

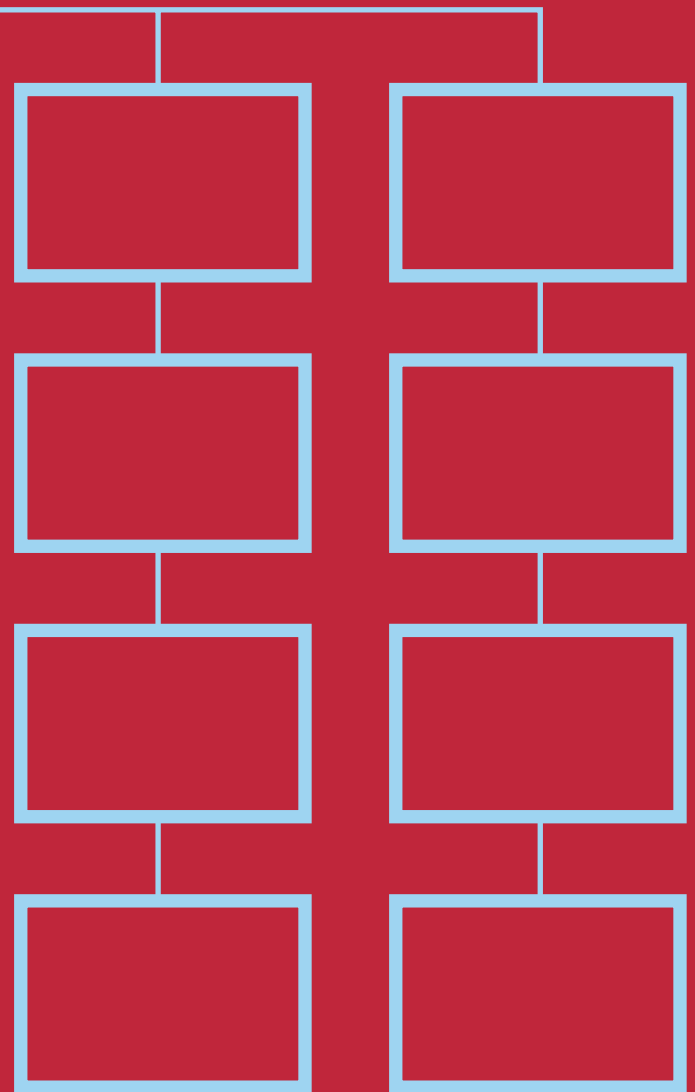


SPUR

SPUR REPORT
AUGUST 2024

Designed to Serve

Resetting the
city's governance
structure to
better meet
the needs of
San Franciscans





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Thank you to the dozens of current and former City and County of San Francisco officials and employees who spoke to us for this report. Their names are listed in Appendix B.



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Executive Summary

City and county government plays a critical role in providing for the well-being of the people of San Francisco. The decisions it makes — and its capacity to implement those decisions effectively — directly affect the lives of hundreds of thousands of people every day. From maintaining public spaces to issuing permits for small businesses to providing high-quality services for the city's most vulnerable residents, a high-functioning government is essential to ensuring the health, safety, and economic vitality of the community.

With more than 34,000 employees and an annual budget of more than \$15 billion, San Francisco's government is larger than many state governments. California's only merged city and county government not only runs city functions such as parks, libraries, and fire and police departments but also manages county functions that include public health, social services, and jails — making its overall structure extremely complex.

San Francisco is governed by a charter that defines the structure of city and county functions. It outlines a system of governance that centralizes the management of the city under a mayor and legislative functions under a board of supervisors. Although the public believes that the mayor serves as the chief executive for the city, the reality is that dozens of charter amendments have diffused management and decision-making across the city's network of boards and commissions. The result is a sprawling system that often cannot deliver services effectively, leading to an overall perception that the government isn't working.

In its current state, the City and County of San Francisco's government structure is like an overgrown garden: Everything was planted for its specific purpose but over time has grown thick and become difficult to disentangle. The overgrown nature of the government structure leads to a lack of clarity on roles and responsibilities and blurs lines of authority and accountability, leading to policies that don't always meet the needs of the people they intend to serve. However, San Francisco can choose to design a better system of governance. Rather than continue with a system that distributes authority and maximizes oversight, it can design a system that supports leadership and empowerment with clear lines of accountability.

SPUR's recommendations prioritize leadership, empowerment, and accountability as foundational design principles. To implement programs and services that are responsive to changing circumstances and that meet community needs, elected leaders, departments, commissions, and government employees should have clearly defined roles, unambiguous rules governing how they interact, and the ability to make informed decisions that support the achievement of shared objectives.

This report puts forward eight recommendations that can help the City and County of San Francisco's government work better. The recommendations focus on resetting the executive and legislative branches by giving them the tools and authority to carry out their respective functions and on modifying the organizational structure of government to better support the delivery of city and county services.

Increase the mayor's ability to manage departments effectively.

The charter limits the mayor's ability to set up an executive office that is adequately staffed to manage a large number of direct reports.

RECOMMENDATION 1

Remove the charter language that restricts mayoral staffing and management.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Reorganize the Mayor's Office for a more manageable number of direct reports.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Restore the mayor's authority to hire and fire most department heads.

Create clear lines of authority and accountability that everyone understands.

Reporting structures and roles and responsibilities should be more clearly defined and organized to better address complex citywide challenges.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Focus the City Administrator's Office on long-term cross-departmental projects and core operational functions.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Merge departments with similar functions and constituencies.

RECOMMENDATION 6

Define the purpose and role of commissions and reduce their overall number.

Support effective policymaking by improving legislative processes.

The legislative process lacks the proper structure to ensure that policy can be effectively implemented.

RECOMMENDATION 7

Build an in-house Legislative Analyst's Office to support the Board of Supervisors.

RECOMMENDATION 8

Raise the bar to put ballot measures before voters.

Introduction

The City and County of San Francisco plays a vital role in providing for the well-being of the community. Operational and policy decisions by the mayor and the Board of Supervisors affect community health, safety, and economic outcomes for everyone who calls San Francisco home. Recent transformations — such as technology advances, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the reduction of office workers downtown — along with long-standing issues, such as the lack of affordable housing and homelessness, have tested the city’s capacity to adapt to changing conditions. The lack of clear, coordinated action to address big challenges has led to a growing perception that the city government isn’t responding quickly enough to meet the growing needs of the people it serves.

Services: Perceptions and Facts

The latest City Survey (April 2023), which assesses San Francisco residents’ satisfaction with various services, reflects that perception (Exhibit 1).¹ The Muni grade was the only overall grade to increase (from a C+ to a B-) since the previous survey in 2019. The grades for government and safety decreased the most. The government rating dropped from a B- to a C, and the safety rating dropped from a B to a C+.

2023 CITY SURVEY	
Government	C
Libraries	B+
Parks	B
Safety	C+
Police	C+
Muni	B-
Utilities	B+
Streets	C+
COVID Response	B

EXHIBIT 1

2023 City Survey Overall Results

Grades for government and safety have decreased the most since the previous survey in 2019.

Source: SF.gov, 2023 City Survey Results, April 13, 2023, <https://www.sf.gov/reports/april-2023/2023-survey-results>.

¹ SF.gov, 2023 City Survey Results, April 13, 2023, <https://www.sf.gov/reports/april-2023/2023-city-survey-results>.

The City Survey is but one way residents' experience with government can be understood. The city's capacity to deliver quality services is predicated on — among other things — its capacity to hire people, coordinate the work of multiple departments, purchase goods and services, and measure outcomes. By these measures, the current governance structure is not set up to effectively deliver services.

- A 2022–2023 report from the San Francisco Civil Grand Jury shows that the number of vacant permanent positions with the City of San Francisco has more than doubled since the start of the 2020 pandemic, affecting service in various ways.²
- SPUR's policy brief *Small and Mighty* outlines how a lack of internal coordination around business permitting results in complex processes for a new business owner. A new restaurant has to navigate 61 steps involving 11 local agencies to obtain all the required permits and licenses.³
- A 2022 report by the Office of the Controller highlights misalignment in how performance measures are gathered and used to monitor city contracts, making it difficult to understand the impact of services provided by community-based organizations in areas such as human services, mental health and crisis intervention, and housing and shelter.⁴

Simplifying governance structures would allow the City and County of San Francisco to allocate resources more equitably and deliver better services. Doing so starts with ensuring that the mayor can manage the city, that lines of authority and accountability are clear, and that the city's legislative processes are designed to support effective policymaking. By revising governance structures, the city could begin to address other issues that create barriers to effective government, including contracting, hiring, customer service, and performance management.

This report looks at the roles and responsibilities of key officials and entities and uses SPUR's six principles of good government to inform recommendations that aim to increase San Francisco's capacity to deliver services effectively for residents, tackle future challenges, and embrace new opportunities.

Six Principles for Good Government

SPUR defines “good government” as government that upholds the rights of its people and supports their ability to thrive.⁵ Good government delivers programs and services that effectively meet the

² San Francisco Civil Grand Jury, *Time to Get to Work: San Francisco's Hiring Crisis*, June 21, 2023, https://www.sf.gov/sites/default/files/2024-02/2023%20CGJ%20Report_Time%20to%20Get%20to%20Work%20-%20San%20Francisco%27s%20Hiring%20Crisis_062123.pdf.

³ Sujata Srivastava, *Small and Mighty: How small businesses can reinvent downtown San Francisco*, SPUR, April 2023, page 12, <https://www.spur.org/publications/policy-brief/2024-04-03/small-and-mighty>.

⁴ City and County of San Francisco Office of the Controller, *The City Should More Effectively Evaluate the Impact of Services Provided by Community-Based Organizations: Citywide Nonprofit Performance Audit*, August 30, 2022, <https://sfcontroller.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Auditing/Citywide%20Nonprofit%20Performance%20Audit%20Report%208.30.2022.pdf>.

⁵ Sarah Karlinsky and TaShon Thomas, *Making Government Work: 10 Ways City Governance Can Adapt to Meet the Needs of Oaklanders*, SPUR, November 2021, <https://www.spur.org/publications/spur-report/2021-11-15/making-government-work>.

needs of the people it serves and ensures that its actions are transparent and responsive to public input. To realize this goal, leaders and government employees should have clear, effective rules for how to interact, know who is doing what, and support each other in achieving shared outcomes.

The principles outlined below are not meant to be exhaustive. Due to the broad nature of the topic, they focus more on process than results and can apply to any level and type of government, regardless of scale, scope, or subject area.

- 1 Clarity and Fairness:** Good government has an established legal framework that is interpreted and enforced impartially. All governmental entities, staff, and elected officials respect and abide by established laws and rules of conduct. Rules and laws are applied in ways that are clear and fair. Legal guidance given to policymakers regarding the application of the law is clear and accurate.
- 2 Transparency:** Good government is transparent. Information is accessible to the public, is understandable, and can be monitored. Key interests seeking to influence the outcome of decisions are known to the public. Communication is clear, allowing leaders to discuss issues thoroughly and make good decisions.
- 3 Accountability:** Good government is accountable to the public for its decisions. Roles and responsibilities of governmental entities, departments, staff, and elected officials are clearly defined. Accountability includes fiscal accountability for tax dollars collected and spent.
- 4 Representation:** Good government engages with the community it represents and is inclusive and equitable. It reflects the community members it serves. It equitably allocates resources, both time and money, to ensure that all residents have opportunities to improve or maintain their well-being and that economic prosperity and growth are shared. Good government balances all voices and is not subject to the undue influence of any group or political power. It listens and considers not only the loudest voices but also those without a voice, without organization, and without financial strength. It represents everyone, balancing often-competing interests for the greater good.
- 5 Effectiveness, Efficiency, and Adaptability:** Good government delivers services to meet the needs of the public while making the best use of the resources available. It effectively leverages its time, talent, and resources to maximize benefits to its residents. It operates at a high level of competence and excellence, obtained through adequate funding, good management, and allocation of resources. Good government is nimble and quickly adapts to address challenges that arise.
- 6 Leadership:** Good government has leaders at every level (elected, appointed, employed) who establish norms and values to instill respectfulness in all interactions. They insist on civility in decision-making and in all public engagement and discourse. They enforce and follow the rule of law. Good leaders motivate and inspire others, creating an environment of collaboration and success despite differences of opinion. Good leaders work through challenges and make tough decisions in a timely manner. They balance all interests, set realistic expectations, strive for the greatest public good, and trust in the process, accepting and implementing results they may not personally like.

