

Date: March 27, 2019
W.I.: 1111
Referred by: Commission

ABSTRACT

Resolution No. 4372

Resolution of appreciation for Brenda Kahn upon her retirement from the Metropolitan Transportation Commission and Bay Area Toll Authority after 38 years of service.

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RE: Resolution of Appreciation for Brenda Kahn

METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Resolution No. 4372

WHEREAS, Brenda Kahn this month retired as Assistant Director for Legislation and Public Affairs after 38 years of trailblazing and dedicated service, helping to tell the story of Bay Area transportation, land use, environmental quality, and all things regional; and

WHEREAS, Brenda was hired in 1981 as MTC's editor on a temporary basis, yet her talent and contributions were so sorely needed and highly prized that she turned that temp opportunity into an MTC career that spanned nearly four decades — in the beginning penning and fact-checking the first *Regional Transit Guide*; writing for and later editing the agency's newsletter, *Transactions*, transforming it from a dry, bare-bones government house organ into an award-winning "magapaper" featuring stories written in a journalistic style with newsy leads, quotes and lively illustrations; and

WHEREAS, Brenda also wrote and/or edited MTC's award-winning annual reports, each one making a compelling case for regional infrastructure and policies that moved the Bay Area forward, always produced artfully and with a sophistication that at times led some to question whether they were in fact "too good for government work;" and

WHEREAS, after a few years Brenda was promoted to a senior-level position of special assistant to then-Executive Director Larry Dahms, helping with special projects that included the role of Commission Secretary with oversight of Commission meeting minutes and packets, as well as writing speeches, legislative testimony, news releases, regional transportation plans, special reports and the like, while supervising a growing public information department, and eventually also leading MTC's graphics department; and

WHEREAS, Brenda developed MTC's Community Art Program and ran it for 30-plus years, with hundreds of rotating shows in various gallery spaces, enlivening the work environment for staffers while giving Bay Area artists new opportunities and building ties to arts groups, including several phenomenal arts organizations in the disabled community; and

WHEREAS, when the digital age took hold and many paper documents were phased out, Brenda took on oversight of the agency's flagship website, introduced social media to MTC's communication toolbox and launched an electronic newsletter; and

WHEREAS, after earning her B.A. in Near Eastern Studies from UC Berkeley, where she was a staff writer for the *Daily Californian*, and her master's degree in journalism from the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University, Brenda was an editor for the American Medical Association Auxiliary, and an editor and researcher for *Runner's World* magazine and *San Jose Magazine*, and worked as a freelance journalist for numerous publications, including the League of Women Voters' *Bay Area Monitor*; and

WHEREAS, for 15 years Brenda has been a volunteer college essay coach at Berkeley High School and has taught journalism at City College of San Francisco; been active in a creative writing group, where she has written short plays that have been performed by working actors; was accepted into the competitive Squaw Valley Writers Workshop; served on the Board of Governors and chaired the venerable *San Francisco Public Relations Roundtable*; and contributed several personal essays and op-eds to the *San Francisco Chronicle*; and

WHEREAS, Brenda hired and trained many stellar public information officers during her tenure, all the while serving as a mentor, teaching them to write in the journalistic style ("don't bury the lede") and the importance of fact-checking ("if your mother says she loves you, check it out"); and

WHEREAS, Brenda has become "the voice of MTC," setting very high standards for communicating with the public and creating a culture of openness and transparency through the use of clear and compelling language; and

WHEREAS, Brenda has her fun side and is responsible for coining catchy terms for a number of MTC events and programs, including the YES! Conference (Youth for the Environment and Sustainability), the CASA housing initiative and the MetroTalks speaker series; and

WHEREAS, during her tenure, Brenda never really stopped working and was a nocturnal power-emailer, sending out a rapid-fire flurry of emails drafted and sent in feverish succession between 10 p.m. and 2 a.m., Pacific Time; and

WHEREAS, Brenda was raised in San Francisco and attended the legendary Lowell High School, has been married to her photographer husband Barrie for 30-plus years, raised four children (including identical twins) and a spoiled Boxer dog, and most recently became a grandparent to a new baby girl, Riley; and

WHEREAS, Brenda has been unable to shake two lifelong addictions: swimming in any and all beautiful pools she can find her way to, and being a fangirl to Gavin Newsom, with whom she has managed to be photographed on multiple occasions; and

WHEREAS, the task of writing resolutions of appreciation (such as this) for retiring staff and Commissioners usually fell to Brenda, and her departure indeed jeopardizes the unique quality, wit and accuracy to be imbued in such parting tributes henceforth; and

WHEREAS, Brenda has a nurturing side that is widely known among staff, and she has offered kindness, food, compassion, more food, and an attentive ear to anyone in need, and has dispensed invaluable advice to many at all ages and life stages; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the staff and Commissioners thank Brenda for cultivating communications excellence at MTC, for her creativity and artistic eye that served the agency so well in so many forms, and wishes her ample and well-deserved time to enjoy her granddaughter and family, for travel, swimming, writing, and all-around great living.

METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Scott Haggerty, Chair

The above resolution was approved by the Metropolitan Transportation Commission at a regular meeting of the Commission held in San Francisco, California, on March 27, 2019.