inclined to focus advisory boards more on public engagement and less on oversight.

Natasha Mihal confirmed that advisory groups were found to be a more helpful way of engagement than general commissions and asked if the CGJ looked into whether that was consistency regarding seat requirements and term limits between advisory groups and general commissions. Monson responded that they did not dive into term limits, but that advisory bodies tended to have the most specific and detailed seat requirements; they tried to be very precise about getting people that had lived experience or were part of the community. In retrospect, it hasn't worked; writing something too detailed makes it harder to do things. As mentioned earlier, it is important to trust that the people who end up on a commission will be good representatives.

Chair Harrington asked whether governance commissions are supposed to be a check and balance on the Mayor, BOS, or department heads in addition to their clear role overseeing departments. Who are commissioners checking and balancing? Are governance commissions an extension of the executive branch? If the Mayor wants something done, is it appropriate for commissioners to disagree and claim independence? Monson thinks it would be a healthier balance if tipped more towards the Mayor, and that BOS has too much veto power in the current appointment process, which is why the process should be streamlined and the practice of split appointments investigated. It doesn't make sense for a minority of commissioners to prevent the Mayor from accomplishing what they want.

Elaborating on the previous point, Vice Chair Fraser inquired whether it is the role of governance commissions to merely be a conduit for what the Mayor wants to accomplish, especially since previously, Monson said that the Mayor should ultimately be accountable for department performance. Who gets to really decide on the tough issues? Monson responded with the City's flat organizational structure and the impossibility of the Mayor managing 50 people; perhaps the commission system is a crutch for enabling oversight and helping distribute management. Either way, it's inefficient. The City would benefit from restructuring and clarity around who is in charge, what they are doing, and how it is working (going back to the previous idea of publishing KPIs). The need for commission oversight might decline over time but it would take a while for the public to see and trust that it is working.



Vice Chair Fraser clarified that Monson was pinpointing the Mayor's Office's staffing structure and noted that San Francisco's commission structure is unique among California's 58 counties. Monson responded that the Mayor's Office has recently been restructured with the creation of four quasi-deputy mayors, which may lead to modifications to the role of commissions.

Vice Chair Fraser concluded by asking whether the recent literature claiming the focus on process (e.g. inclusion and citizen engagement) decreasing the effectiveness of government was resonant. Monson responded yes, 100%.

No members of the public wished to offer comment.

## **7. Public Body Purposes and Templates (Discussion and Possible Action Item)**

Joanna Bell, Senior Performance Analyst at the Controller's Office, facilitated a discussion about the purposes of and developing standard templates for different types of public bodies. Continuing the discussion started at the Task Force's April 2, 2025 meeting, the exercise is intended to show two different approaches: (1) given that we have boards commissions, what are the purposes and value add? and (2) given the purposes and principles of good government, are boards and commissions the best option? The primary goal is to determine the core purposes of different types of public bodies and to surface areas of tension between Task Force members based on a pre-meeting survey.

The average survey responses showed general agreement that contributing expertise is a core purpose of advisory bodies, with equity and inclusion and public participation as other key purposes. For governance bodies, accountability and oversight were core purposes. The primary purpose of regulatory bodies is to uphold and enforce existing law. Looking at the standard deviation, there was moderate disagreement on the purposes of regulatory bodies and governance bodies beyond the core purposes. Chair Harrington advised not to focus attention on the differences for regulatory bodies, since there are so many different types of bodies in that group.

Chair Harrington asked the Task Force whether governance commissions' oversight and accountability responsibilities were for the departments they oversee or the City as a whole (i.e. the Mayor or BOS). Agreeing with Chair Harrington that it was the former, Natasha Mihal brought up the budget process, and whether public bodies weigh in on changes made by the Mayor or BOS or simply hold departments accountable for the approved budgets, even if they disagree. Vice Chair Fraser sought to clarify whether the discussion was about current or desired practices; Chair Harrington replied that it was both, with the latter being more important.

Vice Chair Fraser proposed focusing on the differences between the three types of public bodies in order to better identify distinctions. Starting with **accountability and oversight**, Chair Harrington noted the Task Force member survey indicated it was of low importance for advisory bodies, middling for regulatory, and high importance for governance bodies. Vice Chair Fraser and Natasha Mihal confirmed that they responded based on how the bodies should be, rather than current practices.

