

LEATHER & LGBTQ
CULTURAL DISTRICT



LEATHER & LGBTQ CULTURAL DISTRICT

Cultural History, Housing, and
Economic Sustainability Strategies
(CHHESS) Report

April 2024



Mayor's Office of
Housing and Community
Development

RAMAYTUSH OHLONE LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We acknowledge that we are on the unceded ancestral homeland of the Ramaytush Ohlone who are the original inhabitants of the San Francisco Peninsula. As the indigenous stewards of this land and in accordance with their traditions, the Ramaytush Ohlone have never ceded, lost nor forgotten their responsibilities as the caretakers of this place, as well as for all peoples who reside in their traditional territory. As guests, we recognize that we benefit from living and working on their traditional homeland. We wish to pay our respects by acknowledging the ancestors, elders and relatives of the Ramaytush Community and by affirming their sovereign rights as First Peoples.

– *Gregg Castro / Jonathan Cordero*
(*Ramaytush Ohlone*)





**“United, we preserve, enhance,
and advocate for the continuity
and vitality of the Kinky and
Queer communities of San
Francisco’s LEATHER & LGBTQ
Cultural District.”**

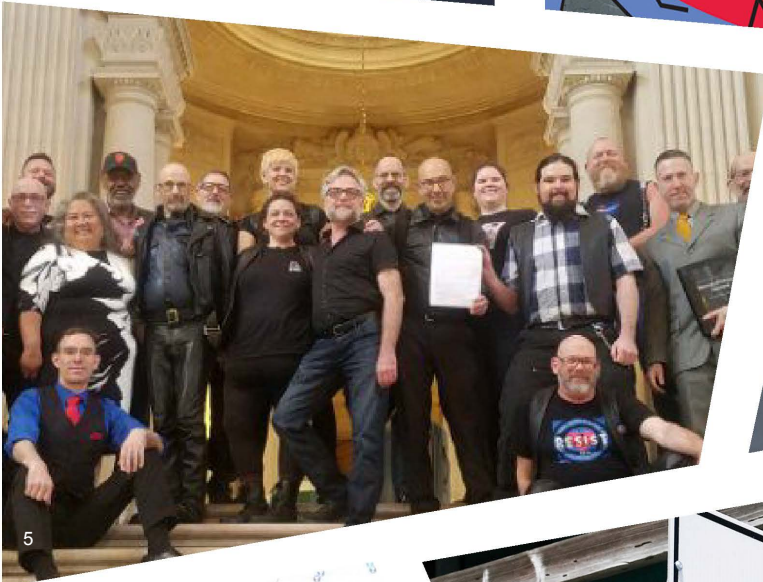
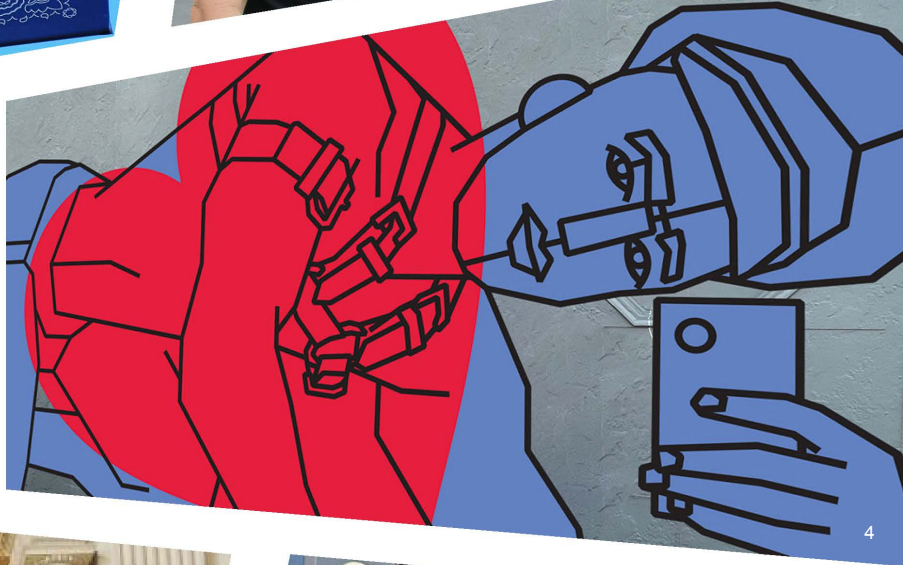


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CITY ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

San Francisco's Cultural Districts Program reimagines community and City partnership.

The LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District acknowledges the administrative support and subject area expertise provided by the City, in particular the Mayor's Office of Housing and Community Development, the Office of Economic and Workforce Development, the Planning Department, and the Arts Commission.



MAYOR'S OFFICE OF
HOUSING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT





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The LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District would also like to thank the many community members and organizational partners who engaged in surveys, focus groups, and interviews to provide the data and ideas that are summarized in this report.





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LETTER FROM THE LEATHER & LGBTQ CULTURAL DISTRICT EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

For generations, San Francisco has been a center of Leather and LGBTQ culture and community that has attracted people from across the nation and around the world.

Our denizens' tireless activism has helped make the City a beacon of tolerance and acceptance, yet one that still faces displacement and erasure. Our community has continuously struggled against displacement and discrimination from its earliest founding, when redevelopment efforts and official pressure in the 1960's led to our institutions and venues relocating in the South of Market neighborhood (SoMa).

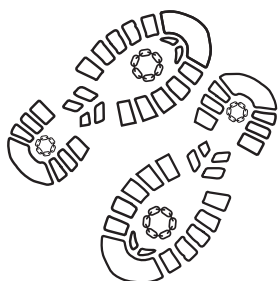


Bob Goldfarb
Executive Director

*Photo Credit:
Vince Sparacio*

When SoMa again faced serious redevelopment pressure that would have pushed out Leather, LGBTQ, Filipino, Black, low-income and working class communities, Kathleen Connell and Michael Valerio organized the first Folsom Street Fair in 1984. Titled "Megahood," the fair galvanized and united an intersectional coalition of communities, local businesses, and service agencies. It demonstrated that the neighborhood was a vibrant and established home to a diverse cross section of San Francisco, not simply a blank slate for large-scale redevelopment. The LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District aims to carry on this lineage of maintaining a home for our culture, our institutions, and our people in the face of neighborhood change.

While progress has been made in terms of City policies towards Leather and LGBTQ communities since 1984, we still face many challenges, from a lack of cultural understanding of Leather and kink to the regular loss of vital community spaces. In just the past five years, we have lost many important Leather and LGBTQ institutions in SoMa to rising rents and development pressure. The accelerating loss of safe spaces for our community to gather and share ideas puts at risk our entire culture as an asset in San Francisco. While the Folsom Street Fair began as an activist protest, it has become an asset to the City that annually draws hundreds of thousands of people and garners media coverage for the City from Buenos Aires to Helsinki. Many varied forces are serving to destabilize our assets which are also the City's assets. While change is necessary for any city to move forward and remain vibrant, we aim to work with the City to welcome the new, while stabilizing the communities that already call this space home.



Drafted over the past four years with deep community engagement, this CHHESS report embodies the core tenets of San Francisco's Leather and LGBTQ culture. It articulates many community challenges and outlines paths to find solutions to



LETTER FROM THE LEATHER & LGBTQ CULTURAL DISTRICT EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

address them. This work feels especially dire at a moment when Leather, LGBTQ and especially trans rights, history, and cultural expression are under attack nationally.

We thank the many Leather and LGBTQ community members who have contributed to this report, to our history, and to our shared spaces within San Francisco. We hope that this accurately reflects your visions for our community's future. We would also like to thank the many City employees within MOHCD, OEWD, SFAC, the Planning Department, and the many other departments who contributed to the report, especially the Cultural Districts Program Managers who have guided us along the way.

Bob Goldfarb

Executive Director

LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District

Friday, March 1, 2024



LETTER FROM THE MOHCD CULTURAL DISTRICTS PROGRAM MANAGER

San Francisco has long been a hub for innovation, social justice movements, and cultural pride.

It's a recognized bastion of sexual freedom and expression—the first US city to issue same-sex marriage licenses and home of the kink-positive Folsom Street Fair, now in its 40th year. It is only natural that it is also the location of the world's first city-recognized LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District, which works to preserve the community's noteworthy contributions and cultivate an atmosphere of safety, vitality, and creativity among its constituents.



Grace Jiyun Lee
*Cultural Districts
Program Manager*

The Cultural Districts program, inaugurated in 2018, adds to San Francisco's ethos of inclusion and social change. The program provides a platform for historically oppressed communities and the City to collaborate on strategic priorities for place-keeping and place-making. Managed by the Mayor's Office of Housing and Community Development in partnership with the Office of Economic and Workforce Development, Planning Department, and Arts Commission, the program—and this co-written Cultural History, Housing, and Economic Sustainability Strategies (CHHESS) Report—signal a partnership between the City and underrepresented groups to achieve a shared and feasible vision for preserving cultural assets and communities at risk of displacement.

This CHHESS Report is a roadmap for community stabilization. The strategies detailed within reflect a multi-year engagement process and build upon previous and current work underway. We know the path to stabilization will not be easy, but this report signals a path forward that has been informed by a spirit of compassion, and respect. With thoughtful implementation, the approaches will help ensure that residents, visitors, businesses, community organizations, and cultural institutions and practices will continue and thrive.

Congratulations to the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District on what they've accomplished with this report. It has been an honor and privilege to learn about the community's history and legacy and work together to envision its future.

Grace Jiyun Lee
Cultural Districts Program Manager
Mayor's Office of Housing and Community Development

Friday, March 1, 2024



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The western South of Market (SoMa) neighborhood has been a gathering space for San Francisco’s Leather and LGBTQ communities for decades, as the home of many of the businesses, organizations, and events that keep these communities thriving.

The LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District was formed in western SoMa in 2018 specifically to preserve, celebrate, and build upon this history, as one of several cultural districts created to respond to citywide cultural displacement.

This Cultural History, Housing, and Economic Sustainability Strategies (CHHESS) report lays out a roadmap for the District’s work, as legislatively required by all cultural districts supported by the San Francisco Mayor’s Office of Housing and Community Development’s Cultural Districts program. Data for this report was gathered through various engagement methods including focus groups, interviews, and surveys of community members. This engagement was then supplemented with archival research by historians working with the Cultural District, along with quantitative data compiled by City departments in the Cultural Districts working group.



This report documents the history of Leather and LGBTQ communities in SoMa, along with the current state of the community...

Using these various data sources, this report documents the history of Leather and LGBTQ communities in SoMa, along with the current state of the community and the assets that make this community unique. The report also documents threats to these assets’ preservation, including the closure of community spaces from rising rents and development pressures, the high cost of living and operating a business in SoMa, and a broader lack of understanding of Leather and kink culture. The report also documents the ways that City departments currently work with Leather and LGBTQ communities to address these challenges, to give context to the recommendations made for additional work.

Below are the thirty-two recommendations that District staff crafted from community feedback, broken into the six categories used across all cultural districts’ CHHESS reports: (1) historic and cultural preservation, (2) land use, (3) tenant empowerment and eviction protection, (4) arts and culture, (5) economic and workforce development, and (6) cultural competency. These recommendations are meant to guide the District’s work and collaboration with the City moving forward.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Historic and cultural preservation: Researching, teaching, and preserving Leather and LGBTQ culture

1. Investigate ways to streamline City processes for protecting and commemorating historic Leather and LGBTQ sites within San Francisco.
2. Continue research on identified historic sites within the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District.
3. Secure resources and space for Leather & LGBTQ archival work.
4. Conduct outreach to residential and commercial tenants and owners about local Leather and LGBTQ sites and culture.
5. Support educational opportunities around Leather, LGBTQ, and kink cultures.
6. Identify funding opportunities to create and install the Leather History Cruise commemorative plaques.

Land use: Shaping community through the built environment

7. Explore strategies to open a LEATHER & LGBTQ Community Center within the District.
8. Explore opportunities to build real estate capacity amongst LEATHER and LGBTQ community members to support stabilization.
9. Identify and utilize vacant space within the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District for community events and new businesses.
10. Explore ways to update zoning rules within the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District to permit and allow for a critical concentration of adult and leather businesses.
11. Explore the development of LEATHER & LGBTQ Special Area Design Standards to preserve District history.
12. Include LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District representation in local planning processes that impact our district.

Tenant empowerment and eviction protection: Fostering housing access and innovation

13. Develop partnerships with City departments, non-profit organizations, and housing rights advocates within San Francisco to ensure Leather and LGBTQ community needs are reflected and supported.
14. Support models of LGBTQ and/or communal housing within the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District.
15. Expand dignified and humane housing and sanitation options for the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District's unhoused community members.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Arts and culture: Facilitating public art, sustaining nightlife, and diversifying event offerings

16. Create a cohesive public art strategy or plan for the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District.
17. Explore a streamlined method to allow Cultural Districts to install public art and district placemaking elements on City infrastructure within their district boundaries.
18. Create a Nightlife and Entertainment Revitalization and Sustainability Plan for the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District.
19. Research and develop resources to support BIPOC, trans, women, sex worker, and disabled Leather and LGBTQ community members in organizing new cultural events within the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District.
20. Create a registry of potential locations in which to gather and host community events and programming.
21. Strengthen connections with LEATHER and LGBTQ communities outside of San Francisco.

Economic and workforce development: Resourcing Leather and LGBTQ businesses, events, and community members

22. Explore ways to simplify permitting processes for new and existing businesses, events, and organizations within the Leather and LGBTQ Cultural District.
23. Develop and market Leather and LGBTQ businesses and organizations within the District.
24. Support an entrepreneur training program for Leather and LGBTQ community members.
25. Organize employment resources and connections for BIPOC, trans, women, sex worker, and disabled members of the Leather and LGBTQ communities.

Cultural competency: Cultivating understanding and appreciation

26. Develop educational materials to familiarize City government staff with specific cultural norms and issues faced by the Leather and LGBTQ communities.
27. Collect more robust and accurate data about San Francisco's LGBTQ communities.
28. Create a task force to explore community safety and conflict intervention strategies.
29. Pilot a "harm reduction" approach to substance use within the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District.
30. Include input and leadership from local sex worker advocates when creating programs and regulations about the sex trade.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

31. Create clear paths to LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District leadership for and increase engagement among BIPOC, women, trans, sex worker, and disabled community members.
32. Work with community and City partners to improve access to culturally competent health resources for Leather and LGBTQ community members within the District.

Moving forward, the District and City will continue to work together to implement these recommendations, and will aim to evaluate progress on the report every three years and update the report every six years.



VISION AND MISSION OF THIS REPORT

VISION

This report envisions the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District as a space in which Leather and LGBTQ community members feel connected to a deep sense of history, are safe to express themselves and their kinks, and through this expression can find community and have experiences not offered anywhere else within the city or the world. It envisions the District as a home free from displacement for both our community's organizations and diverse members—including Leather folks, LGBTQ and transgender folks, BIPOC, women and femmes, disabled folks, and working-class folks—and centers inclusion in its programming and identity.

MISSION

The mission of the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District and of this Cultural History, Housing, and Economic Sustainability Strategies (CHHESS) report is to celebrate and protect the culture of past, current, and future members of San Francisco's Leather and LGBTQ communities. We specifically aim to do this by:

1. Creating an atmosphere that supports our community members' cultural and commercial endeavors, as well as our community-oriented organizations, institutions, events, and businesses;
2. Preserving and promoting the District as a local, national, and international resource for LEATHER and LGBTQ community members, and as a culturally and commercially vibrant neighborhood;
3. Documenting our communities' diverse histories and cultural practices for all persons to learn from and find lineage within;
4. Securing housing, healthcare, economic and artistic resources, and physical spaces that are welcoming to and reflective of the Leather and LGBTQ communities.



METHODS FOR CREATING THIS REPORT

The methods used to create this CHHESS report had two main goals. First, to facilitate deep community engagement and ownership in the final result through the process of identifying both community assets and the challenges that the report's recommendations would address. Second, to facilitate collaboration between District staff, the communities they represent, and the City departments who support the Cultural Districts program, to create a final document that truly felt co-authored by the community and the City. This section reviews these methods in greater detail.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TO DOCUMENT CULTURE AND UNDERSTAND CHALLENGES

To document community practices and history and develop an intimate understanding of the challenges that became the basis for the strategies in this report, the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District broadly engaged Leather and LGBTQ community members who have ties to Western SoMa.

The primary engagement method used was focus groups, which are sessions in which a group facilitator asks a series of questions in a conversational format, and then records participant comments to be summarized and studied later. Focus groups often center a specific issue or topic area. For this report, the District hosted eight focus groups targeting either a particular topic or segment of our community whose input we wanted to highlight. These eight topics were:

- BIPOC community members
- Transgender community members
- Women community members
- Sex workers
- Arts and culture
- Economic vitality
- Kink and Leather
- Tenants' rights

Focus groups were hosted between July and November 2020. To invite community members to these sessions, the District partnered with community-focused organizations and leaders, conducted personal outreach, and advertised sessions on the District's social media platforms. Participants varied in age, ethnicity, gender identity, socio-economic class, and sexual orientation, which helped District staff understand priorities among different segments of our communities.



METHODS FOR CREATING THIS REPORT

Due to concerns related to COVID-19, the District hosted all focus groups virtually. Meetings were facilitated by community leaders from each demographic. At each session, participants were then asked variations of the following questions:

- What qualities make SoMa special?
- What (personal or historical) connections do you see between your communities and the SoMa neighborhood?
- What makes SoMa events and locations feel welcoming or unwelcoming to your communities? Please give examples of specific locations/events if applicable.
- What type of community support would you like to see from the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District?
- What type of policy support would you like to see from the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District?
- In what ways could a Leather and LGBTQ community center benefit your communities in SoMa?
- Is there anything we missed that you would like to add?

Facilitators collected participant feedback through an online platform called Jamboard, which allowed participants to post their responses on digital post-it notes. While notes were visible to all members as they were posted, each individual post was made anonymously. After a five minute posting session, facilitators then led a group discussion to dive deeper into the participants' responses. The Jamboard and notes were transcribed and coded by themes, which allowed District staff to summarize community findings and values and then create corresponding goals and recommendations, detailed in a final report for each focus group. These recommendations then inspired the final strategies in this CHHESS report.

The District also conducted personal interviews to supplement these focus groups. Interviews were hosted with several community and organizational leaders and with people who had been unable to attend the larger focus groups, with a focus on hearing from segments of the Leather and LGBTQ communities often underrepresented in public outreach. Given that fewer people were present for these interviews, interviewers were able to ask more in-depth questions to better understand community challenges.

The District also conducted two surveys during the process of creating this report. The first survey focused on gathering challenges that Leather and LGBTQ community members face and potential solutions to these challenges. The second survey asked respondents to contribute to a list of community "assets," including community spaces, events, and cultural practices. Both surveys were disseminated through the District's newsletter, and the latter was also administered in person at the 2023 Folsom Street Fair.



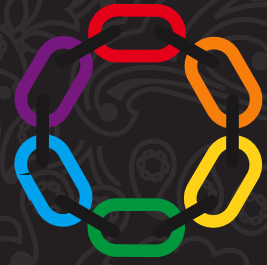
METHODS FOR CREATING THIS REPORT

DRAFTING THE REPORT

Once findings and recommendations were compiled across all focus group discussions, a team of District staff, board members, and a community consultant distilled feedback into many of the sections of this report, including the mission and vision, the challenges faced by Leather and LGBTQ communities, and the strategies. Some strategies came directly from focus group members; if a focus group did not produce a strategy to address an issue that members articulated, staff researched & proposed research-based strategies to address those issues. Staff drafted history and culture sections from feedback in focus groups and built on the work of Leather and LGBTQ historians.

Once completed, District staff shared a strategies draft with the City's Cultural Districts program working group composed of staff from MOHCD, OEWD, the Planning Department, and SFAC, who coordinated with their departments to provide specific feedback. The working group and District staff met to discuss feedback and edit these strategies several times before the committee shared the strategies with department directors for their final review. The District then presented strategies back to community members through a town hall to get additional feedback before finalizing.

City staff, guided by MOHCD and District requests, also provided data that helped to paint a more detailed current picture of the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District. This included data points like the average age and income within the District, employment data, and the location of public art pieces. It also included a list of the work that each department involved in the Cultural Districts programs' working group does with Leather and LGBTQ communities in SoMa and elsewhere in the City.



LEATHER & LGBTQ
CULTURAL DISTRICT

The Cultural Districts Program



THE CULTURAL DISTRICTS PROGRAM

Evolution of the Historic Preservation Field to Cultural Heritage Preservation

Historically, the field of historic preservation has focused mostly on tangible physical elements of the built environment such as architecturally significant buildings and landmarks, rather than intangible assets.

While successful in protecting certain places from displacement, it tends to miss the full story of how communities congregate and how culturally significant spaces have been and continue to be used. Its effectiveness can also be limited for communities whose spaces are not deemed “worthy” of preservation or have already been displaced. Therefore in recent decades, the field has consciously expanded to include focus on intangible elements of heritage such as “customs and practices, artistic expressions, beliefs, languages, folklore, traditions, and even cuisine,” which opens new possibilities for preserving those elements.¹



A focus on preserving intangible cultural assets has also blossomed for over a decade in San Francisco

This trend has been seen at the global level. In 2003, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) adopted the *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, which recognized that “globalization and social transformation” have produced “grave threats of deterioration, disappearance and destruction of...intangible cultural heritage, in particular owing to a lack of resources for safeguarding such heritage.”

A focus on preserving intangible cultural assets has also blossomed for over a decade in San Francisco, a city known globally for its cultural pride and where collective movements for justice have been born. In May 2011, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors’ (BoS) Land Use and Economic Development Committee called a hearing to review the impact of existing historic and cultural preservation policies on other City policy goals and on the need to bolster these efforts, recognizing the potential to link preservation to broader community needs. The Committee then held another hearing a year later in May 2012 to specifically review efforts to preserve the City’s Japantown as one of the last three remaining in the United States, as well as the possibility of creating “Social Heritage Special Use Districts” to preserve Filipino and LGBTQ history as had been recommended in the recently-published Western SoMa Community Plan. In December 2012, the City’s Historic Preservation Commission (HPC), which makes recommendations to the BoS regarding the designation of city landmarks and historic districts, then endorsed a new resolution calling for “further exploration of a city program to document, designate, and incentivize social and cultural heritage,” cementing a shift in the City’s preservation efforts towards intangible cultural assets.

1 San Francisco Planning Department, “Cultural Heritage,” <https://sfplanning.org/cultural-heritage>.



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This shift was also reflected in its planning efforts from this time, most notably in San Francisco's Japantown. The San Francisco Planning Department had begun outreach for a Japantown neighborhood plan in 2006, and by 2010 was seeking plan approval from the City's Planning Commission. However many in the Japantown community expressed concern that the plan failed to adequately address concerns of business displacement, and recommended that the Commission reject the Planning Department's proposal. The Commission agreed with the community, and required the Planning Department to initiate a more extensive community-led engagement process, initiating the process for what became the Japantown Community Heritage and Economic Sustainability Strategy (JCHES) report. With an extensive needs assessment, an engagement process that sought feedback from over twenty-five stakeholder groups and built out a large social heritage inventory, and more than a dozen community-designed recommendations, the report created a new threshold for community planning in San Francisco. The Planning Department also worked around this time to bring community leadership into the drafting of the aforementioned Western SoMa Community Plan by creating the Western SoMa Citizens Planning Task Force and inventorying community assets.

While historic preservation methods, such as historic designation, complemented new strategies, communities were pushing for ways that they could serve as the primary agents for developing programs where they could recognize and support their own cultural heritage assets. As City processes inched closer to engaging differently with communities, these efforts were not enough to respond to the loss and displacement that they were facing. They looked to the City as a partner to provide the framework and tools needed, which required multiple departmental efforts from Planning, the Office of Economic and Workforce Development (OEWD), the Mayor's Office of Housing and Community Development (MOHCD) and the Arts Commission. The San Francisco Heritage nonprofit memorialized these multiple efforts in San Francisco and provided recommendations in their 2014 report, "Sustaining San Francisco's Living History, Strategies for Conserving Cultural Heritage Assets in 2014."

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CULTURAL DISTRICTS PROGRAM

While Planning efforts worked with communities to preserve intangible cultural assets, it was not until 2014 that the structure for today's Cultural Districts program was established through the efforts of the Calle 24 Latino Cultural District. Latinx organizers in the Mission had been concerned about rising levels of displacement for several decades, and saw in the designation of an official district an opportunity to protect and recognize their local assets. The OEWD, through the Invest In Neighborhoods program, worked alongside a coalition of Latinx organizers in the city's Mission District and their City Supervisor. The program's goal was to strengthen and revitalize commercial districts throughout the city by marshaling and deploying resources from multiple departments and nonprofit partners. These resources included neighborhood improvement grants to support community economic development efforts, which awarded a grant to Calle 24 SF to lead a community planning process that would develop a program to support the continued vitality of the newly-formed "Calle 24 SF" Latino Cultural District. The Lower 24th Merchant and Neighbors Association worked with the San Francisco Latino Historical Society, San Francisco Heritage, OEWD, and Supervisor David Campos' Office to introduce a resolution



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in 2014 that acknowledged the cultural assets within the district and to create legislation recognizing the area around 24th Street as the Calle 24 Latino Cultural District. Reflecting the focus in the city on the preservation of intangible assets, the text of the resolution that created Calle24 contained eight and a half pages of community history that itemized not only significant physical locations but also organizations, cultural practices, and social networks within the district, legitimizing their claim to the area.