San Francisco's Governance Structure

The City and County of San Francisco is a highly complex local government. With more than 34,000 employees and an annual budget of more than \$15 billion, San Francisco government is larger than many state governments.

Consolidated City-County

Consolidated as a city-county in 1856, San Francisco is the only merged city-county in California. Its government runs city functions such as parks, libraries, and fire and police departments *and* manages county functions that include public health, social services, and jails (Exhibit 2). In addition, San Francisco manages multiple semi-independent organizations with their own revenue and governance structures, such as the Port of San Francisco, the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission, and the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency.

EXHIBIT 2 City and County Functions

San Francisco is California's only merged city and county government. It not only runs city functions such as parks, libraries, and fire and police departments but also manages county functions that include public health, social services, and jails.

Source: SPUR

City

- PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT:
- Parks and recreation
 - Libraries
 - Housing services
 - Public works
 - Building inspection
 - Streets

- PUBLIC SAFETY:
- Police
 - Fire

County

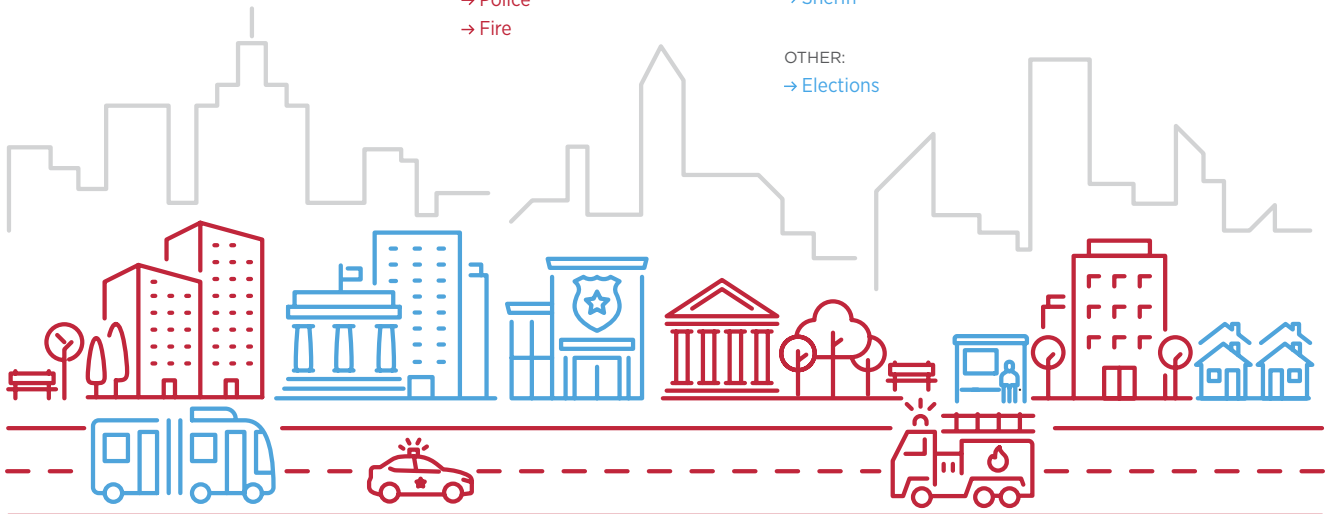
- SOCIAL SERVICES:
- Homelessness and supportive housing
 - Public health
 - Public transportation

- JUSTICE AND COURT SYSTEM:
- District Attorney
 - Public Defender's Office
 - Sheriff

- OTHER:
- Elections

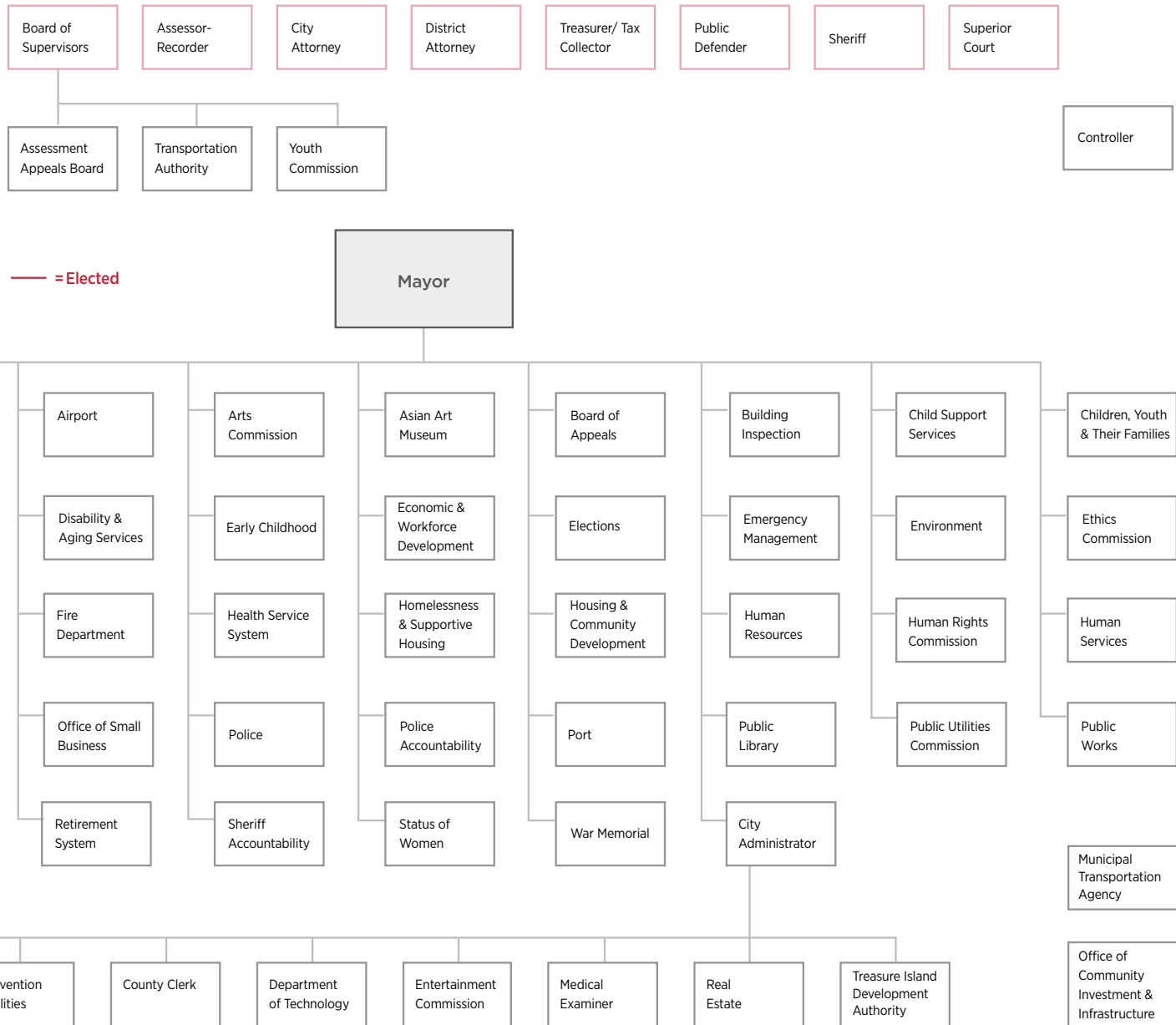
Both

- INTERNAL FUNCTIONS:
- Human resources
 - Legal
 - Financial management



**EXHIBIT 3
City and County
of San Francisco
Organizational Structure**

Source: London N. Breed, *Proposed Budget: Fiscal Years 2022-2023 and 2023-2024*, Mayor's Office of Public Policy and Finance, https://sfmayor.org/sites/default/files/CSF_Proposed_Budget_Book_June_2022_Master_REV2_web.pdf.



A city’s legislative function is usually performed by a city council, whose members are elected. Because San Francisco is a consolidated city-county, its legislative body is an elected Board of Supervisors, a county-level form of government, which performs the duties of both a city and a county.

San Francisco voters elect the two primary branches of city government: the executive branch (a mayor) and the legislative branch (an 11-member Board of Supervisors). Simply stated, the mayor manages the budget and operations of the city, and the Board of Supervisors manages the rules and regulations that apply within the city. San Francisco voters also elect the city attorney, assessor-recorder, Superior Court judges, district attorney, treasurer, public defender, and sheriff, all of whom lead their own departments (Exhibit 3).

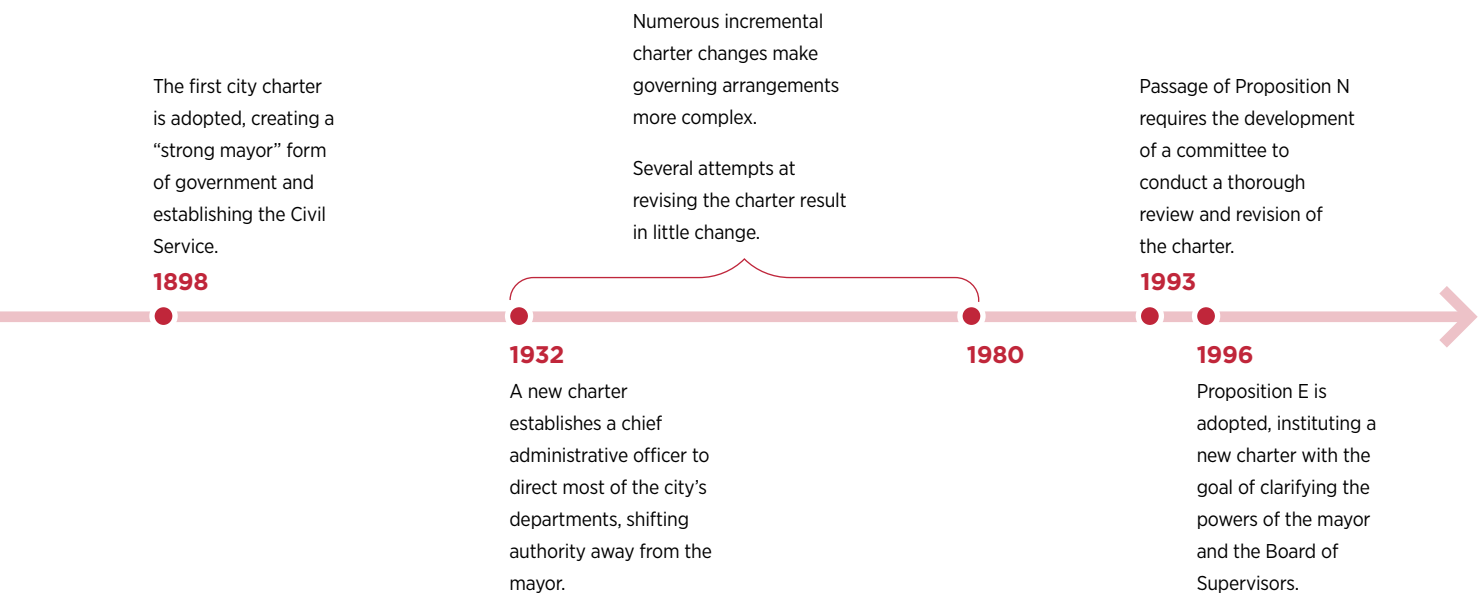
Charter City

Under California law, cities are generally organized either to follow state law (“general-law cities”) or to define their own governmental structure (“charter cities”). A general-law city has the authority to act locally if it does so in line with the California Constitution, state statutes, and state administrative regulations. In a charter city, voters adopt a legal document called a charter, which outlines how the city is governed, including its organization, powers, and functions. San Francisco is a charter city.

