

**FIRE COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING  
MINUTES**

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**Wednesday, April 14, 2021 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.  
This meeting was held remotely on WebEx**

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The Video can be viewed by clicking this link:

[https://sanfrancisco.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view\\_id=180&clip\\_id=38250](https://sanfrancisco.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=180&clip_id=38250)

President Feinstein called the meeting to order at 9:03 a.m.

Commission President	Katherine Feinstein	Present
Commission Vice President	Tony Rodriguez	Present
Commissioner	Stephen Nakajo	Present
Commissioner	Francee Covington	Present
Commissioner	Ken Cleaveland	Present
Chief of Department	Jeanine Nicholson	Present.
Bryan Rubenstein	Deputy Chief -- Operations	
Jose Velo	Deputy Chief --Administration	
Joel Sato	Division of Training	
Sandy Tong	EMS	
Mark Johnson	Airport Division	
Dan DeCossio	Bureau of Fire Prevention	
Dawn DeWitt	Support Services	
Erica Arteseros	Homeland Security	
Natasha Parks	Health and Wellness	
Tom O'Connor	AWSS	
Staff		
Mark Corso	Deputy Director of Finance	
Olivia Scanlon	Communications and Outreach	

**2. PUBLIC COMMENT**

There was no public comment.

**3. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES [Discussion and possible action]**

Discussion and possible action to approve meeting minutes.

- Minutes from Regular Meeting on March 24, 2021.

Commissioner Covington asked that the entire conversation between her and the Chief of Department regarding the ethnic breakdown for the current recruit class be added to the minutes.

Commissioner Covington Moved to approve the minutes as amended and Commissioner Cleaveland Seconded. The motion was unanimous.

There was no public comment.

#### **4. CHIEF OF DEPARTMENT'S REPORT *[Discussion]***

##### **REPORT FROM CHIEF OF DEPARTMENT, JEANINE NICHOLSON**

Report on current issues, activities, and events within the Department since the Fire Commission meeting on March 24, 2021, including budget, academies, special events, communications, and outreach to other government agencies and the public and update from Chief Parks and Tony Boone of the Health, Safety and Wellness Division, and introduction of Dr. Jeremy Lacocque, Medical Director.

Chief Nicholson reported on activities since the last meeting on March 24, 2021. She announced that she would once again have to leave the meeting at 9:30 to attend the Mayor's Department Head meeting. She provided a COVID 19 vaccination update stating 72 percent of members had their first vaccination and the rate is slowly going up and they are still encouraging members to get vaccinated and thanked Chief Arteseros for her assistance with getting folks on Treasure Island vaccinated and working with the Department of Public Health on that. Regarding the budget, Chief Nicholson stated they are still working with the Mayor's Budget Office and making the case to keep them whole because any cuts would be even more damaging and would impact operations. She participated in the Women at Work that was run by the head of DHR, Carol Isen, and featured speakers such as city Administrator Carmen Chu and director of the Commission on the Status of Women, Kimberly Ellis, the FIRESCOPE board of directors meeting which is a group that does great work for the fire service throughout the state of California in terms of policies for large incidents such as wildland fires to make sure that when everybody comes to the incident and comes to the table, they are all speaking the same language and understand the systems that they set up and how to work collaboratively together; she visited Station 35 and is excited to see the progress of the project and she had a productive field visit out by the Cliff House, where they gave Supervisor Connie Chan a display of a cliff and surf rescue drills which showed all the different components involved including a medical response which she hopes will benefit the Department in future budget discussions. She mentioned that Sunday marks the commemoration of the 1906 earthquake. She announced that a general order has gone out for a new fire marshal as Fire Marshal DeCossio will be retiring at the end of this fiscal year.

