



Rashi Kesarwani
Councilmember District 1

CONSENT CALENDAR
October 29, 2019

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Councilmembers Rashi Kesarwani, Lori Droste, Susan Wengraf,
and Sophie Hahn

Subject: Referral to the Civic Arts Commission to develop a grant program available for
arts and cultural organizations to support retaining and improving creative spaces
for artists

RECOMMENDATION

Referral to the Civic Arts Commission to prioritize within their current Work Plan creating a process for awarding competitive grants to Berkeley-based arts and cultural organizations that will help support their ability to stay in Berkeley.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Staff time to develop a grant program.

CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS

A stated priority within the City's current strategic plan is providing state-of-the-art amenities such as those our arts and cultural institutions make available. More than 150 Berkeley arts and cultural institutions enrich our community and provide a significant economic engine that generates millions of dollars and employs thousands of workers. However, rising real estate costs and lack of affordable housing, office, and studio space of any kind pose a significant challenge to the ability of these institutions to remain in Berkeley.¹

This referral to the Civic Arts Commission asks that they prioritize within their current work plan the development of a competitive grant program framework through which any arts and cultural institution would be able to apply for City funds to assist in staying in Berkeley, such as through capital improvements, the acquisition of a permanent location, or temporary rental assistance.

According to The City of Berkeley Arts and Culture Plan, 2018-2027 Update, the first of the five strategic goals towards actualizing our City's vision for the arts is to "support the long-term sustainability of the arts and culture sector by expanding the availability of affordable housing and spaces for both artists and arts organizations."² In an effort to

¹ See April 25, 2019 [Berkeleyside](#) article: "Why new office space in Berkeley is so hard to find."

² City of Berkeley Arts and Culture Plan, 2018-2027 Update, page iii

ensure equitable distribution of City funds for these purposes, this referral requests the creation of a competitive grant application and fair selection process that would be available to any Berkeley art and cultural institution.

In providing a framework for a grant application and selection process for arts and cultural organizations, the Civic Arts Commission may consider the following:

- Recommending an annual award amount (or range) available to each institution;
- Recommending funding stream(s) to fund the grant from existing or new sources and a total amount to make available;
- Establishing a fair and transparent process for reviewing grant applications, including determining the reviewing body (i.e., Office of Economic Development staff or Civic Arts Commission);
- How the funds are to be used.

BACKGROUND

On January 26, 2016, the Berkeley City Council approved capital improvement grants totaling \$250,000 to the U.C. Theatre (\$150,000) and Kala Art Institute (\$100,000) to assist with critically needed facilities upgrades. Without these funds, these anchor art institutions were at risk of becoming non-operational. On the October 15, 2019 City Council agenda, the City Council considered a grant totaling \$150,000 to the Capoeira Arts Foundation (CAF) to assist this globally recognized arts and cultural institution in purchasing their current building on San Pablo Avenue in Berkeley. Without this financial support to assist in purchasing the building, Capoeira would likely be forced to leave Berkeley due to a prohibitive rent increase once their lease expires at the end of this year.

Many arts institutions struggle to remain in Berkeley due to the high cost of living and housing. Given that the City has already supported U.C. Theatre and Kala Art Institute, and Capoeira Arts Foundation is seeking assistance, it is apparent that an open and transparent process that enables any Berkeley-based arts and cultural organization to apply for funding would be an equitable approach to handling this challenge. Smaller and less established arts institutions often do not have the capacity to raise the necessary funds for capital improvements, site acquisition, or temporary rental assistance.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

To the extent that arts and cultural organizations can acquire their buildings and develop on-site housing, this item could reduce vehicle miles traveled.

CONTACT PERSON

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