Chair Harrington returned to his previous question seeking to confirm the Task Force agreed that governance commissions' oversight was downward rather than upward. Vice Chair Fraser concurred that they are not supposed to tell the Mayor what to do. Andrea Bruss also agreed, elaborating that it isn't about every contract, policy, or personnel decision, but about whether services are being delivered to the public.



Vice Chair Fraser shared her struggle with the tautological nature of the discussion. She sees three or four functions: advisory, accountability and oversight, and legal decision-making. She also sees great value in contributing expertise and ensuring that departments hear constituents' voices. If a public body is going to be used, an advisory group without governance functions is preferred. The key question is what each type of body should be able and not able to do. Andrea Bruss agreed that she was trying to manage her own bias for the status quo; rather than responding with the assumption that what is currently in place is the right way to do it, the group should step back and think about the core functions the different bodies should perform, even though it is difficult to think of them outside of the context of the existing structure. Chair Harrington advised the group to discuss what the system should be, which may be different than what would be ideal.

Chair Harrington stated that he would set aside the Regulatory category because it contains so many different types of bodies (i.e. Planning, Board of Appeals, Elections, Ethics). Andrea Bruss raised the notion of distinguishing between regulatory bodies which oversee departments and those that do not. Chair Harrington proposed re-categorizing those as governance bodies and provided two examples of the complexity: the Planning Commission is in charge of the Planning Department, executing under current laws, and recommending new rules, while the Ethics Commission makes new rules and is also responsible for upholding them. Rather than putting these in a box, the Task Force should deal with them as they come. Governance and Advisory, on the other hand, are meaningful terms to continue using.

Vice Chair Fraser put forth a different structure. She sees it as useful for most departments to hold public hearings presenting performance data to a group of non-staff with public comment. The public body would have the power to question, and would be a forum for the public, but commissioners would not have the power to direct the department. The accountability should run to the Mayor and their staff, since they are the people who can be removed; it is difficult to get rid of commissioners.

Chair Harrington confirmed that Vice Chair Fraser's vision meant all public bodies should be advisory, and there should be no governance bodies with oversight. Vice Chair Fraser sees oversight as critically important but believes only the Mayor should be able to tell departments to do things differently. It's about effectiveness; the current structure only makes sense if the commission is high-quality, composed of Mayoral appointees, and is in line with the Mayor. However, Vice Chair Fraser also agrees there is value in presenting information publicly and hearing public response. She asked what oversight meant and which functions it should include (i.e. hiring and firing department heads).

Chair Harrington provided examples of functions for a public body with an oversight role: decision-making around budget submissions, policies, and contracts. Vice Chair Fraser again raised the notion of hiring and firing department heads, which the Chair is less certain about. Vice Chair Fraser asked what should happen to a department head who does not follow commission direction. Chair Harrington believes department heads should be responsible for doing what commissions say and commission involvement in the hiring process (i.e. acting as an executive search firm but not making the final decision and the ability to fire the department head) are important for ensuring it.

Natasha Mihal shared that her current perspective is that commissions being able to fire department heads conflicts with our mayoral form of governance. If a commission creates a policy and the department doesn't do it, does it matter? Chair Harrington asked what it would mean if the commission had no recourse in such a situation to fire the department head. Natasha Mihal noted the opposite was true as well: what does it mean for a department head who has a plan or a mandate from the Mayor to do something in conflict with the commission's direction?



Per Chair Harrington, if a commission and department head disagree, and commissioners are unsuccessful at changing the Mayor's mind, the Mayor should change the commissioners. In response to Natasha Mihal's clarification whether that meant that all commissioners should be mayoral appointees, Chair Harrington said yes, with some exceptions possibly. He sees governance bodies as an extension of the Mayor's Office and part of the executive branch of government. Unless there is an overriding reason not to, the Mayor should appoint and remove; exceptions may include the Police Commission and MTA Board.

Vice Chair Fraser asked if Chair Harrington would be comfortable with each mayor deciding whether or not to have certain commissions. Chair Harrington thinks it is appropriate that governance commissions reside in the charter so that mayors cannot make such changes; the governance processes of the City should exist and mayors should fit into those, not vice versa.

Vice Chair Fraser asked Chair Harrington his opinion on the specific value that commissions add to the Mayor. In his experience as a commissioner and a department head, the Mayor lacks the ability to pay attention to the level of detail being worked on in departments. Using the budget as an example, the Mayor shouldn't have to preview every departmental decision. It is fine if the Mayor wants to get involved, but they should not have to care about the same details the public cares about and which departments should be accountable for and public about.