Chief Nicholson stated that the Street Crisis Response Team and EMS-6 are still doing incredible work housing people and that the Department is still staffing a residence for folks that were placed there during COVID, some being the highest users of the 9-1-1 system who have significant alcohol issues and some mental health issues which have reduced the calls from those individuals by 97 percent which shows when you put your resources in the right places, good work that comes out of it. She introduced Dr. Jeremy LaCocque, the new medical director. Dr. LaCocque stated that he is privileged to have the position and is excited to work for the Fire Department and will do his best to be productive and supportive and advocate for all the men and women that work for the Fire Department.

President Feinstein stated that Dr. LaCocque had an impressive CV and told him we are lucky to have him. She also asked him if he had any thoughts on steps that the Department might be able to take to convince members who have not received the vaccine to receive one. Dr. LaCocque responded that he believes they are ahead of other fire departments in terms of vaccination rates and its something that he brought up with Dr. Brokaw in his first couple of weeks and he wants to work with her to educate members of the Fire Department as much as

possible on the vaccine so there is no misinformation and encourage people to get it and when it is safe to do so.

Commissioner Nakajo thought it would be a good time for the Commissioners to introduce themselves to Dr. LeCocque. Vice President Rodriguez welcomed the doctor and stated he looks forward to in the future when they can work together. Commissioner Covington. stated that she hopes Dr. LeCocque has a long and fruitful tenure in the Department. Commissioner Cleaveland also welcomed the doctor to the best fire department in the country. Commissioner Nakajo welcomed him to the Fire Department and told him he was following some qualified shoes in the sense of Dr. Clement Yeh and that he regrets that they do not have an opportunity to thank Dr. Yeh properly for the service that he gave the Department over the years.

President Feinstein acknowledged what a big loss for the Department it is with Fire Marshal DeCossio retiring as she has learned so much from him in a short amount of time and that his portfolio is huge.

Acting Battalion Chief Natasha Parks, the Health, Safety, and Wellness chief introduced herself and stated she would be presenting with Tony Boone who is the Department's industrial hygienist. She stated that the Health, Safety, and Wellness office was created in September of 2019 to develop and organize the health, wellness, and safety initiatives of all uniformed members. Their goals are cancer prevention in coordination with the San Francisco firefighters Cancer Prevention Foundation, to improve member's behavioral health, and their overall health in coordination with the Physician's Office. She added that she supervises the Behavioral Health Unit, the Critical Incident Response Team called CIRT, and the Peer Support Team as well as the industrial hygienist and she attends and represents the San Francisco Fire Department at various meetings including the Safety and Health Roundtable for the city and county of San Francisco, the COVID question and answer meeting, the Women's Firefighter Cancer Cohort Study, and attends various other meetings. She attends weekly meetings with the Behavioral Health Unit and Chief Velo and she chairs the behavioral health committee and the health and safety committee. She introduced Tony Boone who stated he's been with the Department since 2017 and is a Certified Industrial Hygienist, a Certified Safety Professional, a Certified Hazardous Materials Manager, and a Certified Environmental Inspector and brings close to 30 years of health and safety experience to the Department. His role as the industrial hygienist is to review and update the plans such as the Injury and Illness Prevention Plan, the Respiratory Protection Program, Workplace Violence Prevention, an environmental plan called a Spill Prevention Control and Countermeasures plan, and other plans related to health and safety and environmental to keep the Department in compliance with Cal OSHA and the California Department of toxic substances control, better known as Cal EPA. He added that one of the other things that he does is analyze injury and illness data from the Doctor's office for trends to recommend countermeasures to try to prevent those injuries in the future and he also developed and recorded training that includes hearing conservation, bloodborne pathogens, heat illness, and forklift operation. He stated that one of the environmental roles that he has taken on is to update the California environmental reporting system for all stations to ensure that everything is in compliance with the state, and assist with the facility inspections, and the hazmat inspections for all fire stations as well as providing health and safety and industrial hygiene support, as necessary.

Chief Parks touched on the Behavioral Health Unit which has two full-time San Francisco Fire Department members who are available 24/7 to the members of the Department and their families as well as the Critical Incident Response Team, which they started last year and they are available for incidents such as line of duty deaths, suicides, or serious injury of a member. They also have the Peer Support Team, who are available to talk to all members in need. She mentioned the mental health first classes, the Stanford University PFAS study, March Nutrition Awareness Month, where fruit boxes were distributed to stations, and an upcoming Suicide Prevention class, Peer Support Class, and the Department's participation in the Firefighter Cancer Cohort Study. She announced that the Department will be getting a peer Support dog and handler hopefully in the next month or two. The PowerPoint is attached: <https://sf-fire.org/sites/default/files/COMMISSION/Fire%20Commission%20Support%20Documents%202015/SFFD%20HSW%20%20Commission%20report%204.0.pdf>

Tony Boone added that they are working on plans that are required by Cal OSHA such as the Aerosol Transmissible Disease Plan which can include influenza, measles, tuberculosis, and Ebola. They are also analyzing trends to implement intervention strategies that cause on the job injuries and over the last two to three years the biggest cause of injury for many of the members is overexertion and strain entering and exiting the apparatus so they have implemented a three points of contact video to try to reduce the level of injuries and intervention to remind personnel when you mount or dismount a vehicle, there are three points of contact on the vehicle at all times that should be used.

Vice President Rodriguez thanked them for their report and stated that it is nice to hear what different divisions in the Department are doing and to have it explained as they did so it's easy to understand and added that he thinks it is important to do studies that would prevent and minimize hazardous situations for the members.

Commissioner Covington stated that she asked to have this presentation because she thinks it is important for those of us who have been here for a while to be updated on the good work that they are doing and for the new commissioners to get an idea of how extensive their portfolio is. She confirmed that the safety and health roundtable meetings they have been attending revolve around COVID and involve other city departments and they discuss safety issues, new procedures and policies the city comes up with, and how to implement them. She also confirmed that Chief Parks has been with the Department for 23 years and Mr. Boone has been assigned to the Department since 2017. She also acknowledged Joe Alioto Veronese and his dedication and support for first responders through his National First Responders Fund organization.

Commissioner Nakajo thanked Chief Parks and Mr. Boone for their presentation and acknowledged that they have created a very concrete plan when it comes to health, safety, and wellness and he appreciates all the work they do. He confirmed that they are very involved with the Physician's Office and that the Behavioral Health Unit has two full-time members that have taken Peer Support training, have gone to various trainings throughout the state and one of them has a background in 12-step programs and alcohol and drug addiction programs. He also confirmed that Mr. Boone works with Chief Parks in conjunction with the Physician's Office to provide support and oversight as well as the environmental side under the auspices of Assistant

Deputy Chief DeWitt, as he supports her from the facilities and environmental side. He also confirmed that the station captains provide oversight in terms of COVID 19 health protocols and that all members are still wearing masks and keeping social distancing in accordance with current protocols.

Commissioner Cleaveland thanked Chief Parks and Mr. Boone for their reports and updates and thanked Joe Alioto Veronese who took on the mental health issues of firefighters through his National First Responders Fund and put his money where his mouth is.

President Feinstein thanked them both for all their efforts and their presentation and stated they are going to make the Department healthier, stronger, and better and to keep up the good work.

There was no public comment.

#### REPORT FROM OPERATIONS, DEPUTY CHIEF BRYAN RUBENSTEIN

Report on overall field operations, including greater alarm fires, Emergency Medical Services, Bureau of Fire Prevention & Investigation, Homeland Security, and Airport Division.

Chief Rubenstein's Operations update for March 2021. He announced that Public Information Office is busy, and they welcomed back the Jeremiah O'Brien back to the pier after the greater alarm fire. He stated that the PIO supported the United Fire Service Women in a presentation to Mission High School, attended celebrations for Women's History Month, and participated in a national CBRN drill that was conducted virtually. He touched on the Emergency Medical Services Division and stated 20 new trainees graduated from the paramedicine program; the Bureau of Fire Prevention and Investigation and the Airport Division where the FAA is in town for comprehensive inspections. He mentioned that Chief Arteseros has been working hard to bring different agencies together and at the CBRN drill on the water, part of their responsibility is continuously to be planning, coordinating, executing, and evaluating exercises with other agencies that bring the skills and relationships together necessary so they will be successful when disasters happen in the real world. He added that they continue to staff and participate in vaccination sites all around the city and described other significant incidents that took place during the reporting period including a greater alarm fire on Eureka Street that started as a police incident of an individual throwing knives at police and started a fire which was knocked down very aggressively. He concluded his report by showing a video of Chief Arteseros singing the National Anthem.

Vice President Rodriguez thanked Chief Rubenstein for his report and stated it was informative and avoids a lot of questions because it is so clear as to what they are doing. He confirmed that there are a lot of different costs that go into getting an engine, truck, rescue squad or ambulance out the door for a 9-1-1 call, and they do not itemize it or get down to that level of detail. He thought that kind of information would be beneficial as they go to the different administrations to plead the Department's budget as they face budget constraints and if they could show the actual cost of all these rescues and encampment fires, they could make a case for reimbursement. Mr. Corso responded that they talked to the Mayor's office about those trends for water-based calls, et cetera and that they do work with other entities for those reimbursements, but they don't break it out on a specific call by call basis.

Commissioner Cleaveland thanked Chief Rubenstein for his report as well as the sterling performance by Chief Arteseros. He confirmed that the cause of the fire on Eureka Street has not been determined but once the investigation is closed, they will release the information. He suggested with all the surf and bay rescues the Department will need a full-on marine rescue unit soon which Mr. Corso estimated would cost around five million dollars a year. Chief Nicholson responded that they have had discussions on marine rescue units, and they built Station 35 larger than what the current crew is now in case they could add or expand that station with a dedicated marine unit. Commissioner Cleaveland acknowledged that report from Chief Rubenstein makes him appreciate how much work the Fire Department does every single month, and he is particularly appreciative of the report when it deals with the challenges they face with the Street Crisis Response Team and the people involved there with personal stories that are written about the people who they are trying to help on the street and the fact that the Fire Department is constantly trying to save so many of the citizens from themselves. He also appreciates the work that the EMS Division does, and he hopes that every person in San Francisco understands what a continuing challenge it is for the Fire Department personnel to meet the crisis that they face every single day on the streets. He added that because it is very easy to get drugs in this town and until that changes to some extent, they are never going to be able to erase the problems of drug addiction and alcohol abuse in the city and a very small fraction of the population is causing the city to spend an inordinate number of resources of time and talent addressing a very tiny percentage of the people in the city.

Commissioner Covington stated she is going to beat the drum again about surf rescues and she would like an agenda item regarding what the Department is doing to get some of these costs covered by other entities, and she thinks at this point a robust conversation about this and some suggestions for how to recoup these monies needs to happen. Chief Nicholson responded that the Department has MOUs with the National Park Service, the Presidio, and the Port. Mr. Corso added that for a variety of the different areas along the waterfront, they do have agreements in place with the Golden Gate National Recreation Area for areas of the Presidio and Ocean Beach area and they have an agreement with the Navy for Hunter's Point area and an agreement with the Presidio for the inner working area of the Presidio and they do get reimbursement on an annual basis for providing services, both fire and medical to those areas. They also have an agreement with the Port of San Francisco where they support the portion of staffing at Station 35 and the fireboat operations. Commissioner Covington added that whenever this is agenzized, she would like the details as to how much it costs per rescue and how much the Department is being compensated per rescue. She thanked Chief Rubenstein for his report and complimented Chief Arteseros-Brown on her rendition of the National Anthem. She confirmed that the specialty-trained tactical medics are deployed depending on the situation such as an active shooter scenario, where the medics are going in with a support team of police and they are focused typically on the folks that have been injured in that active shooter incident and they are there to help the police if one of them goes down.