The successful designation of Calle24 in May 2014 inspired other community leaders. It was followed by the formation of the SoMa Pilipinas Filipino Cultural Heritage District (SoMa Pilipinas) in the city's SoMa neighborhood in 2016 and the Compton's Transgender Cultural District (later renamed to simply "The Transgender District") in the Tenderloin in 2017—both of which were similarly formed by coalitions of advocates working in collaboration with their City Supervisors. The LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District was then formed in May 2018, discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

The drafters of the legislation that created SoMa Pilipinas saw an opportunity not only for recognition, but also to build on the work of the JCHESS to push city agencies to elevate community input in the process of assessing needs and crafting strategies to combat displacement. To do so, they added a requirement that the Planning Department develop a new strategic plan for their community that would cover a range of topics, including "arts and culture, workers, business, schools, affordable housing, community advocacy and land use, and services." In addition to creating a framework for assessing needs, this requirement also committed a higher level of City resources to supporting new districts.

What was unique about these new cultural districts were their clear efforts to link intangible cultural preservation work with activism to actually curb residential and commercial displacement. As the Planning Department's 2020 Community Stabilization Report notes, since 1990, the City has seen population declines in what it terms "vulnerable communities," encompassing people of color, low-income households, and LGBTQ+ people, among others—as well as the businesses and organizations that serve them.² This displacement has been attributed to several factors. Residential rents have risen approximately 50% on average between 2011 and 2017, which have contributed to higher rates of housing cost burden and contributed to a decrease in the number of low- and moderate-income households throughout the city.³ Office space rents also increased 122% from 2010 to 2016, which is often felt hardest by local small businesses and those that serve specific cultural communities.⁴ The cultural districts sought the tools to slow this staggering displacement.

2 City and County of San Francisco, "Community Stabilization Report," 2020, https://default.sfplanning.org/plans-and-programs/community-planning/stabilization-strategy/cs_report.pdf.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.; San Francisco Budget and Legislative Analyst's Office, "Policy Analysis Report: Analysis of Small Business Displacement" (San Francisco: City and County of San Francisco Board of Supervisors, 2014), <https://sfbos.org/sites/default/files/FileCenter/Documents/50557-BLA%20Small%20Business%20Displace.101014.pdf>.



THE CULTURAL DISTRICTS PROGRAM

Even while cultural districts were receiving increased recognition and support, many still felt that more could be done to support community stabilization. Advocates particularly wanted to secure reliable funding and support community governance structures that would facilitate successful community engagement. With these goals in mind, advocates from across the existing cultural heritage districts teamed up with District 9 Supervisor, Hillary Ronen—whose supervisorial district formally encompassed Calle24 and who had already worked with that cultural district on zoning reform. Together, they formed a coalition to push for the creation of a more substantive formal program.

The BoS officially created the Cultural Districts program as it exists today through a unanimously-approved ordinance on May 22, 2018. Drawing from discourses around community displacement and the need for a comprehensive approach to preservation, the legislation officially states as its purpose to:

“...bring resources in order to stabilize vulnerable communities facing or at risk of displacement or gentrification, and to preserve, strengthen and promote our cultural assets and diverse communities so that individuals, families, and businesses that serve and employ them, nonprofit organizations, community arts and educational institutions are able to live, work and prosper within the city.”

The coalition of Cultural Districts saw an opportunity to act when other groups within the city began organizing to restore funds from the city’s Hotel Tax for arts and culture programs, and successfully pushed to include the cultural districts as one recipient of this fund.

Later that year, San Francisco voters officially voted to support the proposition that allocated funds from the city’s Hotel Tax to fund the cultural districts moving forward, with 75% voting affirmatively, thus securing the coalition the consistent funding they had sought.

HOW THE CULTURAL DISTRICTS PROGRAM OPERATES TODAY

The Cultural Districts program’s approach to community development can be described as supporting active and local leadership to maintain communities’ social fabrics by and for the people who live, visit, and work there. This approach focuses on participatory planning and community building, and supports communities in keeping the memories and legacy of their neighborhood alive by supporting their ability to maintain their traditions and way of life. The Cultural Districts program fundamentally works on the assumption that the most viable and impactful solutions are usually developed by the people most impacted by social inequities.

The legislation that created the Cultural Districts program officially tasked its implementation to the Mayor’s Office of Housing and Community Development (MOHCD). MOHCD created a new role, the Cultural District Manager, specifically to oversee the program, including interfacing regularly with cultural district staff and administering City funding directly to the districts. The



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legislation also specifies that the program is to be supported by an inter-departmental working group coordinated by MOHCD, consisting of members of the Planning Department, OEWD, and SFAC. Each of these departments supports the cultural districts in meeting cultural equity goals, ensures district programming is tied into existing initiatives, and provides any relevant data housed by their department.

The program receives its annual funding from the city's Hotel Tax, which MOHCD directs to the individual districts and uses to cover any administrative costs it incurs in program management. The amount secured in the first year of the program was \$3 million, with the legislation specifying that each subsequent annual allocation cannot increase or decrease by more than ten percent from the previous year, thus keeping funding relatively stable.

Once a cultural district is created, an independent entity must be identified to manage the district. The entity—a nonprofit organization or fiscally sponsored project often carrying the same name as the district—applies for funding from MOHCD for operational support. Each district is led by a community-based advisory board that gives guidance and sets the mission and vision for the district, and then the MOHCD grant funds additional support (including staff and other operational necessities) needed to carry out the mission. Cultural districts may secure additional funding from other City or outside sources.

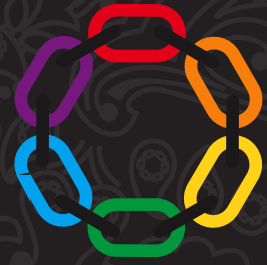
In addition to staff, cultural districts may bring on consultants to produce the required Cultural History, Housing, and Economic Sustainability Strategy (CHHESS) report, a community-co-authored planning document meant to inventory community assets and guide the city's efforts to curb displacement within a district. In both name and goals, this stipulation was inspired by the JCHESS report created by the Japantown community in partnership with the Planning Department in 2013.

CHHESS reports provide a history of the community within that cultural district, a demographic and economic profile of the district (supported by data gathered from various departments, outside sources, and the districts themselves), and a needs assessment, followed by a set of strategies designed to guide community stabilization. To create these strategies, each district must complete extensive community engagement work, including town halls, focus groups, and interviews with relevant stakeholders and organizations. District staff also work closely with City staff to ensure that the strategies are feasible. These strategies are split into six buckets: (1) historic and cultural preservation, (2) housing and tenant protections (3) arts and culture, (4) economic and workforce development, (5) land use, and (6) cultural competency. The cultural district, community partners, and City staff work towards implementation of these strategies. To ensure that the CHHESS strategies continue to serve the community, the district will assess their efficacy every three years and to make updates to the report based on these assessments every six years.



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Cultural District Legislated Strategy Area	Strategy Area Description	City Department Scope Alignment
Historic/cultural preservation	Preserve and develop cultural and historic buildings, businesses, organizations, traditions, arts, events, and district aesthetic	Planning Department / Historic Preservation Commission (HPC)
Housing and tenant protections	Protect residential tenants from displacement and promote affordable housing and homeownership	Mayor's Office of Housing and Community Development (MOHCD)
Arts and Culture	Attract and support artists and cultural enterprises	Arts Commission (SFAC)
Economic and workforce development	Promote jobs, tourism, and economic opportunities that stabilize the district's economy	Office of Economic and Workforce Development (OEWD)
Land use	Create City regulations and programs that support businesses and industries that advance the Cultural District	All
Cultural competency	Promote culturally competent and appropriate City services, policies, and narratives	All



LEATHER & LGBTQ
CULTURAL DISTRICT

The LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District



THE LEATHER & LGBTQ CULTURAL DISTRICT

THE LEGACY OF LEATHER AND LGBTQ COMMUNITIES IN THE SOUTH OF MARKET NEIGHBORHOOD

South of Market (SoMa) has long been one of San Francisco's major LGBTQ neighborhoods. In the 1940s and 50s, much of this activity was concentrated along the neighborhood's waterfront, with several gay bars located along the Embarcadero.⁵

In the mid-1950s and early 1960s, police crackdowns and the development of the Embarcadero Center and Golden Gateway complex pushed gay bars and their patrons west. This migration led both the Polk Street and Folsom Street neighborhoods to become densely and visibly gay during the 1960s—a decade before the emergence of the now widely-known Castro neighborhood.

As these various neighborhoods developed, they were associated with different LGBTQ styles and subpopulations.⁶ The Polk and Tenderloin, for instance, were important LGBTQ residential areas. Street life in these areas included hustlers, drag queens, transgender people (or “transsexuals,” a term that took root in the 1960s), and older gay men. The Polk was also the major LGBTQ retail strip. In the 1970s, the Castro became the political capital of San Francisco's gay life and was closely associated with the career of Supervisor Harvey Milk.



SoMa was distinct from the City's other LGBTQ neighborhoods.

SoMa was distinct from the City's other LGBTQ neighborhoods. Most of the city's gay bathhouses and sex clubs were located here, mainly in former factories or tenement buildings. By providing a space for gay men to interact with other gay men, bathhouses became one of the cultural centers of gay San Francisco life, despite frequent harassment from the police.⁷

Drawn by the supply of inexpensive office space, several early homophile organizations, including the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis, also had offices South of Market. Most of San Francisco's gay printers and publishers were also located in SoMa, which in the mid-twentieth century was the West Coast center for the printing and publishing industries.

Most visibly, SoMa became the San Francisco neighborhood most closely associated with Leather, a distinctive LGBTQ subculture that began to form in the late 1940s in several major American cities. As described by anthropologist and Leather historian Gayle Rubin, Leather was associated with a subgroup of gay men as a symbol of masculinity. Although the “leather” in question referred primarily to black leather motorcycle gear, community members also donned

5 Gayle Rubin, “The Miracle Mile: South of Market and Gay Male Leather in San Francisco, 1962-1996,” in *Reclaiming San Francisco: History, Politics, Culture*, ed. James Brook, Chris Carlsson, and Nancy Peters (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1998), 247–72.

6 Ibid.

7 Allan Berube, “The History of Gay Bathhouses,” in *Policing Public Sex: Queer Politics and the Future of AIDS Activism*, ed. Dangerous Bedfellows (Boston: South End Press, 1996), 187–220; Stephan Ferris, “Out of the Tubs, and into the Streets! Tracing the History of Bathhouse Regulations in San Francisco,” *Harvard LGBTQ+ Policy Journal* 11 (2021): 59–65.



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other styles of working-class male fashion. Levis were popular, and some early Leather bars were often called “Leather-Levi” bars. But as Rubin notes,

“Leather came to mean more than gay masculinity. It also connoted brotherhood and group solidarity...and a kind of rebellious individualism...In addition, leather became the major symbolic and social location...for various kinds of ‘kinky sex.’”⁸

SoMa’s association with Leather culture started in 1962, the year the Tool Box bar opened on the corner of Fourth Street and Harrison. The artist Chuck Arnett decorated the interior walls of the bar with a large mural. In 1964, *Life* magazine did an extensive story on homosexuality in



Photo Credit: David Hyman

America. The opening two pages featured the Tool Box interior, with the mural and many of the patrons. In 1966, Fe-Be’s and the Stud then opened on Folsom Street, followed by the Ramrod in 1968. Soon other bars opened in the area, and “the Folsom” had acquired its Leather reputation. By the late 1960s, it was already being called the “Miracle Mile.”

The area continued to grow over the following decade. In 1977, *Drummer Magazine*, a Leather-focused gay men’s magazine, moved from Los Angeles to San Francisco. *Drummer* became the most widely circulated gay men’s Leather

periodical in the world, and its frequent photos and articles about San Francisco made South of Market an international Leather destination. Most shops providing Leather and kink gear had been in the Polk Street area until the late 1970s, when Taylor of San Francisco and Mr. S Leather shifted Leather retail to SoMa. Mr. S. Leather opened in 1979 and remains one of the most significant providers of Leather and kink goods in the country.⁹ By the late 1970s, “South of Market had become one of the most extensive and densely occupied Leather neighborhoods in the world.”¹⁰ In the process, it became a sanctuary for marginalized San Francisco residents and contributed to their ongoing fight for acceptance, equality, and sexual liberation.

8 Rubin, “The Miracle Mile,” 254.

9 Donna J. Graves and Shayne E. Watson, “Citywide Historic Context Statement for LGBTQ History in San Francisco” (City and County of San Francisco, 2015), https://default.sfplanning.org/Preservation/lgbt_HCS/LGBTQ_HCS_October2015.pdf.

10 Gayle Rubin, “Sites, Settlements, and Urban Sex: Archaeology and the Study of Gay Men in San Francisco 1955-1995,” in *Archaeologies of Sexuality*, ed. Robert Schmidt and Barbara Voss (London: Routledge, 2000), 62–88.



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Leather culture in SoMa was also supported by various establishments and social structures. In addition to the bars and the bathhouses, the most important were the Leather motorcycle clubs. These began in Los Angeles in the 1950s, but San Francisco soon had the Warlocks and the California Motor Club (CMC). Many more would follow, including the Constantines, the Barbary Coasters, the Koalas, the GDI, and the Rainbow MC. The bike clubs sponsored out of town “runs” and in town events such as the famous Warlocks “Witches Xmas” and the CMC “Carnival.” These club events made up much of the Leather social calendar until the 1980s, when the Leather title contests began to displace them. There had been many local title contests held by bars and clubs, but the title system as it now exists was inaugurated in 1979 in Chicago with the International Mr. Leather (IML) competition. Soon *Drummer* magazine, located in San Francisco, held a Mr. Drummer contest. Local bars and community groups held contests to send candidates to Chicago for IML or San Francisco for Mr. Drummer. During the AIDS epidemic, the title system became a major institution. International Ms. Leather (IMsL), a competition for Leather women, was founded in San Francisco in 1986.

While the overall Leather scene was primarily centered around gay men, women have always had a place in Leather and in South of Market. There were lesbian bars, such as the Hula Shack, located in the building that later became a famous Leather bar, South of the Slot. In the 1980s, the Baybrick Inn was one of the most popular local lesbian bars. Dykes on Bikes was founded in 1976 and has led the San Francisco Gay Freedom Day and Pride parades since then. Cynthia Slater was a founder and primary force behind the Society of Janus, one of the oldest mixed-gender/mixed-orientation BDSM organizations in the country that has been a presence in SoMa for five decades.¹¹ In 1978, Samois became the first lesbian BDSM organization in the world; it was followed later by the Outcasts in 1984 and the Exiles in 1997, the latter of which still exists today.¹²

When Samois was organized, anti-BDSM sentiment had become prevalent within the lesbian community and feminist movement. The first feminist anti-pornography group was established in San Francisco in 1977 and treated BDSM as a form of violence. The Women’s Building in the Mission neighborhood refused to rent space to Samois and passed a rule banning all groups associated with BDSM from gathering there, though the Outcasts successfully agitated to get that ban revoked in the 1990s.¹³ The creation of mixed-gender spaces and spaces specifically for leatherwomen became essential for building community, and those spaces have in turn made Leather and LGBTQ culture, and the city as a whole, more accepting and inclusive.

SoMa and the Leather community have also been significant spaces for genderqueer and trans individuals and groups. Alexis Muir, a transwoman, owned several of the buildings that housed

11 Gayle Rubin and Rostom Mesli, “SM Politics, SM Communities in the United States,” in *Ashgate Research Companion to Lesbian and Gay Activism*, ed. David Paternotte and Manon Tremblay (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015)

12 Pat Califia, “A Personal History of the Lesbian S/M Community in San Francisco,” in *Coming to Power*, ed. Samois (Alyson Publications, 1982).

13 Gayle Rubin, “Samois,” in *Encyclopedia of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender History in America*, ed. Marc Stein (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 2004), 67–69; Gayle Rubin, “The Outcasts: A Social History,” in *The Second Coming: A Leather-dyke Reader*, ed. Pat Califia and Robin Sweeney (Los Angeles: Alyson Publications, 1996).



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early Leather bars and sex clubs and became a key figure in establishing the Leather community in SoMa. The neighborhood has been the home of trans- and genderqueer-centered events, such as those organized by Edward Goehring for almost a decade starting in the late 1980s. Leather bars also served as spaces for trans organizing. Lou Sullivan, a transman who founded FTM, self-described as the first organization for female to male transsexuals and crossdressers, hosted the group's first meetings at a local Leather bar and restaurant called the 527/Chez Mollet.¹⁴ Several transmen have also served as local Leather community leaders, while many in San Francisco's Leather community were early supporters of trans inclusion nationally.

The South of Market Leather scene exemplified the complexity and fluidity of gender in many ways, including overlapping with San Francisco's strong culture of drag. Jose Sarria, a local drag queen and the founder and first "Empress" of the Imperial Court System, a now international charitable organization that started in San Francisco and is heavily drag-influenced, was friendly with many leathermen. Sarria even lived in a Victorian house whose ground floor flat became the Catacombs, a world-famous Leather sex club. His pianist, Hazel McGinnis, used to record special bawdy songs for the club. Many leathermen were also directly engaged with the Court System, including the System's first Emperor, Mr. Marcus. Some of the motorcycle clubs provided butch escorts for the drag queens. Paul Bentley, the owner of the popular (and very butch) Leather bar the Ramrod and one of the original owners of the *Bay Area Reporter*, wrote an early Leather column under the byline "Czarina de Miracle Mile" from the perspective of his prominent drag persona, "Lucious Lorelei." Bentley was active in the Court scene and even ran for Empress as Lorelei. Leather bars would also host drag events, such as the San Francisco Eagle's annual Halloween party to celebrate "leather and feathers."



Photo Credit: Henri Leleu Bar Photographs Collection (1997-13), Courtesy of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society.

Although Leather subgroups operated somewhat discretely early on, they became increasingly integrated in the 1980s, as their appointed representatives began meeting regularly to exchange information and news.¹⁵ As Rubin describes, over time, the term "Leather" came to "function as an indicator of community among sadomasochists, bondage aficionados, and fetishists of

14 Susan Stryker, "Portrait of a Transfar Drag Hag as a Young Man: The Activist Career of Louis G. Sullivan," in *Reclaiming Genders: Transsexual Grammars at the Fin de Siècle*, ed. Kate More and Stephen Whittle (Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).

15 Gayle Rubin, "Elegy for the Valley of the Kings: AIDS and the Leather Community in San Francisco, 1981-1996," in *Changing Times: Gay Men and Lesbians Encounter HIV/AIDS*, ed. Martin P. Levine, Peter M. Nardi, and John H. Gagnon (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 101-43.



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various genders and sexual orientations.”¹⁶ This integration was intensified by the onset of HIV/AIDS in San Francisco, which severely affected the city’s LGBTQ communities and ignited a wave of activism. Leatherwomen were at the forefront of AIDS activism and also mobilized to give care and support to their ailing gay male friends and comrades. As Leather became a target of right-wing politicians, leatherfolk began building national and international Leather political coalitions. San Francisco leatherwomen and leathermen were among the principal activists in this mobilization.¹⁷

SoMa’s nightlife scene has also historically served as a vital gathering space for other segments of the LGBTQ community beyond Leather. In the 1970s and 80s, the neighborhood was a key location in the city’s burgeoning disco scene, which developed in local venues such as the End-Up and Trocadero Transfer. This scene gave rise to some of San Francisco’s most famous queer musicians like Sylvester and Patrick Cowley, both of whom were pioneers of the hi-NRG genre of disco and who collaborated famously on Sylvester’s 1978 hit “You Make Me Feel (Mighty Real).”¹⁸ This music was not separate from but rather in conversation with the sexuality of Leather culture, with Cowley also creating dark, electronic soundtracks to several gay porn films.

The neighborhood was also the home of the Stud bar, a famously welcoming LGBTQ space that opened in 1966. While the Stud started as a Leather bar, it quickly became a hippie haunt, before evolving into the city’s hottest queer dance bar for many decades. It later became an important venue for trans entertainment and community. In 2016, in the face of rent increases, eighteen community members stepped up and took over ownership of the bar, making it the first worker-owned cooperative nightclub in the country until its closure during the COVID-19 pandemic. This closure has been felt as a significant loss for many Leather and LGBTQ residents of San Francisco.

The sex positivity and curiosity of SoMa’s Leather culture have also found homes in spaces like sex education centers, play and performance venues, porn studios, coffee houses, and art galleries. These have contributed to the positive perception of the Bay Area as an open-minded and sexually diverse community. The Center for Sex and Culture (CSC), for instance, which was one of San Francisco’s predominant spaces for sex education, study, and exploration and was seen as a “high water cultural mark for human sexuality,” operated out of Western SoMa from the early aughts until 2019 when it too closed due to rising rents. These spaces have often put an emphasis on education and mentorship and addressed topics like consent and sexual health—especially for more marginalized members of the community.

An important aspect of Leather and LGBTQ culture in SoMa has also been the presence of sex work, including full-service sex work, porn, stripping, and professional BDSM services. Bay Area residents engage in the sex trade for various reasons, one of which can be facing employment discrimination based on their LGBTQ identity. San Francisco has long had a visible culture of sex

¹⁶ Ibid., 104.

¹⁷ Rubin, “Elegy for the Valley of the Kings,” 132-133; Rubin and Mesli, “SM Politics, SM Communities in the United States.”

¹⁸ Joshua Gamson, *The Fabulous Sylvester: The Legend, the Music, and Seventies in San Francisco* (Macmillan, 2005).



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work.¹⁹ San Francisco has also been central to the history of sex work advocacy in the United States. One of the essential sex worker advocacy organizations was COYOTE (Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics), founded in the Bay Area by sex worker and advocate Margot St. James in 1973. At one point, COYOTE, the National Task Force on Prostitution, and the Victoria Woodhull Foundation were all headquartered on Folsom in the heart of the Leather neighborhood. These organizations lobbied politicians for less punitive laws and pushed for a greater cultural understanding of sex work, setting the framework for sex worker activism nationally. SoMa and the nearby Tenderloin in particular have attracted health and advocacy organizations such as the St. James Infirmary health clinic, the first peer-based occupational health and safety clinic in the U.S. run by sex workers for sex workers.

Porn has been a particularly visible form of sex work in SoMa and has provided economic stability for many Leather and LGBTQ community members. In 1969, San Francisco became the first city in the country to legalize films that explicitly depict penetration, and an infrastructure of



Photo Credit: Dave Fong

porn studios and theaters quickly grew—many based in SoMa and the nearby Tenderloin. San Francisco filmmakers distinguished themselves with their ability to mix what some labeled “smut” with artistic sensibilities. As more gay films were produced in the 1970s and 80s, many in the Leather community found employment as directors and actors. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, porn production became an even more substantial element of the SoMa economy when several large gay porn production companies, including Titan and Raging Stallion, relocated from Los Angeles to San Francisco. *Kink.com* opened in the city and became the largest producer of BDSM porn in the world. At its height, *Kink.com* employed over 200 full-time employees and thousands of independent contractors, with significant representation from women, people of color, and LGBTQ folks.

The city has also fostered a vibrant network of queer, lesbian, and feminist porn producers who have focused on authentic pleasure, affirming narratives, and visibility for women, trans, and genderqueer actors. Some of this movement was initiated by one of the first women-oriented and feminist sex shops, Good Vibrations, which published erotic photography by pioneering lesbian artists such as Honey Lee Cottrell and Tee Corrine. A major lesbian porn magazine — the legendary *On Our Backs* -- was a San Francisco original founded in 1984. The same group that published *On Our Backs* established Blush Productions, which produced video porn for lesbians, as well as strip shows for women at SoMa’s Baybrick Inn.

19 Neil Larry Shumsky and Larry M. Springer, “San Francisco’s Zone of Prostitution, 1880-1934,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 7, no. 1 (1981): 71–89; Josh Sides, “Excavating the Postwar Sex District in San Francisco,” *Journal of Urban History* 32, no. 3 (2006): 355–79.