Vice Chair Fraser deeply appreciates Chair Harrington's knowledge but is concerned about being locked into the 'San Francisco' experience. In contrast, she has worked in federal and other county systems which lack commission structures and run as well if not better. It was more feasible to get things done, mandates were clear, and people were fired for poor performance. She is worried about designing a commission system around the idea that the Mayor can't personally take care of fifty departments; while that is true, corporations much larger than the City are run by one CEO, who is held accountable. While Vice Chair Fraser sees agreement with Chair Harrington on the goal that departments should deliver in the most effective way possible, she sees misalignment around the Mayor's oversight ability. She believes commissions prevent mayors from having sufficient oversight and that there are other ways to accomplish the same goal that would deliver faster, better, cheaper, outstanding services.

Acknowledging the differences, Chair Harrington pointed out that San Francisco is both 'small d' democratic and 'big d' Democratic; its people have been raised, and they have raised us, to want to be involved in their government in a different way than residents of San Mateo County. He sees this as a positive – though not as a sign that the City is performing well, in response to a comment from the Vice Chair. Vice Chair Fraser noted that SF's system of public participation privileges people who have the time, knowledge, and ability to show up and sit through commission hearings, and that people are being left behind as a result. Natasha Mihal added that these same attributes also limit who can be a commissioner. Chair Harrington pointed out that other processes (e.g., posting contracts or performance measures) won't make people left behind any less if they don't have the time to get involved anyway. He sees commissions as one additive element of a larger approach, whereas Vice Chair Fraser seems to see public bodies as detracting from the overall effort.

Andrea Bruss brought the conversation back to functions – specifically, which are important for a commission providing oversight? She sees accessibility, community representation, and expertise as part of providing oversight. She believes the ability to fire a department head is less important to San Franciscans, who are more likely to hold their elected officials accountable for big policy decisions and who is put in charge of agencies.



Returning to the topic of resident involvement, Vice Chair Fraser shared examples of different ways to involve people in and help them think through specific issues. Public comment, which is a large part of what commissions are seen to be important for, is a painful way to get input and often doesn't get at the dilemmas being struggled with. Getting public input is critically important; every department should be required to conduct and publish customer service surveys. Other methods include charettes, focus groups, and online surveys. It is outdated to take testimony in three-minute chunks through a process which neither asks nor enables people to struggle with thinking through the dilemmas and tensions; it's a resource-intensive format, and the power and diversity of other methods should be harnessed.

Chair Harrington pointed out that commissions don't prevent the City from utilizing those other methods but the lack of them takes away one good way people have chosen to interact with their government. Commissions have effectively changed department direction, which is why removing the hiring/firing authority is important; one example is the Tuolumne River Trust's concerns about PUC ruining the river. The department head would not have taken action if the commission hadn't held hearings with experts and identified a compromise. The Mayor would not have talked about the level of water needed in the river, though Vice Chair Fraser responded that the Mayor's staff with policy expertise would.

The Vice Chair stated that the current system is based in distrust of department heads and the mayor, to which Chair Harrington countered that while trust is present, agreement is not always. Vice Chair Fraser confirmed that the Chair's vision entailed City policy being set by appointees rather than department heads and for department management to be delegated to commissions, which is a system to which a mayor must pay sufficient attention so as to know when it's necessary to remove appointees. Chair Harrington confirmed that he agrees with this, which is the current system outlined in the City charter. Vice Chair Fraser disagreed with this vision.

Chair Harrington sees commissioners acting on behalf of the mayor at a level of detail the mayor and their staff would never get involved in, but Vice Chair Fraser sees that as the department head's role. Having worked for both BOS and a mayor, Andrea Bruss shared that when ignored by a department, many community advocates identify problems for BOS or the Mayor's Office. They are holding their elected officials accountable. Such engagement happens in the natural course of business; staff will contact department heads to request briefings and work through issues. Commissions aren't the only ones pushing department heads or holding them accountable. There are other avenues of recourse and ways for elected officials to engage in more granular departmental policy-making.

