

San Francisco Animal Commission
Meeting Minutes
July 10, 2025

1. Call to Order and Roll Call

Present: Chair Michael Angelo Torres; Commissioners: Mikaila Garfinkel; Michael Reed; Dayna Sherwood

Absent: Vice Chair Irina Ozernoy; Commissioner Nick Chapman; Department Representatives: Deputy Director Amy Corso, SF Animal Care and Control; Department Representatives: Natural Resources Manager Christopher Campbell, SF Recreation and Parks; Officer Greg Sutherland, SF Police Department; Dr. George Han, SF Department of Public Health

2. General Public Comment

No public comments were provided.

3. Approval of the draft meeting minutes from June 2025

Commissioners approved draft meeting minutes.

4. Chairperson and Commissioner reports

No chairperson and commissioner reports were provided. No public comments were provided.

5. Old Business

A. Pandas in Zoo: Issues and Challenges [Discussion Item] [Commissioner Torres]

Taciana Santiago, Co-Founder of Panda Voices, shared an in-depth presentation that covered the unique needs of pandas both in the wild and captivity, the neglect case of YaYa and LeLe at Memphis Zoo, and concerns about bringing pandas to the San Francisco Zoo.

Santiago walked through major challenges to homing captive pandas in zoo, including:

- The native habitat of pandas in China is temperate forests at high elevation, and this environment is critical to the species thriving.
- Bamboo makes up 99% of a panda's diet and must be grown and directly shipped from China, an expensive and complex requirement.
- The lack of veterinarians that specialize in panda care outside of China.
- Enclosures must meet specific conditions, including being large, providing access to the outdoors and varied terrain, and maintaining adequate distance from public viewing.

Santiago also gave an overview of the use of pandas as a mechanism for diplomacy, and the inherent challenges with that.

Commissioner Sherwood asked about the planned future for YaYa; Santiago shared that she would stay at the rescue organization.

Commissioner Sherwood also inquired about the financial incentives and details of panda diplomacy. Santiago stated that reporting shows the revenue from the panda program is not always used for conservation purposes.

Commissioner Garfinkel asked about the lifespan of pandas in captivity and if a panda will typically live in multiple zoos within their lifetime. Santiago shed light on the research centers within China, where they are bred and some are shipped to a zoo before returning to the research center.

Commissioner Reed inquired about how much is paid to China in exchange for the pandas. Santiago responded that typically the cost of a panda is \$1 Million to China, and the cost increases if breeding is involved.

Commissioner Torres asked if there are any situations where bamboo could be successfully grown outside of China. Santiago could not think of a place that had the same quality of bamboo as that grown in China.

Commissioner Garfinkel asked about the Memphis Zoo's decision to return the pandas and what spurred that decision. Santiago responded that the contract was not renewed.

Commissioner Sherwood inquired if there is pressure on China to intervene when pandas are neglected in zoos. Santiago shared that China typically sides with the zoo.

Public Comment

A community member advocated for San Francisco to refrain from acquiring the pandas for ethical, financial and emission factors.

A community member (former San Francisco Zoo employee) expressed support for Santiago's viewpoint.

B. City Government Public Records Requests [Discussion] [Commissioner Reed]

Commissioner Reed shared that he has been trying to obtain records on the inspection of live markets in San Francisco for a long period of time with no success. Due to the lack of transparency and responsiveness, Commissioner Reed said he is considering taking the issue to the Sunshine Task Force.

Commissioner Torres walked through the circles of communication that Commissioner Reed encountered with his requests and Commissioner Reed confirmed that there's been no communication from any departments since June.

Commissioner Sherwood requested clarification on the responses Commissioner Reed has received.

Commissioner Garfinkel suggested reaching out to San Francisco Animal Care & Control for any data.

Public Comment

A community member shared their experience with reporting live markets.

A community member expressed support for taking this to the Sunshine Task Force and suggestions for next steps.

6. Items to be included on the Agenda for Future Commission Meetings. The next meeting is Thursday, August 14th.

Commissioner Garfinkel suggested potentially adding the issue of artificial turf at Crocker Amazon Park to the next meeting agenda. Commissioner Torres agreed to connect her with the individual who made the public comment as a follow-up.

Public Comment

A community member brought up the issue of bird flu and suggested that as an agenda item.

8. Adjournment - 6:50 PM PT