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While San Francisco has been a central place for LGBTQ and Leather community building, it has not been a consistently queer-friendly city. Quite the contrary: the longer histories of LGBTQ and Leather San Francisco have been typically characterized by police harassment and political hostility aimed at these populations, organizations, and businesses. San Francisco (like many other cities) prohibited cross-dressing from the late 1800s until July 1974 in order to deter prostitution and cultivate a “respectable” image for middle-class families.²⁰ This “male or female impersonation” was punishable by police harassment, public exposure and humiliation, significant fines, and imprisonment, and became a standard tool for harassing and arresting LGBTQ people, especially transgender people and drag queens.²¹ The arrests of patrons of a drag ball at California Hall in 1965 has been widely seen as a turning point in the treatment of LGBTQ people in the city. It led to a coalition among local homophile activists, progressive Protestant ministers, and some liberal politicians, which was instrumental in shifting city policies and policing toward less punitive practices. A year later in 1966, police harassment of transwomen in the Tenderloin led to a riot at Compton’s Cafeteria. Today, transwomen, especially trans sex workers, continue to be subjected to arrest and violence.²²

Another area of conflict was created by the post-Prohibition regulation of alcoholic beverages. In California, the Alcohol Beverage Control (ABC) had jurisdiction over granting or revoking liquor licenses, and the state prohibited licenses for bars with gay clientele (referred to legally as “resorts for sex perverts”). The ABC and San Francisco police regularly raided gay and lesbian bars and revoked their licenses. In a study of San Francisco’s gay bars in the early 1960s, Nancy Achilles noted the frequency of police action directed against those bars, which often resulted in loss of their license or closure.²³ And she observed that “It is often the bars themselves which make the most salient pleas for the homosexual’s civil rights, for it is most often the bars which undertake a defense in cases involving the law.”²⁴ The most famous example was that of the Black Cat bar. “Over a period of fifteen years, the Alcoholic Beverage Control Board brought various complaints against the owner of the Black Cat.”²⁵ The case went to the California Supreme Court. In 1951, the court ruled in *Stoumen v. Reilly* that “‘mere proof of patronage by homosexuals’ without additional evidence of ‘illegal or immoral acts’ was insufficient for a license revocation.”²⁶

Nonetheless, police harassment and ABC actions against the local gay bars continued.

20 Clare Sears, *Arresting Dress: Cross-Dressing, Law, and Fascination in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco* (Duke University Press, 2015).

21 Ibid.

22 Susan Stryker, *Transgender History: The Roots of Today’s Revolution* (Seal Press, 2017). See also Christopher Roebuck, “‘Workin’ It’: Trans* Lives in the Age of Epidemic” (Dissertation, Berkeley, CA, University of California Berkeley, 2013).

23 Nancy Achilles, “The Development of the Homosexual Bar as an Institution,” in *Sexual Deviance*, ed. John Gagnon and William Simon (New York: Harper and Row, 1967).

24 Ibid., 235.

25 Ibid., 236.

26 Christopher Agee, “Gayola: Police Professionalization and the Politics of San Francisco’s Gay Bars, 1950-1968,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 15, no. 3 (2006); Nan Boyd, *Wide-Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965* (University of California Press, 2003); John D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970* (University of Chicago Press, 1998).



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Christopher Agee explains that “The ABC officials sent their agents to pursue gay and lesbian bars, organized a legal process that made it nearly impossible for homosexual bars to defend themselves against charges of sexual impropriety, and circumscribed the protections of *Soumen...*” By 1959, “the ABC pushed the state’s high court to define ‘illegal or immoral acts’ as any activity (not just sexual activity) that could be construed as homosexual. The ABC’s new policing regime allowed liquor officials to reduce the average homosexual bar’s lifespan to less than two years.”²⁷

In 1960, “Mayor Christopher launched an all out offensive against homosexual drinking establishments. Christopher called for an open-ended sweep and [police] chief Cahill responded with raids.” Subsequently, the SFPD and “the ABC spent the next year and a half shutting down twenty-five gay and lesbian bars.”²⁸ As a response, the owners of local gay and lesbian bars formed the Tavern Guild in 1961, which became a major force in protecting the bars against the police and ABC. However, despite the active participation of Leather and South of Market bar owners in the Tavern Guild, the Leather bars continued to endure systemic harassment well into the 1980s. In the late 1970s, almost every Leather bar had been visited by the ABC. Some lost their licenses, and many of the key Leather bars were given suspensions. The Ambush endured one such license suspension for several months, serving fruit juice and soft drinks to its loyal clientele.



Photo Credit: Fire Dragon Photo

The history of Leather and LGBTQ communities in SoMa is also closely tied to the neighborhood’s history of urban renewal and redevelopment. Large-scale neighborhood revival approaches have often destroyed vibrant neighborhoods and displaced their residents. SoMa and the Western Addition were two classic examples of these negative effects, particularly for low-income residents and communities of color.²⁹ Urban renewal in SoMa has also imperiled the Leather and LGBTQ presence there from the early 1960s through the present.

As one of San Francisco’s oldest neighborhoods, SoMa has had a predominantly industrial and working-class character since the late nineteenth century. According to Rubin,

“Most of the city’s early industries were located here, including iron foundries, boiler works, machine shops, manufacturers of bullets and shot, breweries, and warehouses. The wharves

27 Agee, “Gayola,” 474-475.

28 Ibid., 479.

29 For SoMa, see Chester Hartman, *City for Sale: The Transformation of San Francisco* (University of California Press, 2002). For the Western Addition, see *Neighborhoods: The Hidden Cities of San Francisco*, The Fillmore (PBS, 1999).



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South of Market were a focus for shipping and shipbuilding. The residential population worked in these industries or in other nearby commercial enterprises.”³⁰

SoMa was largely leveled by the 1906 earthquake and fire. It was rebuilt as a low-cost commercial, industrial, and residential neighborhood. Along with working-class families, SoMa had a high concentration of single workers (mostly men) and seasonal laborers, many living in tenements or SROs (single room occupancy hotels).³¹

In 1952, the Redevelopment Agency of the City and County of San Francisco (SFRA) released a comprehensive proposal that identified SoMa as “among the most severely blighted sections of the city” and called for the displacement of much of the neighborhood’s residential population in favor of more industry. In 1954, a private developer proposed what was called at the time the “San Francisco Prosperity Plan,” which included a convention center, sports stadium, and several

high-rise office buildings.³² The plans for the area continued to evolve, but in 1966 the Board of Supervisors officially approved redevelopment projects for the neighborhood that resulted in the removal of four thousand tenants and over seven hundred small businesses.³³



Photo Credit: Fire Dragon Photo

This large-scale redevelopment disrupted social networks and gathering places, and was opposed by many who then lived, worked, and played in the neighborhood. In 1969,

the opposition coalesced and formed an organization, Tenants and Owners in Opposition to Redevelopment (TOOR). TOOR filed lawsuits that delayed redevelopment and forced the City to fund the construction of housing for low-income residents of the area. TOOR later became TODCO: the Tenants and Owners Development Corporation. TODCO then developed and built several buildings of affordable housing in the area.

Redevelopment construction was paused until the TOOR legal case was settled. Since much of the planned demolition had already occurred, the neighborhood had vacant buildings and cheap rent. Moreover, the displacement meant fewer residents in many parts of the neighborhood. It was these very conditions that began to attract Leather and LGBTQ businesses to SoMa, since

30 Rubin, “The Miracle Mile,” 248.

31 Rubin, “The Miracle Mile,” 248-50; see also Paul Groth, *Living Downtown: The History of Residential Hotels in the United States* (University of California Press, 1999).

32 Rubin, “The Miracle Mile,” 250.

33 Catherine Hoover, “Introduction,” in *No Vacancy: Urban Renewal and the Elderly*, by Ira Nowinski (San Francisco: Carolyn Bean Associates, 1979).



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the relative privacy and lack of complaints about nightlife allowed their gay baths and Leather bars to flourish.

TODCO became a permanent fixture in the neighborhood, developing more low-income housing, especially for seniors. TODCO's Assistant Director was a gay leatherman, Michael Valerio. Valerio was of Filipino/Spanish heritage, as were many of TODCO's tenants. Valerio began working with a lesbian named Kathleen Connell, who was working on a project focused on food delivery services for elderly residents. Connell and Valerio met through the South of Market Alliance, a neighborhood advocacy group fighting the Redevelopment Agency's plans for the area. Connell and Valerio became passionate advocates for the area. They were able to secure a \$5 million allocation for low-cost housing and continued funding for social services in SoMa. They also became among the most dedicated and effective leaders against SoMa redevelopment, which was escalating in the early 1980s. One result of their tireless activism was the creation of what is now one of San Francisco's signature events and one of the most significant Leather events in the world: the Folsom Street Fair.³⁴

Although the Folsom Street Fair is now one of the largest festivals of Leather and kink in the world, it began as a protest against Redevelopment. Both organizers were inspired by Harvey Milk's use of the Castro Street Fair to mobilize LGBTQ people for political purposes and decided to replicate the strategy in SoMa. On the autumnal equinox in 1984, the group hosted the first Folsom Street Fair, subtitled "Megahood" (for Mega Neighborhood). The fair had many goals, including supporting local businesses, attempting to unite local communities (including Leather) against displacement, and depicting SoMa as already vibrant rather than as an empty or blighted area awaiting revitalization. The Fair was Leather friendly, but it was not a Leather event. Over time, however, the focus shifted and by the early 1990s, the Fair had morphed into a major celebration of Leather and kink, and an international destination for Leather/kink tourism. It is now also one of the largest outdoor events in California. But although the Fair was a success, it did not stop redevelopment, which continues to erode the LGBTQ and Leather presence in the area.

In addition to redevelopment, the City's response to the onset of HIV/AIDS in San Francisco destroyed another key community institution: the bathhouses. In early 1984, the local LGBTQ community was desperate to stop the spread of AIDS. Although the virus had not yet been identified, it was known to be sexually transmitted. Some local groups, such as the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence and the Bay Area Physicians for Human Rights, had begun to develop guidelines for safe sex: sexual activity that would not transmit the deadly pathogen. Other politically influential constituencies within the gay community instead targeted the bathhouses. The crusade against the bathhouses was relentlessly pursued by Randy Shilts, an openly gay reporter for the San Francisco Chronicle. Although most public health professionals did not support bathhouse closure and thought it would be ineffective, the idea gained support. Then-Mayor Dianne Feinstein ordered police officers to surveil bathhouses and report on sexual activity, even as her own head of the Department of Public Health (DPH) asserted that the

³⁴ Kathleen Connell and Paul Gabriel, "The Power of Broken Hearts: The Origin and Evolution of the Folsom Street Fair," *Folsom Street Events*, <https://www.folsomstreet.org/history>



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bathhouses would not close.³⁵ Feinstein pressured the DPH to order the closure of the baths and several other establishments where men had sex with men later that same year. (This crackdown on communal sexual spaces extended to a crackdown on sex workers organizing for decriminalization growing in the Bay in the 1980s.) While these orders were initially ignored, DPH filed a complaint with the California Superior Court to request a temporary restraining order against several venues. The judge then made a ruling that introduced new standards for bathhouses, such as monitoring for safe sex and a ban on private rooms with locking doors.

These restrictions effectively banned bathhouses and sex clubs, and they resulted in the elimination of a major segment of the gay and Leather economy South of Market, despite a lack of evidence that closing venues—as opposed to changes in behavior—had any measurable impact on the epidemic.³⁶ Moreover, bathhouses remained open in most other nearby cities. The regulations remained on the books and in force until 2020, when the Board of Supervisors passed and the Mayor signed an ordinance introduced by Supervisors Rafael Mandelman and Matt Haney and supported by supervisorial aide Honey Mahogany that acknowledged the importance of the bathhouses as vital queer social spaces and directed DPH to revisit the minimum standards for bathhouses.

As a result of these various forces, the Leather and LGBTQ occupation of SoMa has shrunk dramatically since the mid-1980s. Low-rise and low-rent buildings have been steadily supplanted by high-rise, capital-intensive construction. The opening of the Moscone Center in 1981 and the expanding area of museums, hotels, and capital-intensive development around the Yerba Buena Complex have put increasing pressure on the surrounding neighborhood. These alterations in land use have brought escalating rents, an influx of new residents, and different types of commerce, often at the expense of Leather and LGBTQ spaces. In 1980, SoMa was home to over forty Leather and LGBTQ community spaces and businesses.³⁷ Today only about ten Leather community spaces and businesses still exist.

But even as the Leather and LGBTQ communities have endured social and political obstacles, they have maintained a small but significant concentration in SoMa, as evidenced by the remaining Leather bars, shops, and clubs and the annual Folsom Street and Up Your Alley Fairs. Together, these types of events, businesses, organizations, and people have kept both the kink and community alive in SoMa.

35 Ferris, “Out of the Tubs and Into the Streets!”

36 Rubin, “Elegy for the Valley of the Kings.”

37 “The Folsom Attitude,” *Drummer Magazine*, 1980.



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THE FOUNDING OF THE LEATHER & LGBTQ CULTURAL DISTRICT

Building on the broader movement towards more substantive cultural preservation work discussed in the “Cultural District Initiative” section and on the work of Leather and LGBTQ community members that began organizing against displacement in SoMa since the 1960s, a grassroots group formed in the summer of 2017 to support the establishment of a LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District in Western SoMa.

The group worked closely with then-District 6 Supervisor Jane Kim, who had also introduced the legislation that created the SOMA Pilipinas Filipino Cultural Heritage District. The group also met with all the other Supervisors and their aides to discuss the legislation. In January 2018, the group then elected its first chairperson and several committee chairs.



Photo Credit: Gooch

Legislation to create the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District was first introduced in September 2017. Supervisor Kim amended the legislation in April of 2018, and it was passed unanimously by the Land Use and Transportation Committee on April 23, 2018. The full Board of Supervisors voted unanimously for passage on May 1, 2018 and it was signed by the Mayor on May 9, 2018. As referenced in the previous chapter, the legislation to create the Cultural District program was then

passed by the Board of Supervisors and signed by the Mayor just a few weeks after, creating a consistent framework for establishing cultural districts and formalizing their relationship with the City.

Similar to the other cultural districts that had already been created, the legislation that established the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District detailed the significance of Leather and LGBTQ history in Western SoMa and inventoried existing assets, much of which was described in the previous section of this report. It also specified that MOHCD would work with the District to create a “Leather and LGBTQ District Cultural History and Housing and Economic Sustainability Strategy” report, nicknamed the “LCHHESS.” When the CD program was created later that month, the similar CHHESS process supplanted the LCHHESS process.

THE FOUNDING LEGISLATION ESTABLISHED THE FOLLOWING DISTRICT BOUNDARIES

The boundaries of the District are defined as the south side of Howard between 7th Street and Highway 101, to the west side of 7th between Howard Street and Harrison St, to Interstate 80 between 7th Street and Division Street, to Highway 101 between Interstate 80 and Howard



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Street; as well as the south side of Harrison Street from 7th Street to 5th Street, the west side of 5th Street from Harrison Street to Bryant Street and the north side of Bryant Street from 5th Street to 6th Street and the west side of 6th Street from Bryant Street to Harrison Street.

While the wording of the legislation has led to some confusion about whether the District includes properties along the odd numbered side of Harrison Street between 6th and 7th Streets, in April 2023, the City released a memo clarifying that these properties are included. (See Appendix B.)

Over the course of the District's first year, District leadership hosted public committee meetings regularly to gather community input into how the District should function and set priorities and to establish bylaws, which were approved in July 2019. The District held its first Board election in August of 2019, and it incorporated and received 501(c)3 status on November 18, 2019.

HOW THE LEATHER & LGBTQ CULTURAL DISTRICT OPERATES TODAY

GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

The LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District uses a formal membership structure as the foundation of its governance. Constituents can apply to be members, which then gives them access to voting privileges. To qualify for membership, applicants must demonstrate a connection with the District. The District's constituents include those who live and work within the District, as well as community members from outside the District's boundaries who engage with its events, organizations, or businesses. This definition recognizes Western SoMa's role as a regional cultural hub as well as the displacement experienced by our community members, who often cannot afford to live in SoMa or even other neighborhoods of San Francisco.

The District is guided by a Board of Directors, which comprises nine board members, of which four are officer positions (President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer). District members elect the President and three of the nine board members annually. The remaining three officers are elected annually by the board itself. Board seats have three-year terms that are staggered so that three seats turn over each year, while officer terms last just one year. The Board meets monthly in open public meetings where District members and the public can listen to discussions about the state of District initiatives, give feedback, and suggest new directions for the District.

In addition to the Board of Directors, the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District operates several committees to engage constituents, receive input, and develop initiatives focused on program areas. Committees are currently active around the following program areas:

- Arts & Culture;
- Communications;
- Diversity & Membership;
- Land Use.



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DISTRICT STAFF

At the time of publication, the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District has two full-time employees and two part-time employees. These employees manage the District's day-to-day operations and have the flexibility and empowerment to act quickly in SoMa's ever-changing environment. They operate with guidance from the Board of Directors while always keeping in mind community feedback received from outreach.

As is true with most cultural districts, the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District also occasionally hires additional staff or consultants to support specific projects, such as archival research and the development of this CHHESS report.

PROGRAMMING AND PARTNERSHIPS

The LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District also maintains partnerships with community organizations, City departments, and other cultural districts that help the organization better reach and advocate for our communities and deliver programs. Exemplary of this is the work that the District did through late 2017 and early 2018 with other leaders from the City, the community, and other cultural districts to pass the ordinance that created the City's formal Cultural District Initiative under MOHCD. The District continues to work with other cultural districts, particularly the Castro LGBTQ+ Cultural District and the Transgender District, with whom staff meet monthly to discuss issues pertinent to LGBTQ communities.

Some of the District's other programs and partnerships include:

- Monthly artist street fairs, known as SOMA Second Saturdays, produced in collaboration with SoMa West Community Benefit District and Folsom Street;
- Several mural projects in conjunction with local artists, the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, and local businesses like OASIS nightclub;
- A Leather and LGBTQ Entrepreneur Training Program, led by a local business consultant;
- Renovation and activation of the community art project on Ringold Alley, and the decoration of Big Belly Trash Compactors with local artists' work, both in conjunction with SOMA West CBD;
- Installation of District branding including Leather flag wraps and pole banners, in partnership with the San Francisco Department of Public Works (DPW) and Municipal Transit Agency (MTA);
- An annual holiday activation event in partnership with local businesses and Folsom Street;
- Regular erotic story sharing events called Erotic Storytelling Hour, with erotic and kink writers and community members in San Francisco and elsewhere;
- A tour of the District highlighting cultural landmarks and the impact of cultural districts on the neighborhood, created in 2022 in partnership with the California Preservation Foundation;



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- Community outreach with Onyx Northwest and The Exiles; and
- Provision of online resources and administrative support with the Friends of Eagle Plaza.

All of San Francisco's cultural districts also partner with fiscal sponsors, which are pre-existing organizations that help the districts administer funds and provide other professional supportive services. The LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District is fortunate to be able to work with SOMArts as the District's fiscal sponsor.

A SNAPSHOT OF CURRENT RESIDENTIAL DEMOGRAPHICS WITHIN THE DISTRICT

This section provides a brief snapshot of residential demographics within the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District, primarily using American Community Survey (ACS) data organized by City divisions for this report. This comes with two important caveats. One is that the ACS does not collect data about sexual orientation or whether someone identifies as transgender or gender non-binary, and thus does not describe some of the key attributes that bring our community members together. The second is that, while ACS data can give detail about who lives in a place, it does not provide information about other people who may work in or visit that place, which are important populations for our District. (Strategy 27 in this report, "Collect more robust and accurate data about San Francisco's LGBTQ communities," focuses on addressing these types of issues.)

The total population living within the District is estimated to be 5,381. The largest age group within the District is 25 to 34 year olds, which accounts for 36% of the District's population. (This is much higher than the portion of the city overall that falls into this age range: 23%.) The largest racial group among District residents is Asian (38%, compared to 34% citywide), followed by White (32%, compared to 39% citywide), Latino (22%, compared to 15% citywide), two or more races (3.5% compared to 5.3% citywide), Black (2.5% compared to 4.9% citywide), Pacific Islander (1%, compared to .3% citywide), and Native American (0.2%, compared to 0.2% citywide).

The median income for District households is \$143,531, compared to \$126,187 in San Francisco overall. However, median income varies significantly by race. While the average income for White households is \$182,542 and the average income for Asian households is \$169,719, this value is significantly lower for Latino and Black households, at \$63,932 and \$53,750, respectively.



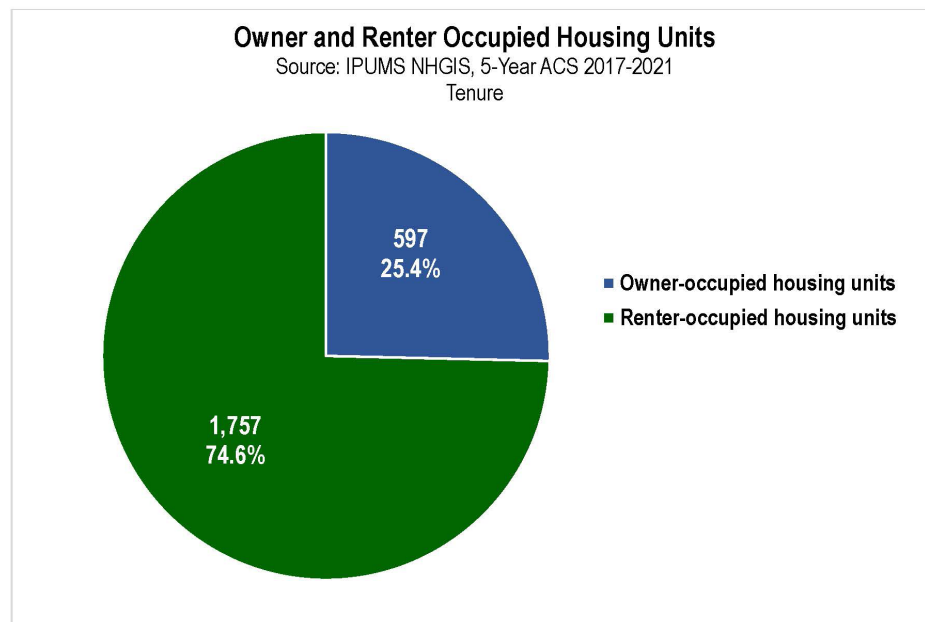
Photo Credit: Bob Goldfarb



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The neighborhood is primarily made up of renters, who occupy 74.6% of housing units. Over 45% of District renters are considered housing cost burdened (meaning they spend more than 30% of their income on housing), which is much higher than the rate in the city overall (34%). Of these cost burdened renters, 47% are considered severely cost burdened, meaning they spend more than 50% of their income on housing. These values are further stratified by race, with over 36% of Black renters being severely cost burdened compared to 21% of Asian renters, 18% of Latino renters, and 19% of White renters.

It is also worth noting that, while ACS data does not collect information on whether someone identifies as LGBTQ, in 2019 the San Francisco Office of the Controller released a survey of the general population that found that 12% of the city's residents identify as LGBTQ.



Data represent estimates from the American Community Survey. The total amount owner and renter occupied units in the Leather and LGBTQ Cultural District equated to 2,354 after proration. The total number of owner-occupied equated to 597. The total number of renter-occupied units equated to 1,757.

LEATHER AND LGBTQ COMMUNITY ASSETS

One way to break down the Leather and LGBTQ culture that our District works to preserve and promote is by inventorying community assets. An “asset” in this instance refers to a place, event, organization, or cultural practice that supports the continuation of Leather and LGBTQ culture and community.

This section describes those assets, some specifically (eg. The SF Eagle, the Folsom Street Fair) and some categorically (eg. bar nights, sex clubs). District staff used various methods to collect these assets, including surveys of and focus groups with community members, and extensive archival research conducted by District historians. (Archival sites are included in the District's current list of historically significant sites, included as Appendix C). This list is not meant to be exhaustive, but begins to document these assets in one place. While these locations are mostly



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within the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District (which determined the District's boundaries), some are located elsewhere in San Francisco. Leather and LGBTQ communities have strong memories and many respondents referenced locations that are no longer operating, so we have included reference to closed but remembered spaces.

Read the lists below to learn more about our communities and assets we seek to protect.

CULTURAL PRACTICES:

- A general sex positivity, and an embrace of all body types;
- A strong emphasis on consent and communication at Leather and kink events;
- A value of liberatory living that is unique to San Francisco and the Bay Area;
- The visibility of sexual health and wellness education and services at Leather events;
- Access to substance harm reduction services and information during Leather events;
- The centrality of fundraising for community causes, especially HIV-related services, at Leather events;
- The art of drag, and San Francisco's uniquely activist-oriented drag scene;
- Clothing-focused fetish practices, including those focused on latex, various uniforms, athletic gear, high heels, and of course leather (vests, boots, harnesses, etc.);
- Public nudity, as well as the freedom to express leather identity and kink in public and semi-public events and spaces;
- The use of semiotics like the "hanky code" to signify kinks and sexual desire;
- An exploration of power dynamics through kink;
- Various types of kink, including pup play, BDSM, cruising, role play, shibari, and more;
- Comradery and building bonds of mutual support that empowers individuals to form a shared sense of identity and belonging within the Leather community.

BUSINESSES:

- Leather and LGBTQ bars and nightclubs, including **Oasis, Powerhouse, Lone Star Saloon, SF Eagle, The EndUp, Cat Club, The Stud, Ambush, Fe-Be's**, and many, many more;
- Leather and kink shops, with several respondents specifically mentioning **Mr. S. Leather, Madame S. Leather, and Leather Etc.**
- Porn studios, including **Kink.com, Crashpad Studios, Pink and White Studios**, and more;
- Cafes and restaurants like **Wicked Grounds**, which often serve as community gathering and educational spaces;
- Curated play spaces, including sex dungeons;



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- Auto shops like **Cowden Automotive** and **The Buggery**, which have largely closed or changed ownership;
- Bathhouses;
- LGBTQ-focused hotels like the **Bunkhouse Hotel**, which have largely closed.