Chair Harrington agreed with Andrea Bruss's assessment but doesn't see it as a reason to get rid of commissions, since mayoral staff only get involved in large items, but the day-to-day is important too. Natasha Mihal asked if someone who reports to the Mayor would be sufficient, or whether it needs to be people outside of government. Chair Harrington sees an organized role for people outside of government, which has been chosen to be provided through commissions. While ad hoc discussions may be useful, they are not the same as a group knowing things in a continuing way. Department heads will sometimes take the easiest path because there are too many other things going on.

Vice Chair Fraser asked Chair Harrington whether departments are run by commissions or department heads. In his view, commissioners provide oversight and say yes or no to decisions, but most things are delegated to the department head to manage. Low-level contracts are an example of appropriate delegation; for example, only rental agreements which deviated from the Port's annual system of approved rates required public discussion and separate commission approval.



Vice Chair Fraser touched on the costs of commission systems, including politicization and power grabs. The system empowers unelected people who lack accountability and report to no one. It also breeds risk-aversion and negativity; staff are castigated in public and treated as untrustworthy. Furthermore, commissions are controlled by the Brown Act and Sunshine Ordinance, which prevent them from effectively using feedback-gathering methods such as charrettes or focus groups to engage in a back-and-forth with participants. She believes passionately that government should be accountable, transparent, ethical, and effective at delivering services to taxpayers and residents but does not see great value in people outside of government running departments; rather than helping achieve these goals, governance commissions slow down the provision of services, diffuse accountability and power, and privilege small groups of people who sit on commissions or know how to work the system.

Disagreeing with the Vice Chair's perspective, Chair Harrington clarified that he does not see commissions as replacing department heads. 98% of what happens in a department does not go before a commission and is the responsibility of the department head. Instead, commissions deal with high-level policy matters and should not or could not be involved in a detailed manner.

At a crossroads in the conversation, Chair Harrington wondered how the group should proceed, stressing the importance of settling on how to approach the conversations [principles vs definitions vs functions] and finding a way to make decisions. Sensing a spot of agreement, Vice Chair Fraser proposed discussing advisory group templates, focusing on roles, powers, and functions – in other words, what would advisory bodies do or not do? Andrea Bruss also preferred to focus on functions, such as policy-setting, and posited that the group would be uncomfortable settling on purposes and definitions before discussing functions. Building on Andrea's proposal, Natasha Mihal proposed a brainstorming approach, because trying to obtain consensus in the current meeting would be tedious.

Chair Harrington reported the results of the Task Force member survey regarding the purposes of advisory bodies: there is consensus that their primary purposes were to contribute expertise, enhance equity and inclusiveness, and add to public participation, and that they don't have a role in accountability and oversight, valuable checks and balances, or upholding and enforcing the law.

Vice Chair Fraser inquired whether they would hire and fire department heads, and Chair Harrington proposed they would not. The Vice Chair then asked what it means for members of advisory groups to contribute expertise, to which Chair Harrington responded that appointees add value due to their lived experience, background, training, and/or knowledge, contributing new and different information. Translating this into functions, Vice Chair Fraser confirmed that this means there should be seat requirements with qualifications for appointments and a meeting agenda set by the department head, but with appointees able to request future topics. While Chair Harrington also sees public meetings as an inherent function of advisory bodies, Vice Chair Fraser pointed out there was a tension between public participation and commissioner expertise.

Natasha Mihal inquired whether the contribution of expertise was proactive or reactive (responding to something proposed to them). To Chair Harrington, it could be both; departments can request advice, but advisory groups should also have the ability to say what they want and talk about things that are important to them. The expertise they bring may match or exceed the department's knowledge. It's a more organized version of public participation; rather than showing up to a public meeting as a one-off and speaking for three minutes, appointees are part of a panel that talks about the topic on an ongoing basis. In response to a question from Natasha Mihal about whether departments must take into account what advisory group members say, Chair Harrington responded that hopefully departments would act on the things they hear from their advisory groups though they were not required to.



In response to a question from Vice Chair Fraser, Chair Harrington noted a subset of advisory groups established or attended by staff, aka staff working groups, such as the Committee on Information Technology (COIT) or the Interdepartmental Staff Committee on Traffic and Transportation (ISCOTT). The Chair is focused more on citizen advisory commissions (CACs). Rachel Alonso confirmed that the distinction has been made in the Task Force's workbook via a new "staff working group" category, leaving the "advisory group" category to refer to CACs.