San Francisco’s current charter, known as the 1996 Charter, outlines the procedures for local governance, including the powers of the mayor, the Board of Supervisors, the city administrator, and other key officials. Voters can approve changes to the charter; these changes are known as amendments. Since adoption in 1996, the charter has been updated dozens of times (Exhibit 4).

EXHIBIT 4 Timeline of Charter Reform

Source: SPUR.



Executive Branch

STRONG-MAYOR FORM OF GOVERNMENT

In the United States, there are two predominant forms of local government: “mayor-council” and “council-manager” (Exhibit 5).

Many larger cities have some form of a mayor-council system. In this system, a mayor who is directly elected by the voters acts as chief executive, while a separately elected city council constitutes the legislative body. The form may be further categorized on the basis of the relative powers of the mayor and the council. In a typical “strong-mayor” system, the elected mayor is granted almost total administrative authority, with the power to appoint and dismiss department heads. Conversely, in a “weak-mayor” system, the mayor has no formal authority outside the council and serves a largely ceremonial role as council chairperson. Although San Francisco is categorized as a strong-mayor city, it is more accurately described as a “quasi” strong-mayor city because the charter provides many mayoral powers but also places a number of constraints on them.

Council-manager forms of government are typical of smaller cities and of counties. In a council-manager government, the elected council serves as the primary legislative body and appoints a chief executive officer, typically called a city or county manager, to oversee day-to-day municipal operations. This manager reports to the council.

APPOINTED LEADERSHIP

San Francisco also has two key appointed leadership roles, a controller and a city administrator, who help manage the city and who are nominated for long-term leadership positions by the mayor.

CONTROLLER

The controller is San Francisco’s chief financial officer and maintains the city’s financial integrity. The controller is appointed by the mayor and confirmed by the Board of Supervisors.

The controller’s responsibilities, according to the charter, generally include:

- Operating the city’s financial systems and issuing its financial procedures
- Preparing a financial analysis of each city and county ballot measure
- Auditing and analyzing the operations and performance of city government, including the level and effectiveness of city services
- Processing and monitoring the city’s budget, which includes keeping the budget in balance

The controller determines how much money the city has to spend and does the city’s accounting and financial reporting. The controller can freeze spending if funds are not available and thus can determine the resources that can be allocated. Lack of a single source of truth about the amount of available funds can lead to conflicts during the budget process.

EXHIBIT 5

Comparative Cities and Combined City-Counties

San Francisco has a mayor-council form of government, like Oakland, Los Angeles, and San Diego and, outside of California, Seattle and Boston. Other combined city-counties, such as Denver, Philadelphia, New York City, and Washington, D.C., also share this structure.

Source: SPUR.

San Francisco	848,019 (population)	Combined City-County	Mayor-Council	11 member Board of Supervisors (elected by district)
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Comparative California Cities

Oakland	440,646	1 of 14 cities within Alameda County	Mayor-Council	8 council members (7 members elected by district; 1 member elected at-large)
San José	1,013,240	1 of 15 cities within Santa Clara County	Council-Manager	11 council members, including the mayor (10 members elected by district; mayor elected at-large)
Los Angeles	3,898,747	1 of 88 cities within Los Angeles County	Mayor-Council	15 council members (elected by each district)
San Diego	1,386,932	1 of 18 cities within San Diego County	Mayor-Council	9 council members (elected by each district)
Sacramento	524,943	1 of 7 cities within Sacramento County	Council-Manager	9 council members, including the mayor (each member runs a legislative branch; 8 members elected by district; mayor elected at-large)

Comparative Cities Outside of California

Seattle	737,015	1 of 39 towns/cities within King County	Mayor-Council	9 council members (7 members elected by district; 2 elected at-large)
Austin	961,855	1 of 13 cities within Travis County	Council-Manager	11 council members, including the mayor (10 members elected by district; mayor elected at-large)
Boston	675,647	1 of 4 cities within Suffolk County	Mayor-Council	13 council members (9 members elected by district; 4 members elected at-large)

Comparative Combined City-Counties

New York City	8,804,190	5 counties (boroughs) within New York State	Mayor-Council	51 council members (elected by district)
Washington D.C.	689,545	Does not have counties within but is considered a county-equivalent for data collection	Mayor-Council	13 council members (8 members elected by district; 5 elected at-large)
Denver	715,522	City-county	Mayor-Council	13 council members (11 members elected by district; 2 elected at-large)
Philadelphia	1,603,797	City-county	Mayor-Council	17 council members (10 members elected by district; 7 elected at-large)

Several provisions help the controller make nonpolitical long-term decisions. The controller:

- Serves a 10-year term, beyond the length of two election cycles
- Operates independently and reports directly to either the mayor or the Board of Supervisors
- May be removed by the mayor for cause, with a two-thirds vote to do so by the Board of Supervisors

CITY ADMINISTRATOR

The city administrator is appointed by the mayor for a five-year term and is confirmed by the Board of Supervisors. The city administrator reports directly to the mayor.

The responsibilities of the City Administrator's Office (CAO), according to the charter, generally include:

- Administering long-term plans such as bonds
- Coordinating all capital improvement and construction projects
- Administering policies and procedures for contracts, procurement, and permits
- Appointing and removing heads of departments under its direction
- Managing publicity and advertising funds
- Providing administrative services for the executive branch

DEPARTMENTS AND AGENCIES

The fiscal year (FY) 2023–2024 San Francisco budget lists more than 50 departments (see Appendix C).⁶ Many of the largest departments represent county functions that manage extensive operations such as hospitals (Department of Public Health), the transportation system (the Municipal Transportation Agency), and utilities infrastructure (the Public Utilities Commission). Some departments were created by a charter amendment to focus on a particular area or to address concerns or conditions of the time (Department of Police Accountability). Other departments have been combined or divided.

BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

San Francisco has many commissions, boards, and advisory bodies (also known as “commissions”) made up of residents who provide input to public officials in specific issue areas, such as health, policing, and planning. Generally, responsibilities include holding public meetings on issues of concern for the public, issuing recommendations, and conducting oversight regarding related policymaking and legislation. Most commissions are advisory; however, some are governance bodies that shape the operations of a department or regulatory bodies with the authority to approve rates, permits,

⁶ San Francisco's fiscal year runs from July 1 to June 30.

contracts, projects, or other decisions required to uphold the law. As of May 2024, San Francisco had 126 boards and commissions created through four means: the charter, Board of Supervisors' ordinances, state law, and voter initiatives. Currently, 57 bodies have decision-making power, and 70 are advisory bodies (see Appendix D).

Legislative Branch

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

The San Francisco Board of Supervisors is the legislative body within the government of the City and County of San Francisco. San Francisco selects its 11-member board through district elections, with each supervisor representing a different part of the city. The elections are held through ranked-choice voting, a voting method that uses a ranked ballot to elect a majority winner. Over the past 50 years, the city has alternated between electing supervisors by district or from the city at large.

To provide continuity, terms are staggered so that only half the 11-member board is elected every two years. The members serve a four-year term, and they can be elected in two successive terms. The president is elected by the board to serve a two-year term. Board meetings are established by a resolution that the board passes every other year in January.

The Board of Supervisors' mission is to respond to the needs of the people of the City and County of San Francisco, to establish city policies, and to adopt ordinances and resolutions. The charter prohibits the board from interfering with administrative functions, although the board may make inquiries and request information about those functions to inform legislation.

LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

Legislation consists of ordinances (municipal regulations or laws), resolutions (formal expressions of intent, opinion, or will), and, occasionally, formal motions (proposals for action that are the sole authority of the Board of Supervisors).⁷

Legislation can be initiated by the mayor, members of the Board of Supervisors, or city departments. It is drafted and introduced at a Board of Supervisors meeting and from there assigned to be reviewed and potentially amended by relevant board committees. Committees vote to recommend the legislation for approval or rejection by the full board. Once it passes the committee vote, the legislation then goes before the full Board of Supervisors for consideration and a vote.

A majority vote of the board members is required to pass ordinances, resolutions, and motions, unless a greater number is required under state law, charter provision, Municipal Code, ordinance, or board rule. *The Board of Supervisors Rules of Order* contains an index on votes required for various matters.⁸ A majority vote of the members present during a meeting is required to amend proposed legislation and to approve most motions.

⁷ City and County of San Francisco Board of Supervisors, *Legislative Process Handbook*, 2022, https://sfbos.org/sites/default/files/Leg_Handbook.pdf.

⁸ City and County of San Francisco, *The Board of Supervisors Rules of Order*, 2023, page 48, https://sfbos.org/sites/default/files/rules_of_order.pdf.

Approved legislation is sent to the mayor, who can sign it into law, veto it, or allow it to become law without a signature after 10 days. The board can override a veto by the mayor with a two-thirds majority vote. Once it is law, the legislation becomes part of the Municipal Code, with an enactment date specified.

BALLOT MEASURES

Charter amendments and ordinances can get onto the ballot through a signature-gathering process or through the legislative process.⁹

Charter amendments proposed through the legislative process can appear on the ballot with a majority vote of the Board of Supervisors. The mayor can also propose a charter amendment for the ballot, which must be approved by the Board of Supervisors before being submitted to the Department of Elections. Any group can get a charter amendment on the ballot by collecting signatures from 10% of the city's registered voters.

Ordinances can be sent to the ballot by the mayor, by a majority vote of the Board of Supervisors through the legislative process, or by signatures from four or more members of the Board of Supervisors. Neither the board nor the mayor must have approval from the other branch to put an ordinance on the ballot. An ordinance can also be put on the ballot by any group that can collect signatures from at least 2% of the city's registered voters.

⁹ Mike Ege, "Explainer: How Ballot Measures Are Made in San Francisco," June 22, 2022, *The San Francisco Standard*, <https://sfstandard.com/2022/06/22/explainer-how-ballot-measures-are-made-in-san-francisco/>.

Findings

SPUR's research indicates that to provide programs and services that effectively meet the needs of the people, the government of the City and County of San Francisco needs clear lines of authority, accountability, resource alignment, and a vision shared by all of its entities.

FINDING 1:

The charter limits the mayor's ability to set up an executive office that is adequately staffed to manage a large and diverse set of direct reports.

The mayor is the chief executive of the city. Voters assume that the mayor is leading the city and hold the mayor accountable for meeting the needs of their communities through elections. But the mayor's ability to respond to these collective needs is stymied by a large set of direct reports. The charter prevents the mayor from reducing that set by limiting the mayor's ability to set salaries, hire for certain titles (notably, deputy mayors), and delegate management authority.¹⁰ The charter also specifically prohibits mayoral staff from managing other departments that are considered outside of the mayor's scope of power, including departments managed by the city administrator, other elected officials, and an increasing number of commissions. These restrictions reflect historical concerns about senior officials acting as unelected mayors with no voter accountability, but they hamper the mayor's ability to uphold the "general administration and oversight of all departments and governmental units," the first mayoral responsibility in the charter. Consequently, the mayor can only respond to the needs of the day and lacks the capacity to pursue a cohesive strategy and policy agenda. Moreover, the political nature of the budget process has discouraged growth in mayoral staff in line with the growth of government. With only 43 budgeted staff in total, the Mayor's Office is one of the smallest city departments and is less than half the size of the Board of Supervisors, which has 92 budgeted staff.

Currently, 43 department heads and seven mayoral staff members report directly to the mayor. The executive office is insufficiently resourced to manage this large a number of departments and direct reports, but current charter provisions make it difficult to set up an office with delegated authority to manage this broad span of control.

Other large U.S. cities with strong-mayor forms of government, such as Indianapolis, New York City, and Washington, D.C., have deputy mayors who manage portfolios of departments

¹⁰ Charter Section 3.100 prescribes a salary cap on mayoral staff and restricts the mayor's ability to designate deputy mayors and similar roles: "12. Subject to the fiscal provisions of this Charter and budgetary approval by the Board of Supervisors, appoint such staff as may be needed to perform the duties and carry out the responsibilities of the Mayor's office, provided that no member of the staff shall receive a salary in excess of seventy percent of that paid the Mayor. For purposes of this provision, staff does not include the City Administrator, department heads or employees of departments placed under his or her direction by Section 3.104. Notwithstanding any other provisions or limitations of this Charter to the contrary, the Mayor may not designate nor may the City and County employ on the Mayor's behalf any person to act as deputy to the Mayor or any similar employment classification, regardless of title, whose responsibilities include but are not necessarily limited to supervision of the administration of any department for which the City Administrator, an elected official other than the Mayor or an appointed board or commission is assigned responsibility elsewhere in this Charter."

and offices. Deputy mayors can be effective at reducing a mayor's number of direct reports. They also can be effective at coordinating departments to advance a cohesive strategy. For example, the Washington, D.C., Mayor's Office has five deputy mayors who cover specific policy areas. The deputy mayors report to the city administrator, who acts as a chief operating officer. (In New York City, this role is played by the first deputy mayor.) Delegating authority to deputy mayors streamlines the overall reporting structure and provides a clear chain of command and accountability.

FINDING 2:

Achieving shared goals is difficult with diffused reporting structures and conflicting mandates.

There is no correct number of departments that San Francisco should have; however, the current number makes delivering effective services unnecessarily complex. Each department needs its own administrative staff to manage functions such as budget, human resources, purchasing, and information technology. A 2020 analysis by the Controller's Office indicated that spinning off a new Sanitation and Streets Department from the Department of Public Works would necessitate a 10% to 25% increase in staffing for these functions, costing between \$2.5 million and \$6 million a year.¹¹ This proposal didn't move forward in part due to projected administrative costs.

In addition to administrative costs, each department has its own strategic plan and priorities. One department's plan can conflict with the plans of other departments that may share similar goals or serve the same constituents. This department-specific orientation can reinforce silos and make citywide coordination and performance management very difficult.

The vast number of departments with sometimes overlapping or even conflicting mandates or guidance can make it incredibly difficult for people to navigate services. For example, starting a business in San Francisco involves navigating complex bureaucratic processes that often stretch far beyond public health and safety concerns. A new restaurant must go through 61 steps involving 11 local agencies to get its required permits and licenses. Just to get started, a restaurant may have to pay 17 different government fees, making it both a difficult and expensive process.¹²

Consider that mayoral authority for appointing department heads varies from complete to none (Exhibit 6). When the mayor, the Board of Supervisors, and commissions share responsibility for appointing department heads, lines of accountability can be blurred, creating ambiguity about who has authority to set the departments' direction. This makes setting shared goals and advancing a citywide agenda difficult. San Francisco's challenges require urgent collective effort, and the most pressing of them call for cross-departmental coordination and alignment.

¹¹ City and County of San Francisco Office of the Controller, *File 200510 - Charter amendment to create a Public Works Commission and to create the Sanitation and Streets Department and Sanitation and Streets Commission*, July 20, 2020, <https://sfgov.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=8665206&GUID=601DEB29-0748-44A0-AAE8-C2841DA32FD6>.

¹² Sujata Srivastava, *Small and Mighty: How small businesses can reinvent downtown San Francisco*, SPUR, April 2023, page 12, <https://www.spur.org/publications/policy-brief/2024-04-03/small-and-mighty>.

EXHIBIT 6

Mayoral Authority for Department Head Appointments Varies Widely

San Francisco has eight different paths for appointing department heads. The mayor has complete authority to appoint just four department heads. In other

cases, the mayor's choice is constrained by a shortlist selected by a commission or must be confirmed by the Board of Supervisors. Many department heads are directly appointed by a board or commission.

Source: SPUR.

Varying Levels of Mayoral Authority

Mayor has complete authority	Mayor must select from commission shortlist	Mayor appoints; Board of Supervisors confirms	Mayor selects from commission shortlist; Board of Supervisors confirms
Housing & Community Development Children, Youth & Their Families Economic & Workforce Development Emergency Management	Fire Homelessness and Supportive Housing Airport Human Rights Human Services Juvenile Probation Office of Small Business Police Disability & Aging Services Early Childhood Entertainment Port Public Health Public Library Public Utilities Public Works Recreation & Parks Rent Arbitration Status of Women Environment City Planning	Controller City Administrator Animal Care & Control Convention Facilities County Clerk Medical Examiner Purchaser/Contract Administration Real Estate Technology	Police Accountability Human Resources

No Mayoral Authority

Board or commission appoints	Elected by voters	Other boards appoint
Building Inspection Board of Appeals Child Support Services Elections Ethics Health Service System Retirement System Arts Commission Asian Arts Museum Civil Service Municipal Transportation Agency War Memorial	Assessor-Recorder Treasurer-Tax Collector District Attorney Public Defender City Attorney Board of Supervisors Sheriff Superior Court Adult Probation	Sheriff Accountability Law Library Fine Arts Academy of Sciences Office of Community Investment and Infrastructure

FINDING 3:**The role of the City Administrator's Office is not clearly defined, and it is not organized to address complex citywide challenges.**

The 1996 Charter transformed the chief administrative officer overseeing a majority of departments into a city administrator with more limited authority. The role has further evolved on the basis of the position holder and in response to the mayor's priorities. In many jurisdictions, the role is designed to support the daily operations of a city and to coordinate activities across departments, but in San Francisco, it has often served as a catchall for emerging initiatives with no natural home. As a result, the current portfolio of the City Administrator's Office (CAO) is a mix of departments, programs, and agencies serving widely different functions and constituencies. (See Exhibit 8 for the current structure and our recommended changes.)

Like the controller, the CAO is meant to be an apolitical appointment focused on long-term administrative and operating procedures of the city. However, in contrast with the controller, whose role is well defined, the role of the city administrator is less understood. A diverse purview and a lack of explicit authority to convene and ultimately drive decisions across departments limit the CAO's capacity to play a long-term strategic role. Instead, the CAO is often focused on political priorities and responding to the emergencies of the moment.

FINDING 4:**The purpose, roles, and responsibilities of the city's many boards and commissions are often unclear.**

In their advisory function, commissions play a key role in civic engagement, providing a forum for public input on important issues. When functioning well, commissions inform decision-making and policy with new thinking and a broad set of perspectives. They facilitate public engagement, provide transparency, and help hold the city accountable for delivering public services that are equitably allocated, accessible, and responsive to community needs.

Notably, 57 commissions have decision-making authority in San Francisco.¹³ Influential commissions include the Planning Commission, the Police Commission, and the Recreation and Park Commission. Some are mandated by state or federal law. Many of these commissions have authority to make operational decisions about key staffing, public assets, resources, and budget and have broad policy-setting powers. When commissions are responsible for departmental oversight and policy direction, their authority can overlap or conflict with mayoral authority. Creating commissions and giving them authority is part of the ever-shifting balance of power and oversight between the mayor and the Board of Supervisors.

¹³ Members of these decision-making bodies need to file financial disclosures with the Ethics Commission. See <https://www.sfcityattorney.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Commission-List-10252022.pdf>.

The Powers and Duties of Boards and Commissions

The San Francisco Charter lists 11 powers and duties of board and commissions:

1. Formulate, evaluate, and approve goals, objectives, plans, and programs and set policies.
2. Develop and keep current an annual statement of purpose outlining areas of jurisdiction, authorities, purpose, and goals.
3. After a public hearing, approve applicable departmental budgets or any budget modifications or fund transfers.
4. Recommend rates, fees, and similar charges.
5. Submit at least three qualified applicants for the position of department head.
6. Remove a department head by acting on the mayor's recommendation (or choose to retain the head).
7. Conduct investigations into governmental operations within the board or commission's jurisdiction and make recommendations.
8. Exercise other powers and duties prescribed by the Board of Supervisors.
9. Appoint an executive secretary.
10. Hold hearings and take testimony.
11. Retain temporary counsel for specific purposes.

Some of the duties focus on responsibilities associated with a board's or commission's advisory role. Others overlap with the mayor's authority, most notably in removing department heads.

Source: San Francisco Charter, Sec. 4.102.

Created for a variety of reasons and governed by individual charters that vary by body, San Francisco's 126 boards and commissions (57 decision-making and 69 advisory) have inconsistent basic procedures. For example, the way a commission or board fills its seats depends on its charter, as does the way it removes a member. In some cases, the mayor's nominees must be approved by the Board of Supervisors, but nominees by the Board of Supervisors do not need to be approved by the mayor. In many cases in which appointments are split between the mayor and the Board of Supervisors, one or more other parties also appoint member(s). For example, the Elections Commission has members appointed by the city attorney, the public defender, the district attorney, the treasurer, and the San Francisco Unified School District's Board of Education. A few entities,

such as the California Academy of Sciences Board of Trustees, appoint their own members. For the public, this inconsistency translates as a lack of transparency about who is accountable for decisions.

Managing the current commission system of 126 bodies and more than 1,200 commissioners/members requires a large investment of city staff time, which can detract from actual service delivery. Staff support includes onboarding new members; responding to questions/directives from commissioners; planning, scheduling, and developing materials for public meetings; following public posting requirements; hosting, presenting, and providing staffing support at meetings, which can go on for many hours; and managing subcommittees of the advisory body. Staff support can also include compiling responses to information requests, preparing reports, writing briefing memos, and drafting motions/resolutions.

Notably, multiple commissions and boards can cover services in one area. In November 2022, voters passed Proposition C, a charter amendment that the Board of Supervisors introduced to create the Homeless Oversight Commission. The seven-member commission oversees the Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing and approves its budget. Today, the voter-approved Homeless Oversight Commission exists alongside the Local Homeless Coordinating Board, the Our City, Our Home Oversight Committee, and the Shelter Monitoring Committee, all of which oversee different aspects of the homelessness response system and require staff time and support to administer.

Also notably, many San Francisco departments have more than one board or commission to manage. The Department of Disability and Aging Services within the Human Services Agency currently supports at least six commissions/advisory bodies with a total of 102 members. Five of these entities meet monthly; one meets quarterly. Every dollar spent supporting these entities represents less funding to direct services for San Francisco's elderly and disabled residents.

FINDING 5:

The legislative process lacks the proper structure to ensure that policy can be effectively implemented.

As the legislative branch, the Board of Supervisors establishes policies, adopts ordinances and resolutions, and responds to the needs of the people of the City and County of San Francisco. Key structural issues — including insufficient policy analysis, tight timelines, and the voter initiative process — have limited the board's ability to pass effective policy.