Commissioner Nakajo thanked Chief Rubenstein for his comprehensive report. He confirmed that the EMS-6 target population consisted of 804 calls generated by high-frequency callers for the reporting month and that number is about average for all months. He acknowledged how descriptive, detailed and comprehensive Chief Tong's report is and Chief Tong responded that they are required to have many reports which entail many meetings that are attended by EMS-6

leadership and collaborate with their partners for data gathering and there's the quality improvement piece that they report to make sure they are treating their patients properly and documenting their encounters, which all takes time and takes time away from regularly assigned members. She added that there is a lot of background work to support the actual street work that they do. Commissioner Nakajo responded that in terms of what the Department does which is public services, there is an administrative component to it, and it concerns him because he knows it takes time. He confirmed that most of the high utilizers are not opioid users, but they may have some other issues in terms of mental health or alcoholism, or drugs. Chief Nicholson added that reimbursement for the services that they provide, the Street Crisis Response Team is currently funded by Proposition C, which is for mental health and homelessness within the city, and they are making the case this year as well that EMS-6 should be funded by that as well and not by the Department because there is that nexus. Commissioner Nakajo asked Chief DeCossio how the Slow Streets affect the department in terms of response to an emergency. Chief DeCossio responded that Slow Streets were put forward as a temporary program. He added as follows: "what the Fire Marshal's office received from MTA was we are running about 50 percent of traffic volume for the pre-COVID. So we take all of that into consideration when we review and give our input to these proposals that come forward, including Slow Streets. And specifically, the Slow Streets, we've approved -- we've approved or given our recommendation to approve 32 of them so far. Twenty-seven have been deployed. Five more are coming. That's for temporary. With regard to permanent, that's a different story because to -- to review a program as a permanent program, we have to have some kind of vision into the future, because permanent, obviously, is a long-term plan. We don't know what kind of traffic volume we're going to be facing when all the COVID restrictions are lifted. We've started tracking our response times internally, our Department, throughout the city. We've identified eight neighborhoods. And we've gone back five years up to the current time. And going back from 2016 to the current time, there's been a slow creep of increase in response times. And that's to be expected because, at that time, the city was really growing. The population was increasing, et cetera. One would expect when COVID hit a little over a year ago with the traffic volume going down that our response times would speed up. But they haven't. They've continued to increase. The question is, it's a judgment call. It's a judgment call. What is a reasonable amount of increase for these programs? And just to give you a little insight, we've seen an increase anywhere from just a few seconds to 32 seconds in response time throughout the city. So moving forward, and if we're running between 50 and 70 percent traffic volume now, what is that going to be when we're at a hundred percent? And that's the question we have to answer and look through the lens when we -- when we evaluate something for a permanent -- a permanent program. So it's -- the fire marshal's position in our office is that we take a little more time to evaluate this data as the city opens up, as the volume increases, and how does that correlate or correspond to our response times? Does it stay pretty level or does that increase as well? So we -- there's a lot of unknowns. Getting to your point about how it impacts us, San Francisco is unique. And CD-2 can speak probably better to this from the operational end of things, but I look at it through the lens of the fire marshal and what -- and -- and what is unique to San Francisco is the density and the topography and the zero lot lines and the exposure concerns. You look at San Francisco and we are second only to New York City in density, population per square mile. And then you give all the -- all those other considerations. So time is critical. Seconds matter in San Francisco. Also, if you look at buildings built before 1942, most of them are going to be balloon frame construction. So