Vice Chair Fraser inquired about who should appoint members of advisory groups. Chair Harrington sees value in having multiple appointing authorities to better achieve a diversity of opinions. He noted a question for the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors (BOS) about the different methods for BOS appointments (i.e. BOS President, Rules Committee, and each BOS member). The problem with increasing the number of appointing authorities is the bodies becoming too large; having 35 or 50 members may not be useful. Andrea Bruss asked whether the group agreed that overly large bodies aren't useful to either the people participating or the policymakers receiving the advice.

Vice Chair Fraser requested functions be mapped to the purposes and principles to help future discussions move to a more granular level of detail. For example, accountability and oversight would map to hiring/firing authority and policy-setting. Transparency would map to size or the number of seats. Task Force members identified additional functions and operational attributes of public bodies:

- Budget and contract approval
- Reviewing performance
- Disciplinary matters (relevant only to the Fire, Police, and Civil Service commissions)
- Whether the body is 'checking and balancing' downward (the department) or upward (the Mayor)
  - Decision-making independence from appointing authorities is an example of 'checking and balancing' upward. For example, Police Commissioners believed they had independent authority and did not need to follow anyone else's direction. Chair Harrington has seen a number of commissioners think this is their role.
- Terms

Task Force members discussed how the purpose or principle of **transparency** would be operationalized overall, despite being less important for advisory bodies. While Vice Chair Fraser pushed for more granularity and specificity, Chair Harrington argued that bringing issues into a public forum was an intrinsic part of public bodies. The group agreed that "holding public hearings" was the most relevant function. Publicly reviewing department budgets prior to submission to the Mayor's Office was also flagged as relevant.

Task Force members had no new functions for the **public participation** purpose. For the **contributing expertise** purpose, Chair Harrington reiterated the centrality of inviting people to participate based on their lived experience or technical knowledge, with the purpose of hearing from people in an organized way. Andrea Bruss and Vice Chair Fraser operationalized this through requirements for the composition of the body or its seats. Natasha Mihal raised the issue of conflicts of interest vis-à-vis contributing expertise. Chair Harrington explained that advisory body members were permitted to have business before the department because they were not making decisions about contracts, for instance. On the other hand, the City threw many experts off governance commissions due to concern about conflicts of interest, which he isn't sure he agrees with.



The next purpose tackled by the Task Force was **consensus-oriented decision-making**, about which the survey results revealed higher levels of disagreement. However, through discussion, the Task Force agreed it was a nice-to-have but not required, and potentially impossible to achieve. Governance commissions operate by majority rule.

The Task Force then discussed the importance of and how to operationalize the purpose of **equity and inclusiveness**. Vice Chair Fraser doesn't see commissions as helping in this regard nor does she believe that one person can represent an entire group. Chair Harrington agreed that commissions could not be fully representative, but he does see value in having a diverse set of commissioners, because it raises the possibility of a diversity of opinions. Andrea Bruss connected this to the functional topic of appointee qualifications, Natasha Mihal noted the need to expand beyond who the commissioners are themselves, and Chair Harrington identified trade-offs between this purpose and expertise, especially for bodies with fewer members. Andrea Bruss distinguished between the role appointing authorities play in ensuring commissions are diverse and the responsibility commissioners have to bring an equity perspective to the way they act and conduct their work.

Turning next to **responsiveness**, Task Force members discussed their differing interpretations:

- Quickness (Natasha Mihal)
- The ability to act on issues raised by the public (for instance by directing staff to do something). It indicates that someone is listening and is the ability to have a response, even if the response is to make no changes to department operations; ignoring the public is not a legitimate response (Chair Harrington)
- Departments providing services needed or wanted by their target populations (Vice Chair Fraser)
- Authority delegated to department heads, preserving the ability for decisive action when needed (for instance, being able to repair a fence or playground without commission approval of a contract) (Andrea Bruss)

Chair Harrington saw authority delegation as more relevant to the purpose of accountability and oversight than responsiveness, because his focus is on the commissions, not department heads. Andrea Bruss proposed incorporating this concept into templates via the calendaring of hearing items. Vice Chair Fraser elaborated on this by asking whether individual commissioners should have the ability to calendar items. Chair Harrington stated that commission meeting agendas should be set by the president and department head, with individual members requesting items be calendared. He assumes that if a majority of commissioners wanted an item calendared, that the president would act accordingly. Natasha Mihal pointed out that this inherently touches on the commission providing direction to a department.

