



Office of the Mayor

CONSENT CALENDAR
October 15, 2019

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council
 From: Mayor Arreguin and Councilmembers Kesarwani and Davila
 Subject: Grant Referral for Capoeira Arts Foundation

RECOMMENDATION

Refer a Grant of \$150,000 for the benefit of the Capoeira Arts Foundation (CAF) to the mid-year budget process to support their purchase of the Casa De Cultura-1901 San Pablo Ave-in partnership with BrasArte to create a permanent home for their organizations, their school, the United Capoeira Association (UCA) Berkeley, and for other Brazilian art forms.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

\$150,000 to be allocated from excess equity in consideration with other council referrals for the mid-year budget process.

CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS

The Capoeira Arts Foundation INC, (CAF) is a California 501(c)(3) not for profit Corporation located at 1901 San Pablo Avenue, Berkeley CA 94702. CAF has operated out of Berkeley California, led by Ubirajara Almeida, “Mestre Acordeon” for the last 38 years. Mestre Acordeon has been teaching here for 41 years. His school, as well as being a “second home” to local capoeiristas, attracts visitors from all over the world and is considered an icon in the national and international Capoeira community

The Mission of CAF is to create awareness of the depth and breadth of the African-Brazilian experience, with a strong focus on capoeira. To achieve its mission, CAF teaches capoeira and other related traditional art forms; presents artistic, social and musical, and cultural events that aim to strengthen the community; publishes written works, and produces musical recordings and documentary films.

Mestre Acordeon has been in Berkeley since 1997, and CAF was initially located at 2026 Addison St (now the Freight and Salvage). Upon moving to CAF has operated at 1901 San Pablo, at their Casa De Cultura (Brazilian Cultural Center), in partnership with [BrasArte](#) since 2008, another non-profit organization with a similar goal of preserving African Brazilian culture and arts. BrasArte had a studio for many years on Solano Ave called the World Dance Center. These organizations have more than a 70 year history in Berkeley. The organizations have made the Casa De Cultura a destination for local and

international musicians, capoeiristas, dancers, instrument makers, students of these cultural manifestations and the artists who visit to celebrate their craft in the space.

The lease on the Casa De Cultura (1901 San Pablo Ave) is up in December 2019. At a time when renter evictions are common, the owner of 1901 San Pablo has offered the organizations the unique opportunity to purchase the building and would like to facilitate this process. A grant from the City will go toward the \$600,000 down payment (\$200,000 has already been raised), with the balance to be raised through additional donations and an innovative community investment model. Without support from the City, the organizations risk losing their home and the City risks losing historic Berkeley arts non-profits and a longstanding cultural community center.

The building, Casa De Cultura, is uniquely developed to support the activities of both organizations. In 2008, the organizations made \$400,000 in capital investments at the signing of the initial lease. CAF and BrasArte engaged in a large scale remodel, adding four bathrooms, two changing rooms with showers, new doors, floors and storage space. They are unlikely to find another location in Berkeley, let alone the Bay Area that is as well suited to their needs. Even if they could identify a space, moving to another location in this real estate market would likely be prohibitive to one or both organizations. The opportunity to purchase the building stems from the owner's desire to support the continued presence of CAF and BrasArte in Berkeley, and the creativity and commitment of the organizations to make it happen.

Opportunities for the City to support the permanent preservation of historic cultural centers are rare. The purchase of their building would guarantee CAF and BrasArte's long term presence in Berkeley and would enable the organizations to expand their operations. Additionally, purchasing the building would open the door to further capital improvements, such as the development of onsite workforce housing that would provide much needed affordable housing for artists.

BACKGROUND

The Casa De Cultura and the organizations it houses, CAF and BrasArte, is a cultural and community anchor providing world class education in dance, capoeira, arts and music. Their celebrations, like the annual Levagem, bring the culture and spirit of Brazil to the streets of Berkeley. The Foundation in Berkeley is the flagship location and "Home Base" of their global capoeira community. They offer classes for adults and children of all ages, gender and ethnic backgrounds, regardless of ability to pay. Students come from around the world and make pilgrimages to the Mestre Acordeon's school as he is one of the most highly respected capoeira teachers in the world. He has been teaching in Berkeley for 41 years and in 2009 the City of Berkeley declared October 18th to be "Mestre Acordeon Day." Local students come from Alameda, Contra Costa, San Francisco and Marin Counties with many coming from the cities of Berkeley, El Cerrito, Richmond, Oakland, San Francisco, San Rafael, Walnut Creek, Santa Cruz, El Sobrante, Hayward and Alameda. ‘

The updated Arts and Culture Plan cites a Vision where:

- The City of Berkeley is a place where the arts are fully integrated into civic life and community identity.
- Our public spaces inspire, promote dialogue and serve to engage all who live and work in Berkeley, and all who visit our city.
- The city provides a supportive environment for artists and arts organizations to prosper and thrive. The arts are inclusive and empowering and serve to strengthen collaboration within our community
- Quality arts education for all ages inspires creativity, builds community and facilitates cross-cultural understanding.
- The economic contributions of local artists and arts organizations are valued, prioritized and supported.
- Berkeley is known regionally, nationally and internationally as a place where anyone can experience the transformative power of the arts in a variety of settings and locations.

The non-profits' purchase of the Casa De Cultura completely embodies this vision. Additionally, the organizations have expressed a commitment to expand their collaboration with local schools for education and workshop experiences, which would contribute to goal 3 of the Arts and Culture Plan to "expand high quality and equitable arts education"¹. Currently, they have programs in Malcolm X and Cragmont, and over the years have run capoeira programs in nearly all Berkeley public schools.

Grants like this to support non-profit arts organizations have precedent in Berkeley. In 2015 the City Council voted to allocate similarly sized grants to Kala Art Institute and the UC Theater. At the time, both organizations needed support from the City to upgrade their facilities that would make their operations viable and sustainable for a long time.²

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

No environmental effects.

CONTACT PERSON

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¹ City of Berkeley Arts and Culture Plan, 2018-2027 Update, Page 32

² [November 3, 2015 Berkeley City Council Agenda, Allocation of Grant Funds to U.C. Theatre and Kala Art Institute](#)

