

**FIRE COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING  
MINUTES**

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**Wednesday, May 12, 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=38506](https://sanfrancisco.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=180&clip_id=38506)

President Feinstein called the meeting to order at 9:01 a.m.

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|---------------------------|-------------------------------|----------|
| 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 |          |
| Shaine Kaialoa            | 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 April 28, 2021.

Commissioner Rodriguez Moved to approve the minutes 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 April 28, 2021, including budget, academies, special events, communications, and outreach to other government agencies and the public.

Chief Nicholson reported on activities since the last meeting on April 28, 2021. She announced the good news that they have identified a piece of property for a new training facility and last Tuesday at the Board of Supervisors meeting, legislation was introduced, sponsored by Mayor Breed and co-sponsored by President Shamann Walton which will allow the city to enter into a purchase option agreement with Prologis, who is the owner of the property at 1236 Carroll Avenue, along with another piece of property that is owned by the Port of San Francisco. She talked about the complicated regulatory process they are working through as well as CEQA before they can move forward with the final purchase. She mentioned that they are still in discussions with the mayor's budget office and that it was confirmed that the Mayor is going to fund a new Street Wellness Response Team consisting of a paramedic, EMT and possibly a HOT team member that will basically respond to incidents of "well-being checks" of people who are not suffering from a medical crisis or behavioral health crisis but need to get into the services they need. She gave a shout out to Chief Tong for her leadership on this, as well as Chief Pang and Chief Tangherlino. She also acknowledged the good work of Mark Corso, Olivia Scanlon and Chief Velo who have been working diligently on the budget. She stated that 1,300 members of have been vaccinated against COVID and she thinks those numbers will go up. She added a drill on 45<sup>th</sup> Avenue with Chief Kaialoa and Chief Velo where they were able to do some valuable training exercises on a home that was going to be torn down. She announced that Chief Mark Johnson of the Airport Division will be retiring at the end of June. She also announced the passing of Firefighter Steven Brantley who passed away last week unexpectedly.

Commissioner Covington extended her condolences to the family of Firefighter Brantley. She stated that she was relieved at the report of the new training center as it has been a long time in coming and she thanked the entire team that worked on it. She mentioned that she was sad to hear that Chief Johnson is leaving not just the airport, but the whole Department as well as Chief DeCossio and acknowledged what an asset they are to the Department. She expressed her excitement of the news on the Street Wellness team.

President Feinstein echoed what Commissioner Covington said pertaining to Chief Johnson and Chief DeCossio and she also thinks they are both going to leave very big shoes to fill. She confirmed with Chief Nicholson that both parcels are needed for the new training facility site.

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 reported on Operations for April 2021. He announced that during dispatcher week, the Chief acknowledged all the dispatchers through an online message as well as visiting the communications center. They also celebrated volunteer appreciation day, including NERT, Administrative Assistant Day and the 115<sup>th</sup> commemoration of the 1906 earthquake. He

mentioned that they conducted many drills including surf rescue training and complex cliff rescue drills and responded to many incidents through the reporting period including many grass and brush fires, encampment fires, RV fires and structure fires. He added that the Public Information Officer, Lt. Baxter has been very busy as usual and was the first PIO to get a certification from the state as a credentialed PIO specialist. He stated that they began training with the SFMTA on safety at and around fire scenes and he touched on EMS, the Bureau of Fire Prevention and Investigation, the Airport Division, and Homeland Security.

Commissioner Cleaveland confirmed that Binax testing takes about 15 minutes to get a result. He also confirmed that one of the challenges that the Street Crisis Response Team faces is a lack of shelter in place beds. Chief Nicholson responded that there are systemic issues that they cannot solve on their own and they are having discussions with the mayor's office, with the Department of Public Health and other agencies about putting money into affordable housing and mental healthcare beds to ease the challenges, but it will take time.

Commissioner Rodriguez congratulated the team that worked on finding a new training center and he thanked Chief Rubenstein for his concise report. He also congratulated Chief Johnson and Fire Marshal DeCossio for their service to the city. He also acknowledged the successful program regarding the EMS services and Chief Pang and likes to see the success stories in the report.

