

STAFF REPORT

DATE: January 30, 2024
TO: City Council
FROM: Subcommittee on Commissions (Mayor Chapman and Vice-Mayor Vaitla)
SUBJECT: Consider Recommendations Related to Commissions

Based on all the information gathered and reviewed, the subcommittee affirms that informed input from knowledgeable community members provides valuable support to the Council's decision-making process. Because of this, **as the City prepares to embark on a General Plan update, the Commissions Subcommittee seeks to define significant, specific roles for the city's advisory commissions in the process, especially around community engagement efforts. The recommendations in this report stem from the overarching goal of utilizing commissions to gather information on our community's vision for the future.**

Recommendation

1. Receive report by subcommittee
2. Consider the following recommendations to consolidate and better define roles of commissions, especially in view of the upcoming General Plan update:
 - a. Create a Circulation and Active Mobility Commission by merging the Unitrans Advisory Committee and the Bicycle, Transportation, and Street Safety Commission.
 - b. Create a Fiscal Commission by merging the Finance and Budget Commission and the Utilities Commission.
 - c. Create a Climate and Environmental Justice Commission by merging the Natural Resources Commission and the Tree Commission.
 - d. Create an Equity and Culture Commission by merging the Human Relations Commission and the Civic Arts Commission.
 - e. Take initial steps to incorporate the Historic Resource Management Commission into the Planning Commission.
3. Assign commissions (as detailed further below) to take lead roles in community engagement around state-mandated General Plan elements, as follows:

State-mandated General Plan Element	Lead Commission(s)
Circulation	Circulation and Active Mobility
Environmental Justice (EJ)	Equity and Culture; Climate & EJ
Conservation	Climate & EJ; Open Space & Habitat
Open Space	Open Space & Habitat
Land Use	Planning
Housing	Social Services

4. Task the subcommittee with continuing work on reviewing and revising the authorizing resolutions of each Commission, including for the post-General Plan update period, bringing information back to the full Council for final review and approvals.
5. Task the subcommittee to explore the creation of a “Community Health Commission,” with a strong focus on mental health, especially among vulnerable populations (aging adults, children, youth). The subcommittee, as part of this approach, would also consider renaming the Social Services Commission to “Affordable Housing Commission” and changing its focus of work to all issues around housing availability, affordability, and security. The non-housing responsibilities currently held by the commission would be reallocated to other commissions, especially the proposed Community Health Commission. If Council authorized the subcommittee to explore this concept, the subcommittee would return to the full Council with options for further consideration.

Fiscal Impact

The primary fiscal impact relates to time savings, both during and after the General Plan update process, by redirecting staff administrative activities and relying on commissions to play leading roles in the General Plan update. Consolidating commissions also brings resource savings throughout the commission process (recruitment, commissioner administration, meeting management, etc.). However, the driver behind the recommendations is not fiscal in nature and costs associated with net staffing levels are not affected by the proposals.

Council Goal(s)

The work of this Subcommittee is best associated with the Council Goal to Foster Excellence in City Services, although ultimately the proposals touch on all Council Goals.

Commission Input

This item is under the direct purview of City Council. City Commissions are Council-appointed and in most cases advisory to the City Council. The Council Subcommittee spoke with all available chairs (or vice-chairs) of existing commissions to receive their feedback on what is working in the present structure and what could be improved. In

addition to expressions of satisfaction with commission functioning in some areas, we heard repeated concerns about lack of clear direction from Council and wanting to see greater commission impact on Council decision-making, as well as a greater diversity of viewpoints expressed on Commissions.

Background and Analysis

Background

On February 7, 2023, the City Council held a workshop to discuss the Council's expectations related to its advisory commissions. The Council expressed their support of and appreciation for the knowledge and expertise stemming from the City's many advisory commissions. The Council also shared support for regular review of commission processes and scopes to ensure the commission process is valuable to participants, the broader community, and the City Council, as well as to review the overall scope of each commission to determine if updates are recommended or necessary. With Council consensus that they would like to look at the scope and structure of advisory commissions, the City Council appointed a subcommittee of Mayor Chapman and Vice-Mayor Vaitla.