**Effective resource management** was another area with disagreement. Chair Harrington did not see it as the role of any commission, because he interpreted it as how a budget was spent, which was the responsibility of the department head and their staff. Using the hypothetical situation of a large budget for playgrounds, Andrea Bruss asked Chair Harrington whether commissions should care where or how they are built, or just whether the approved budget is adhered to; his response was that an entire rebuild of playgrounds in the city would impact a lot of people and warrant a public discussion. He explained his interpretation as the level of resources being up to both departments and commissions but how those resources are managed as being up to departments. Seeing an overlap with oversight and accountability, Natasha Mihal proposed abandoning this purpose. Andrea Bruss concurred, feeling the concept was already covered by the budget and contract approval functions previously flagged. Vice Chair Fraser proposed a different interpretation: are commissions the best way to make sure that resources are managed appropriately? In her perspective, the answer is no. Chair Harrington clarified that he doesn't



necessarily believe commissions are the best way to do a number of the things discussed, but they are a very effective part of the way we do things. He proposed the Task Force not seek the concept of “best.”

The final purpose discussed was **upholding and enforcing existing laws**. Based on the survey, Task Force members saw this as important for regulatory bodies but not advisory bodies. Andrea Bruss explained that her interpretation of this concept was whether public bodies had a role in administering regulations or were responsible for determining whether departments correctly applied the law. Chair Harrington noted a distinction: everyone should be following laws but not necessarily enforcing laws.

Natasha Mihal asked whether the Task Force should be considering something others have suggested: that commissions have a role to play in watching for fraud and corruption. Chair Harrington said typically no, except for ensuring sole source contracts are legally correct. Commissions lack the ability and expertise to do this at a broad scale.

During public comment, Supervisor Connie Chan’s legislative aide Calvin Yan shared a draft ballot measure for the Task Force’s consideration which aims to minimize political influence and assert subject expertise in decision-making by allowing an equal number of commission members appointed by the executive and legislative branches (aka split appointments), with the City Administrator empowered as the tie-breaking appointing authority. Further amendments to the City charter are necessary for this split commission approach to function. Supervisor Chan is prepared to introduce the proposed measure for the November 2026 election should the Task Force choose to recommend it; she welcomes feedback or amendment suggestions.

## **8. Future Agenda Topics (Discussion Item)**

During public comment, Calvin Welch recommended the Task Force look into other aspects of the charter which address the role of the BOS since it has fundamentally changed from when the charter was first adopted. Several ballot measures have added BOS to the selection of key commissions (Planning, Police) which was not the case when the charter was originally drafted. Charter section 2.114, Non-Interference in Administration, specifically targets BOS and makes it a dismissible offense to interfere in the administration of a department. The language in the first complex sentence of the second paragraph implies that BOS cannot be involved in selecting new commissioners, which contradicts current practice. Chair Harrington requested this be added to the Task Force’s work plan.

Natasha Mihal asked what the Task Force would be discussing in upcoming meetings. Rachel Alonso shared that the agenda for the May 7<sup>th</sup> meeting will include presentations from Angela Calvillo, the Clerk of the BOS, and Professor Corey Cook, who will address the efficacy of commissions in accomplishing the goals. Other potential topics include department outreach, a data update, and continuing today’s discussion, starting to make decisions about functions. Given time constraints of the next meeting, Chair Harrington prioritized an update on the commission workbook data.

Vice Chair Fraser expressed curiosity about how the Task Force would define which departments need governance commissions, which need advisory bodies, and which don’t need any public body at all. Andrea Bruss added that down the road, the group will need to decide where the bodies live; for instance, should any advisory bodies continue to be in the charter? Rachel Alonso promised to add these to the Task Force’s work plan and thanked the group for surfacing things early; while initial conversations are high-level, more detailed discussions will need to happen in the future. Chair Harrington concurred, noting that the Task Force should be prepared to discuss individual bodies. Vice Chair Fraser agreed and



requested the Chair produce a document about what it is about departments that require a governance body between it and the Mayor's Office.

**9. General Public Comment – Continued from item 4 if necessary**

Item 9 was not needed, as item 4 did not exceed 15 minutes.

**10. Adjournment**

Chair Harrington adjourned the meeting at 3:53pm

---

Minutes prepared by Rachel Alonso, Project Director