Commissioner Nakajo thanked Chief Rubenstein for his comprehensive report. He asked Chief Tong, Chief DeCossio and Chief Johnson specific questions regarding their submittals to the Operations report and he was able to confirm what the numbers meant on the activity summary report including calls pertaining to EMS and Suppression and clarification of the roll out of the Street Crisis Response Team and the definition of the Street Wellness Program the Mayor is considering funding soon which both fall under community paramedicine. He confirmed that there will be the need of administrative support as well for the new Street Wellness program. He clarified with Chief DeCossio the differences in operational and construction permits. He thanked Chief Tong and Chief DeCossio for their comprehensive reports. He also wished Chief DeCossio and Chief Johnson well in their upcoming retirements. He also expressed his condolences to the family of Firefighter Brantley.

Commissioner Covington asked Chief Rubenstein to give some examples of possible impediments to safe firefighting. Chief Rubenstein responded that the city is a great city to fight fires in, but with the geography with hills and above ground wires they are presented with challenges, but the members are well versed and trained for those challenges, and they make it look easy, even though its actually not easy.

There was no public comment.

##### **5. UPDATE ON THE SLOW STREETS PROGRAM *[Discussion]***

Jeffrey Tumlin, Director of Transportation, and Tom Maguire, Director of Streets Division to provide an overview of the Slow Streets Program.

(Note that Mr. Maguire did not attend the meeting)

President Feinstein welcomed Director Tumlin and thanked him for accepting the invitation to present at the Commission meeting and for his willingness to answer some questions and concerns that they have in terms of Slow Streets impact on the San Francisco Fire Department.

Mr. Tumlin introduced himself as the Director of SFMTA and stated that he has held that position for the last 16 months. He mentioned that he has worked all over the United States and everywhere he has worked there has been a long-standing tension between traffic and fire safety. He gave the following overview: "Here in San Francisco, we typically have about 20 deaths and injuries every year as a result of traffic violence. And most of those deaths and severe injuries are preventable. In our world, the primary technique for improving traffic safety is reducing speed since speed is overwhelmingly the primary determinant of the likelihood of crash, and particularly, the severity of the crash. Of course, in the fire safety world, the opposite is true. One of the best things that we can do in order to improve fire safety is reduce delay for emergency response vehicles because seconds matter. And this is particularly true in San Francisco given the complexity of the city and its history. There is a reason the phoenix rising from the fire and the ashes is on the city flag. So this is our challenge, and we're so grateful for the partnership that we've had with your team, particularly Captain Chad Law and Fire Marshal De Cossio. They've been really, really important partners as we try to find a path for not only improving traffic safety, but also improving emergency response at the same time. That's our goal. It's how do we make both of these safety factors work together in sync. Here at the SFMTA, I've been directing staff to make sure that we use emergency response time as one of our primary performance indicators. We manage all of the streets of San Francisco across all modes of transportation. And we want to make sure that we are using the Fire Department's excellent data for being able to measure impact on emergency response over time, and to also make sure that in all of our work, we're thinking about fire engines, police vehicles, ambulances, and other emergency response vehicles. I'd like to introduce Jamie Parks. He is the program manager for the overall Slow Streets program and our Streets Division. He'll be presenting a brief summary about the work that we've been doing on all of the experimental, all of the partnership, as well as some thoughts about how we might plan more closely together in the future. I've been eager to co-design Slow Streets and other street interventions with Fire Department leadership in order to allow the streets to work for better safety for people. At the same time, they actually serve as emergency response routes. And we've got some ideas based upon our experience in other jurisdictions about how that may work. Overall, my goal is to make sure that we have an overall city wide network of primary emergency response routes that are always protected from congestion. We know that congestion is going to continue to rise in San Francisco. We want to use tools like our transit only lanes as a means for emergency vehicles to be able to bypass congestion. We think if we're creative with it that we can do the same thing with Slow Streets." Mr. Tumlin announced that he would have to leave the meeting by 11:00 a.m.