In reviewing the scopes and structure of each of the City's 14 advisory commissions, the subcommittee undertook the following research:

- Reviewed each commission's authorizing resolution and the commissions' assigned tasks;
- Met with chairs and vice-chairs of each commission to gain a better understanding of what works well and areas of potential improvement, especially with respect to Council direction about what areas of commission activity would be most valuable;
- Talked with staff, including select commission staff liaisons, to hear perspectives on what works well and areas of potential improvement;
- Considered Council needs related to recent and upcoming policy discussions, plans, and interests, especially community engagement for the upcoming General Plan update;
- Considered evolving needs and interests since the last commission update (2006 for many commissions);
- Considered changes in law, technology, economy, and the community.

Analysis and Recommendations

General Plan Update process

The City Council will be discussing a process for the General Plan update in February. The Subcommittee recommends including in that discussion direction to align several of the commissions with state-mandated elements (chapters) of the General Plan.

Specifically, we suggest asking certain commissions to spearhead the community outreach component related to each element. We also suggest that any commissions

not linked to a specific element play supportive roles in the General Plan update process. Overall, we feel that Commissions are well-placed to gather information on our community's vision for the future.

This focus on the General Plan update, as well as the consolidation and streamlining plan below, responds to concerns the subcommittee heard from chairs and vice-chairs about lack of direction and linkages to Council decision-making. After the General Plan update, the commissions would continue to function in their respective roles with revised authorizing resolutions, as noted further below.

Community outreach would entail working under the guidance of a consultant to:

- Develop an outreach strategy, including a methodology to reach under-served and vulnerable groups;
- Conduct a series of community meetings to obtain input;
- Summarize input in a format that can be easily inserted into the General Plan Update;
- Provide information to the City Council for approval and inclusion in the General Plan Update.

The subcommittee would also work with the General Plan Update consultant to ensure that the designated commissions are prepared to fulfill their role related to community engagement. During the General Plan update period, commissions that are engaged in General Plan work should only engage in other work if it is necessary to fulfill duties or legal obligations (i.e., the Social Services Commission/Affordable Housing Commission reviewing an affordable housing proposal, Equity and Culture organizing annual events, Circulation and Mobility advising on proposed transportation infrastructure improvements, etc.)

Consolidation and streamlining

To facilitate the General Plan-related work, the subcommittee recommends consolidating several of the commissions and more generally streamlining the scope of all commissions. Given worrying recent health trends, we also recommend that Council explore the creation of a new "Community Health Commission" with a strong focus on mental health, especially among vulnerable populations (aging adults, children, youth). As noted below, this Commission could take on some of the present responsibilities of the Social Services Commission.

The chart below summarizes our recommendations, including General Plan linkages. Six of the eight state-mandated elements are covered in the table below: Circulation, Conservation, Environmental Justice, Housing, Land Use, and Open Space. (The required Noise and Safety elements are not listed; community engagement for these will be led by Staff.) We also recommend the subcommittee continue its work to streamline the scope of commissions through reviewing and suggesting changes to the authorizing resolutions, especially to define essential tasks in the post-General Plan update period.