EVENTS:

- The **Folsom Street Fair** and **Up Your Alley Street Fair** (aka Dore Alley), both of which are large Leather street festivals hosted in SoMa;
- The **Barrison Street Fair**, a fair hosted by the Bears of San Francisco and Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence;
- **Leather Week**, including the **Leather Pride Fest** and **LeatherWalk**;
- **SoMa Second Saturdays**, a Leather market organized by the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District on the second Saturday of each month;
- Educational events to explore and learn about Leather culture and kink, including classes and munches (several respondents particularly called out **Wicked Ground's** munches);
- Many kinds of bar nights, ranging from kink nights and sex parties to beer busts, underwear nights, and curated drag shows;
- **Dark Odyssey's** play events throughout the year;
- Private kink parties and orgies;
- Pup moshes, where pups and handlers come together to socialize.

ORGANIZATIONS:

- **International Ms. Leather (IMsL)** and **Bootblack (IMsBB)** and **International Mr. Leather (IML)** and **Bootblack (IMBB)**, as well as the San Francisco's local leather, bootblack, and kink competitions;
- **The Society of Janus**, a BDSM education and support group based in San Francisco;
- **The Exiles**, a BDSM education group focused on people who do not identify as cisgender men;
- **Folsom Street**, the organization that organizes the **Folsom Street Fair** and the **Up Your Alley Street Fair**, and runs the **Folsom Street Community Center**;
- **The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence**, a San Francisco-based order of queer and drag nuns;
- **The Center for Sex and Culture**, a space for sex education, study, and exploration that operated in Western SoMa until 2019;
- Multidisciplinary event and exhibition spaces like **SOMArts** and **Liminal Space**;
- **Twisted Windows**, which organizes bondage performances and interactive events;
- **Queer Leather Meditation**, an online Leather community meditation group;



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- **Femmes on Top**, a BIPOC-led, femme-focused Leather group;
- Sexual health organizations like **St. James Infirmary**, a medical clinic and service center for sex workers that recently closed;
- Various types of social clubs, including LGBTQ sports teams, motorcycle clubs, kink groups, and quasi-religious organizations;
- Various Leather- and LGBTQ-focused newspapers and magazines, such as the revered **Drummer Magazine**.

PUBLIC SPACES:

- **Eagle Plaza**, a public plaza located outside the San Francisco Eagle;
- **Ringold Alley**, a historic cruising alley that is now the location of historic plaques focused on Leather history;
- Cruising parks, including **Buena Vista Park**, **Collingwood Park**, and **Land's End**;
- Nude beaches, such as **Marshall's Beach**.

CHALLENGES FACING SOMA'S LEATHER AND LGBTQ COMMUNITIES TODAY

Beyond assets, it is also important to inventory challenges faced by Leather and LGBTQ communities—many of which directly threaten the preservation of community assets. Below is a high-level summary of the many challenges that LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District staff heard expressed while gathering data for this report. Each strategy in the “Strategies” section of this report delves deeper into a particular aspect of these challenges.

1. **Many important Leather and LGBTQ spaces within SoMa have closed within the past several decades, primarily from rising rents and development pressure.** These have included educational and event spaces like the *Center for Sex and Culture*, public health resources like *St. James Infirmary*, and bars like *The Stud's* location on Harrison Street. Several businesses and institutions have also reported feeling powerless in their negotiations with landlords, and many faced significant losses from the COVID-19 pandemic. The loss of these spaces makes it more difficult for Leather and LGBTQ people to build community and shared culture. While the loss of each individual space is difficult, an additional concern is the reduced concentration of Leather and LGBTQ spaces. These venues have given SoMa a reputation as a welcoming neighborhood for our communities and acted as vibrant cultural hubs.
2. **Leather and LGBTQ culture—and especially kink practices—remain in many ways misunderstood by wider society.** In the context of government, this lack of understanding can lead policymakers and government employees to create and implement policies in ways that inadequately consider our communities' experiences. This lack of understanding is perpetuated by less-than-robust data collection about Leather and LGBTQ communities within San Francisco. Community members also expressed concern that as significant new development comes to SoMa, it will push Leather and LGBTQ people to “sanitize” their cultural practices to not offend new residents and businesses.



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- 3. The cost of living in SoMa, as in many other San Francisco neighborhoods, has become prohibitively expensive for many community members to live there.**
This has already led many Leather and LGBTQ community members to choose to live elsewhere in the Bay Area and then travel to SoMa to engage with Leather and LGBTQ cultural offerings. There is also concern that new housing being built in the area remains unaffordable to those who need it most in San Francisco's housing market, and thus new development will not actually stabilize communities long-term despite the requirements for below market rate units.
- 4. Business owners and organizations face difficulty opening spaces within the District.** Community members expressed that tremendous difficulty comes from both navigating City bureaucracy to receive proper approvals to operate as well as the time to receive those approvals. Given that many important spaces have closed, the inability for new spaces to open keeps the community from recovering their footing within the neighborhood.
- 5. The programming and events that do still exist in SoMa do not encapsulate the range of experiences and identities within the Leather and LGBTQ communities.** BIPOC, women, and trans community members in focus groups expressed not feeling included in existing events and programs. The shrinking number of spaces mentioned above also makes it even harder to find a diversity of offerings.
- 6. Leather and LGBTQ community members expressed feeling unsafe at times in SoMa.** This lack of safety stemmed from a variety of sources, including insufficient street lighting and a lack of nighttime transit options, and sparse pedestrian traffic. Many members stressed that increased police presence did not equate to feeling safer, and that heightened police presence would lead many to feel less safe in public spaces. Worries about safety at night are particularly concerning given the centrality of nightlife to Leather and LGBTQ communities and to the District's vibrancy.



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CULTURAL DISTRICT

How San Francisco's City Departments Currently Support Leather and LGBTQ Communities



HOW SAN FRANCISCO'S CITY DEPARTMENTS CURRENTLY SUPPORT LEATHER AND LGBTQ COMMUNITIES

The Cultural District (CD) program builds upon work that has been and continues to be undertaken by San Francisco City departments to engage Leather and LGBTQ communities, both in the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District and citywide.

This section touches on existing investments and tools that support stabilization and place-making implemented by the departments that support the Cultural Districts program (MOHCD, SFAC, OEWD, and the Planning Department), along with several other City departments.

THE MAYOR'S OFFICE OF HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The Mayor's Office of Housing and Community Development (MOHCD) supports residents with affordable housing opportunities and essential services to build strong communities. It creates housing, preserves existing housing, protects vulnerable residents, and empowers neighborhoods. MOHCD staff manage the CD program and the interdepartmental group that supports it. MOHCD programs also serve a high level of LGBTQ-identifying people within the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District, with 20.1% of clients based in the District identifying as LGBTQ compared to 11% of clients in the City overall.

HOUSING STABILIZATION AND RESIDENTIAL ANTI-DISPLACEMENT INITIATIVES

MOHCD's Housing Division creates policies and programs that create safe, stable, and affordable housing. Over more than five decades, tenant advocacy, community activism, and City leadership have shaped policies that protect tenants from displacement, such as rent control, just cause eviction protections, and various other expansions of tenant protections under the Rent Ordinance.

Specific eviction prevention and housing stabilization programs managed by MOHCD include:

- Tenant Right to Counsel;
- Housing-related mediation with the Bar Association of San Francisco;
- Financial assistance programs, including:
 - San Francisco Emergency Rental Assistance Program (SF ERAP) and Season of Sharing;
 - Long-term tenant-based rental subsidies programs, such as the Our Trans Home Initiative, Ending Trans Homelessness Initiative, Anti-Displacement Shallow Subsidy Program, Senior/Disability Shallow Subsidy Program, and various subsidy programs that serve people living with HIV/AIDS;
 - Guaranteed Income Programs, including a guaranteed income program targeting the trans community.
- Affordable Housing Lottery Preference Programs.



HOW SAN FRANCISCO'S CITY DEPARTMENTS CURRENTLY SUPPORT LEATHER AND LGBTQ COMMUNITIES

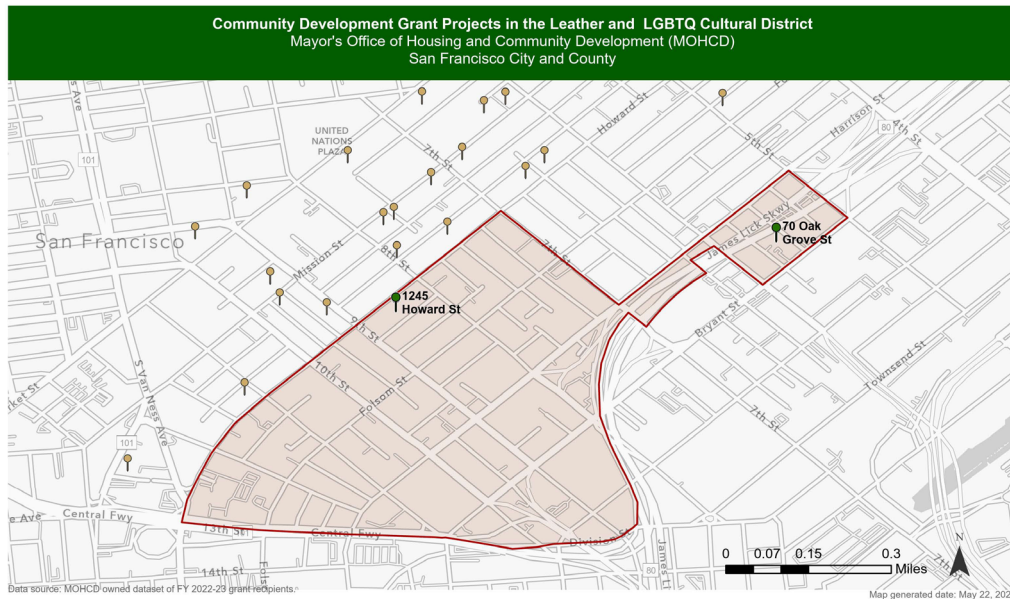
MOHCD also manages several housing preservation efforts, most significant of which are:

- The *Small Sites Program (SSP)*, which supports local nonprofit sponsors with acquisition and preservation loans to convert rent-controlled properties to permanently affordable housing;
- The *Community Living for Mental Health (CLMH) Program*, which expands opportunities for people with chronic mental illness or substance use disorders to live in communal, non-institutional housing with 24/7, on-call case management services.
- As of the publication of this report, there are two properties located within the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District restricted permanently as affordable housing, one through the Small Sites Program and one through the CLMH Program. The investment in these two sites totals \$7.2M.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

In addition to funding various Leather- and LGBTQ-focused community development initiatives and organizations throughout the City, MOHCD currently awards community development grants to two organizations within the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District:

- Success Centers, which assists SoMa residents to find pathways to citywide employment systems by removing barriers, offering training, and giving referrals to other job centers;
- Five Keys Schools and Programs, which provides digital literacy classes, computer devices, and internet connectivity for low-income homeless shelter workers.



Recipients of Community Development Grant Funding in the Leather and LGBTQ Cultural District

Agency Grant Recipients & Project Locations and Descriptions:

- 1) **Success Centers, Inc. | 1245 Howard St** | Assist SOMA residents to find pathways to citywide employment systems by barrier removals, training and referrals to Job Centers and Job Training Programs.
- 2) **Five Keys Schools and Programs | 70 Oak Grove St** | Provide digital literacy classes, computer devices, and connectivity for low-income homeless shelter workers, who are unstably housed, formerly incarcerated, or people of color.



HOW SAN FRANCISCO'S CITY DEPARTMENTS CURRENTLY SUPPORT LEATHER AND LGBTQ COMMUNITIES

THE SAN FRANCISCO ARTS COMMISSION AND OTHER PUBLIC INVESTMENTS IN LEATHER AND LGBTQ ART

The San Francisco Arts Commission (SFAC) champions the arts as essential to daily life by investing in a vibrant arts community, enlivening the urban environment, and shaping innovative cultural policy. SFAC programs include Civic Design Review, Community Investments, Galleries and Public Programs, Public Art, and the Civic Art Collection.

SFAC provides grants to local arts and culture nonprofits, individual artists, and events. Through their Cultural Equity Initiatives grants, for instance, SFAC awarded approximately \$3.5M to arts and culture nonprofits and individual artists located within the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District from FY21-23. Past grantees with projects or locations in the District include ArtSpan, Chrysalis Studio, the GLBT Historical Society, and Women's Audio Mission.



Two of SFAC's seven cultural centers throughout the City are also located within the District: SOMArts (which also serves as the Fiscal Sponsor of the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District) and the Asian Pacific Islander Cultural Center (APICC). SOMArts operates out of a city-owned building at 934 Brannan—where APICC is a subtenant.

There are currently no Civic Art Collection artworks in the District. In 2021, the SFAC Civic Design Review committee approved the design of the Leather and LGBTQ District's Leather History Cruise Commemorative Plaque Project with over a hundred projected plaques concentrated within the District.

Grants for the Arts (GFTA), which is a division of the City Administrator's Office, also helps fund several Leather and LGBTQ cultural events, including the Folsom Street Fair, the Trans March, and San Francisco Pride.

THE OFFICE OF ECONOMIC AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

The Office of Economic and Workforce Development (OEWD) strives to create a thriving and resilient economy for San Franciscans, where barriers to economic and workforce opportunities are removed and prosperity is shared equitably by all. OEWD also focuses on helping the city's residents and businesses to recover lost ground from the COVID-19 pandemic.



HOW SAN FRANCISCO'S CITY DEPARTMENTS CURRENTLY SUPPORT LEATHER AND LGBTQ COMMUNITIES

SUPPORT FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

OEWD offers support for small businesses citywide that benefit businesses within the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District.

One such program is the Legacy Business Program under OEWD's Office of Small Business (OSB), which recognizes longstanding, community-serving establishments. The program provides educational and promotional assistance to businesses to encourage their continued viability and success, as well as marketing help, business assistance, and grants. To be eligible, businesses must be 30 years or older with no break in San Francisco operations of more than two years, and must have contributed to the neighborhood or the community's history and/or identity. This program acknowledges over twenty Legacy Businesses within SoMa and seven Legacy Businesses specifically within the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District, including San Francisco Eagle, The Endup, Lone Star Saloon, and DNA Lounge. A full list of Legacy Businesses in SoMa and the District can be found in Appendix D.

In January 2021, the City also began implementation of Proposition H, which allows business permits to be processed more quickly, within thirty days. To date, over 3,500 businesses have benefited from the program citywide. In July 2021, the City opened the One-Stop Permit Center, which centralized twenty-three services from the Planning Department, Department of Building Inspection, Department of Public Health, Department of Public Works, Fire Department, Recreation and Parks Department, Entertainment Commission, and OSB in one place. In March 2022, the OSB added two new Small Business Permit Specialist positions to help entrepreneurs research permit requirements, serve as a main point of contact for permits being routed through multiple agencies, and resolve permitting questions.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the OSB created the Music and Entertainment Venue Recovery Fund to provide grants to local venues that were unable to operate. Recipients of this program included nine venues within the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District, including the Cat Club, the DNA Lounge, the EndUp, F8, Halcyon, Holy Cow, the Lone Star Saloon, Oasis, and the San Francisco Eagle.

COMMUNITY AND NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT

OEWD also provides support at the neighborhood level. The Community Economic Development Division of OEWD, formerly known as the "Invest In Neighborhoods" program, provides customized support to small businesses, nonprofits, and community organizations in order to strengthen the city's neighborhood business corridors and commercial centers. Current benefits of the program include:

- Small business service and financing programs, including access to Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding, other capital sources, and the Small Business Development Center;
- Façade and tenant improvements through the *SF Shine* program;
- Construction mitigation support;
- Neighborhood commercial corridor strategies.



HOW SAN FRANCISCO'S CITY DEPARTMENTS CURRENTLY SUPPORT LEATHER AND LGBTQ COMMUNITIES

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

OEWD invests in workforce programs that aim to increase economic access. These programs include the Adult Job Centers (Neighborhood and Specialized), Young Adult programs (Job Centers, RAMP–Bootcamp and Subsidized Employment), Sector programs (Construction, Health Care, Hospitality, Tech and other “industries of opportunity”), and the Dream Keeper Initiative. Community-based partners funded through these investments conduct citywide outreach to multiple neighborhoods, including SoMa, with a target to support marginalized communities by providing them with the training, skills, tools and resources to effectively access both private and public sector jobs.

Additionally, three OEWD partner organizations are located within SoMa: Mission Hiring Hall, Hospitality House, and PRC. Mission Hiring Hall is the City’s construction and hospitality sector displaced worker coordinator that connects jobseekers to training and employment opportunities in these respective industries. Hospitality House is the Tenderloin Neighborhood Job Center that provides career services. PRC is a Specialized Job Center that specializes in serving community members with HIV/AIDS and individuals in recovery or experiencing mental health issues.

THE PLANNING DEPARTMENT AND PLANNING AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSIONS

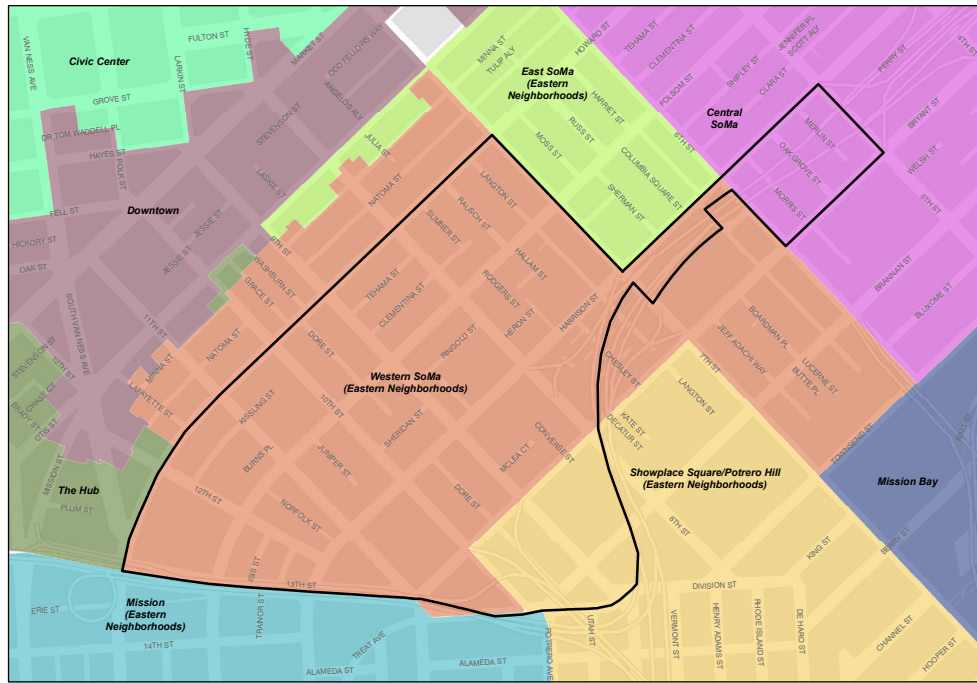
The Planning Department is a regulatory city agency that guides San Francisco’s growth and development, under the direction of the Planning and Historic Preservation Commissions. The Department oversees both current and long-range planning efforts to achieve a diverse jobs and housing base while sustaining the City’s unique cultural heritage, minimizing environmental impacts, promoting exemplary urban design, and fostering safety and resiliency. Proposed projects are reviewed for compliance with Planning Code requirements, while urban and residential design guidelines and standards further inform project review to ensure development is aligned with neighborhood built form. The Planning Department is also responsible for maintaining the City’s General Plan, which provides guidance to all city agencies and departments regarding urban design, land use, transportation, housing, and public safety. Planning also advises cultural districts on existing planning tools and resources, co-develops targeted programs to serve cultural districts’ needs, and implements controls.

NEIGHBORHOOD PLANNING

One of the Planning Department’s primary roles is the creation of neighborhood plans for various parts of the city, in partnership with local communities. This CHHESS report is in conversation with several of these planning documents in SoMa. Beginning in the early 2000s, community planning processes were initiated for San Francisco’s Eastern Neighborhoods including Eastern and Western SoMa. Conflicts between existing industrial uses and proposed new uses including office and residential had been arising. Community focused workshops were convened that set the groundwork for the Eastern Neighborhoods Plans, discussed below.



HOW SAN FRANCISCO'S CITY DEPARTMENTS CURRENTLY SUPPORT LEATHER AND LGBTQ COMMUNITIES



Leather & LGBTQ Cultural District: Area Plans
SAN FRANCISCO

WESTERN SOMA COMMUNITY PLAN

The majority of the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District falls within an area known as Western SoMa, for which the most pertinent official planning document is the *Western SoMa Community Plan*.

The planning process for that document was guided by a community-based citizens body called the Western SoMa Citizens Planning Task Force, which was established by a 2004 Planning Commission resolution that removed Western SoMa from the Eastern Neighborhoods rezoning process then underway until the neighborhood underwent a comprehensive, community-based planning process. Task Force members were appointed by City Supervisors to represent diverse aspects of community life, and included representation from both SoMa's Leather/LGBTQ+ communities and Filipino community. The San Francisco Planning Department served as a key partner with the Task Force, with assistance from other City departments, along with Asian Neighborhood Design and a number of academic organizations. The Task Force adopted several planning principles to guide the process, including mitigating possible neighborhood impacts resulting from new development; stabilizing the neighborhood against speculative land use proposals; and maintaining and encouraging community cultural diversity.

The plan identified that the "South of Market is of particular importance to the Filipino and LGBTQ communities" and that LGBTQ communities "add a richness to [SoMa's] cultural fabric." As such, the *Western SoMa Community Plan* makes several recommendations that pertain specifically to Leather and LGBTQ communities:



HOW SAN FRANCISCO'S CITY DEPARTMENTS CURRENTLY SUPPORT LEATHER AND LGBTQ COMMUNITIES

Policy 6.1.2: Recognize the contributions of the Filipino and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transexual, and Queer (LGBTQ) communities by creating Social Heritage Special Use Districts.

Policy 6.4.1: Identify Filipino and LGBTQ resources and provide opportunities for their restoration, rehabilitation, and preservation in Western SoMa adaptive re-use projects.

Policy 6.4.2: Recognize the social and cultural heritage values and properties of the LGBTQ District [referenced in Policy 6.4.1], already acknowledged and documented by its own community and local history.

Policy 9.4.3: Protect and support Filipino, LGBTQ, and other minority or culturally significant local businesses, structures, property and institutions in Western SoMa.

Policy 9.4.7: Prioritize maintenance and support funding for cultural and service facilities and events such as street fairs that support the LGBTQ community.

Beyond these LGBTQ-focused recommendations, the plan also makes several other recommendations related to cultural preservation that the work of the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District can be seen as helping to implement, including but not limited to:

Policy 2.1.8: Develop anti-displacement programs for existing neighborhood businesses with special attention given to innovative, creative and arts related programs and businesses.

Policy 4.23.3: Develop Folsom Street as a pedestrian-oriented transit corridor.

Policy 6.1.5: Identify traditional historical events as part of the neighborhood's social heritage.

Policy 6.4.4: Protect the 'social heritage' values, properties, and social heritage districts within Western SoMa.

Policy 8.2.7: Encourage programs that require the involvement of local artists, artisans, and craftspersons involvement in the design of open space, signage, and street furniture.

Policy 10.3.3: Encourage development of new community buildings that support a diverse spectrum of neighborhood activities.

RECOGNIZING, PROTECTING AND MEMORIALIZING SOUTH OF MARKET LGBTQ SOCIAL HERITAGE NEIGHBORHOOD RESOURCES

In addition to the *Western SoMa Community Plan*, in 2011 the Western SoMa Community Planning Task Force issued the report *Recognizing, protecting and memorializing South of Market LGBTQ social heritage neighborhood resources*. The Task Force hosted several meetings with Leather and LGBTQ community members to identify and map community assets "according to grassroots methodologies for identification and analysis." Community members also proposed several recommendations to meet the document's goals, including:



HOW SAN FRANCISCO'S CITY DEPARTMENTS CURRENTLY SUPPORT LEATHER AND LGBTQ COMMUNITIES

1. Establish boundaries for an LGBTQ Social Heritage Special Use District (SUD) that demarcates core cultural heritage assets.
2. Identify and classify individual assets.
3. Sustain ongoing research and policies that encourage the preservation of local social heritage and local culture through the Western SoMa Community Plan and other means.
4. Use the urban landscape to celebrate public history, using public features as a way to educate and accept diversity, leaving an important legacy at the heart of the neighborhood.
 - a. Honor a handful of LGBTQ sites which have embodied the essence of the neighborhood legacy with individual commemorative inscription and symbols.
 - b. Create a social-heritage path or tourist trail which celebrates collective important and valuable events and traditions such as festivals and street fairs still growing into local, regional and even world wide history.
 - c. Propose renaming streets and alleyways after some of the major figures of local leather history.
 - d. Seek to establish an LGBTQ museum, which will illustrate and fuse paraphernalia in context and produce a booklet similar to the one recently published by the Labor Archives (*The San Francisco Labor Landmarks Guide Book: A Register of Sites and Walking Tours*)

CENTRAL SOMA PLAN

A small portion of the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District also falls within what is referred to as “Central SoMa” (displayed below), which is an area that was carved out of previously industrial areas in the Eastern SoMa Plan Area and the Western SoMa Plan Area. The primary planning document for this area is the *Central SoMa Plan*, which was adopted in 2018 after an eight year engagement process.