Good policy design requires that supervisors and their staff not only understand a topic, its history, potential solutions, and possible intended and unintended outcomes but also have knowledge of and experience with the way San Francisco's government works — expertise that allows them to analyze the implementation context and operational considerations that will impact a policy's effectiveness. Supervisors and their staff may need years to gain this expertise. However, they regularly face both political and policy pressures to work within tight timelines to craft legislation, often operating with information gaps. As a result, legislative outcomes may not always match intentions.

The city pays about \$3 million a year for outsourced legislative and budget analysts to support the Board of Supervisors in reviewing policy recommendations. But these analysts do not help the board develop new legislation, which is passed almost year-round.

Departmental staff can struggle to operationalize and thoughtfully implement constantly changing rules and laws. In just the last five years, 82 ordinances requiring Planning Code changes became effective.¹⁴ Each of these ordinances requires at least one change to the city's complex Planning Code (creation, amendment, expansion, or deletion). Often, the ordinance entails multiple section changes. For example, the 2024 Citywide Expansion of Allowable Commercial, Restaurant, and Retail Uses Planning Code Summary includes 11 code change areas, and it notes the need for more clarifications and modifications to other use regulations and processes. When adopted legislation introduces code changes, staff must scramble to implement them in a dynamic environment — one in which staff may still be operationalizing previous changes. Notably, staff must analyze all *proposed* — not just adopted — legislation that would impact the Planning Code.

Policymaking can also occur through voter initiatives, not just through legislation. San Francisco has set a lower bar for taking an item to the ballot than for passing legislation. The mayor can send a non-charter measure to the ballot without any input from the legislative branch. For its part, the Board of Supervisors can send a non-charter measure to the ballot without a majority (only four of 11 votes are needed), and the mayor cannot veto that legislation even if it is a revenue measure that changes the city's Tax Code. Non-charter voter-initiated measures can be sent to the ballot with signatures from just 2% of registered voters.¹⁵ These low thresholds for voter initiatives mean that collaborative problem-solving is not required, opening the door to measures that may be motivated more by politics than by policy. They also mean that, at any given election, voters can be faced with deciding a large number of measures, many of which could have been passed through legislation.

FINDING 6:

Once created, governmental entities and legislation are difficult to remove.

Once a department, commission, board, advisory body, or piece of legislation is created, eliminating it is difficult. Even when an entity no longer serves the greater good of the city, or the cost to maintain it exceeds the benefit, internal or external constituencies or both often feel strongly that it should continue to exist. The path of least resistance is to leave the entity in place.

¹⁴ San Francisco Planning Department, "Planning Code Changes and Interim Controls," <https://sfplanning.org/planning-code-change-summaries>.

¹⁵ Nicolas Heidorn, Kenneth P. Miller, and Bipasa Nadon, *Re-Assessing San Francisco's Government Design: Is City Hall Well-Structured to Meet the Current Crisis?*, The Rose Institute of State and Local Government, August 2023, https://s10294.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Together-SF-Report_081723_DIGITAL-1.pdf.

Recommendations

SPUR makes eight recommendations that, when taken together, would make the government of the City and County of San Francisco more effective. The recommendations are designed to (1) increase the mayor's ability to effectively manage departments, (2) create clear lines of authority and accountability that everyone understands, and (3) support effective policymaking by improving legislative processes.

Increase the mayor's ability to manage departments effectively.

The following recommendations align management authority with the public's perception of the mayor as the chief executive. They focus on giving the mayor the needed authority, resources, and staffing to manage the city effectively.

RECOMMENDATION 1

Remove the charter language that restricts mayoral staffing and management.

Implementation: Charter amendment

The mayor should be able to hire and compensate seasoned staff in key positions to manage the city effectively. Charter constraints on the mayor's executive authority should be removed to allow the Mayor's Office to attract candidates with deep management experience to coordinate efforts across the city and advance a strategic agenda.

Charter Section 3.100 on powers and responsibilities would change as follows:

Subject to the fiscal provisions of this Charter and budgetary approval by the Board of Supervisors, appoint such staff as may be needed to perform the duties and carry out the responsibilities of the Mayor's office. ~~provided that no member of the staff shall receive a salary in excess of seventy percent of that paid the Mayor. For purposes of this provision, staff does not include the City Administrator, department heads or employees of departments placed under his or her direction by Section 3.104. Notwithstanding any other provisions or limitations of this Charter to the contrary, the Mayor may not designate nor may the City and County employ on the Mayor's behalf any person to act as deputy to the Mayor or any similar employment classification, regardless of title, whose responsibilities include but are not necessarily limited to supervision of the administration of any department for which the City Administrator, an elected official other than the Mayor, or an appointed board or commission is assigned responsibility elsewhere in this Charter;~~

RECOMMENDATION 2

Reorganize the Mayor’s Office for a more manageable number of direct reports.

Implementation: Charter amendment and budget process

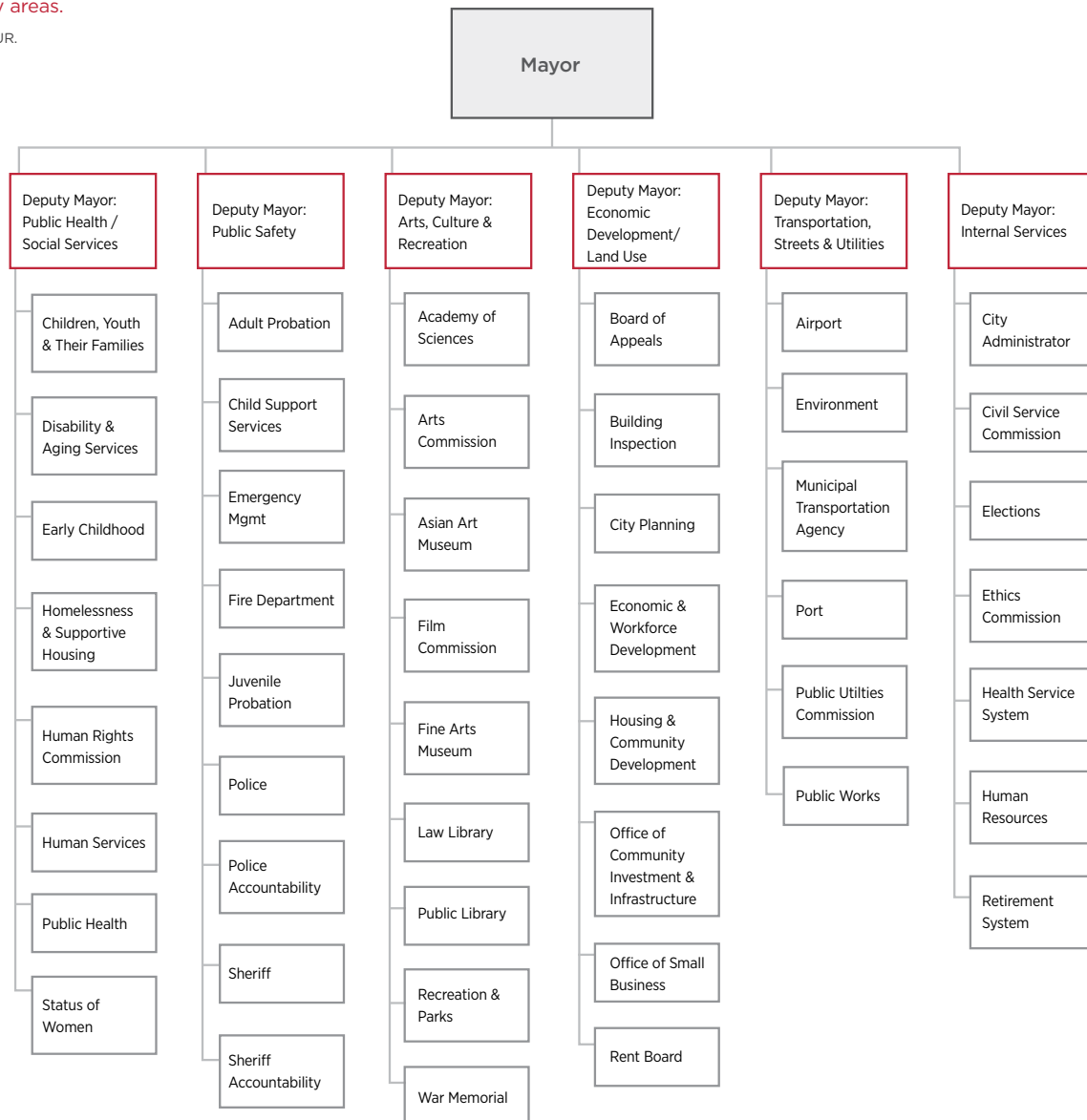
The Mayor’s Office should be organized in a way that optimizes departmental coordination and oversight (Exhibit 7). Indianapolis, New York City, and Washington, D.C. are excellent models. These cities use deputy mayors or other senior officials to ensure cross-departmental issue coordination and to pursue a cohesive strategy. Delegating authority to deputy mayor-like roles would streamline the overall reporting structure and provide a clear chain of command and accountability.

EXHIBIT 7

Proposed Structure for the Mayor’s Office

To optimize departmental coordination and oversight, the Mayor’s Office could include deputy mayors for six policy areas.

Source: SPUR.



RECOMMENDATION 3**Restore the mayor's authority to hire and fire most department heads.**

Implementation: Charter amendment

The mayor's ability to appoint department heads is clearly stated in the charter; however, this direct line of accountability has been diffused through the creation of intermediary commissions, often with the authority to appoint and dismiss directors. As the city's chief executive, the mayor needs this management tool to ensure the performance and vision alignment of city leadership.

Commissions may offer recommendations, but ultimately the mayor should retain control and be able to make the final decision to appoint and remove department heads unless prohibited by state or federal law. Exceptions would include officials who are elected by voters (such as the city attorney), appointed officials (such as the city administrator and controller) who also require confirmation by the Board of Supervisors, and department heads who report to the city administrator (to maintain clear lines of accountability).

This structure would provide clearer lines of accountability for all stakeholders, including the public, and would reduce the potential for conflicting policy or operational directions.

Create clear lines of authority and accountability that everyone understands.

The following recommendations seek to ensure clear roles and responsibilities while consolidating entities and reducing duplication where possible.

RECOMMENDATION 4**Focus the City Administrator's Office on long-term cross-departmental projects and core operational functions.**

Implementation: Practice change and budget process

The CAO should be realigned to accord with the charter and should be empowered by the mayor to serve as the city's chief operating officer, a role focused on the city's long-term projects and core operational functions (Exhibit 8).

As an apolitical professional leader, the city administrator should be given the authority by the mayor to convene departments, set direction, and manage performance to address essential city concerns, such as capital planning and climate resilience. The city administrator should have the power to make citywide decisions when departments cannot agree about approach or best course of action.

Given the importance of operational support functions to government performance, the city administrator should serve as the city's chief operating officer, overseeing back-office functions such as procurement, contracting, and information technology. The CAO should work to set internal policy, standards, and guidance where needed to improve the experience of people and businesses working with the city and to increase internal services, such as providing website templates and purchasing tools that all departments can access.