Proposed Commission	Previous Commission(s)	Proposal	Associated General Plan state-mandated Element
Circulation and Active Mobility (CAM)	BTSSC, Unitrans Advisory Committee	<p>Merge BTSSC and UAC. The UAC is required to meet once or twice per year and to be comprised of certain stakeholders. Membership with the BTSSC overlaps, as does scope. The overlap creates duplication of effort and could be streamlined without compromising effectiveness.</p> <p>When the annual/biennial Unitrans specific meetings are required, the combined commission will include the necessary additional stakeholders from ASUCD.</p> <p>The UAC is comprised of 3 at-large positions, two of which are currently vacant, 3 ASUCD representatives and 1 representative each from BTSSC, NRC, and SCC. In this proposal, the at-large member from UAC will move to BTSSC; ASUCD representatives will have an identified active role for the specific 1 or 2 meetings per year. Other commissions are welcome to send representatives to these meetings but in an ex officio capacity.</p> <p>All current members of the BTSSC and the at-large member of the UAC would be invited to be on the Circulation and Active Mobility Commission without needing to be reappointed.</p>	Circulation
Climate and Environmental Justice (CEJ)	NRC, TC	<p>Merge NRC and TC. Now that the Climate Action and Adaptation Plan (CAAP) is approved and moved to implementation phase, the subcommittee recommends the NRC and TC charges be adjusted to reflect this reality. The skill sets on the two commissions are necessary for a successful, well-coordinated approach to implementing the CAAP, including a strong focus on planning, maintaining, and expanding a healthy urban forest.</p> <p>Note that tree removal requests would be moved from the purview of this commission to a separate “Tree Removal Committee” composed of subject matter professionals, on the model of the City’s Subdivision Committee. The group would hold publicly noticed and open meetings, and decisions would remain appealable to the City Council.</p>	Conservation, Environmental Justice

		<p>All current members of the NRC and TC would be invited to be on the Climate and Environmental Justice Commission without needing to be reappointed.</p>	
Equity and Culture (ECC)	HRC, CAC	<p>Merge HRC and CAC. The subcommittee recommends that the new ECC continue the work of the Human Relations Commission and Civic Arts Commission, but leverage existing opportunities to utilize civic arts as an important tool to promote equity, mutual respect, and cultural diversity, especially through events, community discussions, and public artwork.</p> <p>Some of the listed responsibilities of the Civic Arts Commission, such as Individual public art maintenance, would be coordinated by staff. .</p> <p>All current members of the HRC and CAC would be invited to be on the Equity and Culture Commission without needing to be reappointed.</p>	Environmental Justice
Fiscal (FC)	FBC, UC	<p>Merge FBC and UC. The FBC and the UC both advise the City Council on fiscal issues, with similar skill sets. Combining the responsibilities of each commission into a Fiscal Commission would provide the City Council with a more holistic view of the City's financial picture and its effects on stakeholders, considering all funds (General, Enterprise, Special, etc.).</p> <p>All current members of the FBC and UC would be invited to be on the Fiscal Commission without needing to be reappointed.</p>	Advise on various elements at Council request
Open Space and Habitat (OSH)	(same)	No change at present	Open Space, Conservation
Recreation and Parks (RPC)	(same)	No change at present	Advise on various elements at Council request
Planning (PC)	PC, HRMC	<p>Eventually merge the HRMC responsibilities into the PC. Many of the underlying issues that the PC deals with are similar to those of the HRMC, and the staffing is the same. Additionally, the Downtown Plan has specifically removed HRMC from any discussion or actions on properties within the plan area, where most of the previous focus on historic resources has been. Expertise in historic matters can be added</p>	Land Use

		<p>to the PC scope during future recruitments and existing PC members can be offered training opportunities in historic resource management. This would streamline the review process for development proposals.</p> <p>The subcommittee would need to work with staff and return to the Council with a proposal and a timeline for how best to achieve this merger.</p>	
Police Accountability (PAC)	(same)	No change at present.	Advise on various elements at Council request
Senior Citizens Commission (SCC)	(same)	No change at present.	Advise on various elements at Council request
Social Services Commission (SSC)	(same)	Direct the Council subcommittee to consider renaming the Social Services Commission to the “Affordable Housing Commission” and changing its focus of work to all issues around housing availability, affordability, and security. The non-housing responsibilities currently held by the commission would be reallocated to other commissions, especially the proposed Community Health Commission.	Housing
Community Health Commission (CHC) (PROPOSED)	Potential new commission	Direct the Council subcommittee to explore the creation of a “Community Health Commission,” with a strong focus on mental health, especially among vulnerable populations (aging adults, children, youth).	Advise on various elements at Council request

We stress our recommendation that all current commissioners who are willing remain on their commission until the end of their term (or they submit a resignation), even if it means larger-than-normal commissions over the next few years.