Director Tumlin introduced Jamie Parks. Mr. Parks introduced himself and presented the following overview: "I oversee the Livable Streets Division at SFMTA. Our division, in addition to Slow Streets, is responsible for delivering San Francisco's traffic calming, bicycle, and pedestrian safety improvements, and generally oversees our commitment to implementing our Vision Zero program, which is the city's commitment to ending traffic fatalities in San Francisco. And through our projects, we seek to achieve many, many goals. But whether it's fighting climate change, congestion, emergency access times. But more than anything, we're guided by the principal of safety. And in fact the safety of San Franciscans is something that I really admire about the San Francisco Fire Department in my work with your staff. And, you know, as Director Tumlin mentioned, sometimes the tools that we have are invention, but in my six years at SFMTA doing this work, my team was worked with the Fire Department on literally hundreds of projects, and I personally have worked really close with the Fire Department on dozens of projects. And even though some of them have been really hard,

ultimately, we've reached an agreement on every single one of them. And I attribute that to building a culture of mutual respect between our staffs. I -- with both -- I think both departments recognizing a need for compromise. And also a structured process for project review and approval, including even SFMTA funding a dedicated position, a captain position in the Fire Department in 2017 as the volume of our work kind of outpaced the Fire Department's capacity to keep up with it. So but to move to Slow Streets, you know, as with -- as with everything else, COVID placed a lot of stress on the structure that we previously had. Circumstances really dictated that SFMTA move faster than ever in repurposing our streets to meet the unique needs of pandemic response, whether that's emergency transit lanes, social distancing lanes, safe sleeping sites, or Slow Streets. And actually, I'm really proud of how we've worked together on those programs, including Slow Streets. Last April, we invented a new COVID specific review process for street changes that both expedites review, but also ensures that the Fire Department gets to review and approve all street changes even with the rapid pace of change during COVID. So with Slow Streets, they have been a critical tool for San Franciscans to move safely and comfortably around their neighbors during COVID. And we're really proud that we've been able to implement over 40 miles of Slow Streets, and that we've done -- and that we have done so with thorough Fire Department review as well. The location and design of each Slow Street is the result of close collaboration and feedback from the Fire Department to ensure that even as we meet the goals on Slow Streets, that we're also preserving emergency access and response times. And so in short, the success of Slow Streets has really relied crucially on Fire Department input. And as the pandemic recedes, and we look forward eagerly to a post-COVID world, I will again be asking for Fire Department support and collaboration to determine how Slow Streets can continue to play a role in San Francisco's transportation network. And so I'm really happy to be here today for that dialogue. And I -- with that, I want to introduce my colleague Shannon Hake who manages the details of the Slow Streets program to go further into some of the details and show some of -- show some photos about how we have design Slow Streets to date to accommodate emergency access, the data collection and evaluation that we've been doing, and some of the next steps that we're thinking about for post-pandemic Slow Streets.”

Ms. Shannon Hake, program manager for the Slow Streets Program provided the following overview and the attached presentation: “ So Slow Streets is a COVID response program that began in April of last year in response to the need for socially distant walking and biking while the Muni system had been drastically reduced. The program was meant originally to restrict through traffic on certain residential streets. And the program went through a period of very rapid growth last summer with three phases of the program being -- being added in just a few months. And the final four streets of the program in phase four were just added last month. They have not yet been implemented. And these are temporary restrictions authorized by 120 days after the state of emergency is lifted. So Slow Streets are implemented with temporary barricades and signage at designated intersections to identify the street as a shared space for vehicles, bicycles, and pedestrians. These are not street closures and there are no changes to parking, deliveries, curb side uses, or other local services. Slow Streets are implemented on low volume residential streets only. Our materials have evolved quite a bit over the past year as both our agencies learned what works and what doesn't on Slow Streets. We phased out the use of A-frames in the roadway in response to Fire Department concerns last summer. And we began experimenting with new materials last fall when the barricades proved unpredictable for the Fire Department. Now we're moving to new treatments that fire trucks can easily drive around or drive over in the roadway. Over the course of the summer, we'll be replacing all of our barricades with these new flexible delineators which will be more durable and less susceptible to movement and damage. And by the end of the summer, we will no longer be using the Type-3 barricades to designate Slow Streets. These materials were field tested with Fire Department staff last summer in a (UNINTELLIGIBLE) on the program. We collect and analyze data continuously through the program to understand its impacts. We've collected

