

Paul A. Allen
San Francisco, CA
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(via email)

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Re: (1) 2025 Commission Agenda; (2) Transparency and Evidence

Dear Commissioners:

I noted the first item, above, in my less than 2 minute comment at the Commission meeting of December 4 this past week but I put it in writing here partly because not all Commissioners were present at the meeting. The second item derives from the lengthy discussion at the meeting on the use of body cameras.

1. 2025 Commission Agenda.

I urge the Commission to have on its agenda at the first meeting of the new year, or as soon thereafter as practicable but certainly in January, a presentation by the Chief (or his designee) that looks back on 2024 with the following report: (a) the top 3 (or so) relative public safety successes and the likely reasons therefor; and (b) the top 3 (or so) public safety disappointments or unmet challenges and, with respect to those, what it would take — resources, strategy, tactics, change to exogenous variables, whatever — to address those challenges more successfully in 2025 than was done in 2024. The reasons for such a report should be self evident.

While one supposes that this could be part of the Chief's Report, if it is to be done this way I urge the Commission to provide public notice of same in its advance, published agenda as such a report is, or should be, a matter of keen public interest.

2. Transparency & Evidence – Working Groups and Best Practices.

Working Groups. The consideration at the December 4 meeting of agenda item DGO 10.11, Body Worn Cameras, exposed an opportunity to improve public confidence in the work of the Police Commission. Virtually the entire one hour debate on this matter was consumed with a narrow issue – and here I risk mischaracterizing the matter, perhaps in the view of one or more Commissioners as well as the Chief – whether cameras must be activated during purely internal deliberations involving critical incidents. Amid much back and forth, the deliberations, views, and even composition of the relevant Working Group was invoked. But who was on the Working Group? The public has no idea. One member of the Working Group attended this Commission meeting but even she seemed confused about the titles of the SFPD members who participated, and she obviously could not identify all the members or the interests they represented. This is not acceptable, particularly if the Commission is to rely so heavily on the deliberations and work product of these Working Groups.

The Commission should require that when a DGO is presented for final (or perhaps even preliminary consideration) there be attached as an addendum to the draft DGO a roster of the Working Group members, their affiliations, and the dates when the Group met. This should be standard fare and hardly controversial.

Best Practices. The Consideration of DGO 10.11 again illustrated opportunities to improve public confidence in the work of the Police Commission when it comes to following national “best practices.” (I offered my opinion on this matter years ago during consideration of another DGO.) During the back and forth on the narrow point referenced above – the required use of cameras during internal deliberations on critical incidents – both sides seemed to claim that their position followed national best practices. In this setting, there should be some evidence of that. For example, if a proposed DGO significantly changes extant SFPD policy, and particularly if SFPD objects, shouldn’t the Working Group provide citations to those best practices and departments? Which departments? Where? What, precisely, is the best practice? How else can the public have confidence that the proposal is meritorious, that it really does reflect best practices, and that it advances public safety, the latter being the Commission’s First Principle?

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Paul Allen