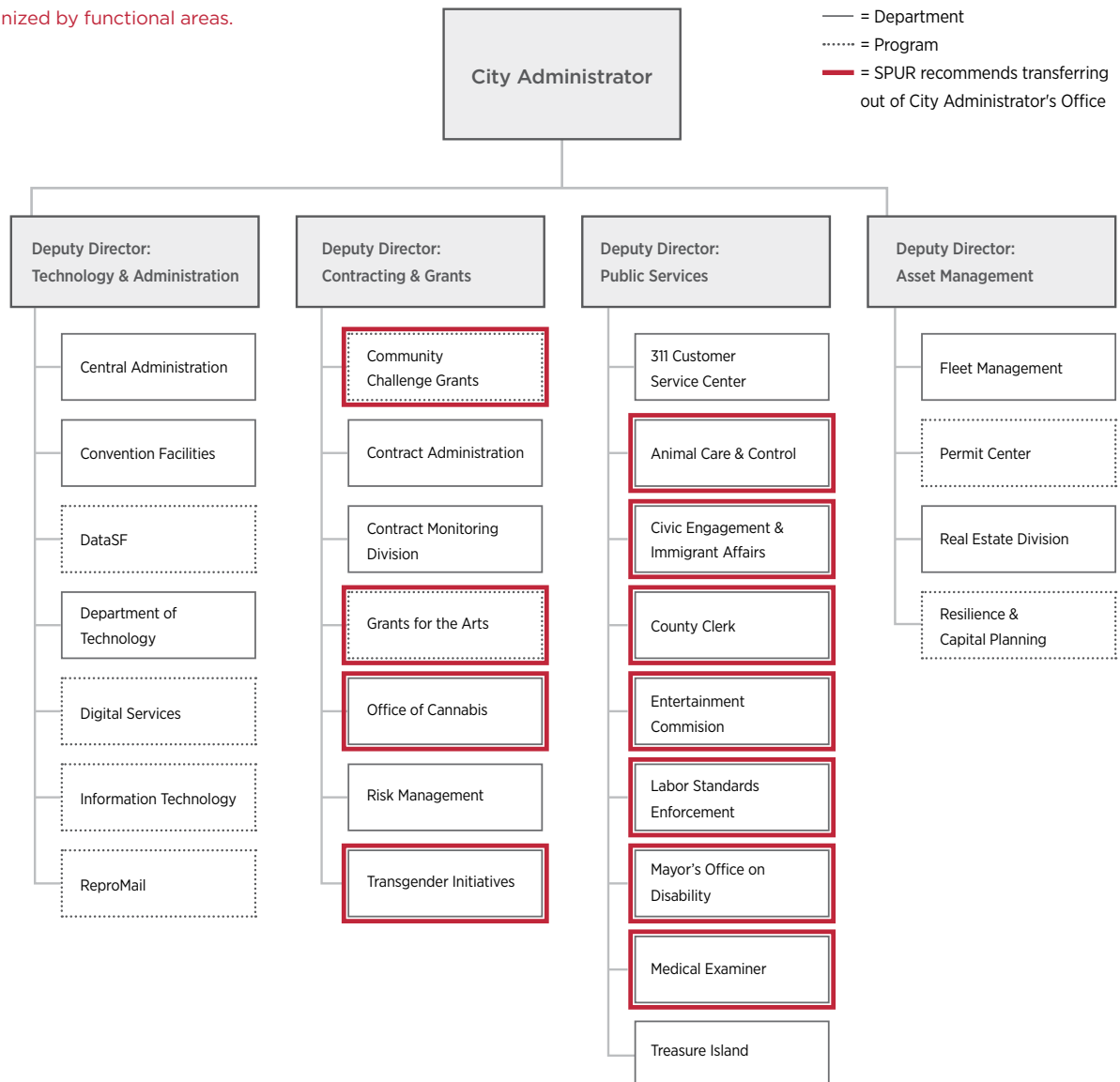
The CAO should be resourced with staff experienced in facilitating, mediating, and managing complicated work that requires coordination across departments, such as citywide policies for data standards and the use of artificial intelligence; long-term cross-departmental project delivery and capital planning; and improvements to internal processes such as grantmaking and hiring.

Programs and functions outside the CAO’s clarified purview should be moved to other departments with similar constituencies and services. Recommendation 5 offers criteria and a recommended process for departmental consolidations to transition these functions and programs out of the CAO.

**EXHIBIT 8
City Administrator Organizational Chart**

Currently, 27 departments and programs report directly to the city administrator. They range from public services (for example, 311 Customer Service) to internal planning (for example, Risk Management) to oversight of relatively small agencies (for example, Animal Control). Four deputy directors manage portfolios organized by functional areas.

Source: London N. Breed, *Proposed Budget: Fiscal Years 2022–2023 and 2023–2024*, Mayor’s Office of Public Policy and Finance, https://sfmayor.org/sites/default/files/CSF_Proposed_Budget_Book_June_2022_Master_REV2_web.pdf.



RECOMMENDATION 5**Merge departments with similar functions and constituencies.**

Implementation: Budget process

For the government to respond nimbly to residents' needs and emerging issues, its organizational structure needs to be clear. The overlapping functions of some of San Francisco's current departments make it hard to align delivery of government services and difficult for residents to figure out how to access these services.

Service delivery can be improved by housing similar functions under one organizational roof. Four questions can clarify which departments might benefit from consolidation:

- Are the departments able to operate effectively and efficiently?
- How well are the departments managed?
- Can the departments collaborate as needed to deliver desired outcomes?
- To what extent do the benefits of separate departments outweigh their costs?

Possible starting points include:

- Consolidating departments with similar customers, constituents, or functions
- Moving smaller departments into divisions of larger departments with aligned missions, thereby increasing efficiencies in back-office functions such as technology, human resources, and finance
- Weighing the costs and benefits of each department, considering that every dollar spent for one service is a dollar not available for other public services and that resources and staff should be reallocated to higher priorities

The above-described criteria suggest some possible departmental consolidations:

- **Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing:** Reintegrate this department into the Human Services Agency. It could be a separate division, similar to the Department of Disability and Aging Services, to maintain its focus while leveraging operational efficiencies within a large agency that serves many of the same people.
- **Permits:** Use a constituent-centered lens to consolidate all permitting departments under one umbrella with clear lines of authority and accountability to improve service. This umbrella could be an agency similar to the Human Services Agency. Divisions within it could include the Department of Building Inspection, the Planning Department, the Entertainment Commission, and permit areas within the Department of Public Works and possibly the Fire Department.

- **Department on the Status of Women, Office of Transgender Initiatives, and Office of Civic Engagement and Immigrant Affairs:** Integrate these entities into the Human Rights Commission.
- **Office of Labor Standards Enforcement:** Integrate this office into the Office of Economic and Workforce Development.
- **Mayor’s Office on Disability:** Integrate this body into the Department on Disability and Aging Services.

The City Services Auditor (CSA) in the Controller’s Office currently evaluates the performance of departments. The CSA should support departments through a change management process when departmental consolidations are proposed. Departmental consolidations would likely take many years to implement, but they could be prioritized and rolled out in phases. They would reflect an about-face from the current practice of adding layers of governance and instead suggest a practice change that focuses on simplification and on reducing layers of governance where possible.

RECOMMENDATION 6

Define the purpose and role of commissions and reduce their overall number.

Implementation: Legislative and charter change

Structured appropriately, commissions can support better policymaking and government service delivery or expand the chief executive’s management capacity. However, commissions can also consume significant city resources and complicate decision-making. To ensure that the appropriate balance is struck, the city should (1) develop a process to clarify the purpose of San Francisco’s boards and commissions, (2) reduce their overall number, (3) streamline the appointment process, and (4) set sunset dates so that commissions can fold once they have served their purpose.

Roles and Responsibilities

To clarify roles and responsibilities, the city needs to understand when a commission is needed. SPUR has identified three types of entities, defined by purpose:

- 1. Governance:** Entities that shape how a department is executing its mission. For example, a governance body has control over alignment of resources, weighs in on key staffing, and has broad policy-setting authority. Because of their significant decision-making authority, governance entities should be few in number; otherwise, mayoral and departmental authority and accountability could be blurred. They should be limited to departments with citywide and direct services to the public. Examples include departments that oversee parks, transit, utilities, public health, human services, police, fire, and libraries.
- 2. Regulatory:** Entities that have regulatory authority to approve rates, permits, contracts, and projects or otherwise have approval or authority related to some aspect of government

operations. A regulatory body is often required by state or federal law. Its main responsibility is to uphold and enforce existing law. These bodies have decision-making authority within this scope and should be few in number. Examples include departments that oversee planning, building, appeals, rent, ethics, and elections.

- 3. Advisory:** Entities that provide technical assistance, policy guidance, and best thinking on policy areas. An advisory body provides broad perspectives that inform the work of government in an organized, consistent, and transparent manner. It is not a decision-making body. Advisory bodies can also include time-limited task forces and community advisory boards with sunset dates. Most of San Francisco's bodies should be purely advisory.

Currently, many bodies have responsibilities that span more than one purpose. Ideally, each body would have one purpose and would be meeting that purpose.

Member Appointment Process

The city should develop a rational and standard member appointment process, reflective of bodies' defined roles and responsibilities. The current process is not clearly mapped to function and can fall under the purview of the mayor or the Board of Supervisors or other entities. A less opaque process could be helpful in recruiting new commissioners. SPUR proposes the following:

- **Governance and regulatory bodies:** Because the duties of these bodies are aligned with the management and day-to-day operations of the city, appointments to these bodies should be made by the mayor. Exceptions include commissions that should be independent from mayoral oversight, such as the Elections Commission and Ethics Commission.
- **Advisory bodies:** The legislative and executive branches of government should each make half of the appointments to these bodies.
- **All appointments:** Appointing authorities should directly appoint and remove their own commissioners, with no approvals required.

Number of Entities

There is no ideal number of commissions, boards, and advisory bodies for San Francisco. That said, the more entities the city manages, the greater the strain on city resources. Moreover, reducing the number of often-hard-to-fill seats could improve the overall pool of potential candidates.

The city should develop a short-term task force to evaluate and make recommendations on the consolidation or elimination of commissions, boards, and advisory bodies. Members should be appointed by the mayor, the president of the Board of Supervisors, the city administrator, the city attorney, and the controller. The task force could evaluate commissions on the basis of the following questions:

- Which bodies serve similar constituents/customers?
- Is there more than one body per department, policy area, or both? Where is there duplication or a good rationale for consolidation?
- Is the body related to one specific funding source or to a small interest group?
- Is the body facilitating public engagement, providing transparency, and helping hold the city accountable for providing equitable access to public services?
- Is public engagement reflective of the communities that the commission serves?
- Does the body help drive positive outcomes for the city?

Altering existing commissions with a process that prioritizes gains from consolidation over maintaining individual entities would benefit from the Board of Supervisors approving task force recommendations with a straight yes/no vote, as opposed to reviewing each recommendation individually. The Department of Defense took this approach when reducing the number of U.S. military bases.

Making Hard Decisions for the Greater Good

The Department of Defense needed a timely and effective way to reduce the number of U.S. military bases in response to changing needs and to increase efficiency. However, closing individual bases was difficult because of the negative local economic impact and the political stakes. U.S. Congress members might support the idea of closing unnecessary bases but bow to political pressure to oppose any base closure impacting their own districts.

The Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process changed the decision-making landscape in two critical ways. First, it established an independent commission to make the process more effective, fair, and independent of individual agendas. Second, it changed the scope of the decision by bundling all proposed base closures into a single list requiring decision-makers (the president of the United States and Congress) to approve or disapprove the entire list at once.

Under the BRAC process, the nine-member commission is appointed by the president and has a deadline to provide its final recommendations. The commission first reviews an initial list proposed by the Department of Defense. The commission does its

Continued →

research and evaluation, which includes public hearings. It can amend the list based on its findings, within certain guidelines.