they're not going to have fire blocking. So you have zero lot line setbacks, exposure issues, balloon frame, and so timing is critical so we have to have an aggressive fire attack and get to the scene of the fire quickly to limit the exposure and the spread of fire. So saying all of that, time is important to us. And -- and right now, anywhere from 5 to 32 seconds, that's delayed time. That puts our people more at risk. It puts the people we serve more at risk. The question is, is it a reasonable risk? And that's a policy decision. So -- so it delays our response a certain amount, and it's a policy decision. What's a -- what's a reasonable amount of delay with the tradeoff and the benefits of these programs? And -- and -- and not to go on too much, I'll just say this, again, looking through the eyes of a permanent program, I think we need to track this for a greater period of time as we open up before we move into a permanent status of these programs.” Commissioner Nakajo thanked the Fire Marshal for comprehensively answering his question and it’s one of the greatest things that he personally is going to miss about not having him with us after his retirement date and that it has been a great pleasure to work with him as he has always been professional, consistent and comprehensive and a great asset to the Department. Commissioner Nakajo confirmed that MTA is the policymakers when it comes to the jurisdiction and oversight of slow street designs.

President Feinstein stated that she would be interested in learning a little bit more about the in-depth FAA evaluation at the airport. She expressed her concern with the overhead wires at the fire at 43 Lawrence and confirmed that they have a multitude of challenges that make San Francisco home to the greatest fire department in the world and that an aerial ladder could not be used at that building as they are trained to recognize what kinds of wires are what, so they used ground ladders and fought the fire aggressively. She also stated that in regard to cost recovery on cliff and surf rescues, it may be appropriate for the appointment of a committee and that she would take that into consideration and will pursue it further.

There was no public comment.

## **6. COMMUNICATIONS [Discussion]**

- Letter from Robert Demmons dated April 2, 2021.

Commissioner Covington asked the Commission Secretary to read the letter aloud, which she did.

Commissioner Covington stated that she greatly appreciated Chief Demmons for sending the letter and confirmed that a 1-alarm fire can very quickly escalate to 2, 3, or 4 alarms and that something that they must bear in mind when talking about Slow Streets because Slow Streets can slow down the response times.

Commissioner Rodriguez hopes that they do comprehensive studies and that people in the neighborhoods have a voice. He confirmed that the lead agency for shared spaces is DPW and Slow Streets are 100 percent MTA which takes input from the local neighborhood, the residence where the Slow Streets are located, and with that input, they move forward and put it on an agenda item for task if they decide to move forward and to vote up or down on it.

President Feinstein stated her concerns about the narrowness of Grant Avenue and access issues. Fire Marshal DeCossio responded that they have standards and guidelines that they follow, and their general rule of thumb is they do not encroach any further than what has been existing for decades and if not a hundred years plus.

Commissioner Covington stated she was glad they are having this discussion and that they got the letter from former Chief Demmons because there seems to be a lot of confusion about what a slow street is and what a shared space is. She added that Slow Streets are supposed to be designed for people to walk and be able to get out during the pandemic. She added that she is very familiar with Page Street and while it was intended for people to get out and walk and have a safe place to congregate during the pandemic the novelty has worn off and there is no one on Page Street walking and all of the traffic that would ordinarily be on Page Street has been forced on to other streets, primarily Oak Street and she thinks that safety is the number one priority, not just for the Fire Department but for everyone. She stated that the surveys that MTA put out, needs to be revisited because the people who were surveyed in her neighborhood, were surveyed during the time that it was presented for Page Street to be a temporary slow street, which was a new term and people did not even know what a slow street was, and many did not respond at all because it was a temporary thing for COVID. She added that if seconds count, and there is no reinforcement as to what is allowed as a barrier on a so-called slow street, in her opinion it is very dangerous. She repeated her suggestion to have this topic as an agenda item.

**7. AGENDA FOR NEXT AND FUTURE FIRE COMMISSION MEETINGS *[Discussion]***  
Discussion regarding agenda for next and future Fire Commission meetings.

- Robust discussion on cost recovery for surf, cliff, and bay rescues
- Slow streets discussion
- Update on AWSS
- Update from Chief Kaialoa on Division of training and status on current academy class.

There was no public comment.

**11. ADJOURNMENT** President Feinstein adjourned the meeting at 11:58 a.m.