



# Legacy Business Registry Staff Report

Hearing Date: April 25, 2022

## BUDDHA LOUNGE, INC.

*Application No.:* LBR-2021-22-18  
*Business Name:* Buddha Lounge, Inc.  
*Business Address:* 901 Grant Ave.  
*District:* District 3  
*Applicant:* Shannon Kwan, CEO  
*Nomination Letter Date:* March 1, 2022  
*Nominated By:* Supervisor Aaron Peskin  
*Staff Contact:* Richard Kurylo  
legacybusiness@sfgov.org

### BUSINESS DESCRIPTION

Buddha Lounge is a beloved local bar located at 901 Grant Avenue in San Francisco's Chinatown neighborhood. Established by five partners – Walter F. Lee, Paul M. Kwan, Shut Chi Tse, Franklin M. Lan, and Charles F. Wong – in 1951, the bar was later purchased by William and Phillip Kwan in 1999. It has remained a family business ever since, and today Buddha Lounge is proudly co-owned by mother and daughter Arleen and Shannan Kwan.

For the last 71 years, Buddha Lounge's warm atmosphere and unique charm have welcomed generations of Chinatown residents, San Franciscans, and tourists. Outside the bar, Buddha Lounge's bright neon sign proudly bears its name and illuminates Grant Avenue at night. To enter, customers pass through a brightly colored, vase-shaped opening that evokes the traditional clay vessels used to store Chinese rice wine. Once inside, patrons can enjoy "Lucky Buddha Beers" (beer in Buddha-shaped glass bottles) or Chinese Mai Tais, listen to music on the jukebox, or play Liars Dice with the bartender, all under the warm glow of paper lanterns. The bar also features a mural of Buddha, which was painted when it opened in 1951.

Buddha Lounge has also contributed greatly to the Chinatown community. The bar is a generous supporter of BeChinatown, a coalition of neighborhood residents and merchants involved in community improvement projects. The group helped install Chinese lanterns in several neighborhood alleys, improving visibility and safety for pedestrians. Buddha Lounge is also a longtime sponsor of the Buddhist Temple of San Francisco. The bar has been featured in numerous media publications, and even landed on Anthony Bourdain's list of favorite places in San Francisco.

### CRITERION 1

**Has the applicant operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years?**

Yes, Buddha Lounge has operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years:

901 Grant Ave., 1951 to Present (71 Years)

**Legacy Business Program**  
Office of Small Business  
City Hall Room 140  
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place  
San Francisco, CA 94102  
(415) 554-6680  
legacybusiness@sfgov.org  
[www.legacybusiness.org](http://www.legacybusiness.org)





## CRITERION 2

**Has the applicant contributed to the neighborhood's history and/or the identity of a particular neighborhood or community?**

Yes, Buddha Lounge has contributed to the history and identity of the Chinatown neighborhood and San Francisco.

The Historic Preservation Commission recommended the applicant as qualifying, noting the following ways the applicant contributed to the neighborhood's history and/or the identity of a particular neighborhood or community:

- The business is known for serving "Lucky Buddha Beers," which are imported from China and come in Buddha-shaped glass bottles.
- