



MEMORANDUM

March 7, 2025

TO: MEMBERS, PORT COMMISSION
Hon. Kimberly Brandon, President
Hon. Gail Gilman, Vice President
Hon. Willie Adams
Hon. Stephen Engblom
Hon. Steven Lee

FROM: Elaine Forbes
Executive Director

SUBJECT: Informational presentation on a two-year license agreement for a proposed arts and culture activation at Pier 29 by Community Arts Stabilization Trust (CAST), a Bay Area nonprofit leader in arts real estate development.

DIRECTOR'S RECOMMENDATION: Information Only – No Action Required

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Community Arts Stabilization Trust (CAST), a Bay Area nonprofit leader in arts real estate development, community partnerships and property management of arts facilities, has approached the Port with a proposal for a minimum 2-year license for interim activation of Pier 29 as an arts and culture hub. The CAST proposal includes a partnership with the Hawkins Project, a San Francisco-based foundation associated with author Dave Eggers' youth and cultural nonprofit endeavors, and JD Beltran, an artist, educator and long-time member of the San Francisco Arts Commission.

CAST proposes a two-year activation of the Pier 29 that will include the City's largest combined artist studio and exhibition space, as well as a flexible, convertible space for cultural programming and events that can accommodate up to 2,500 people. Overall, CAST projects annual public engagement to exceed 100,000 visitors/attendees per year through a combination of daytime exhibition and evening event foot traffic.

Key features of the proposal include:

- A limited-term arts and culture pop-up that utilizes portable workspaces and staging. It will not require major tenant improvements or trigger building upgrades, thus delivering a quick transformation of a long-dormant building.
- Daily activity including a walk-in gallery with rotating exhibits, a visitor information kiosk for cruise and other visitors and a daytime presence of visual artists using space to make and display work as well as learn in a residency setting
- A publicly accessible venue that will provide arts and culture organizations with low-cost event and exhibition space in a central downtown location and free and ticketed programming to the public
- A partnership with CAST for day-to-day building operations and hosting of weekly curated events, while also allowing for periodic Port-initiated special events

The proposed use will deliver a new downtown cultural destination to the Northern Waterfront between the Ferry Building and Fisherman's Wharf, providing consistent placemaking with daily exhibits and world class special events and performances on the weekends and evenings. Additionally, this activation will (i) deliver affordable artist space, (ii) create workforce development and jobs; (iii) support area businesses; and (iv) create additional real estate activity and interest in the Northern Waterfront.

After prior market-based efforts to activate the building proved infeasible, CAST's approach will involve very minimal building improvements and draw on philanthropic fundraising and event/exhibition-based revenue for near-term activation.

CAST aims to begin public programs in late 2025.

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT

A new arts and culture hub at Pier 29 will support Port's following Strategic Objectives:

Economic Recovery:

Pier 29 has been vacant since the America's Cup ended in 2013. Although interim, CAST's proposed use will generate new, stable income for the Port over 2 years. An arts and culture hub will draw foot traffic 7 days a week to support Port tenant businesses, which have struggled since the pandemic.

Economic Growth:

Port and CAST investment in minor but critical improvements to Pier 29 will improve the usability of the property, increase its value as an event venue, and potentially catalyze increased investment interest in the building and in the Northern Waterfront.

Equity:

CAST's activation of Pier 29 will open it to the public, providing free and affordable programming to diverse audiences. It will also provide economic opportunity to arts and culture workers. Finally, it will provide affordable event space to a range of arts and

culture organizations, including those lower-capacity groups and those from the Southeast waterfront.

Engagement and Public Awareness:

CAST's activation of Pier 29 will include a public lobby, open daily, which will allow visitors to view and purchase art by local artists. It will also function as a visitor kiosk, providing awareness of area cultural attractions.

BACKGROUND

Despite its compelling location, Pier 29 has been vacant since America's Cup in 2013. Since then, Port staff have explored long-term development opportunities through solicitation and short-term "public benefit" activation strategies. In 2016, Port pursued a lease for occupancy of a portion of the facility as a "makers market" and retail outlet but ultimately the deal did not materialize. More recently, the site was used for special events and was under a license with Metro Events as an overflow facility for Pier 27, though utilized infrequently. The license with Metro Events ended in 2022. The facility is currently used for occasional parking and infrequent, very short special events. The Port has no current projected revenue from Pier 29 in 2025.

Given the raw condition of the facility, limited infrastructure, and occupancy thresholds that trigger significant upgrades, long-term leasing or development opportunities are limited, especially in the current economic climate. The building's challenges include:

- Occupancy limited to low-intensity warehouse (type S) uses
 - Weight limits due to pier/substructure conditions
 - Occupancy for short-term special events possible only with added safety measures (e.g. fire watch)
- Power capacity for exclusive Pier 29 use is extremely limited
- Limited restroom facilities
- Requires fire protection operations planning
- Cruise operations impose restrictions on use and access
- Decreasing demand for dead storage, compounded by the Pier's floor load limits

The Port's only recent successes in generating revenues at Pier 29 have flowed from broader City programs driven by extraordinary events (Covid protective equipment storage during the pandemic; federal security agency use during the APEC conference). Because of this, Port staff have been motivated to entertain creative ways to use the space to facilitate activity in the area, capture cruise visitors, and help support the viability of neighboring uses (e.g. Pier 23 cafe).

Members of the CAST team, writer and literary nonprofit leader Dave Eggers, and JD Beltran, a long-time member of the San Francisco Arts Commission, inquired about available space in early 2024. Over the last several months a dialogue has continued that materialized in the contemplated proposal.

TEAM

Founded in 2013, CAST's nonprofit mission is to create and stabilize equitable physical spaces for arts and cultural organizations at a time when artists and nonprofits are increasingly priced out of their homes and workspaces. CAST has a capable team and track record of success permitting, renovating and activating complex commercial buildings. CAST projects include: the Counterpulse Theater, Luggage Store Gallery, 447 Minna St, and City-owned property such as the Geneva Car Barn. CAST has most recently completed acquisition of the Warfield building at 988 Market St in partnership with public radio station KALW, as well as a new cultural center in SOMA at 457 Minna St in partnership with the Filipino American Development Foundation. In East Oakland, CAST is currently in active development of a new major cultural hub in partnership with the Black Cultural Zone CDC.

By Q1 2025, CAST is forecast to own, operate and/or manage 300,000 sq ft of affordable arts space in the Bay Area. Not only does CAST provide a conduit to the artist and cultural community, but they have an experienced team that can manage and facilitate property and sub-contracts with artists, cultural groups and event producers, acting as property manager and steward of the facility. This role will be particularly important as they engage lower-capacity cultural partners, including those from the Southern waterfront, who have lacked easy and affordable access to Port buildings and public spaces for programming.

Eggers is best known as a writer, editor and publisher, who also established the literary nonprofit 826 Valencia, which has locations around the world. His Hawkins Project creates and funds courageous literary, visual, public and other creative works, specializing in quickstarting projects that work with community partners to create welcoming spaces that are flexible, responsive to local needs, and bring world attention to innovative neighborhood projects.

Beltran is founder and directs the Center for Creative Sustainability in San Francisco and has served on the City's Arts Commission for many years. She is an artist, educator, and cultural leader who has advanced projects, groundbreaking solutions, and organizational initiatives that address cultural, social, environmental, and economic challenges.

NEXT STEPS

Port staff welcomes feedback from the Port Commission and the public. Port staff continues to work on the terms of the license agreement and will return at a future Commission hearing for action.

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