The commission provides its evaluated closure list to the president, who can only approve or disapprove the recommendations in their entirety. If approved, the list is given to Congress, which has the opportunity to disapprove the entire list by a deadline. Because the president and members of Congress are prohibited from removing individual bases from the closure list, the commission's recommendations remain intact. This prohibition provides needed political cover for politicians.

Since the BRAC process was created in 1988, the Department of Defense has successfully implemented it for five rounds of base closures (1988, 1991, 1993, 1995, and 2005).

Sources: Dorothy Robyn, "Speaker McCarthy: We Need a BRAC Commission, but Not to Tackle Federal Spending," Brookings Institution, June 6, 2023, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/speaker-mccarthy-we-need-a-brac-commission-but-not-to-tackle-federal-spending/>; and U.S. Department of Defense, FY 2023 Budget Estimates: DoD Base Realignment and Closure BRAC Rounds (BRAC 1988, 1991, 1993, 1995 & 2005), April 2022, https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2023/budget_justification/pdfs/05_BRAC/FY2023_BRAC_Overview.pdf.

Periodic Commission Review

Recognizing that more commissions will be created, the city should proactively establish a regular review by a trusted nonpolitical authority. If the initial streamlining project works well, the city should learn from and build on it. The initial task force should decide who takes on this long-term task. When appropriate, sunset dates should be identified for any new commission.

Support effective policymaking by improving legislative processes.

The following recommendations seek to improve the city's processes for developing and implementing policy.

RECOMMENDATION 7

Build an in-house Legislative Analyst's Office to support the Board of Supervisors.

Implementation: Budget process

Providing in-house legislative analyst capacity could support high-quality, objective analysis and research to illuminate policy trade-offs and improve the effectiveness of legislation for residents.

The city should establish a new office staffed with nonpolitical public policy experts who work directly for the Board of Supervisors. The analysts would develop an understanding of how the city operates, establish the relationships needed to work thoughtfully with departments to gather information, rely on their knowledge of existing policy before recommending legislative fixes, and

be able to discern when practice changes are better solutions. They would support the whole board and report to the clerk of the board, rather than to individual supervisors.

In addition, the office could further support the Board of Supervisors by advising on and providing consistent oversight of critical city concerns, thereby reducing the need for so many commissions, boards, and advisory bodies.

The proposed office could be modeled on the State of California's Legislative Analyst's Office.¹⁶ The new office could be staffed by existing legislative aides and with funding currently allocated to outside consultants. In the fiscal year 2023–2024 budget, the combined value of contract and other board aide positions was around \$12 million.¹⁷

RECOMMENDATION 8

Raise the bar to put ballot measures before voters.

Implementation: Charter amendment

Ballot measures should require the collaboration of executive and legislative branches before they are sent to voters to decide. Submitting non-charter measures to voters on the ballot should require at least as much collaboration as is necessary to pass legislation: a majority vote of the Board of Supervisors, subject to mayoral veto. Before sending items to the ballot, the mayor should be required to obtain the approval of the Board of Supervisors. Increased internal collaboration would create outcomes intended for long-term general benefit — not short-term wins — and would ensure that voters aren't given the responsibility to decide on complicated technical matters when policymakers can't agree.

San Francisco's very low bar for qualifying non-charter ballot initiatives by signature — 2% of registered voters — could also be raised. Changing the signature requirement for non-charter measures to 5% of registered voters would be more on par with the requirement in other charter cities in the state. The benefit would be greater community alignment on the items that appear on the ballot.

SPUR's governance recommendations would increase San Francisco's ability to meet the needs of its residents, improve engagement processes, and adapt to new challenges. The recommendations seek to clarify unclear or ineffective lines of authority, to empower San Francisco's leaders to lead, and ultimately to make San Francisco government more accountable to the residents it serves. These recommendations have the potential to be effective because they recognize and account for the growth of government and that growth's compounding effects, the balance between oversight and obstruction, the balance between representation and resource allocation, and the reality of power struggles among political players. By revising governance structures, the city could begin to address other issues, including contracting, hiring, and performance management.

¹⁶ The Legislative Analyst's Office in the State of California provides fiscal and policy advice to the state legislature. The state legislature also receives policy advice from committee staffers.

¹⁷ The board's legislative analyst contract value in FY 2023–2024 was \$3,121,318. This value was confirmed by the clerk of the board's office. There were 44 full-time-equivalent legislative aide positions in the board's FY 2023–2024 budget. According to the Department of Human Resources' classification database, the top-step salary for that position is \$143,078. An additional 40% for benefits was assumed for a total estimated cost of \$200,306 per aide or \$8,813,482 for all 44 aides.

Appendix A: Plan of Action

PURPOSE	RECOMMENDATION	IMPLEMENTATION
Increase the mayor's ability to manage departments effectively.	1. Remove the charter language that restricts mayoral staffing and management.	Charter amendment
	2. Reorganize the Mayor's Office for a more manageable number of direct reports.	Charter amendment and budget process
	3. Restore the mayor's authority to hire and fire most department heads.	Charter amendment
Create clear lines of authority and accountability that everyone understands.	4. Focus the City Administrator's Office on long-term cross-departmental projects and core operational functions.	Practice change and budget process
	5. Merge departments with similar functions and constituencies.	Budget process
	6. Define the purpose and role of commissions and reduce their overall number.	Legislative and charter change
Support effective policymaking by improving legislative processes.	7. Build an in-house Legislative Analyst's Office to support the Board of Supervisors.	Budget process
	8. Raise the bar to put ballot measures before voters.	Charter amendment

Appendix B: Interviewees

SPUR thanks the following individuals for their time and input.

Interviewees

John Avalos, Former Supervisor, San Francisco Board of Supervisors

London Breed, Mayor, San Francisco

Andrea Bruss, Deputy Chief of Staff, Mayor's Office

Misha Chellam, Founder, Abundance Network

Kanishka Cheng, Chief Executive Officer, TogetherSF

David Chiu, City Attorney, City Attorney's Office

Carmen Chu, City Administrator, City Administrator's Office

Sheryl Davis, Executive Director, Human Rights Commission

Sarah Dennis-Phillips, Director, Office of Economic and Workforce Development

Jason Elliott, Former Chief of Staff, Mayor's Office

Sean Elsbernd, Chief of Staff, Mayor's Office

Tyra Fennell, Director of Community Relations, Mayor's Office

Elaine Forbes, Director, Port of San Francisco

Phil Ginsburg, General Manager, San Francisco Recreation and Parks Department

Matthew Hymel, County Administrator, County of Marin

Carol Isen, Director, Department of Human Resources

Steve Kawa, Former Chief of Staff, Mayor's Office

Jim Lazarus, Former Deputy Mayor, Former Deputy City Attorney

Douglas Legg, Deputy City Administrator, City Administrator's Office

Rafael Mandelman, Supervisor, San Francisco Board of Supervisors

David Mauroff, CEO, San Francisco Pretrial Diversion Project

Myrna Melgar, Supervisor, San Francisco Board of Supervisors

Rudy Nothenberg, Former City Administrator, City Administrator's Office

Aaron Peskin, President, Board of Supervisors

Andres Power, Policy Director, Mayor's Office

Ed Reiskin, Former Director, Municipal Transportation Agency; Deputy Mayor,
City of Washington, D.C.

Trent Rhorer, Executive Director, Human Services Agency

Judson True, Director of Housing Delivery, Mayor's Office

Jeff Tumlin, Director, Municipal Transportation Agency

Adam Van de Water, Director, Transbay Joint Powers Authority
Amy Waggoner, Former Deputy Mayor, City of Indianapolis
Greg Wagner, Chief Financial Officer, San Francisco Department of Public Health
Scott Wiener, State Senator, California State Legislature; Former Supervisor,
San Francisco Board of Supervisors
Malcolm Yeung, Former Senior Advisor, Mayor's Office
Monique Zmuda, Former Deputy Controller, Office of the Controller

SPUR Good Government Task Force

Kelly Dearman, Director, San Francisco Department of Disability and Aging Services
Jean Fraser, Chief Executive Officer, Presidio Trust
Bob Gamble, Former Budget Director; Former Director, Redevelopment Agency
Ed Harrington, Former Controller, Controller's Office; Former Director, Public Utilities Commission
Dawn Kamalanathan, Former Deputy of Operations, San Francisco Unified School District
John Rahaim, Former Director, San Francisco Planning Department
Ben Rosenfield, Former Controller, Controller's Office
Noelle Simmons, Former Deputy Director, Human Services Agency and the Homelessness and Supportive Housing Department; Budget Director, Mayor's Office

Appendix C:

San Francisco Department Budgets and Funded Employees

San Francisco's current budget funds 52 departments, each with its own budget and staffing. Some departments have thousands of employees and budgets of more than \$1 billion; others have 10 or fewer staff.

City and County of San Francisco — Total Budget and Full Time Employees Fiscal Year 2023–24

DEPARTMENT	TOTAL DEPARTMENTAL RESOURCES (\$)	FUNDED POSITIONS	SERVICE AREA
Public Health	3,191,642,002	7,720.50	Community Health
Public Utilities Commission	1,788,497,463	1,723.51	Public Works, Transportation, and Commerce
Municipal Transportation Agency	1,472,760,301	5,649.98	Public Works, Transportation, and Commerce
Airport Commission	1,305,429,570	1,681.63	Public Works, Transportation, and Commerce
Human Services	1,191,048,628	2,261.76	Human Welfare and Neighborhood Development
Police	774,911,711	2,933.86	Public Protection
Homelessness and Supportive Housing	712,707,581	247.13	Human Welfare and Neighborhood Development
General Services Agency — City Administration	596,531,211	974.49	General Administration and Finance
Fire	511,284,481	1,805.90	Public Protection
Public Works	453,229,178	1,164.52	Public Works, Transportation, and Commerce
Children, Youth and Their Families	342,020,691	70.79	Human Welfare and Neighborhood Development
Early Childhood	335,683,726	63.19	Human Welfare and Neighborhood Development
Sheriff's Department	292,771,330	999.9	Public Protection
Recreation and Park Commission	263,212,390	986.82	Culture and Recreation
Public Library	200,254,962	717.23	Culture and Recreation
Mayor's Office of Housing	191,033,317	40.22	Human Welfare and Neighborhood Development
General Services Agency — Technology	166,313,253	259.12	General Administration and Finance
Economic and Workforce Development	157,744,988	116.58	Public Works, Transportation, and Commerce
Human Resources	150,759,857	205.47	General Administration and Finance
Port	150,125,276	258.97	Public Works, Transportation, and Commerce
Emergency Management	138,774,182	313.13	Public Protection

Continued →

DEPARTMENT	TOTAL DEPARTMENTAL RESOURCES (\$)	FUNDED POSITIONS	SERVICE AREA
City Attorney	108,739,568	316.21	General Administration and Finance
District Attorney	89,560,041	295.29	Public Protection
Building Inspection	86,103,574	269.24	Public Works, Transportation, and Commerce
Controller	83,981,973	250.23	General Administration and Finance
City Planning	58,697,834	186.2	General Administration and Finance
Adult Probation	58,116,740	144.69	Public Protection
Public Defender	52,610,099	217.4	Public Protection
Retirement System	51,469,503	151.85	General Administration and Finance
Treasurer/Tax Collector	50,557,260	201.49	General Administration and Finance
Juvenile Probation	48,967,777	173.67	Public Protection
Arts Commission	42,641,948	29.79	Culture and Recreation
War Memorial	37,645,417	67.38	Culture and Recreation
Assessor/Recorder	37,177,891	170.27	General Administration and Finance
Superior Court	32,781,944	N/A	Public Protection
Environment	32,317,937	82.66	Human Welfare and Neighborhood Development
Board of Supervisors	23,606,605	92.05	General Administration and Finance
Fine Arts Museums	23,247,361	107.91	Culture and Recreation
Elections	22,942,949	55.11	General Administration and Finance
Human Rights Commission	21,523,406	31.1	Human Welfare and Neighborhood Development
Rent Arbitration Board	17,725,223	49.88	Human Welfare and Neighborhood Development
Health Service System	13,862,082	47.67	General Administration and Finance
Child Support Services	13,666,530	64.12	Human Welfare and Neighborhood Development
Status of Women	12,766,542	10.36	Human Welfare and Neighborhood Development
Asian Art Museum	11,412,118	52.51	Culture and Recreation
Mayor	10,722,635	42.76	General Administration and Finance
Police Accountability	9,970,353	40.84	Public Protection
Ethics Commission	7,537,872	30.56	General Administration and Finance
Academy of Sciences	7,460,485	13.35	Culture and Recreation
Law Library	1,794,860	2.38	Culture and Recreation
Civil Service Commission	1,511,609	6	General Administration and Finance
Board of Appeals	1,143,037	4.25	Public Works, Transportation, and Commerce

Source: City and County of San Francisco Budget and Appropriations Committee, Annual Budget and Appropriation Ordinance as of July 18, 2023, <https://sfbos.org/sites/default/files/o0144-23.pdf>.