While the *Western SoMa Community Plan* was more hesitant to embrace large-scale development, the *Central SoMa Plan* explicitly articulates that “Central SoMa should play a major role in accommodating the City’s share of anticipated regional growth in jobs and housing” while still respecting and enhancing neighborhood character and capturing public benefit from this growth.

Similar to the *Western SoMa Community Plan*, the *Central SoMa Plan* recognizes that both Filipino and LGBTQ communities have “a long-standing presence in SoMa” and that the neighborhood is home to “many important businesses, organizations, festivals and events, and communities...Collectively, these cultural assets create an inimitable sense of place and a connection to its past, as well as a social and economic fabric that can be shared across generations.” Below are a few of the major policy recommendations that the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District can be viewed as helping to implement:



HOW SAN FRANCISCO'S CITY DEPARTMENTS CURRENTLY SUPPORT LEATHER AND LGBTQ COMMUNITIES

Policy 7.2.2: Facilitate the creation and implementation of other social or cultural heritage strategies [in addition to those for the Filipino community], such as for the LGBTQ community.

Policy 7.3.2: Support the preservation of buildings and features that reflect the industrial and arts legacy of the neighborhood.

Policy 7.6.2: Incentivize retention of character-enhancing buildings.

The plan also articulates one of its objectives as “recogniz[ing] the importance of nightlife uses in creating a complete neighborhood,” which is key to the vibrancy of Leather and LGBTQ communities within SoMa.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION

In conjunction with the Planning and Historic Preservation Commissions, local community groups, and elected officials, the Planning Department has also led a number of initiatives to document, preserve, and commemorate significant architectural, cultural, and/or historic assets with ties to SoMa’s Leather and LGBTQ history.

In 2009, the Planning Department hired Page & Turnbull, Inc., to prepare a *South of Market Area Historic Context Statement*. While this document primarily focused on architectural history rather than cultural, it did include discussion of SoMa’s LGBTQ and Leather history and of the identification of sites associated with these communities. Page & Turnbull also identified what is called the “California Register Eligible Western SoMa Light Industrial & Residential Historic District,” which is identified as an eligible historic district under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)—though it is not officially designated under any local, state, or national registers.

In 2016, the Historic Preservation Commission also adopted *The Citywide Historic Context Statement on LGBTQ History in San Francisco*, which was co-authored by public historian Donna Graves and architectural historian Shayne Watson, with support from the City’s Historic Preservation Fund, OEWD, and the GLBT Historical Society. As described in the document, “a historic context statement is a historic preservation planning tool used by federal, state, and local governments to guide the identification, documentation, and evaluation of historic properties associated with a specific theme.” This particular statement focuses on the development of LGBTQ communities in San Francisco from the 19th century through the early 1990s, including their presence in SoMa and the development of Leather culture from the 1960s through 1990s. It then offers a how-to guide for preserving LGBTQ historic properties in San Francisco and makes recommendations for protecting and interpreting the City’s LGBTQ historic properties that are relevant to the recommendations in this CHHESS report, including:

- Complete a historic resource survey of LGBTQ sites in San Francisco;
- Designate LGBTQ historic districts;
- Create a historical plaque program and interpretive exhibits;
- Create educational tours;

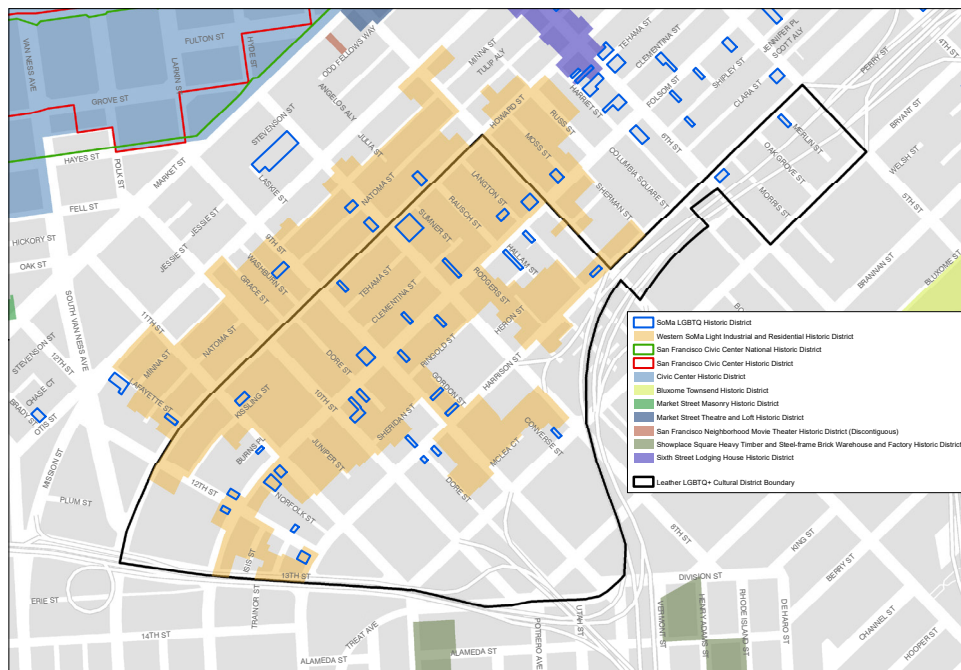


HOW SAN FRANCISCO'S CITY DEPARTMENTS CURRENTLY SUPPORT LEATHER AND LGBTQ COMMUNITIES

- Honor intangible heritage and legacy businesses;
- Create LGBTQ heritage corridor special use districts;
- Implement OEWD's Invest In Neighborhoods Program.

Also in 2016, the San Francisco Planning Commission voted unanimously in favor of allocating \$1.5M in funding towards the development of the world's first Leather-themed outdoor public plaza, called Eagle Plaza after the nearby Eagle bar. Located on 12th Street between Harrison and Bernice Streets, the official groundbreaking for the Eagle Plaza was held in 2019. In conjunction with the construction of the development at 1532 Harrison Street, the City's In-Kind Agreement program was used to fund its development. Additional fundraising events have supported the development of design elements including an 80 foot flag pole for the Leather Flag and Leather pride-themed crosswalks, installed in 2020 and 2021 respectively. The space is now utilized by recurring events including SoMa Second Saturdays and a weekly Farmer's Market to activate the plaza and neighborhood.

In 2017, the California Eligible SoMa LGBTQ Historic District was also identified. This discontinuous historic district includes roughly one-hundred potential buildings scattered throughout Western SoMa with LGBTQ historic or cultural associations from the 1960s to present. Resource types include homophile organizations, publishing houses, bars, restaurants, entertainment venues, bathhouses, sex clubs, retail spaces, and more. The District is identified as an eligible historic district under the CEQA, which means it is not officially designated under any local, state, or national registers. Additional properties can also be added to the district if associations with LGBTQ culture are discovered through historical review.



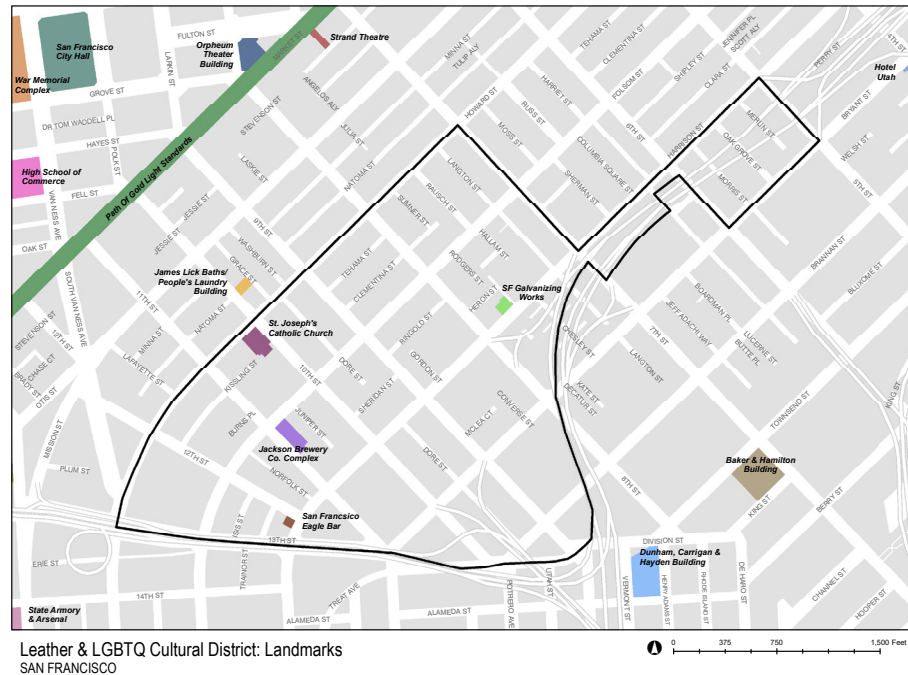
Leather & LGBTQ Cultural District: Historic Districts
SAN FRANCISCO

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HOW SAN FRANCISCO'S CITY DEPARTMENTS CURRENTLY SUPPORT LEATHER AND LGBTQ COMMUNITIES

In 2021, the San Francisco Eagle bar was also designated as Article 10 Individual Landmark Number 295, becoming the seventh City Landmark with an LGBTQ association, the first LGBTQ landmark in SoMa, and among the first designated Leather landmarks in the world.



In a similar vein to the Planning Department's preservation work, in 2021, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors also approved the designation and installation of seventy-nine sidewalk plaques marking locations of Leather and LGBTQ historic sites, together called the Leather History Cruise. In 2022, the Board then approved the addition of forty-six more plaques to this list based on additional district research, and directed Public Works to aid in implementation. (See Appendix C for a list of all Leather History Cruise sites.)

From 2021 to 2022, the Planning Department also oversaw the design and approval of facade plaques for installation on two properties associated with SoMa Leather/LGBTQ history: 323 10th Street (former site of Stompers Boots) and 367 12th Streets (former site of the Service of Mankind Church). The plaques were required as project improvement measures under CEQA, and were designed by the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District in conjunction with the sites' developers.

The Historic Preservation Commission has also supported the creation of an LGBTQ+ Cultural Heritage Strategy, which aims to "honor the legacy, nurture the well-being, promote economic opportunity, and ensure the longevity of San Francisco's LGBTQ+ community." This strategy is being steered by a working group formed by a resolution of the Board of Supervisors in 2016, which has presented on various existing historic preservation strategies in the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District, including the preservation of Ringold Alley and the creation of Eagle



HOW SAN FRANCISCO'S CITY DEPARTMENTS CURRENTLY SUPPORT LEATHER AND LGBTQ COMMUNITIES

Plaza. The Strategy also makes recommendations within three buckets: Well-being, Culture, and Opportunity. Many of these recommendations align with the work of the District and this CHHESS report, including:

- **Well-being**
 - 2.A: Identify categories of services needed and designate community partners that will be responsible for providing navigation tools.
 - 3. Improve cultural humility training.
- **Culture**
 - 3.B: Develop programs and processes to identify, document, and preserve LGBTQ+ historic sites in San Francisco.
 - 3: Develop a work plan to address outdated mitigation and process improvement measures for development projects that demolish LGBTQ+ associated sites in SF.
 - 5.B: Create stipend and mentorship programs to facilitate community engagement in arts and culture.
- **Opportunity**
 - 2: Expand workforce development efforts.
 - 3: Increase business and entrepreneur support.
 - 3.C: Support popup program in vacant retail spaces with targeted outreach to LGBTQ+ small businesses and nonprofits.

THE OFFICE OF TRANSGENDER INITIATIVES

The Office of Transgender Initiatives (OTI) within the Office of the City Administrator works with the community and the City and County of San Francisco to advance equity for transgender, non-binary, and gender nonconforming people. OTI ensures that the trans community's needs are considered across City programs, and manages initiatives such as a trans-focused cultural competency training for City employees and legal and healthcare resources lists for trans community members.

THE SAN FRANCISCO HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION'S LGBTQI+ ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The San Francisco Human Rights Commission's (HRC) advocates for human and civil rights, in service of the City's anti-discrimination laws. The Commission has several committees that focus on specific topics. One of these is the LGBTQI+ Advisory Committee, which is the City's only LGBTQI+-focused legislative body that was initially established in 1975 to provide guidance to the HRC regarding discrimination against LGBTQI+ communities. It later became a key body in the 1980s advocating for the civil rights of people living with HIV/AIDS, and has led to several other LGBTQI+-focused initiatives during its time operating.



HOW SAN FRANCISCO'S CITY DEPARTMENTS CURRENTLY SUPPORT LEATHER AND LGBTQ COMMUNITIES

In 2021, Mayor Breed's office announced the relaunch of the Committee after a several year period of dormancy. The Mayor appointed twenty-five members to the Committee, including representatives from the offices of United States Representative Nancy Pelosi, California State Senator Scott Wiener, and District 8 Supervisor Rafael Mandelman. The relaunch of the Committee includes more representation from elected officials, community-based organizations, non-profits, and general community members.

OTHER INITIATIVES OF THE MAYOR'S OFFICE

The Mayor's Office has also launched several other initiatives to support the city's LGBTQ communities. In 2021, Mayor Breed declared the month of August as Transgender History Month in San Francisco, which acknowledges the specific historical contributions of the transgender community. That same year, the Office also dedicated over \$2M to providing services for the City's Black trans community as part of the larger Dream Keeper Initiative.

Mayor Breed's Office also created the City's first Drag Laureate Program, which provides a \$55,000 stipend to a drag performer who participates in and hosts community events and "serve[s] as an ambassador for San Francisco to the LGBTQ, arts, nightlife, and entertainment communities." The first drag laureate was announced in May 2023 as D'Arcy Drollinger, a community leader and co-owner of the Oasis nightclub located within the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District.

The Office has also consistently voiced support for establishing an official LGBTQ museum in the City, building on existing efforts by organizations like the GLBT Historical Society.

LGBTQ DATA COLLECTION ACROSS CITY DEPARTMENTS

Since July 2017, San Francisco City Ordinance 159-16 has required City departments that collect demographic information in the process of providing services to clients (or grantees or contractors that do so on the City's behalf) to also record information about those clients' sexual orientation and gender identity. This tracking and recording has been carried out by six departments:

- Mayor's Office of Housing and Community Development (MOHCD);
- Department of Public Health (DPH);
- Human Services Agency (HSA);
- Department of Disability and Aging Services (DAS);
- Department of Children, Youth and Their Families (CDYF);
- Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing (HSH).

Each of these departments releases an annual report summarizing the data they collect, with DAS and HSA issuing a joint report.



HOW SAN FRANCISCO'S CITY DEPARTMENTS CURRENTLY SUPPORT LEATHER AND LGBTQ COMMUNITIES

In 2018, Mayor London Breed's office also issued an executive directive that extended this requirement to all departments that collect demographic information during the course of licensing, permitting, or other administrative, business, or service functions. In 2021, the BoS then passed legislation introduced by Mayor Breed and Supervisor Mandelman that directs the City's Department of Human Resources to collect voluntary and confidential sexual orientation demographics from City employees and applicants. To do so, the legislation repealed a previous section of the Administrative Code that disallowed for the collection of this data that had initially been passed to avoid discrimination.

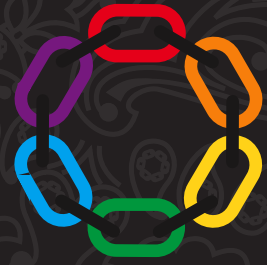
SOMA PILIPINAS FILIPINO HERITAGE DISTRICT CULTURAL HISTORY, HOUSING, AND ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGIES REPORT

Given its location in Western SoMa, The LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District also largely overlaps with the SOMA Pilipinas Filipino Cultural Heritage District, which covers the majority of the South of Market neighborhood. Similar to the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District, SOMA Pilipinas works closely with the City departments that comprise the Cultural District working group, led by MOHCD.

Similar to how this CHHESS report provides a vision for the District and for Leather and LGBTQ communities in SoMa, SOMA Pilipinas published a CHHESS report in 2022 that guides their work. Strategies include:

- (1) Develop and support SOMA Pilipinas Filipino cultural heritage archive and living legacy;
- (4) Protect and stabilize buildings that contain a high proportion of Filipino tenants and stabilize existing Filipino residents; and
- (19) Develop a barangay center/co-location services hub.

The LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District is committed to working closely with SOMA Pilipinas leadership on co-implementation of these plans. Our communities share many members as well as an interwoven history of struggle against displacement in SoMa.



LEATHER & LGBTQ
CULTURAL DISTRICT

Recommended Strategies



RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES

HISTORIC AND CULTURAL PRESERVATION: RESEARCHING, TEACHING, AND PRESERVING LEATHER AND LGBTQ CULTURE

Leather and LGBTQ culture have helped shape San Francisco as a City of progress and justice and have contributed to the City's proud cultural heterogeneity. However, as the City's landscape rapidly changes and as SoMa develops at a rate faster than any other San Francisco neighborhood, we continue to lose access to safe, affordable locations for LGBTQ and Leather folks to gather, create networks of support and advocacy, and conduct commerce, which threatens our very ability to continue those functions. Some segments of society continue to view Leather and LGBTQ culture as unknown, meaning that new development in the District can lead to pressure to sanitize our community traditions.

In this section, we also aim to build on existing City planning documents that discuss preservation of Leather and LGBTQ history, business, and culture within the District, including the *Citywide Historic Context Statement for LGBTQ History in San Francisco, Recognizing, protecting, and memorializing South of Market LGBTQ social heritage neighborhood resources*, and the *Western South of Market Community Plan and Central SoMa Plan*.

Supporting leather folks supports some of our most marginalized San Francisco residents to survive and thrive. These strategies aim to preserve and demarcate existing cultural hubs and practices for future generations to contribute socially, culturally, and economically to San Francisco. Leather and LGBTQ culture also spans many different demographics, and we aim to ensure our understanding of Leather and LGBTQ community and history within the District celebrates and is inclusive of the history of BIPOC, women, trans, and sex worker community members. We also recognize that historic preservation is deeply woven into other sections of this report, requiring cultural, political, and economic support to sustain our traditions into the future.



Henri Leleu Bar Photographs Collection (1997-13), Courtesy of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society.

STRATEGIES

1. ***Investigate ways to streamline City processes for protecting and commemorating historic Leather and LGBTQ sites within San Francisco.***

Of the over 120 sites, businesses, and organizations that the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District has recognized as having contributed to building Leather and LGBTQ community in SoMa over the past century, only around ten remain. (For the list of recognized sites, see Appendix C.) The buildings that once housed many of these businesses and organizations are also quickly being redeveloped. However, the available



RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES

protections for historic locations and businesses through programs like the Landmark Designation and Legacy Business Registry are lengthy, require significant resources, and are piecemeal since they require site-by-site designation rather than taking a District-wide approach.

The District aims to protect the physical buildings of existing District businesses and centers, commemorate cultural sites we have lost, and generally mark SOMA as being known for Leather and LGBTQ history. To achieve this, the District seeks to create a more streamlined and consistent way to recognize, protect, preserve, and commemorate historic sites within its boundaries. This will include working with the Planning Department and OEWD to explore ways to increase communication and negotiation with developers and property owners. Methods to investigate include requiring new developers to acknowledge and commemorate the Leather and LGBTQ history of the sites they are displacing when initiating development and connecting with advocacy groups that encourage responsive and inclusive development. They may also include requiring the installation of Interpretive Historical Elements in Notices of Special Restrictions (NSR) in all projects at historic locations identified by the District that require a hearing at the Planning Commission, and initiating a similar process for projects that are only subject to 311 notices to ensure the elements is kept in place permanently. Methods to help fund the relocation of any existing establishments that are displaced should also be investigated.

2. *Continue research on identified historic sites within the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District.*

The LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District board, staff, and affiliated community historians have identified approximately 120 sites connected to Leather and LGBTQ history within the Cultural District (referenced in the previous strategy, see Appendix C). Because LEATHER & LGBTQ communities have not historically benefited from institutional support—like mainstream media coverage and official archival practices—our existing records of many of these sites are limited.

The District, therefore, seeks to conduct further research and documentation into these sites through sources such as publications and oral histories and to document its findings in one location. This additional research will inform community education and preservation efforts, potentially lead to landmarking or engagement with other existing preservation programs, and enrich archival efforts laid out in Strategy 3 below.

The District will also work with the Planning Department's Historic Preservation Division and other City departments to conduct more in-depth research into the District's list of historical sites, identify new sites referenced in historical documents, and connect District staff and community members with resources to conduct further research. The District also seeks to work with the Planning Department to augment existing historic resource surveys to identify additional sites with Leather and LGBTQ associations.



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3. ***Secure resources and space for Leather & LGBTQ archival work.***

In focus groups, community members called out the Bay Area's legacy of cultivating freedom of expression and identity through Leather and LGBTQ events, gatherings, street fairs, and venues, mentioning that "no other city has a Leather District like San Francisco." Community members also expressed the desire to archive better historical materials and information associated with these cultures, building on and supporting the work of organizations like the GLBT Historical Society. Our communities see a secure archive and library as a vital step to nourishing future Leather and LGBTQ culture in San Francisco.

The LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District seeks to create an archive or expand upon existing archival efforts to store Leather and LGBTQ historical and cultural items and to allow community members to access them. Archival efforts should focus on a range of objects, including images, data, art, clothing, documents, and research relevant to the history of Leather and LGBTQ communities within the District and the Bay Area at large, and should have both physical and digital elements so as to be accessible to in-person and virtual audiences. The District should also ensure that the Leather and LGBTQ history preserved in District-supported archival work is inclusive of the history of BIPOC, women, trans, and sex worker community members. One community member summed up the sentiments of many focus group participants when they said: "I love Leather history and would love to have a place that collects and showcases BDSM books and artifacts. [But] I ask that [the archivists] not white-wash [our] history."

To support archival efforts, the District will coordinate amongst existing Leather and LGBTQ archival stakeholders to gather resources and ensure efforts are not unnecessarily duplicated. The District may also partner with a university or other existing archival organizations, such as the GLBT Historical Society, that can provide research expertise and even physical space for archival objects. The District will also work with professional archivists to develop an official records policy for historically significant Leather and LGBTQ items, including how to collect, retain, display, and deaccession these items. As mentioned in Strategy 2 above, the District has invested in soliciting and training community members specifically to research past and present locations of significance for Leather and LGBTQ communities and will continue to fund this type of work. The District has also built a custom online database to track historical locations and details in order to provide resources for upcoming walking tours and plaque projects.

City departments can support the District's work to identify and secure space for a physical archive; can direct City archival services (such as those at the San Francisco Public Libraries) to collaborate with the District on exhibits, publications, and best archival practices; and can integrate District efforts with other LGBTQ archival efforts the City is undertaking. They can also explore how City partnerships through Strategy 7, which supports the opening of a Leather + LGBTQ Community Center, can further the goal of a District historical archive and library.



RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES

4. *Conduct outreach to residential and commercial tenants and owners about local Leather and LGBTQ sites and culture.*

As referenced in the goal for this section, when new residents do not understand or are unfamiliar with long-standing Leather and LGBTQ cultural practices, they may seek to stop these practices from happening. Our community members frequently report transphobic, homophobic, misogynistic, and sex-negative interactions with residents.

To help new and existing District residents connect with local Leather and LGBTQ culture and history to improve community relations, the District will seek out opportunities to inform residents about our history and culture and create educational materials (or support the creation of these materials by Leather and LGBTQ community members) to distribute through the District's communication channels. These materials can also draw upon archival material preserved in Strategy 2 above.

The District will also work with City departments to explore ways to inform new and future residents of SoMa developments that:

- They will be living in a recognized Cultural District;
- They will be living in proximity to important cultural events (such as the Folsom Street Fair) that may impact vehicular traffic, street closures, and noise levels at particular times;
- If applicable, they are within five hundred feet of a historically significant Leather or LGBTQ landmark;
- They can obtain additional information about the District from District staff.

The City has used a similar model to require developers to inform new tenants if they are moving within proximity of an entertainment venue, to ensure they understand associated risks and benefits ahead of time. The City and the Cultural District could also explore utilizing a "Good Neighbor Policy" (similar to the Entertainment Commission's policy with this name) to aid in notifying neighbors of Cultural District events and gatherings.

This work could also include exploring ways to integrate Leather and LGBTQ historical data into online zoning and planning platforms, like the San Francisco Property Information Map (PIM), plan check letters, and in other Planning Department materials.

5. *Support educational opportunities around Leather, LGBTQ, and Kink cultures.*

Leather and LGBTQ communities have many specific cultural practices that may be misunderstood not only by larger segments of society but also by other Leather and LGBTQ community members since these communities are in no way monolithic. This is often compounded because many LGBTQ people do not grow up in households with other LGBTQ people and thus do not learn about LGBTQ and adjacent cultures like Leather until later in life. In our focus groups, community members requested that the



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District help facilitate education and awareness of different facets within the LGBTQ and Leather community. For example, the trans community would like District-wide education about trans issues and pronouns; local sex workers request District-wide awareness of unsafe work policies; BIPOC community members would like to increase Black Leather history within the District.).

