

February 17, 2009

To: SF Arts Commission Ad Hoc Committee

From: Rachelle Axel

Re: Suggestions for Consideration

In the eight years I have worked for the San Francisco Arts Commission, this agency has never successfully completed a strategic planning process.

Without this road map to guide the agency, when variables are introduced into our infrastructure, we lack an anchor of fundamental priorities, strategies and policies that would help ground us in decision making. These anchors would also help us respond consistently and confidently to community feedback and City Hall's push-back.

These variables include (but are not limited to):

- Financial recessions
- Financial windfalls
- Expansion opportunities
- New partnerships and collaborations
- Program restructuring
- Agency restructuring
- Internal initiatives
- New administrations

A request for a long-term planning process has repeatedly been called out, most recently at the Commission / Senior Staff Retreat in late November and again as these budget cutback exercises have rolled out.

Please consider the following:

- 1) The Mayor's budget is not submitted till June 1st.
- 2) While \$393,562 must be offered as agency cuts from SFAC's budget as soon as possible, consider February 20th as the beginning of the conversation, not the end of the conversation. (For example, on June 1, 2004, I received a lay-off notice; after efforts on behalf of SFAC leadership, that notice was rescinded on July 13, 2004. There was time at that late date to offer new scenarios to counter City Hall's initial demands.)
- 3) Senior staff should be engaged in agency reorganization discussions—individually and as a group.
- 4) Documents such as the San Francisco Arts Task Force Findings and Recommendations (2006), the Arts Element of the San Francisco Master Plan and recent SFAC retreat notes should be used as building blocks for this conversation.
- 5) Quickly convene community meetings to get broad constituency input.

I urge the committee to call for a planning process, to define the parameters and information required of such a planning process and to begin it as quickly as possible. Turning to other City agencies that have solid plans in place (such as Recreation & Parks, DCYF, SF Main Library, etc.) will provide helpful frameworks for this effort.

There will inevitably be more budget reductions later in this calendar year; a strategic plan will help us address the next wave of agency cuts and will help assuage any irreparable damage to SFAC's infrastructure.