Appendix D:

Boards and Commissions

	COMMISSION	CHARTER OR MUNICIPAL CODES	DECISION-MAKING AUTHORITY
1	Abatement Appeals Board	Building Code § 105A.2	Yes
2	Access Appeals Commission	Building Code § 105A.3	Yes
3	Airport Commission	Charter § 4.115	Yes
4	Arts Commission	Charter § 5.103	Yes
5	Asian Art Commission	Charter §§ 5.102, 5.104	Yes
6	Assessment Appeals Board	Administrative Code § 2B.1	Yes
7	Board of Appeals	Charter § 4.106	Yes
8	Board of Examiners	Building Code § 105A.1	Yes
9	Board of Supervisors	Charter, Art. II	Yes
10	Building Inspection Commission	Charter § 4.121	Yes
11	Children, Youth and Their Families Oversight and Advisory Committee	Charter § 16.108-1; Administrative Code § 2A.233	Yes
12	Children and Families First Commission	Administrative Code § 86.1	Yes
13	Citizens' Committee on Community Development	Administrative Code § 2A.290	Yes
14	Citizens' General Obligation Bond Oversight Committee	Administrative Code § 5.30	Yes
15	Civil Service Commission	Charter §§ 10.100, 10.101	Yes
16	Commission on the Environment	Charter § 4.118	Yes
17	Commission on the Status of Women	Charter § 4.119	Yes
18	Disability and Aging Services Commission	Charter § 4.120	Yes
19	Elections Commission	Charter § 13.103.5	Yes
20	Elections Task Force	Charter § 13.110	Yes
21	Entertainment Commission	Charter § 4.117	Yes
22	Ethics Commission	Charter § 15.100	Yes
23	Film Commission	Administrative Code § 57.2	Yes
24	Fine Arts Museums Board of Trustees	Charter §§ 5.102, 5.105	Yes
25	Fire Commission	Charter § 4.108	Yes
26	Health Commission	Charter § 4.110	Yes
27	Health Service Board	Charter § 12.200	Yes
28	Historic Preservation Commission	Charter § 4.135	Yes
29	Human Rights Commission	Charter § 4.107	Yes
30	Human Services Commission	Charter § 4.111	Yes

Continued →

	COMMISSION	CHARTER OR MUNICIPAL CODES	DECISION-MAKING AUTHORITY
31	Immigrant Rights Commission	Administrative Code § 5.201	Yes
32	Juvenile Probation Commission	Charter § 7.102	Yes
33	Library Commission	Charter § 8.102	Yes
34	Municipal Transportation Agency Board of Directors	Charter § 8A.102	Yes
35	Our Children Our Families Council	Charter § 16.127-1; Administrative Code § 102.1	Yes
36	Planning Commission	Charter § 4.105	Yes
37	Police Commission	Charter § 4.109	Yes
38	Port Commission	Charter § 4.114	Yes
39	Public Utilities Commission	Charter § 4.112	Yes
40	Public Utilities Rate Fairness Board	Charter § 8B.125	Yes
41	Public Utilities Revenue Bond Oversight Committee	Administrative Code § 5A.31	Yes
42	Public Works Commission	Charter § 4.141	Yes
43	Recreation and Park Commission	Charter § 4.113	Yes
44	Refuse Rate Board	Health Code § 290.6	Yes
45	Residential Rent Stabilization and Arbitration Board	Administrative Code § 37.4	Yes
46	Residential Users Appeal Board	Board of Supervisors Ord. 191-78; Public Utilities Commission Res. No. 03-0112	Yes
47	Retiree Health Care Trust Fund Board	Charter § 12.204	Yes
48	Retirement Board	Charter § 12.100	Yes
49	Sanitation and Streets Commission	Charter § 4.139	Yes
50	Sheriff's Department Oversight Board	Charter § 4.137	Yes
51	Small Business Commission	Charter § 4.134	Yes
52	SOMA Community Stabilization Fund Community Advisory Committee	Administrative Code § 5.27-1	Yes
53	Southeast Community Facility Commission	Administrative Code § 54.2	Yes
54	Sunshine Ordinance Task Force	Administrative Code § 67.30	Yes
55	Treasure Island Development Authority Board of Directors	California Health & Safety Code § 33492.5	Yes
56	War Memorial Board of Trustees	Charter § 5.106	Yes
57	Workforce Investment Board	Administrative Code § 30.4	Yes
58	Adult Day Health Care Planning Council	Administrative Code § 44.1	No
59	Advisory Council on Human Rights	Administrative Code § 12A.6	No
60	Ballot Simplification Committee	Municipal Elections Code § 610	No
61	Behavioral Health Commission	Administrative Code § 15.12	No
62	Bayview Hunters Point Citizens Advisory Committee	Administrative Code § 5.70	No
63	Bicycle Advisory Committee	Administrative Code § 5.130	No
64	Cannabis Oversight Committee	Administrative Code § 5.38-1	No
65	Capital Planning Committee	Administrative Code § 3.21	No
66	Child Care Planning and Advisory Council	Administrative Code § 5.200	No

Continued →

	COMMISSION	CHARTER OR MUNICIPAL CODES	DECISION-MAKING AUTHORITY
67	Citizens Advisory Committee for Street Utility Construction	Administrative Code § 5.66	No
68	City Hall Preservation Advisory Committee	Administrative Code § 5.240	No
69	Close Juvenile Hall Working Group	Administrative Code § 5.40-1	No
70	Code Advisory Committee	Building Code § 105A.4	No
71	Commission on Aging Advisory Council	Administrative Code § 5.54	No
72	Commission of Animal Control and Welfare	Health Code § 41.2	No
73	Committee on City Workforce Alignment	Administrative Code § 30.5	No
74	Committee on Information Technology	Administrative Code § 22A.3	No
75	Committee for Planning Utility Construction Program	Administrative Code § 5.63	No
76	Committee for Utility Liaison on Construction and Other Projects	Administrative Code § 5.63	No
77	Community Corrections Partnership	California Penal Code §§ 1228-1233.8	No
78	Dignity Fund Oversight and Advisory Committee	Charter § 16.128-11; Administrative Code § 5.34-1	No
79	Disaster Council	Administrative Code § 7.4	No
80	Early Childhood Community Oversight and Advisory Committee	Administrative Code § 5.13-1	No
81	Eastern Neighborhoods Community Advisory Committee	Administrative Code § 5.32-1	No
82	Family Violence Council	Administrative Code § 5.19-1	No
83	Food Security Task Force	Administrative Code § 5.10-1	No
84	Free City College Oversight Committee	Administrative Code § 5.2-1	No
85	Graffiti Advisory Board	Administrative Code § 5.18-1	No
86	Housing Conservatorship Working Group	Administrative Code § 5.37-1	No
87	Housing Stability Fund Oversight Board	Administrative Code § 5.45-1	No
88	Inclusionary Housing Technical Advisory Committee	Administrative Code § 5.29-1	No
89	Industrial Development Authority Board	Administrative Code § 42.1	No
90	In-Home Supportive Services Public Authority	Administrative Code § 70.2	No
91	Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council	California Welfare and Institutions Code §§ 749.2-749.27	No
92	Local Homeless Coordinating Board	Administrative Code § 5.31-1	No
93	Market and Octavia Community Advisory Committee	Planning Code § 341.5; Board of Supervisors Res. No. 474-08	No
94	Mental Health SF Implementation Working Group	Administrative Code § 5.44-1	No
95	Mission Bay Transportation Improvement Fund Advisory Committee	Administrative Code § 5.23-1	No
96	Municipal Green Building Task Force	Environment Code § 702	No
97	Municipal Transportation Agency Citizens' Advisory Council	Charter § 8A.111	No

Continued →

	COMMISSION	CHARTER OR MUNICIPAL CODES	DECISION-MAKING AUTHORITY
98	Our City, Our Home Oversight Committee	Administrative Code § 5.41-1; Business and Tax Regulations Code § 2810	No
99	Park, Recreation, and Open Space Advisory Committee	Charter § 16.107; Park Code § 13.01	No
100	Pedestrian Safety Advisory Committee	Administrative Code § 5.4-1	No
101	Permit Prioritization Task Force	Campaign and Governmental Conduct Code § 3.400	No
102	Public Utilities Citizen's Advisory Committee	Administrative Code § 5.140	No
103	Real Estate Fraud Prosecution Trust Fund Committee	Administrative Code § 8.24-5	No
104	Reentry Council	Administrative Code § 5.1-1	No
105	Relocation Appeals Board	Administrative Code § 24.7	No
106	Residential Rehabilitation Area Citizen Advisory Committees	Administrative Code §§ 32.30, 32.30-1	No
107	Residential Rehabilitation Area Rent Committees	Administrative Code § 32.34	No
108	Sentencing Commission	Administrative Code § 5.250	No
109	Service Provider Working Group	Administrative Code § 2A.234	No
110	Shelter Grievance Advisory Committee	Administrative Code § 5.36-1	No
111	Shelter Monitoring Committee	Administrative Code § 20.305	No
112	Single Room Occupancy (SRO) Task Force	Administrative Code § 5.28-1	No
113	South of Market Community Planning Advisory Committee	Administrative Code § 5.26-1	No
114	State Legislation Committee	Administrative Code § 5.5	No
115	Street Artists and Craftsmen Examiners Advisory Committee	Police Code § 2400	No
116	Street Utilities Coordinating Committee	Administrative Code § 5.60	No
117	Structural Advisory Committee	Building Code § 105A.6	No
118	Sugary Drinks Distributor Tax Advisory Committee	Administrative Code § 5.33-1	No
119	Supportive Housing Services Fund Committee	Administrative Code § 10.100-131(f)	No
120	Sweatfree Procurement Advisory Group	Administrative Code § 12U.6	No
121	Treasure Island/Yerba Buena Island Citizens Advisory Board	Board of Supervisors Res. No. 89-99	No
122	Treasury Oversight Committee	Administrative Code § 5.9-1	No
123	Urban Forestry Council	Environment Code § 1200	No
124	Veterans' Affairs Commission	Administrative Code § 5.100	No
125	Workforce Development Advisory Committee	Administrative Code § 83.8	No
126	Youth Commission	Charter §§ 4.122, 4.123	No



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