

9 businesses clear 1st hurdle to legacy status

8 neighborhoods are represented in initial batch under new law

By JONATHAN NEWMAN

MORE THAN A YEAR after the Board of Supervisors directed the city's Office of Small Business to establish a registry of legacy businesses in San Francisco — longstanding community-serving businesses valuable for their cultural assets — the first nine candidates for legacy status saw their applications win the unanimous approval of the Historic Preservation Commission on July 20.

Next and final stop: a public hearing before the Small Business Commission on Aug. 8.

Collectively, the nine have racked up nearly 400 years of business activity in San Francisco.

The rollout of the registry has been frustratingly slow, developing the bureaucratic guidelines for applicants and the standards for determining how and when a business earns the right to receive promotional and marketing assistance and, most importantly, financial grants from the city remain unsettled.

Voters in November approved Measure J, creating the Legacy Business Historic Preservation Fund, a means to channel money to qualifying legacy businesses and their landlords. The mayor's office allocated \$2.5 million to the fund in April.

Legacy business status opens the path to receiving a yearly grant of up to \$500 per full-time employee and, for landlords willing to extend leases of 10 or more years to the business, an annual stipend of up to \$22,500.

The Office of Small Business — with a major new program suddenly thrust upon its already busy staff — struggled to process legacy applications and develop the underpinnings of a legacy promotion program until May when the supervisors added \$306,250 to the office budget.

Two of the initial nine applicants are nonprofits: Community Boards, a



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Lone Star Saloon: The building housing this SoMa oasis at 1354 Harrison St. that serves “working-class gay men” was sold recently. The saloon owner hopes legacy status will give him some needed bargaining power with the new landlord. Grants to landlords willing to extend leases of 10 or more years to legacy businesses could reach an annual amount of \$22,500 each.

40-year-old, citywide public conflict resolution center now housed on Van Ness Avenue, two blocks from City Hall; and Precita Eyes, the Mission District's pioneering mural arts organization on 24th Street established in 1977.

Two are bars: Specs' Twelve Adler Museum Cafe in North Beach, family-owned and -operated since 1968, and Lone Star Saloon on Harrison Street, the only nominee in District 6 in the first batch.

Three are restaurants: Pacific Cafe, in business in the outer Richmond since 1974; Haight Street's Two Jack's Nik's Place Seafood, opened in 1977 by the current owner Nikki Cooper's parents; and Toy Boat Dessert Cafe on Clement

Street, established in 1982.

Gilman's Kitchens and Baths, which has served the Bayview community for 62 years, and Macchiarini Creative Design and Metalworks, a 68-year-old art and jewelry design house on Grant Avenue, complete the first official roster of legacy businesses in San Francisco.

Richard Kurylo, the newly appointed Legacy Business program manager, shepherded the nine in their presentations before the commission, highlighting the “generously portioned” meals served at Pacific Cafe, the monthly “throwback night” when Two Jack's Nik's Place Seafood charges 1977 prices, the treasures of memorabilia on display at Toy Boat Dessert Cafe and Specs' Twelve Adler Museum Cafe, the oldest private museum in the city, and the oasis for “working-class gay men” provided by Lone Star Saloon.

The Small Business Commission must now determine if each of the nine businesses has operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in operations exceeding two years, or more than 20 years if the business is in danger of displacement, as is the case with Lone Star Saloon, whose building was recently sold.

The commission must also determine whether the business has significantly contributed to the history of its neighborhood and is committed to maintaining its appearance and the traditions that have defined it in the past.

Community Boards opened for business in 1976 when the neighborhood movement was booming. It claims status as the oldest-running public conflict resolution center in the country. Forty years ago, when rents were cheaper, Community Boards maintained nine small offices throughout the city, a network of sites where neighbors met in mediation to resolve common problems. Now, it operates from one location in Opera Plaza, staffed by one full-time employee, three part-time workers, a rotating handful of temporary interns and a volunteer army of nearly 400 trained mediators, translators and facilitators.

Community Boards has lost two leases in the past 14 years. Communications Director Jim Garrison tells the

story: “We were at Market and Van Ness Avenue when our rent doubled in the first dot-com boom. Then, we moved to 24th Street at Folsom and fell victim to the Google bus pressure. We watched the corner taqueria close and, again, saw our rent doubled. For us, the possible yearly grant for our one full-time employee isn't significant, but we hope the legacy recognition will convince our landlord to extend our lease for 10 years beyond its end next year.”

Kurylo cautions that grant guidelines for businesses and landlords are still in development and notes that any legacy business or landlord must be free from delinquent taxes, fines, penalties, interest, assessments or fees owed to the city before receiving grant money.

Despite the slow start of the legacy program, Kurylo has another 10 businesses ready to go before the Historic Preservation Commission on Aug. 3, including two in District 6 — SF Party on Post Street, the three-story emporium of all the bells, whistles and novelties needed for a proper celebration, which traces its ancestry to 1901; and Image Conscious, a 36-year-old publisher and distributor of fine arts posters, now on Tenth Street.

“My goal is to get 50 more applications passed on to HPC by year's end in addition to the 19 now working their way through the process,” Kurylo said.

The legacy business ordinance caps the number of legacy status approvals at 300 in any fiscal year, so there's plenty of room for more before June 30, 2017. ■

ERRATUM

In the July issue, The Extra misstated that the 63 nominations before the Office of Small Business were applications. Also, misstated that legacy status is restricted to businesses with 100 or fewer employees. The employee limit applies to the maximum grant an enterprise could receive once recognized by the registry. ■

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