The District seeks to support educational opportunities around Leather, Kink, and LGBTQ culture not only for new SoMa residents who may not be Leather or LGBTQ community members but also for these communities themselves in and beyond SoMa. This will strengthen intra-community connections and allow people to explore new parts of their individual or communal identity to help keep our cultural practices alive for future generations. At the same time, it will aid in informing and de-mystifying Leather and LGBTQ practices to the larger Bay Area community. These opportunities can manifest as community workshops, panels, zines, and art. They might be connected to specific subcultures (e.g. Leather Dyke activism, transgender awareness, or pup culture) or practices (e.g. shibari), or to broader community principles (e.g. consent, negotiation, and communication skills).

6. *Identify funding opportunities to create and install the Leather History Cruise commemorative plaques.*

The Leather History Cruise is a series of over one hundred sidewalk plaques that commemorate significant Leather and LGBTQ historical sites throughout SoMa. The project will engage pedestrians with District history, as well as draw visitors to the neighborhood. The project has already been authorized by the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, which directs the Department of Public Works to take all actions necessary to implement the project. The designs have also received approval from the San Francisco Arts Commission's Civic Design Review process and the Mayor's Office on Disability's review process. Fourteen plaques are being installed as part of the public realm improvements planned for the SFMTA's Folsom-Howard Streetscape Project. Several Community Benefits Districts within SoMa support the project and have agreed to maintain the plaques once they are installed. However, project leaders still do not have funding for plaque fabrication or installation other than the fourteen being included in the Folsom-Howard project.

The District will therefore continue to work to identify ways to fund the fabrication and installation of the remaining plaques. City departments can aid the District in securing funding, such as by waiving permitting fees for the project to keep costs as low as possible. The District can also work with the SoMa Community Advisory Committee to attempt to fund the project through financial or in-kind contributions from local development.



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LAND USE: SHAPING COMMUNITY THROUGH THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

SoMa has been developed in ways that have left Leather and LGBTQ communities with little physical space to gather, host events, create programming, or engage in the activities that allow our culture to thrive in San Francisco. The neighborhood also continues to change rapidly due to its proximity to downtown and transit hubs, with several City plans having marked SoMa as an ideal site for new development.

A primary goal of this section is to carve out physical spaces for Leather and LGBTQ communities to use and gather within our District and to maintain these spaces to prevent displacement as the neighborhood changes. We hope to pursue this goal through tried and true methods such as opening a community center, as well as more innovative methods like making

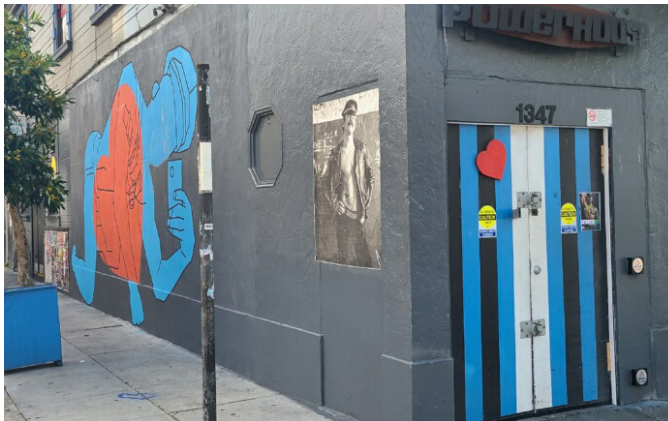


Photo Credit: David Hyman

temporary use of vacant spaces and exploring options for community land ownership that integrate commercial space. We also aim to update existing, antiquated zoning rules that fail to adequately protect our local businesses or allow for sex-positive spaces identified as vital by our communities.

Lastly, we aim to engage more explicitly with the planning and development processes that are changing our District. This

includes City plans and the allocation of impact fees, as well as the work of individual real estate developers working in SoMa, to whom we hope to communicate our community's concerns earlier in a development project's timeline and provide clear possible outlets for partnership and contributions.

STRATEGIES

7. Explore strategies to open a LEATHER & LGBTQ Community Center within the District.

A central request that emerged from community focus groups was the need for more gathering spaces for culturally relevant programming. Many community groups would like a space to meet regularly but cannot afford local rents or want to host events that are not permitted by zoning in many event spaces. BIPOC, trans, and sex worker event producers and community organizers also report difficulty in accessing gathering spaces that are safe and welcoming for marginalized community members. This is exacerbated by the fact that several institutions that have commonly provided space for community-oriented events within or near the District have closed or moved in recent years, including the Center for Sex and Culture, St. James Infirmary, and The Stud Bar.



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The District seeks to open a community center for the Leather and LGBTQ communities to serve as a new anchor and space for gathering. This community center would be located within the District and would ideally offer several different uses, including:

- a large, flexible community space available to community groups;
- District public meetings;
- educational programs;
- a gallery or exhibit space for local artists;
- a lounge for casual meetings and hangouts that foster social support;
- office space for a community center and District staff; and
- additional spaces such as a cafe or retail shop.

The District has already partnered with Community Vision Capital and Consulting to identify priorities for a community center, create several (practical and aspirational) scenarios for the physical layout and size of the community center, and develop a budget based on likely costs, available funding sources, and potential sources of income from the space (such as through subleasing) based on other comparable projects in San Francisco. The District has also explored options for both purchasing and renting a community center space, depending on funds secured for the project. The District can also work with City staff to facilitate asset mapping, layout design, site evaluation, creation of a max capital campaign budget, support in funding development, and connection to resources like the SFAC's Creative Space planning grants.

This strategy would build on policies recommended in the Western SoMa Plan to “encourage the development of new community buildings that support a diverse spectrum of neighborhood activities” and to “support the siting of new facilities to meet the needs of a growing community and to provide opportunities for residents of all age levels.”

8. *Explore opportunities to build real estate capacity among Leather and LGBTQ community members to support stabilization.*

The SoMa neighborhood is developing at a rate faster than any other neighborhood in San Francisco. Community members often express feeling powerless in the face of this development and that they lack the expertise and resources needed to intervene through engagement with real estate markets for community benefits.

The District, therefore, seeks to develop real estate capacity amongst Leather and LGBTQ community members and the District's board and staff. This could happen by drawing on the expertise of existing community organizations and others with real estate knowledge to develop educational opportunities and facilitating access to more substantive resources like funding. Eventually, this support could create an entity that would develop real estate geared towards community uses in SoMa, such as a community development corporation, community land trust, or community investment fund.



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City departments could support this work by partnering with San Francisco cultural districts that are seeking to acquire and develop property for community purposes and connecting them with educational opportunities to build capacity. They could also consider adding new programs to their list of existing supports for community developers, such as the first right of purchase for local community development entities on the sale of government-owned land in SoMa and loan underwriting to acquire property.

9. *Identify and utilize vacant space within the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District for community events and new businesses.*

San Francisco's commercial corridors have seen increasing vacancy levels in recent years due to a wide range of factors, such as increasingly high commercial rents, the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on many small businesses, and the practice of some commercial landlords to hold spaces vacant in anticipation of higher rents in the future. These vacancies can severely impact the street-level experience of a corridor, as fewer commercial storefronts usually mean fewer goods and services to choose from and fewer pedestrians walking to access those goods and services.

The District seeks to reduce vacancies in SoMa to foster a more vibrant street-level experience and enable small businesses to access existing spaces that are currently unused. To achieve this goal, the District can conduct independent research and work with City departments such as the Department of Building Inspection to study ownership trends in SoMa and strategies to locate and reduce vacancies, ultimately producing a vacancy map and other relevant land use data points. This work could be done in conjunction with other relevant stakeholders in SoMa who wish to lower vacancies, such as the local Community Benefits Districts. This work should also assess if vacancies are at all encouraged by existing zoning regulations.

Once this information has been collected, the District, City departments and other identified stakeholders can conduct a community needs assessment to learn what Leather and LGBTQ activities and businesses need space and which sites could house these uses. Research should also assess the impact of the current vacancy tax funds. It should explore potential incentives to offer landlords to reduce vacancies, such as fee waivers for providing ground-floor retail spaces to cultural districts for a reduced rent or donation. The City could also expand OEWD's Vacant to Vibrant program, which helps small businesses, arts organizations and cultural entrepreneurs collaborate with local property owners to create engaging pop-up experiences and community spaces in downtown San Francisco.

10. *Explore ways to update zoning rules within the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District to permit and allow for a critical concentration of adult and LEATHER businesses.*

Allowing adult businesses is key to removing stigma and reviving the types of businesses that were historically a focal point of LGBTQ social life in San Francisco and especially



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in SoMa. These businesses also increase the neighborhood's economic health, both through increased employment and increased foot traffic to other businesses.

The San Francisco Planning Code defines **adult entertainment** uses as “a retail use which includes the following: adult bookstore, as defined by section 791 of the Police Code; adult theater, as defined by Section 791 of the Police Code; and encounter studio, as defined by Section 1072.1 of the Police Code.” (See the glossary of this report for the City's definitions of “Adult bookstore,” “Adult theater,” “Encounter studio,” and other related terms.) Currently, the Code prohibits adult business use in most areas of the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District, which prevents these types of businesses from opening. The Code also specifies that “Such [an adult entertainment] use shall be located no less than 1,000 feet from another adult entertainment use,” which prevents adult businesses from clustering in ways that could support a vibrant commercial district. (For reference, on Folsom Street, this minimum distance is more than a block apart.)

The District believes changes need to be made to the current Planning Code to allow for more adult businesses to be sited within SoMa, allowing these community-serving businesses to develop.

The Planning Department can support this change by dedicating more resources toward understanding zoning and regulation around adult-oriented businesses, nightlife, and street fairs within SoMa and investigating ways to update the Code to allow these uses. Strategies might include changing the current base zoning designation within the district to one that allows for adult businesses, updating the definitions of the base zoning categories themselves to allow for adult businesses, or updating overlays that cover the district to allow for adult businesses. (Potential changes to overlays include principally permitting adult entertainment uses in the Folsom Street Neighborhood Commercial District (Folsom NCT), the WSOMA Mixed-Use General (WMUG) District, the Mixed-Use General (MUG) District, the Service/Arts/Light Industrial (SALI) District, the WSOMA Mixed Use-Office (WMUO) District, and the Folsom Street Residential Commercial District (RCD); and conditionally permitting adult entertainment uses in the Residential Enclave-Mixed District (RED-MX).) Strategies could also include eliminating space requirements between adult businesses.

The District will continue to gather key stakeholders on this issue to inform and support future legislation or changes to the Planning Code. The District can also educate community members about these changes, if made, to ensure code updates result in meaningful efforts to start new businesses in SoMa.

11. Explore the development of LEATHER & LGBTQ Special Area Design Standards to preserve District history.

Having served as an industrial center for San Francisco during the 19th and 20th centuries, SoMa's industrial buildings provided sites for early Leather community building, and the neighborhood is still known today for its industrial aesthetic. As the neighborhood



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develops, however, community members have expressed concern that large, glass-box development will create an alienating pedestrian experience in the district and thus make it less of a destination for our communities.

The District therefore seeks to preserve elements of the existing industrial aesthetic and a sense of history in the built environment within its boundaries. To do so, the District would work with City departments to create LEATHER & LGBTQ design standards that would provide City departments such as DPW, SFMTA, and the Planning Department with community-vetted design and public realm elements and concepts for incorporation into public projects in the District. These would also be designed to comply with the SOMA Pilipinas Special Areas Design Guidelines and vetted with the Planning Department, and thus could be provided to applicants for inclusion in private development projects and incorporated into the review of private projects by the Planning Commission.



Photo Credit: Dave Fong

12. Include LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District representation in local planning processes that impact our district.

SoMa has been the focus of several planning and development advisory processes over the past several decades that seek to guide the area's development, most notable of which are the Eastern, Western, and Central SoMa Plans. However, some of these plans have included limited Leather and/or LGBTQ community representation and greater benefits to the SOMA area would be achieved by increasing that representation to cover broader policy areas and members representing local community groups.

Therefore, the District aims to be more directly included in existing planning and development advisory processes initiated or maintained by the City. District staff will work with the Planning Department to be highly engaged in any community planning processes that overlap with the District from the beginning. If a task force or an advisory committee form as part of these planning processes, the District will seek membership in these groups where appropriate.



RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES

TENANT EMPOWERMENT AND EVICTION PREVENTION: FOSTERING HOUSING ACCESS AND INNOVATION

In our focus groups, most community members reported that the high cost of living in SoMa has dramatically changed its demographics and culture. Our District aims to be a place where our communities and families can afford to live, work, and thrive. But because rents in the District have risen over the past decade, many community members who had lived in SoMa for much of their time in San Francisco can no longer afford to live there. This was expressed by both working-class and middle-class community members, and especially by BIPOC, trans, women, and sex worker community members, who also link this housing displacement to limited high-paying employment opportunities.

The LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District aims to create meaningful relationships with housing advocates and policymakers to prevent further displacement and better support our District's access to affordable housing. We want to contribute to greater data collection on LGBTQ and Leather communities so that housing issues can be more accurately described, identified, and addressed within the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District. We also recognize that we cannot fully address tenant empowerment and protection without addressing the needs of SoMa's unhoused community members, and thus want to engage with issues that our unhoused folks' experience, bring support to these community members, and be part of long-term solutions as San Francisco reckons with its housing crisis.

STRATEGIES

13. *Develop partnerships with City departments, non-profit organizations, and housing rights advocates within San Francisco to ensure Leather and LGBTQ community needs are reflected and supported.*

Given the prevalence of housing displacement within our focus group feedback along with the complexity of housing policy and advocacy within San Francisco, the District seeks to build stronger connections with existing initiatives and organizations in San Francisco focused on making housing more affordable and thus preventing displacement and stabilizing communities. District staff will assist with disseminating housing-related information to Leather and LGBTQ community members, and can identify ways to cater Citywide initiatives or initiatives in other neighborhoods to be more context-specific in SoMa.

District staff will also collaborate with City agencies on existing housing planning initiatives that encompass the district, such as the Planning Department's *Housing Element* report. This will ensure Leather and LGBTQ community needs are reflected within these types of reports while simultaneously educating District staff, board, and community members on these issues to inform future programming.



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14. *Support models of LGBTQ and/or communal housing within the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District.*

In addition to being a foundation of individual and family stability, housing has historically been a key site for Leather and LGBTQ community building. Many now-famous LGBTQ organizations, like the Daughters of Bilitis, started in San Francisco in their founders' living rooms, which provided a safe private space where plans could be made and ideals of the community could be articulated. However, as home and rent prices in San Francisco and SoMa have skyrocketed, it has become increasingly difficult to stabilize community-oriented housing models.

The District acknowledges the importance of housing in Leather and LGBTQ community building and will support existing initiatives that foster Leather- and LGBTQ-inclusive housing. These include online housing matching groups that can be listed on the District's website or advertised through the District's listserv, partnerships with communal or shared housing organizations to make information on these forms of housing more accessible, and research to identify barriers to communal housing within the district. City departments can explore ways to support the District in creating communal housing listings, such as by providing legal support, and can facilitate connections between the District and organizations like the LGBT Center and Open House that have existing housing programs for LGBTQ folks, to help disseminate housing information.

15. *Expand dignified and humane housing and sanitation options for the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District's unhoused community members.*

SoMa and nearby neighborhoods like the Tenderloin have a high concentration of folks experiencing housing insecurity. The District seeks to expand dignified and humane housing and sanitation options for unhoused folks within SoMa and the Tenderloin.

To do so, District staff can partner with organizations spearheading this work elsewhere in the City, and provide resources and expertise to tailor this work for the district. They can also work with City agencies to access public sanitation services commonly accessed through private housing, such as more public restrooms and handwashing stations, and a mobile shower program such as that used by the houselessness services organization LavaMae.



RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES

ARTS AND CULTURE: FACILITATING PUBLIC ART, SUSTAINING NIGHTLIFE, AND DIVERSIFYING EVENT OFFERINGS

Art and cultural expression are key ways that communities deepen their connections, articulate their values, and commemorate their history. In focus groups and interviews, LGBTQ and Leather community members reported wanting to see their identities reflected in District arts and cultural programming—specifically through murals, street art, queer and kink events, and queer-owned businesses. Folks noted that they feel culturally connected to the District when they see people walking around who are “visibly queer, in leather and kink gear, cruising, and who they ‘know.’” This cultural visibility gives community members a reason to invest socially and financially in the District and builds a strong sense of belonging.

This artistic and cultural vibrancy in the District is threatened by the continued displacement of community members, commercial institutions, and establishments discussed in other strategy sections of this report. Community members also reported that not enough of the artistic and cultural expression within the District is led by or reflects more marginalized community members, including BIPOC, trans, women, sex worker, and disabled community members.

This section outlines strategies to create a more supportive environment in which Leather and LGBTQ community members can create art and organize cultural events. This includes ensuring that this type of work is paid and recognized, making City processes related to arts and culture more easily navigable for our community members, and supporting keystone events like the Folsom Street Fair. It also includes addressing the lack of representation amongst more marginalized community members by gearing support directly to these groups. Lastly, this section also includes several goals around coordinating efforts in district-wide plans or strategies, to ensure we view individual events, pieces of art, and performances as parts of larger cultural systems and identify pain points in these systems where support is needed.

STRATEGIES

16. *Create a cohesive public art strategy or plan for the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District.*

An important aspect of cultural expression within the Cultural Districts is the installation of public art and design elements that reflect community practices, images, and history. Focus groups with Leather and LGBTQ community members also revealed that they want to see more public art within SoMa. Thus far, the District board and staff have collaborated with several local small businesses to create murals on building exteriors, as well as worked with the SoMaWest Community Benefits District to include artwork from local Leather and LGBTQ community artists on local BigBelly waste compactors, and can work to expand these efforts. However, community members also want to see a greater variety of public art within the district, such as more interactive art or public performances, as well as to ensure that community members (and especially trans, women, and BIPOC community members) are selected to create and are paid for this artwork.



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A plan or strategy thus would help the Cultural District to ingrain these wishes in public art processes while ensuring cohesion and conversation between pieces of public art. The District will help to organize the process and gather stakeholders with interests in public art within the district, including business leaders and local artists, to identify priorities for the strategy or plan.

The District will also work with City agencies to simplify City policies around artwork permitting and the supportive programs that fund art projects for community artists. The District would ensure that this strategy or plan worked in tandem with the Design Guidelines described in Strategy 12 above. The District would also partner with the Arts Commission and other arts planning groups to create the public art strategy and identify potential resources, obtain data about existing artwork and relevant information about permitting and logistical issues, and connect with existing supportive programs to bring art into San Francisco neighborhoods.

17. *Explore a streamlined method to allow cultural districts to install public art and district placemaking elements on City infrastructure within their district boundaries.*

The current processes for installing public art or placemaking elements on City infrastructure or for introducing new branded infrastructure such as gateways or bike lock stations are difficult for several reasons. They are often decentralized and require involvement from several City departments, can be prohibitively expensive, or can simply run into the issue of City departments never having supported a specific type of art before and therefore not having a process in place for approval. While several cultural districts have worked along with their City District Supervisors to require City agencies to create new processes and waive permit fees, these efforts have been project-by-project and district-by-district rather than holistic and proactive, leaving uncertainty about how to initiate these processes each time.

The District seeks to work with City departments to develop a process to support and streamline the creation and installation of placemaking tools across the cultural districts. This would include working with stakeholders from agencies that control permissions over public infrastructure—including the DPW (especially the Bureau of Street-Use and Mapping), SFMTA, the Public Utilities Commission (PUC), and the San Francisco Fire Department—along with the staff of other cultural districts to proactively create processes to streamline public art installation for cultural district placemaking projects, such as a one-stop-shop for these types of permits. This process should be inclusive of a range of art and infrastructure, including public murals, sidewalk plaques, gateways, traffic and light pole banners and wraps, and other design elements.

As a part of this process, the District would also seek to work with City agencies and supervisors to codify fee waivers for permits and reviews from City agencies for cultural district art projects, such as those collected from DPW, the SFAC, and the Mayor's Office of Disability. Cultural districts could also explore a legislative amendment to funnel certain public art fees into a fund to support cultural district art projects.



RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES

18. Create a Nightlife and Entertainment Revitalization and Sustainability Plan for the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District.

As a 2016 report from the San Francisco Board of Supervisors acknowledged, “bars and nightlife have historically provided a safe gathering space for the members of the LGBTQ community, including spaces to find and build community;” have “played an important part in the history of the LGBTQ Civil Rights Movement;” and are “important art venues, social spaces, and places for political organization and charitable fundraising.”³⁸ They are also important small businesses that provide local employment opportunities. However, the vitality of these spaces has been severely impacted by the long-term rising costs of operating an establishment and by the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced many venues to close for upwards of a year (and pushed some, like The Stud, to close permanently).

Therefore to preserve Leather and LGBTQ culture within the District, a concerted plan is needed to support local nightlife. This plan should focus on a range of areas, including business support, public safety, neighborhood branding and lighting, transportation, and strategies to avoid conflicts between nightlife establishments and neighborhood residents. It should also include extensive engagement from establishment owners and employees, performers and event organizers who work within the district, establishment patrons, and local residents. This would build on objectives laid out in the Western SoMa Community Plan to “Protect and encourage appropriate neighborhood entertainment uses” and to “Encourage appropriate activities during both day and night.”

The District could create this plan in partnership with City departments, including the Planning Department, the Office of Economic and Workforce Development (and specifically their Business Development Manager for Nightlife and Entertainment), the Office of Small Business, and/or the Entertainment Commission. Relevant support includes identifying focus areas, bringing relevant stakeholders to the table to ensure broad community input, and finalizing strategies. The District could also develop short-term partnerships with OEWD (or specifically OSB) to distribute grants to nightlife venues or a specific nightlife working group for other local planning initiatives. City agencies should also consider Western SoMa as a potential site for any nightlife support programs it aims to pilot in a particular neighborhood before expanding to the rest of the City.

³⁸ BoS Resolution No. 446-16: Resolution urging the establishment of the LGBTQ nightlife and culture working group, and urging the Office of Economic and Workforce Development and the Entertainment Commission to convene the working group with a goal of protecting, preserving, and expanding LGBTQ nightlife, including drafting and enact a plan to create the Citywide LGBTQ Cultural Heritage Strategy



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19. *Research and develop resources to support BIPOC, trans, women, sex worker, and disabled Leather and LGBTQ community members in organizing new cultural events within the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District.*

Cultural events such as art exhibitions, performances, leather rituals, dance parties, and creative kink-related meetups are central spaces for building community within Leather and LGBTQ communities. Encouraging new events also helps encourage attendance at local event venues, thus helping to support them economically, and is important as our communities seek to reconnect and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Organizing an event can require significant time and resources that many community members may not have access to if they do not have prior experience in event planning. This is particularly true for BIPOC, trans, women, sex workers, and disabled community members who have been underrepresented amongst local event organizers, which can ultimately lead to fewer events being planned that take the needs of these groups into account. In focus groups, members of these groups explicitly requested targeted resources. Barriers can also be particularly complicated when hosting sex-positive events, whose organizers may have fewer spaces to choose from and may have a harder time securing an event license.

The LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District, therefore, will support BIPOC, trans, women, sex worker, and disabled community members who are attempting to organize new community-oriented and sex-positive events, with the longer-term goal of creating a Cultural Event Producers training program. Relevant support includes:

- Resources such as a “how-to” toolkit for organizing an event within the district, including relevant information about event licensing and finances;
- A workshop series or “boot camp” that walks through information and resources found in the toolkit;
- Information about available event venues and vendors, and facilitated introductions with these groups;
- Event marketing through district communication channels;
- Direct grants for first-time events; and
- Guidance from established event organizers about creating a financially feasible event within the District.

The District could partner with current Leather and LGBTQ community event organizers to create this material. It could also partner with venue owners within the district, including those not primarily geared towards Leather and LGBTQ communities, to create a registry of available venues with which program participants could be matched.

The District could also work with City agencies to administer and advertise the program, to connect the program to existing cultural event grants, and to create a new grant program specifically for organizing new cultural events, especially on a small scale. The City can work with



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relevant stakeholders to identify and make connections with educational and skill development opportunities to support community event organizing.

20. *Create a registry of potential locations in which to gather and host community events and programming.*

As noted in the previous strategy, while several types of events provide key spaces of community building for Leather and LGBTQ communities, organizing an event can require significant resources and connections that many community members do not have. In particular, finding a location that will host a new event can be time-consuming, and venue owners may be cautious to host new events for fear of low turnout that can impact revenue.

To help facilitate the process of finding a location for events, the District will create a registry of potential locations in which to gather and host community events and programming. To do so, the District will reach out to potential local venues to gather information about the space (such as costs, square footage, contact information, and the types of events they are open to hosting), and to request their engagement within the registry. These venues could include those already associated with Leather and LGBTQ communities, other general venues, and potentially also government-managed buildings and public spaces. This strategy will directly support Arts and Culture Strategy 21 above, which aims to provide various resources for event organizers from underrepresented groups, and will help interested local venues advertise their spaces to our community members. This resource will also help the District assess the infrastructure that actually exists within the district to support the types of events considered culturally significant for Leather and LGBTQ communities, which may spark future efforts to support particular types of events. The District could use a tool like <https://culturecompass.org/> to start a registry of community locations.