traffic counts over the past year to learn about the impacts of Slow Streets and to determine how they're working. Since these are temporary materials, we're able to quickly address issues and change or even remove barricades along our Slow Streets. We're also trying to do as much outreach as possible on these Slow Streets, even during the pandemic, to determine how they're working. Just a few months ago, we sent over a hundred-thousand post cards to residents, people living within a quarter mile of a slow street. We received over 15,000 responses and are now analyzing the stretch data about user perception on Slow Streets. So this is the Slow Streets network as it exists today with the implemented Slow Streets shown in green and recently approved but not yet implemented Slow Streets shown in blue. Fire Department staff has reviewed and approved these temporary Slow Streets corridors in phase one, two, three, and four of the program. And more than 10 corridors have been removed from the program based on Fire Department feedback. As we look ahead to a post-pandemic future, we're currently evaluating how Slow Streets fit into the larger city-wide transportation network while we're collecting even more data about how Slow Streets are working. Our tools and our materials are temporary and we're continuing to learn more about how the program is working.

President Feinstein thanked all three presenters for being at the meeting to help them better understand Slow Streets. She expressed her concerns. She stated that Slow Streets was created in part at least to allow people more outdoor area access during a pandemic where they were in a position where maybe they could not access their outdoor area the way they did prior to COVID and she feels the intent is to make it permanent. Director Tumlin responded that Slow Streets have been highly experimental from the very beginning and the intent was absolutely to create critical open space where it was needed, as well as particularly in the west side of San Francisco where they had to eliminate three quarters of muni lines to be able to provide residents with an option for safely walking, biking or using a wheelchair in order to get from their home to a bus stop that was now much farther away or to their neighborhood commercial district. He added that they have always had multiple functions and they have been surprised by the results so over the last several months they have been collecting data on how they are being used and what people think of them and they are getting very different reactions from all over the city. He stated that in some cases, Slow Streets have turned into an important commute route for people using skates, skateboards, scooters, wheelchairs, and bikes. He used an example of Page Street, where the distance traveled on the paved Slow Street is quite significant and people are using it to get from the western half of the city to the eastern half. He provided other examples as well.

President Feinstein expressed her concerns over the installation of speed humps and bumps and the damage they cause to the Fire Department apparatus. Mr. Tumlin explained that the Traffic Calming Program is different from the Safe Streets Program. Mr. Parks added that the Traffic Calming Program is an application-based program for San Francisco residents to request traffic calming on their blocks and they have not been installing speed humps as part of the Slow Streets Program. He mentioned that they have switched to speed cushions that have slots down the middle that allow for emergency vehicles to access the slots by crossing the center line of the roadway. There was discussion regarding the MUNI only lane on Van Ness which emergency vehicles can use to respond to emergencies. She confirmed that the selection of a particular slow streets depends upon community support and that they keep track of how many people are using the slow streets by using tubes in the roadway which counts vehicles and bikes and they have done pedestrian counts at certain times of the day, not just on the Slow Streets, but adjacent streets as well. President Feinstein stated that she hopes someone from the Fire Department will address what has happened with response times since the implementation of the Slow Streets because she has been told they have been impacted. Fire Marshal DeCossio responded that they have been tracking response times during the pandemic and they have seen an increase of anywhere from five seconds to 30 seconds over the eight neighborhoods they tracked, and his concern is as the Fire Marshal, is that in a time where they have reduced

traffic volume given COVID restrictions and what does that look like in the future when things ramp back up.

