



Draft Minutes – Revision 1

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

Daniel Lurie
Mayor

Wednesday, May 21, 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/47pnf3wt> and password PropE. Members of the public may use email address 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 042 8414 followed by ##. See page 3 for additional remote public comment instructions.

Agenda

1. Call to Order

Chair Ed Harrington called the meeting to order at 1:02pm.

2. Roll Call

Present:

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

Lily Moser called roll. With all five members present, a quorum was established.

3. Announcements (Informational Item)

The meeting was held in hybrid format, with participation available both in person and via WebEx. Technical instructions for public participation via WebEx were provided.

4. General Public Comment

Three members of the public addressed the Task Force:

- **George W.** provided historical context, emphasizing the strength of San Francisco's commission system and its ties to the Mayor's power. He highlighted the lack of independence among

commissioners and the incremental reallocation of powers between the Board of Supervisors (BOS) and the Mayor.

- **Caryl Ito** shared her experience as an Airport commissioner during Mayor Willie Brown’s administration, recalling a pivotal moment when the commission unanimously disagreed with the Mayor’s proposal to replace the Airport Director.
- **David Pilpel** thanked the Clerk of the BOS for listing Task Force meetings on the BOS website and advocated for maintaining a centralized list of all public body meetings. He also suggested expanding the City’s Ethics and Sunshine training to include practical guidance for commissioners.

5. Approve Minutes – May 7, 2025 meeting (Action Item)

The Task Force unanimously approved the minutes of the May 7, 2025 meeting without comment.

6. Commission Attributes and Data Gathering (Discussion and Possible Action Item)

Additional materials: [excel workbook of commission data](#)

Henry O’Connell, Senior Performance Analyst with the Controller’s Office, provided an update on the Commission Workbook, a centralized dataset being developed to support the Task Force’s evaluation of San Francisco’s public bodies. The workbook aims to standardize data and resolve inconsistencies across City records.

149 public bodies were identified within the Task Force’s scope, categorized into three groups: actively meeting (113 bodies), inactive (34 bodies), and sunset in law (2 bodies). Chair Harrington emphasized the importance of making tentative decisions and publicizing the 34 inactive bodies for potential elimination or consolidation. Henry O’Connell noted that 25 bodies are required under state or federal law, necessitating deeper analyses to determine if they can be combined or must remain as-is.

Only 14 of the active bodies have sunset dates. The Task Force discussed whether to apply sunset provisions more broadly.

The group reviewed appointing authorities, noting that 68 of the active bodies have mixed appointments. Governance bodies are mostly mayoral appointments, with some exceptions. Chair Harrington and Vice Chair Fraser both encouraged use of clearer terminology going forward—suggesting “bodies” or “groups” for general use, with “commission” reserved for governance entities.

O’Connell reported that advisory bodies were far more likely to have seats with specific qualifications, such as lived experience or professional background. An upcoming analysis will explore whether such qualifications correlate with chronic vacancies.

The Task Force discussed dropping certain data fields, such as quasi-judicial and policy-making labels, contract authority, and last meeting date. Vice Chair Fraser urged not to drop the quasi-judicial designation outright but to define it consistently.

The Task Force also discussed defining inactivity thresholds and gathering additional data on vacancies, expired terms, and required meetings per year.

Five members of the public spoke during public comment:

- **Angela Calvillo**, Clerk of the Board of Supervisors, clarified that Board Rule 2.21 applies only to bodies established by ordinance, not to charter commissions. She also mentioned that bodies authorized by the board must meet at least four times a year and provided an example of a quasi-judicial body.
- **John Monson**, a Civil Grand Jury member, discussed the challenges of tracking vacancies and praised the inclusion of a quasi-judicial designation.
- **Caryl Ito** shared the history of the Commission on the Status of Women, emphasizing its importance and the need to address women's issues separately from human rights.
- **Dr. Kathryn Kenley Johnson**, a long-time San Franciscan and sociologist with a focus on women's issues, reiterated the importance of protecting the Commission on the Status of Women and highlighted the need for distinct attention to gender-based violence.
- **David Pilpel** recommended categorizing advisory bodies as permanent or temporary and suggested a public survey to address issues of elimination, mergers, or maintenance

7. Proposal for Commissions (Discussion and Possible Action Item)

Additional materials: [Advisory Committee Comparison](#) PDF, [Governance Committee Comparison](#) PDF

Chair Ed Harrington and Vice Chair Jean Fraser presented conceptual frameworks for defining and categorizing San Francisco's public bodies. They emphasized that these were proposals for discussion, not finalized recommendations. Vice Chair Fraser proposed a three-part nomenclature:

- **"Commissions"** for governance bodies,
- **"Committees"** for advisory groups, and
- **"Boards"** for quasi-judicial or regulatory entities

Governance commissions were discussed first. Chair Harrington proposed that governance commissions be small (5–7 members), largely mayoral-appointed, and charter-based. He stressed the importance of public engagement, trust, transparency, responsiveness, and expertise—whether from commissioners or participating members of the public. He distinguished between "general" commissions (e.g., Fire, Police, PUC, Port) with broad public impact and "focused" commissions (e.g., arts or children) with more specific scopes. He questioned whether smaller departments, such as those tied to cultural institutions, should maintain separate operational infrastructure, and suggested consolidating back-office functions under a unified arts department while retaining commission structures for fundraising and community recognition.

He recommended that governance commissions serve as executive search partners to the Mayor—providing hiring recommendations for department heads but not exercising final authority. Department heads, he said, should report both to their commission and the Mayor. He also supported staggered four-year commissioner terms, with the Mayor retaining removal authority.

Vice Chair Fraser questioned the need for governance commissions beyond a select few enterprise departments (e.g., Airport, Port, PUC) that operate independently and require long-term planning. She emphasized the need for clear accountability, arguing that most departments should report directly to the Mayor. She expressed concern that commissions often entrench the status quo, privilege a small group of insiders, and dilute executive authority. Vice Chair Fraser proposed that governance commissions be structured like nonprofit boards, with fiduciary duties, term limits, split appointments, and protections from political interference.

Task Force members raised questions about exceptional cases. Natasha Mihal asked whether the rationale for retaining arts commissions could also apply to children's commissions. Chair Harrington responded that the latter were charter-based and rooted in community expertise rather than prestige. Both acknowledged that flexibility was needed in applying a single framework.

There was further discussion on commissions with complex oversight roles, such as the Police, MTA, and Planning Commissions. Chair Harrington noted these are shaped by high public interest and historical tension between the Mayor and Board. Planning, he said, focuses more on citywide policy than departmental management.

Vice Chair Fraser and Chair Harrington debated the value and cost of public input via commissions. Fraser emphasized that commissions can overburden departments and exclude broader participation. Harrington acknowledged such costs but maintained that well-managed commissions enhance performance and civic trust.

The conversation then turned to **advisory committees**. Fraser argued they should be purpose-specific, time-limited, and created at the discretion of the Mayor or Board, without requiring standing structures. She proposed that public engagement be customized by issue and population, ideally in collaboration with the Office of Civic Engagement and Immigrant Affairs (OCEIA).

Harrington agreed that some advisory bodies may no longer be useful but cautioned against dismantling functioning structures in hopes that alternatives would work. He supported a default sunset clause for advisory bodies (e.g., every three years), with reauthorization based on continued value.

Andrea Bruss suggested giving department heads more flexibility to structure engagement, modeled on the Port's elective community advisory groups. She and others noted that repeated reauthorization could reduce public participation rather than expand it.

Sophie Hayward observed that although Fraser and Harrington differed in emphasis, both proposals supported clearer definitions, sunset provisions, and more thoughtful design of public bodies

Five members of the public spoke during public comment:

- **Caryl Ito** recommended the Task Force engage in a social media push to increase awareness of the meetings. She emphasized the importance of the Commission on the Status of Women and its responsibilities.
- **Tom Radulovich**, a former elected official for twenty years, highlighted the role of deliberation in producing better outcomes and supported split appointments for quasi-judicial bodies to enhance legitimacy.
- **Dr. Kathryn Kenley Johnson** discussed the advantages of economies of scale but stressed the importance of the governance function for the Commission on the Status of Women.
- **Stacy Smith** used a metaphor from his incarceration experience to emphasize the need for diverse representation in civic engagement.
- **David Pilpel** noted the broad categories within governance and recommended the City consider whether department heads should select commission secretaries.

Chair Harrington noted the next meeting would review the remaining slides on regulatory and quasi-judicial bodies.

8. Future Agenda Topics (Discussion Item)

Rachel Alonso, Project Director, announced that the next meeting will revisit department and commissioner engagement to inform future decisions. An update on the overall work plan is also needed but may need to follow that engagement discussion.

Chair Ed Harrington noted he has encouraged departments to submit estimates for the Budget and Legislative Analyst's financial analysis.

Rachel Alonso added that materials summarizing the governance and advisory commission discussion—as well as the upcoming appeals board conversation—will be posted online. These materials will help identify areas of consensus and topics requiring further debate.

No members of the public wished to speak.

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 3:47pm.

Minutes prepared by Rachel Alonso, Project Director