City agencies could support this work by identifying publicly-owned or -managed spaces within the District that might be used for Leather and LGBTQ community events. They could also help the District investigate potential incentives to encourage venue owners to rent their space to new event organizers for a reduced rate, given that these rates will encourage underrepresented segments of our communities to be able to organize more events.

21. *Strengthen connections with Leather and LGBTQ communities outside of San Francisco.*

San Francisco's vibrant local Leather and LGBTQ communities are also deeply connected to Leather and LGBTQ culture in other places, including Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, Palm Springs, and Berlin, as well as local hubs like Oakland, the North Bay, and San Jose. These connections enrich culture, but they also materially result in travel and tourism between cities; the Folsom Street Fair, the largest Leather-focused event in San Francisco, attracts upwards of 400,000 attendees, a majority of whom come from outside the City.



RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES

To continue supporting the cultural and economic vitality of the District, the Cultural District will continue to build connections and cross-program with Leather and LGBTQ community leaders and event organizers in these other cities.



RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES

ECONOMIC AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT: RESOURCING LEATHER AND LGBTQ BUSINESSES, EVENTS, AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Community members see an economically vibrant SoMa as one where a diverse group of people, spaces, and businesses combine to offer unique experiences that folks cannot find in other neighborhoods. Focus group participants specifically noted outdoor seating, parklets, bike lanes, and outdoor festivals as good for accessibility and business. Others mentioned that it is important to have a diversity of events and businesses to choose from, including those with high and low price points, different types of food and nightlife, and “one-of-a-kind experiences.” However, many community members reported that the high overhead cost of commercial rental space makes maintaining a healthy and profitable business within the District difficult, and commercial landlords have the upper hand in all negotiations.

Therefore, in this section, we lay out goals to help support Leather and LGBTQ businesses and organizations within the District. For the sake of this section, we define a Leather and *LGBTQ business or organization* as a business located within the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District:

- whose goods and services are predominantly consumed by Leather and LGBTQ patrons;
- with majority ownership by Leather and LGBTQ community members; and/or
- that provides significant support to the Cultural District’s programs or other Leather and LGBTQ non-profit organizations operating in the Cultural District.

Typical examples of *Leather and LGBTQ businesses or organizations* include Leather and LGBTQ bars, event and entertainment venues, sex clubs, kink apparel shops, adult bookstores, inclusive art spaces, and restaurants. Support for these businesses could take many forms, including streamlining permitting processes and helping entrepreneurs within our communities—particularly underrepresented groups—grow a business.

Beyond supporting businesses and events geared towards Leather and LGBTQ communities, we also hope to simply create more employment opportunities for these communities’ members so that they can thrive within the District and create a stronger connection between our communities and locally-based companies.

STRATEGIES

22. Explore ways to simplify permitting processes for new and existing businesses, events, and organizations within the Leather and LGBTQ Cultural District.

A major piece of feedback that emerged in focus groups was the difficulty of obtaining permits from the City for business and event purposes, such as street closure, sound, and food permits. The process for obtaining these permits is often extremely costly and time-intensive, which can sometimes make them prohibitive to certain event organizers or individuals looking to start a business.



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The City has made progress in this area in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, primarily through the Shared Spaces program, which consolidates permitting processes and has waived fees for permit operators. However, while this program was made permanent by the Board of Supervisors in July 2021, the component that waives fees is no longer in effect as of June 2022, which again makes these permits prohibitively costly for many applications. (For instance, the District will have difficulties continuing to host Second Saturdays, a monthly Leather and LGBTQ community market that showcases local artists, performers, and artisans.)

The District supports exploring new strategies to streamline permitting processes for new and existing Leather and LGBTQ businesses, events, and organizations and for keeping these processes more affordable to encourage greater accessibility. District seeks to work with City departments, particularly the Police Department and the Entertainment Commission, to explore ways to streamline event permitting processes and to make these processes more transparent. Relevant topics for exploration include the creation of a one-stop permitting shop rather than requiring applicants to coordinate amongst various City departments, as well as the dedication of a City employee's time to assist the various cultural districts with event permits so that these Districts can curate programming and events for their communities. Additionally, the District and partnering City departments can consider ways to exempt cultural districts from the Shared Spaces fees and other permitting fees to encourage them to be able to organize community-oriented programming affordably.

23. *Develop and market LEATHER & LGBTQ businesses and organizations within the District.*

Much of San Francisco's success as a world-class tourist destination—which brought in upwards of \$10 billion in tourism revenue in 2019—is due to its cultural diversity. The District's primary commercial and tourism area is Folsom Street between 7th and 12th Street and 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th Street between Howard and Harrison Street.

To ensure that the District is able to support and be included in local tourism efforts and benefit from tourist dollars spent in the City, the District will work to develop and market Leather and LGBTQ businesses and organizations within SoMa. This can include creating marketing campaigns in partnership with local Leather and LGBTQ businesses to showcase their wares and encourage commerce and sharing these campaigns through District media and contact lists. The District can consider highlighting particular businesses or products as part of these campaigns.

The District can partner with City departments and groups like the San Francisco Convention and Visitors Bureau to integrate information about the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District into promotional material, such as tourism maps, lists of cultural destinations, and ads in and on vehicles and stations managed by the SFMTA.



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District and City staff can also identify, promote, and develop commercial activity in particular segments of the District. The District can specifically work with OEWD to investigate designating streets within the District (such as Folsom Street or other community-identified streets) as Invest In Neighborhoods (IIN) areas. This strategy is suggested in the *Citywide Historic Context Statement for LGBTQ History in San Francisco*, which lists potential benefits, including design and development assistance that can be targeted to specific businesses and buildings and/or be provided to the neighborhood in general; loans, grants, or financial assistance services that could be targeted to businesses, organizations, and institutions; and marketing services, business recruitment; and programming and activation services that could be targeted to specific businesses, properties, and cultural activities and events. Alternatively, the District could work with OEWD and the SFMTA to investigate designating a corridor location for inclusion in their Small Business Corridor Program and work with local business owners to identify potential areas for support and marketing.

The City could also work with the various LGBTQ-focused cultural districts to create joint marketing material, or to support joint tourism efforts between the Districts, such as by offering a shuttle that specifically travels between them.

24. Support an entrepreneur training program for Leather and LGBTQ community members.

In 2022, the Cultural District created an entrepreneur training program geared toward helping Leather and LGBTQ community members start and sustain new businesses. The program was designed to help take a business from initial idea to operation. Enrollment prioritizes BIPOC, women, trans, sex worker, and disabled community members, and the District partners with existing organizations to recruit from these groups.

To further develop this program, the District seeks to partner with OSB to learn best practices for running an entrepreneur training program. OSB could also amplify the impact of the program by connecting members with additional funds through the Business TA program, and could dedicate resources towards a program manager position to support businesses associated with each of the Cultural Districts, including new businesses created in the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District's program. Lastly, OSB could consider supporting businesses that graduate from the program through initiatives like waiving business licensing fees or ensuring contracts for the first three years of operation, or helping business owners navigate RFP or contracting processes.

25. Organize employment resources and connections for BIPOC, trans, women, sex worker, and disabled members of the Leather and LGBTQ communities.

The District hopes to create more employment opportunities for BIPOC, trans, women, sex worker, and disabled members of the Leather and LGBTQ communities who have historically faced the greatest barriers to employment, to enable them to thrive within the District and to strengthen the connection between our communities and locally-based companies.



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To do so, the District can organize and promote resources such as a digital job board for community members, and conduct outreach to ensure these resources reach segments of our community who are often discouraged from participating in professional employment channels. Postings on this board could range from more formal professional positions to informal skills-sharing opportunities by other community members. The District can also partner with other organizations focusing on employment and professional training opportunities for LGBTQ, trans, BIPOC, women, and disabled communities, to help these organizations best reach our community members. The District will also strive to hire from within our community for various work opportunities, to ensure program funds go as far as possible in stabilizing our community. The District can also partner with City departments to recruit community members for professional apprenticeship, pre-apprenticeship, and training programs already organized by those departments, such as those in construction, health care, and hospitality.



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CULTURAL COMPETENCY: CULTIVATING UNDERSTANDING AND APPRECIATION

One of the greatest challenges that Leather and LGBTQ communities face is having our culture misunderstood by those who are not a part of it. As discussed in the Historic and Cultural Preservation section above, this misunderstanding of Leather and LGBTQ culture can lead to views that overlook the positive cultural value it holds for community members. There is also a tendency to think that Leather and LGBTQ communities are monolithic, and in particular to not pay attention to the most marginalized among us, including BIPOC, trans, women, sex workers, and disabled community members. With government agencies in particular, this lack of understanding can lead to programs and even laws that fail to understand the intricacies of our

needs or to predict negative impacts on our communities.



This section seeks to increase cultural understanding of Leather and LGBTQ communities within our District and San Francisco. This includes several steps. We aim to ensure that better data is collected on LGBTQ individuals so that this data might inform how City policies are developed and implemented, and that government employees

are educated about community norms. We also aim to make sure that services like those related to health and safety are approached in a way that is sensitive to community needs and desires.

STRATEGIES

26. *Develop educational materials to familiarize City government staff with specific cultural norms and issues faced by the Leather and LGBTQ communities.*

City government staff members are often unsure how to engage with members of the Leather and LGBTQ communities in a way that is culturally competent and sensitive to the issues faced by those communities. The lack of a shared understanding of Leather and LGBTQ cultural norms can hinder the work of the District, part of the mission of which is to increase understanding of these norms for the broader City.

Therefore, the Cultural District seeks to partner with City departments to create educational materials that would familiarize City staff with specific cultural norms and issues faced by Leather and LGBTQ communities. These materials would review the history of homophobia, transphobia, and kink shaming within San Francisco, how it has shaped policy, and how policymakers and government employees can take this into account moving forward. They would also help define the groups encapsulated under the “Leather” and “LGBTQ” umbrellas, to demystify Leather and LGBTQ culture. Special attention should be given to the diversity of experiences within Leather and LGBTQ communities, such as the experiences of sex workers, trans, and BIPOC community members. Materials could take various forms such as videos, training modules, and



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language guides, depending on which format can best be integrated into existing City training initiatives. This would build upon work already being done by the City to provide education to employees, such as the “Transgender 101: Strengthen Your Commitment to Inclusion” video that covers issues related to transgender, gender nonconforming, and gender nonbinary communities and that all City employees are required to view. This effort should be coordinated across Cultural Districts focused on LGBTQ communities to ensure training materials are consistent.

27. *Collect more robust and accurate data about San Francisco’s LGBTQ communities.*

Communities can best advocate for themselves when they have an acute understanding of the issues they face, which requires accurate and sensitive data collection and analysis. Currently, San Francisco’s City Ordinance 159-16 requires tracking and reporting of services to San Franciscans who identify as LGBTQ+ by six departments: DPH, MOHCD, the Department of Human Services (HAS), the Department of Aging and Adult Services (DAS), the Department of Children, Youth, and Their Families (DCYF), and the Department of Homeless and Supportive Housing (HSH). The Office of the Controller also conducted a survey in 2019 that found that 12% of City residents identify as LGBTQ+.

However, this data still has significant limits in understanding broader trends amongst LGBTQ+ San Franciscans outside of their direct engagement with City services, or in very broad strokes at the citywide level. This issue even came up in the drafting of this report; while City representatives worked to provide the District with information about our community to frame the issues discussed, there were very little data available that clearly discussed LGBTQ communities, which has made it more difficult to quantify our communities’ issues beyond qualitative interview and focus group data. The federal government also does not collect specific information on sexual orientation and gender identity in surveys like the Decennial Census or the American Community Survey that are commonly used for understanding demographic trends locally.

The District seeks to improve data collection of San Francisco’s LGBTQ communities. This work has already been started through the focus groups and interviews conducted in support of this CHHESS report. The District hopes to expand this work, particularly in quantitative data collected by the City, other organizational partners, and the District itself. To do so, the District would work with other LGBTQ+-focused cultural districts and organizations, as well as stakeholders from City groups like the Office of Transgender Initiatives, to conduct a thorough assessment of existing data sources on LGBTQ+ communities and identify areas for improvement. This could include data on topics such as housing, employment, and police interactions. The District can also partner with City agencies to update information gathering practices to expand data collection to more San Franciscans beyond points of service, and to collect more granular material that will help describe the needs of our community.



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28. *Create a task force to explore community safety and conflict intervention strategies.*

A major piece of feedback we received from focus groups was that members of our community felt unsafe at times within the District. This was most prominent for women, trans, and sex worker community members, who often experience harassment and violence, both on the streets but also at times in Leather and LGBTQ community spaces and events themselves when participants fail to practice consent. Even as community members spoke of violence and harassment, however, most expressed a commitment to safety measures that do not involve the police, since they have experienced the police themselves as a source of violence that has historically targeted LGBTQ, BIPOC, and sex worker communities and particularly people at the intersection of those communities.

The District, therefore, seeks to create a task force to explore strategies for community safety and conflict intervention. These might include volunteer escorts between nightlife venues and transportation stations, investment in increased street lighting, alternative transportation modes such as pedicabs, and de-escalation training for interested community members. These might also include a “Code of Conduct” for nightlife venues that stresses principles of consent and includes cultural competency training and educational materials for SoMa business owners, event producers, and other venue staff such as bartenders and security. For initiatives that include educational material like the Code of Conduct, the District could also partner with other cultural districts and/or nonprofit groups engaged in these issues.

The District also seeks to support City services such as the Department of Public Health and Fire Department’s joint Street Crisis Response Team (SCRT) initiative that offers non-police crisis response. The City also can help facilitate the work of our emerging task force by connecting them with other safety-oriented task forces operating within the City, and can invest in design-oriented safety methods such as improved street lighting.

29. *Pilot a “harm reduction” approach to substance use within the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District.*

Several cities are considering shifting their approach to substance use from a punitive model to one focused on “harm reduction.” Rather than punishing people for recreational substance use, this approach acknowledges that some people do engage in such substance use and that this presents certain health risks that can be exacerbated by a punitive approach, and seeks to minimize negative health impacts.

The District seeks to introduce a harm reduction approach to substance use within SoMa. This framework commonly includes strategies such as: making drug testing strips available at nightlife venues to ensure substances can be properly identified, making Narcan available at these venues in the case of an opioid overdose and training staff in its use, providing educational material on safer substance use methods, and providing clean needles and safe injection sites.



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The Entertainment Commission, and OEWD are already exploring how to connect nightlife venues with naloxone and overdose reversal training, and the District seeks to partner with and build upon these efforts. This could include the District distributing materials and training locally, engaging community-based organizations already taking this approach, and partnering with the City to pilot a program to introduce these harm-reduction methods in SoMa venues. The District could also partner with DPH to discuss ways to implement elements of San Francisco’s Overdose Prevention Plan released in 2022, such as reducing barriers to establishing safe consumption sites in SoMa.

30. *Include input and leadership from local sex worker advocates when creating programs and regulations about the sex trade.*

Policy around prostitution and human sex trafficking is usually created without the input of the communities it affects the most: sex workers and survivors. This results in punitive and harmful consequences for those who trade sex, especially for trans women, BIPOC, poor and low-income, and LGBTQ members of our community. Policies are often created to curb human trafficking but fail to do so, only pushing sex trading further underground into less safe circumstances.

Over the past twenty years, San Francisco has invested tax-payer money into a variety of punitive policies and programs related to sex work. These include:

- SFPD Special Units, Vice Squads, and arrest “crackdowns;”
- Arrests, fines, and jail time;
- SF “John School”— a “scared straight” educational course for those cited for solicitation;
- Mandatory recidivism programs for sex workers;
- Trafficking trainings and hotlines;
- Decriminalizing the sale of sex but leaving the purchase of sex as a criminal offense (often referred to as the “end-demand” or “Nordic model” approach);
- The Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act (SESTA) and the Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act (FOSTA), passed in 2018.

All of these efforts have failed to reduce prostitution or sex trafficking and have not increased the safety or wellness of those involved in the sex trade. These efforts also fail to address the driving forces of people who trade sex: housing stability, economic opportunity, lack of single-parent support, absent queer youth support, Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), transphobia, and racial economic disparity. Until the material needs of those in the sex trade are addressed, it’s nearly impossible to change the practices of prostitution in San Francisco with policy.

Sex workers, therefore, advocate providing much-needed support and resources to those in the sex trade rather than taking a criminalizing approach. Co-creating sex trade policy



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with the leading sex worker activists in the Bay Area continues the legacy of data-driven public health and harm reduction work that has been fostered in San Francisco. The decriminalization of sex work reduces police violence, deters violent clients, increases access to legal resources and health care, curbs mass incarceration, and advocates for LGBTQ equality. These approaches are recognized and supported by organizations like the ACLU and World Health Organization. SF policymakers are currently exploring decriminalization, legalization, and the creation of a sex work district. These initiatives must involve and center sex workers, sex-trafficking survivors, and advocates.

The District seeks to work with San Francisco policymakers to include input and leadership from Bay Area sex worker advocates in processes for making regulations about the sex trade and human trafficking. This is imperative as the City begins to explore methods of decriminalization and zoning. The District especially wishes to strengthen its relationship with DPH and other departments that interact with the wellness and safety of local sex workers.

31. *Create clear paths to LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District leadership for and increase engagement amongst BIPOC, women, trans, sex worker, and disabled community members.*

The District aims to take several steps to ensure a diverse board that accurately reflects the makeup and needs of our community. These include prioritizing diversity and inclusion in board makeup and recruitment, establishing associate board-level positions, and reviewing and revising tenure or term limits if needed. Beyond board-specific strategies, they also include directly inviting key individual and organizational leaders of underrepresented groups to participate in District decision-making processes and developing a broader strategy for actively reducing oppression amongst Leather and LGBTQ communities including racism, sexism, misogyny, and cis-sexism.

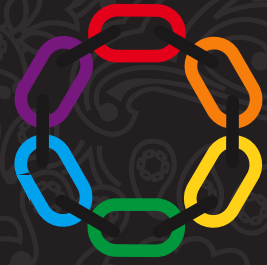
32. *Work with community and City partners to improve access to culturally competent health resources for Leather and LGBTQ community members within the District.*

Leather and LGBTQ community members report needing culturally competent health care and social services. The District seeks to work with community and City partners to create a resource guide to connect community members with relevant health and services, including those knowledgeable in trans, LGBQ, sex work, polyamorous, and kink-positive health needs. For instance, these partners might include groups like Lyon Martin Health Services, St. James Infirmary, Rad Mission Neighbors, the San Francisco AIDS Foundation, and LYRIC Youth Center. The District seeks to also bring the specific needs of Leather and LGBTQ communities to health care and social service organizations that already exist within SoMa but may benefit from additional information and training on providing services to these communities. The District aims to publish this resource on our website and our social media platforms, and print brochures for those who do not have online access.



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City Departments like DPH could support this work by partnering directly with the District and others to bring services to the area, such as by offering mobile health clinics in the district focused on HIV/STI testing and prevention, needle exchanges, Narcan and fentanyl test strip use, and COVID-19 testing and vaccination.



LEATHER & LGBTQ
CULTURAL DISTRICT

Conclusion



CONCLUSION

This Cultural History, Housing, and Economic Sustainability Strategies (CHHESS) report lays out a roadmap to guide the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District's work to serve Leather and LGBTQ communities in SoMa and throughout the Bay Area.

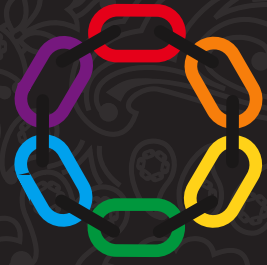
It reflects the labor and love of both District and City staff, but most importantly of community members who gave their time and input to shape these recommendations and document community assets. Reflecting on our communities' rich history provides inspiration and fortitude as we look to implement the recommendations in this report, and especially to safeguard and nurture existing cultural hubs and practices to ensure these spaces exist for future generations.

Moving forward, the District and City departments will continue to collaborate to achieve the recommendations laid out in this report, championing inclusivity and celebrating diverse voices within Leather and LGBTQ communities. This will occur in several ways:

- District leaders will continue to meet with representatives of the departments that make up the Cultural Districts program's steering committee (MOHCD, OEWD, Planning, and SFAC) to develop incremental benchmarks and push recommendations forward. CHHESS report check-ins will take place quarterly.
- As per the legislation that created the Cultural Districts program in 2018, the District will work with MOHCD to review progress of the CHHESS report every three years, and will work on updates to the report every six years.
- The District will regularly report back to San Francisco's Leather and LGBTQ communities on the progress of implementing the recommendations in this report, continuing to listen, learn, and grow, and will funnel community feedback to relevant City departments.



Photo Credit: Felix Uribe



LEATHER & LGBTQ
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Appendices



APPENDIX A: GLOSSARY

311 Neighborhood Notification: When required by Planning Code Section 311, Neighborhood Notification is conducted by the Planning Department for many discretionary permits within certain zoning districts. When an applicant submits a Building Permit to the Department of Building Inspection (DBI), the Planning Department is the first reviewing agency and will conduct the Neighborhood Notification. Typically, building expansions, certain changes of use, and formula retail uses (aka chain stores) require Neighborhood Notification. See Section 311 of the San Francisco Planning Code for more information.

Adult bookstore (as defined by Section 791 of the San Francisco Police Code): An establishment having 25 percent or more of its total inventory or product lines, books, magazines or periodicals which are distinguished or characterized by their emphasis on matter depicting, describing or relating to “Specified Sexual Activities” or “Specified Anatomical Areas” as defined herein, or an establishment which devotes 25 percent or more of its floor or display space to the sale or display of such material. The term “product line” refers to items that are all identical, such as numerous copies of the same book or periodical.

Adult entertainment (as defined by Section 102 of the San Francisco Planning Code): A retail use which includes the following: adult bookstore, as defined by Section 791 of the Police Code; adult theater, as defined by Section 791 of the Police Code; and encounter studio, as defined by Section 1072.1 of the Police Code. Such use shall be located no less than 1,000 feet from another adult entertainment use.

Adult theater (as defined by Section 791 of the San Francisco Police Code): A theater as defined herein which uses more than 10 percent of its presentation time, measured on an annual basis, for the exhibition or display of entertainment which is distinguished or characterized by an emphasis on matter depicting, describing or relating to “Specified Sexual Activities” or “Specified Anatomical Areas” as defined herein.

Asexual: Having little or no interest in sexual activity.

BDSM: An acronym that stands for bondage and discipline, domination and submission, and sadism and masochism. This is often used as an umbrella term for various kinks and fetishes.

BIPOC: Black, indigenous, and people of color.

Bisexual: Attracted to more than one gender.

Bootblack: Someone who is passionate about caring for leather items. The term derives from the name for someone who shines leather boots, but bootblacking within the Leather community extends beyond boot care. Bootblacking is also a common practice at Leather competitions and fundraisers, and an International Bookblack Competition runs in tandem with the International Leather Competitions.



APPENDIX A: GLOSSARY

Butch: Used to describe a masculine gender expression, regardless of what gender they identify with.

Community benefit district (CBD): A type of neighborhood organization in which local property owners are levied a special assessment to fund improvement to their neighborhood, that are then administered by the organization. CBDs are typically created in commercial or mixed-use neighborhoods, and carry out activities such as sourcing local art, cleaning and beautifying streets, and organizing community events. San Francisco has over sixteen such districts.

Community development corporation (CDC): 501(c)(3) non-profit organizations that are created to support and revitalize communities, especially those that are impoverished or struggling. CDCs often deal with the development of affordable housing. They can also be involved in a wide range of community services that meet local needs such as education, job training, healthcare, commercial development, and other social programs. (Definition from NACEDA: The National Alliance of Community Economic Development Associations.)

Community investment fund (CIF): Community investment funds help to empower communities by allowing community members of any economic class to invest in a fund which in turns invests in ventures, revitalization projects, or other mission-driven enterprises. CIFs allow communities to build wealth through a cycle of investment, growth, profit (returned to community investors), and reinvestment. (Definition from Cutting Edge Capital.)

Community land trust (CLT): Community land trusts are nonprofit, community-based organizations designed to ensure community stewardship of land. CLTs can be used for many types of development, but are primarily used to ensure long-term housing affordability. To do so, the trust acquires land and maintains ownership of it permanently. With prospective homeowners, it enters into a long-term, renewable lease instead of a traditional sale. When the homeowner sells, the family earns only a portion of the increased property value. The remainder is kept by the trust, preserving the affordability for future low- to moderate-income families. (Definition from <https://community-wealth.org>.)

Consent: Active agreement to engage sexually.

Cultural Districts program: Managed by the San Francisco Mayor's Office of Housing and Community Development, the Cultural Districts program is a place-making and place-keeping program. The vision is to preserve, strengthen and promote cultural communities, and its goals are to support legacy businesses, nonprofits, community arts, and traditions. Neighborhood-based community groups and their cultural values lead each District's efforts. The program's aim is to support specific cultural communities or ethnic groups that historically have been discriminated against, displaced, and oppressed.