Commissioner Nakajo thanked all three for presenting and stated his concerns as follows: “ Just as a point of information with all of the questions that are coming out, my statement is basically that MTA in terms of the nature of how it operates within the city and county of San Francisco, I as a Fire Commissioner now going into my 25th year, affects all aspects of my life, both privately as well as non-profit executive director in the Japan town community, but also Fire Commissioner. The influence of MTA on all aspects have been great influence in terms of being a private citizen. Being 25 years within the Commission, it also talks that I've seen the duration of the development of the pedestrian and safety. I have seen the concept of bicycle and bicycle lanes. I've seen the development of what we call the bumps, the small bumps, the big bumps in the middle of the streets. I've seen the emergence of Slow Streets. I basically definitely appreciate the cooperation between MTA, the Department, and our Fire Department. But as you can tell from us on the jurisdiction of the Fire Commission, and I as a commissioner, take all these issues very seriously. And in terms of the Slow Streets, I get -- I understand what is going on. I understand the pandemic. I understand what you are talking about. My bottom line question as a Fire Commissioner to the Chief of the Department and to all the command staff is if there's an incident in suppression or medical emergency, and as you roll out of that house, and our first premise is to get to our patients and get to the citizens in terms of suppression or any matter of emergency, public service on emergency, my question last time in terms of Slow Streets in terms of your research and the popularity of that, I get that too. What I get is the importance of us as a Department to roll our vehicles and our membership out to address ourselves to the public citizen of San Francisco to get to them immediately on an EMS or a suppression issue. My question to the command force is what is supposed to happen with these various definitions of Slow Streets, the location of them. I'm glad you had the succession and the knowledge base, but what the heck are we supposed to do as a membership when that driver gets on that truck or their engine and they roll out of that house? Are they automatically supposed to understand what street is closed, what street is not closed, what is a Slow Street as they try to respond? So again, for me, I appreciate the cooperation and what you're trying to do with the citizens of San Francisco. I feel our responsibility is to the citizen of San Francisco in responding in an emergency, but fire suppression as well. So that's my -- my -- my jurisdiction in terms of my concern is that consistent communication and coordination. I'm glad you're taking into consideration, as you say, this issue in terms of what we need as a Fire Department or what you want to accomplish within your MTA jurisdiction. My bottom line is trying to address in a timely manner our citizens of San Francisco.”

Commissioner Covington was sad that all the commissioners were not able to present questions because of the time constraints and hoped that staff would be able to come again as she has many problems with Slow Streets. She added that when you talk about a delay of 5 to 30 seconds, and your house is on fire, it seems like a lifetime. She mentioned that Slow Streets was made to be temporary, and the City should allow it to sunset and start all over again because she feels this is going through the back door for a program that could harm the members of the Fire Department and the citizens of San Francisco.

Commissioner Cleaveland asked if MTA was intending to morph all of the Slow Streets into permanent safe streets and Mr. Tumlin responded that they are looking at each corridor one by one and Ms. Hake added that they are not planning on making all the temporary Slow Streets permanent, they are evaluating them with the data they have collected and the perception surveys that they received from residents and they are making sure the Slow Streets are not having negative impacts on the transportation patterns of adjacent streets, of intersecting

streets, or on parallel streets and looking at emergency response times and making sure that they aren't contributing to any delay.

Public Comment:

Charles Woodfield, who lives in Eureka Valley, Raul Maldonado, who lives in District 11, Al Colly who lives in D-1, Mike Chen who lives near Polk Gulch in District 2, male speaker who lives on Golden Gate Avenue, Jay Bing who lives in the Richmond District, Dave Alexander who lives in the Richmond District, Anne Christie of SPUR, Luke Bornheimer, organizer at Kid Safe SF, and Brian Haagsman with Walk San Francisco's Vision Zero organizer all spoke in support of Slow Streets and gave their reasons why.

Emailed public comment in support of Slow Streets was sent from: Susan George, Andrew Dai, Luke Spray, Hazel O'Neil, Donovan Lacy and their emails are attached: <https://sf-fire.org/files/2021-05/for%20Slow%20Streets.pdf>

Emailed public comment against Slow Streets received from: Geoffrey Moore, Jennifer Carrico, Helen Gekakis, and Nancy Pratt. Their emails are attached: <https://sf-fire.org/files/2021-05/against%20Slow%20Streets.pdf>

**6. COMMISSION REPORT *[Discussion]***

Report on Commission activities since last meeting on April 28, 2021.

President Feinstein announced that she has been working with the City Attorney's Office regarding performance evaluations for the Chief of the Department, the Department Physician and the Commission Secretary and since there has been a change in leadership at DHR, they are not in a position to proceed with evaluations at this time.

There was no public comment.

**7. AGENDA FOR NEXT AND FUTURE FIRE COMMISSION MEETINGS *[Discussion]***

Discussion regarding agenda for next and future Fire Commission meetings.

There was no public comment.

**8. ADJOURNMENT**

President Feinstein made a motion to adjourn the meeting in honor and respect with the deep thanks in memory of Firefighter/Paramedic Brantley. Commissioner Cleveland seconded. The motion was unanimous, and the meeting adjourned at 11:37 a.m.