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Design standards: Standards that establish a set of goals, values, and qualities for new development projects and exterior building remodels. Standards are intended to create a common set of expectations related to design that can be used by neighborhood groups, the public, designers, property owners, developers, planners, and the San Francisco Planning Commission.

Dore Alley Fair: See “Up Your Alley Fair.”

Encounter studio (As defined by Section 1072.1 of the San Francisco Police Code:) An establishment to which patrons or members are invited and is so arranged as to provide booths, cubicles, room or rooms, compartments or stalls wherein an entertainer provides entertainment as defined herein to patrons or members or groups of members or patrons within the aforesaid booths, cubicles, room or rooms, compartments or stalls.

Erotic Storytelling Hour: A monthly event hosted by the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District in which community members and guest writers share erotic stories for each other and an audience.

Femme: Used to describe a feminine gender expression. The term is sometimes used as a noun, “femmes,” to describe people who express typically feminine gender norms, or used as part of the phrase “women and femmes” to refer to feminine-expressing individuals including and beyond those identified as women at birth. The term is also sometimes used to distinguish from “masculine” or “butch” gender expressions.

Fetish: An attraction to or sexualization of objects or parts of the body typically considered nonsexual.

Fisting: The act of inserting the hand into a vagina or rectum. Also known as “handballing.”

Folsom Street Fair: An annual Leather and fetish street fair occupying Folsom Street from 8th to 13th Streets in San Francisco’s South of Market (SoMa) neighborhood. Having begun in the 1980s as a way to fight gentrification in SOMA, the fair has become the world’s largest Leather and fetish event, bringing in upwards of 400,000 guests annually from both local Leather communities and from outside the city. “Folsom Street” might also refer to the 501(c)3 non-profit arts and culture organization that produces the street fair in addition to several other events, such as the “Up Your Alley Fair.”

Gay: Attracted to other people of the same gender.

Gender expression: Refers to how people express their gender identity. Everyone expresses their gender identity in different ways: for example, in the way they dress, the length of their hair, the way they act or speak and in their choice of whether or not to wear make-up. (Definition from the Sylvia Rivera Law Project.)



APPENDIX A: GLOSSARY

Gender identity: Refers to how people see and identify themselves; for example, some people identify as female; some people identify as male; some people as a combination of genders; as a gender other than male or female; or as no gender. (Definition from the Sylvia Rivera Law Project.)

Gender non-conforming (GNC): Refers to people who do not follow expected stereotypes about how they should look or act based on the sex they were assigned at birth. (Definition from the Sylvia Rivera Law Project.)

Harm reduction: Harm reduction is an approach to health interventions that seeks to “meet people where they’re at,” without requiring them to meet certain conditions in order to maintain their health. For instance, harm reduction approaches to substance use are not strictly abstinence-oriented, but instead encourage individuals to examine the connections between their substance use or sexual health and their health and well-being, and to take steps toward any positive change.

International Mr. Leather (IML): An annual competition celebrating Leather and kink communities, hosted in Chicago. The competition includes representation from around the world, including the Bay Area. The competition selects both a recipient of the “International Mr. Leather” and “International Mr. BootBlack” titles.

International Ms. Leather (IMsL): An annual competition and title celebrating Leather and kink communities. Originally hosted in San Francisco’s SoMa neighborhood in 1988, the event has also been hosted in several other locations, predominantly San Jose. The event has also shifted from originally being a women-focused event to one in which all genders can compete. The competition selects both a recipient of the “International Ms. Leather” and “International Ms. BootBlack” titles.

Intersex: Refers to someone with one or more innate sex characteristics, including genitals, internal reproductive organs, and chromosomes, that fall outside of traditional conceptions of male or female bodies. (Definition from GLAAD.)

Invest in Neighborhoods (IIN): An interagency partnership between the San Francisco Office of Economic and Workforce Development and the San Francisco Planning Department to strengthen and revitalize the city’s neighborhood commercial districts.

Kink: The use of non-normative sexual practices, concepts, or fantasies. The term derives from the idea of a “bend” or “kink” in one’s sexual behavior to contrast such behavior with “straight” or “vanilla” sexual practices.

Landmark designation: A designation by San Francisco’s Historic Preservation Commission for buildings, districts, places, structures, or objects that are examples of city, state, or national heritage, such as a site of a significant historic event, identification with a significant culture or person, exemplary architecture, work of master architect or designer, representation of a significant theme, and a unique or distinctive visual feature.



APPENDIX A: GLOSSARY

Leather: A particularly prominent fetish culture based around wearing and engaging in sexual activities with leather garments and tools, including jackets, vests, chaps, and harnesses. Because of its prominence, the term “Leather” is sometimes used as a stand-in for general kink and fetish culture.

Leather and LGBTQ business and organization (as used in this report): A business located within the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District whose goods and services are predominantly consumed by Leather and LGBTQ patrons; with majority ownership by Leather and LGBTQ community members; and/or that provides significant support to the Cultural District’s programs or other Leather and LGBTQ non-profit organizations operating in the Cultural District.

Leather community: A community based around shared engagement in and appreciation for various leather, kink, and fetish cultural practices. Given their respect for traditionally non-normative sexual practices and their focus on individual expression and transformation, many Leather community spaces have traditionally also been safe havens for folks living outside the sexual or heteronormative mainstream, such as LGBTQ folks, polyamorous folks, and sex workers, and there is often significant overlap between their members. Leather community activism is also strongly tied to LGBTQ activism, including a significant focus on HIV activism.

Leather History Cruise: A series of over one hundred plaques commemorating Leather and LGBTQ history within the South of Market neighborhood.

Legacy Business Program: A program managed by the Office of Small Business that recognizes and preserves longstanding, community-serving establishments that have contributed to San Francisco’s history and identity. These businesses include retailers, restaurants, service providers, manufacturers, and more, and foster civic engagement while also serving as valuable cultural assets.

Lesbian: A woman who is attracted to other women.

Megahood: See “Folsom Street Fair.”

Munch: A casual social gathering for those interested in a particular kink, often to learn more about said kink.

Nightlife: This document uses this term to refer to (1) the city’s main economic and cultural drivers that operate between the hours of 6pm and 6am, such as restaurants, bars, venues, nightclubs, art galleries, live theater and performance spaces, and other event spaces, many of which serve as significant community and neighborhood institutions; (2) public and private services that support the establishments listed above, such as nighttime transportation services, street cleaning services, security, and police or other crisis response groups; and (3) the ways city infrastructure (ie. streets, lighting, public art, etc.) is used between the hours of 6pm and 6am.

Non-binary (“enby”): Refers to people whose gender identity and/or expression does not fit neatly into the categories of man or woman (ie. the gender binary).



APPENDIX A: GLOSSARY

Notice of Special Restrictions (NSR): A legal recording with the San Francisco Recorder's Office of restricted use against a property. NSRs serve to inform current owners and future owners of properties as to limitations on uses of properties.

Pup play: A type of BDSM role-play where people imitate adolescent canine behavior. Pups can also form social groups, called "packs," that provide mentorship and family structures beyond sexual behavior.

Queer: An umbrella term used to refer to people who are not heterosexual and/or cisgender. Originally used as a derogatory term meaning "strange," "queer" has since been reclaimed by activists and is the way many people self-identify, particularly given its more fluid definition compared to terms like "gay" or "lesbian."

San Francisco Mx. Leather: A new, annual competition and title celebrating Leather and kink community members who identify with the "Mx" honorific.

Sex work: The exchange of sexual services or performances for money or goods. It encompasses a range of activities, including but not limited to professional BDSM services, in-person companionship, pornography, webcam modeling, stripping, and other forms of adult entertainment.

Shared Spaces Program: A San Francisco City program that provides a streamlined permitting process for San Francisco businesses, arts and culture organizations, and others to use sidewalks, parking lanes, full-street spaces, and open lots for local business and cultural activities.

Shibari: A form of Japanese rope bondage.

SOMA Second Saturdays: A Leather, fetish, and LGBTQ market held on the second Saturday of each month in the South of Market (SoMa) neighborhood, hosted by the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District, Folsom Street, and SOMA West CBD

SOMA West Community Benefit District (CBD): A "community benefit district" located in the western portion of San Francisco's South of Market (SoMa) district, in the area bounded by South Van Ness Avenue, 13th Street, Bryant Street, 5th Street, and Howard Street. This is the largest (geographically) of the city's Community Benefit Districts.

Specified anatomical areas (for the definitions for "adult bookstore" and "adult theater" above): 1. Less than completely and opaquely covered: a. Human genitals, pubic hair, buttock, natal cleft, perineum, anal region; and b. Female breast at or below the areola thereof; and 2. Human male genitals in a discernibly turgid state, even if completely and opaquely covered.



APPENDIX A: GLOSSARY

Specified sexual activities (for the definitions for “adult bookstore” and “adult theater” above): 1. Human genitals in a state of sexual stimulation or arousal; 2. Acts of human masturbation, sexual intercourse or sodomy; 3. Fondling or other erotic touching of human genitals, pubic region, buttock or female breast.

Trans/Transgender: A general term used to describe someone whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth.

Up Your Alley Fair: A Leather and fetish street fair held annually on the last Sunday of July, occupying Folsom Street from 9th to 10th Streets and Dore Street from Howard Street to half a block past Folsom Street. The fair is smaller than the Folsom Street Fair, and is more focused on the local community.



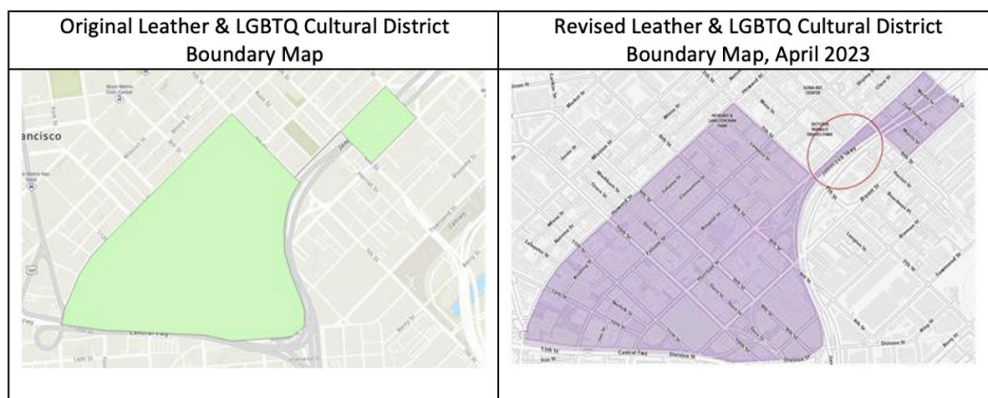
APPENDIX B: LEATHER & LGBTQ CULTURAL DISTRICT OFFICIAL BOUNDARIES

This memo is intended to clarify the geographic bounds of the Leather & LGBTQ Cultural District. The Leather and LGBTQ Cultural District’s **founding legislation** established its perimeter as follows:

The boundaries of the District are defined as the south side of Howard between 7th Street and Highway 101, to the west side of 7th between Howard Street and Harrison St, to Interstate 80 between 7th Street and Division Street, to Highway 101 between Interstate 80 and Howard Street; as well as the south side of Harrison Street from 7th Street to 5th Street, the west side of 5th Street from Harrison Street to Bryant Street and the north side of Bryant Street from 5th Street to 6th Street and the west side of 6th Street from Bryant Street to Harrison Street.

The City subsequently created a map of the Cultural District that did not incorporate any parcels along this stretch of Harrison Street, as the legislation does not specify the southern boundary of the south side of Harrison Street in between 6th and 7th Streets. In April 2023, the City received clarification from the Leather & LGBTQ Cultural District that their understanding and intent for the geographic boundary in question had always been to encompass the odd-numbered addresses along Harrison between 6th and 7th (1001 and 1009 Harrison St).

To address the discrepancy, City staff requested review by the City Attorney as to whether updating the shapefile map would require an amendment to the original legislation. On April 27, 2023, City Attorney Heather Goodman reviewed the issue and agreed that incorporating the South side of the Harrison Street to include the odd numbered parcels along the south side of Harrison between 6th and 7th is a reasonable interpretation of the original legislation, and no further legislation is needed.





APPENDIX C: LIST OF LEATHER AND LGBTQ HISTORIC SITES RECOGNIZED BY LEATHER & LGBTQ CULTURAL DISTRICT HISTORIAN

Below is the list of locations identified as historically significant to Leather and LGBTQ communities by historians associated with the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District, along with columns showing whether these sites have any existing historic designations.

The San Francisco Eagle’s City Landmark and the CEQA Eligible SoMa LGBTQ Historic District locations are designated specifically due to those site’s Leather and/or LGBTQ history, while the other noted historic designations are due to factors separate from their Leather or LGBTQ history. Although a few of these sites are still in operation today, the majority were in operation at one or more points over the past century but have since closed.

The majority of these locations were also approved to be included in the Leather History Cruise, which will be a series of sidewalk plaques marking locations of historically significant Leather and LGBTQ sites. (Sites in the Leather History Cruise were approved by the Board of Supervisors through two separate pieces of legislation: in 2021 by Resolution 141-21 (File #201223), and in 2022 by Resolution 439-22 (File #220888).)

Address	Location Name	APN	Historic Designation									
			N/A	City Landmark			CEQA Designation					
			Non-extant	Category B or C Rated Property	Article 10 Individual	Article 10 Landmark District	Article 11 Landmark	Individually Eligible through Survey	Eligible SoMa LGBTQ Historic District Contributor	Sixth Street Lodging Historic District Contributor	Western SOMA Light Industrial and Residential Historic District (contributor)	Western SOMA Light Industrial and Residential Historic District (non-contributor)
68 4th Street	Keystone Room	3705004					X					
399 4th Street	Tool Box	3751411	X									
500 4th Street	Hotel Utah	3777001			X		X	X				
520 4th Street	Trocadero Transfer	3777003							X			
374 5th Street	The Hothouse	3753008						X	X			



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43 6th Street	New Crow Tavern; Ginger's Too	3704051								X		
60 6th Street	Frisco Cafe; Frisco Club; Frisco Saloon; Frisco Royale	3703006								X		
67 6th Street	67 Club; Sixth Street Rendezvous	3704026								X		
83 6th Street	Society for Individual Rights	3704026								X		
161 6th Street	Animals	3725061							X	X		
224 6th Street	Mister B's Ballroom	3731002							X	X		
240 6th Street	Labyris Auto Repair; The Buggery	3731004							X			
241 6th Street	Buzz's South Side Hotel	3732078	X									
298 6th Street	The Gas Station; Round Up; Watering Hole	3731011	X									
336 6th Street	A Taste of Leather	3754112, 3754113	X									
401 6th Street	The EndUp	3760035							X			
205-225 6th Street	South of Market; The Glory Hole; The Night Gallery; Nightshift	3732122							X			
098 7th Street	Haven Bar	3702031	X									
227 7th Street	Mister S Leather	3731241, 3731242	X									
280 7th Street	Folsom Street Warehouse Theatre; The Cave; Rawhide II; The Rawhide / Club Rawhide / Club Hide	3730290							X			X
288 7th Street	Bay Times; Gauntlet	3730011							X		X	
310 7th Street	Mister S Leather	3755003, 3755004									X	
398 7th Street	The Lineup	3755017							X			X



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135 8th Street	Pimiento Restaurant; Comme Nous; Black House; Cherry Bar; Jungle Music	3727113											X	
164 8th Street	The Trench	3728006							X					X
198 8th Street	The Black and Blue	3728008							X			X		
201 8th Street	Club Baths of San Francisco	3730038							X					X
289 8th Street	Hole in the Wall; Wicked Grounds Cafe	3730028										X		
385 8th Street	Mister S Leather	3755136												X
154 9th Street	The Golden Rivet; The Rivet; The Bullet	3509007							X			X		
201 9th Street	C'est Si Bon; Lipp's; The Pit / Cocktails; Asia SF	3729082						X					X	
282 9th Street	The Cake Gallery	3518012							X			X		
285 9th Street	Anon Salon	3729023										X		
367 9th Street	Brush Creek Media	3756009							X			X		
385 9th Street	Baywood Motel; Ho Jin Inn	3756006												X
395 9th Street	Bay Area Reporter	3756005												X
399 9th Street	The Arena; The Stud	3756004							X					X
451 9th Street	Cliff Raven's Tattoo	3757049										X		
54 10th Street	San Francisco AIDS Foundation	3507043	X											
317-A 10th Street	A Taste of Leather/Mack	3519045							X			X		
323 10th Street	Stompers Boots	3519044							X			X		
353 10th Street	Capricorn Coffee	3519038										X		



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366 10th Street	The Best Impression	3520010									X	
169 11th Street	Fort Help	3510021									X	
225 11th Street	Don Ramon's	3517030							X		X	
278 11th Street	The Covered Wagon; Leatherneck; San Francisco Plunge / Dirty Sally's; Drummer Key Club; Oasis	3516010								X		X
314 11th Street	Transmission Theatre; Studio Z; Beatbox; Halcyon	3521002										X
375 11th Street	Chaps	3520131	X									
367 12th Street	Service of Mankind Church	3521019								X		
398 12th Street	San Francisco Eagle	3522014		X						X		X
527 Bryant Street	Chez Mollet / The 527 / Off The Levee	3776098								X		
1010 Bryant Street	The Boot Camp	3757008								X		
768 Clementina Street	Taylor of San Francisco	3729053										X
744-746 Clementina Street	Church of the Secret Gospel	3729048										X
875 Folsom Street	Cowden Automotive	3752076								X		
890 Folsom Street	890 Folsom	3733028	X									
947 Folsom Street	Folsom Gulch Adult Books	3753139								X		



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960 Folsom Street	A Taste of Leather; Trading Post Emporium	3732025							X			
979 Folsom Street	The Hula Shack; South of the Slot	3753130							X			
1015 Folsom Street	Big Town; Sutro Bath House; Colossus; 1015 Folsom	3754057						X	X			
1082 Folsom Street	Alta Hotel / Finnegan Hotel; Folsom Street Hotel	3731125							X		X	
1099 Folsom Street	Source Gallery	3754034									X	
1123 Folsom Street	Stables	3755234							X			
1127 Folsom Street	Templar Hall Clubhouse	3755100		X								
1129 Folsom Street	Coyote; National Task Force on Prostitution; Victoria Woodhull Foundation	3755099		X								
1137 Folsom Street	Bald Billy's Bath House / Billy's Locker Club Hotel	3755097	X									
1147 Folsom Street	Folsom Street Barracks; Red Star Saloon	3755079	X									
1190 Folsom Street	Headquarters; The Baybrick Inn	3730027							X		X	
1225 Folsom Street	Ramrod; My Place; Chaps II; Driftwood	3756045							X		X	
1229 Folsom Street	Mark I. Chester Studio	3756044									X	
1250 Folsom Street	National Leather Association International Headquarters	3729015							X		X	
1258 Folsom Street	The Folsom Street Man	3729016									X	



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1285 Folsom Street	A Taste of Leather; Mack Folsom Prison	3756034							X		X	
1347 Folsom Street	In-Between; No Name; The Bolt; The Brig; Powerhouse	3519053							X		X	
1369 Folsom Street	Folsom Street Club / Corn Holes; Night Gallery; Hole in the Wall	3519050							X		X	
1501 Folsom Street	Fe-Be's; A Taste of Leather	3521058							X		X	
1535 Folsom Street	The Stud	3521092							X		X	
1582 Folsom Street	Hamburger Mary's	3516018							X		X	
1600 Folsom Street	Brasserie; Castle Grand Bar & Restaurant	3515010							X		X	
1779 Folsom Street	Mister S Leather	3529047		X								
1898 Folsom Street	Corner Longhorn Saloon; Folsom Prison	3549018	X									
134 Gilbert Street	Gay M/C Clubs Meeting Place - Don Rotan's Apt.	3784023 A		X								
15 Harriet Street	Drummer Magazine	3731116							X			
715 Harrison Street	Dreamland	3762118							X			
933 Harrison Street	Blow Buddies	3760135		X								
975 Harrison Street	The Hand Ball Express	3760122	X									
1270 Harrison Street	Canary Island Diner	3756003	X									
1309 Harrison Street	Golden Gate Tattooage; Folsom Magazine	3525076							X			
1351 Harrison Street	Ambush	3525074							X			



APPENDIX C: LIST OF LEATHER AND LGBTQ HISTORIC SITES RECOGNIZED BY LEATHER & LGBTQ CULTURAL DISTRICT HISTORIAN

1354 Harrison Street	The Lone Star	3519013								X		
1550 Harrison Street	Warehouse	3521056	X									
2300 Harrison Street	The Leather Shop; Circa Corporation	3593001		X								
927 Howard Street	Auto Motion	3732103		X								
964 Howard Street	Best Hotel; Anxious Arms Hotel	3725020								X		
1158 Howard Street	Worn Out West; Stormy Leather	3727022								X		
1287 Howard Street	Fey-Way Studio	3729174								X		X
1360-1380 Howard Street	Project One Association; Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Substance Abuse Task Force	3509011										X
1550 Howard Street	Bay Area Reporter; Noe Valley Printing Company	3511018								X		X
33 Hunt Street	San Francisco VD Clinic	3722081	X									
98 Lafayette Street	Tavern Guild of SF / Tavern Guild Foundation; WR Wholesale Resource	3511018								X		X
74 Langton Street	Eighty Langton Street	3730104							X			X
471 Minna Street	Citizen News/ Guy Strait	3725069	X									
655 Minna Street	Lou Greene Printers	3727072 A										X
693 Mission Street	Mattachine Society; Pan-Graphic Press; Daughters of Bilitis; Dorian Book Service Quarterly	3727072 C										X
1349 Mission Street	Center for Sex & Culture	3509018		X								



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1519 Mission Street	Jon Sims Center (housed Center for Sex and Culture)	3511075							X				X	
1525 Mission Street	The Loading Dock	3511075							X				X	
1551 Mission Street	Cheque Room; Meet Market; Campus; Hair; Upper Warehouse	3511033										X		
431 Natoma Street	Page One; Hanno's in the Alley; The Tempest	3725129	X											
544 Natoma Street	544 Natoma	3726168		X										
953 Natoma Street	The Caldron	3510028												X
64 Rausch Street	Little Michelle's; The Half-Shell Seafood Bar & Grill	3730199												X
Ringold Street	Ringold Leather History Walk													
78-80 Ringold Street	Hedonic Engineering	3756/030											X	
330 Ritch Street	Ritch Street Health Club; Club San Francisco/Club SF	3787040					X						X	
22 Russ Street	Citizen News/ Guy Strait	3726068		X										
285 Shipley Street	Drummer Magazine; The Sentinel	3753082									X			
24 Shotwell	Drummer Magazine	3549/052		X										
209 Stevenson Street	My Room; Latex Lilly's Saloon	3706074	X											
735 Tehama Street	Phallic Church of San Francisco	3729066												X
38 Washburn Street	Bunkhouse Hotel	3509/044												X



APPENDIX D: BUSINESSES ON THE SAN FRANCISCO OFFICE OF SMALL BUSINESS' LEGACY BUSINESS REGISTRY THAT ARE LOCATED IN SOMA AND THE LEATHER & LGBTQ CULTURAL DISTRICT

Business Name	Street Address	Type Of Business	Established Date	Located within the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District?
Ruby Sailing	1129 Folsom St.	Tourism	1975	Yes
Royal Automotive Group	285 South Van Ness Ave	Automotive / Motorcycle	1947	Yes
Butter	354 11th St.	Bar / Entertainment Venue	1999	Yes
DNA Lounge / DNA Pizza	375 11th St.	Bar / Entertainment Venue	1985	Yes
Endup	401 6th St.	Bar / Entertainment Venue	1973	Yes
Lone Star Saloon	1354 Harrison St.	Bar / Entertainment Venue	1989	Yes
San Francisco Eagle	398 12th St.	Bar / Entertainment Venue	1981	Yes
California Choppers	1490 Howard St.	Automotive / Motorcycle	1975	No
Bay Area Video Coalition	145 9th St.	Media / Film	1976	No
Ted's Market and Delicatessen	1530 Howard St.	Grocery Store / Delicatessen	1967	No
Yadav Diamonds and Jewelry	888 Brannan St.	Jewelry	1983	No
Fanta Cleaners Inc.	650 4th St	Laundry	1980	No
AIDS Legal Referral Panel	1663 Mission St.	Legal	1989	No
Legal Assistance to the Elderly	1663 Mission St.	Legal	1979	No
Mission Neighborhood Health Center	1663 Mission St.	Medical / Dental / Optometry	1967	No
GLBT Historical Society	989 Market St.	Museum / Historical Preservation	1986	No
Babylon Burning	939 Howard	Printing	1980	No
Image Conscious	147 10th St	Printing	1983	No



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Business Name	Street Address	Type Of Business	Established Date	Located within the LEATHER & LGBTQ Cultural District?
Tu Lan Vietnamese Restaurant	8 6th St.	Restaurant	1977	No
American Conservatory Theater	1127 Market St.	Theater / Performing Arts / Cinema	1966	No
Delano Nursery	686 Brannan Street, Store 17	Flower Shop / Garden Center	1922 (but not at this particular location)	No



**LEATHER & LGBTQ
CULTURAL DISTRICT**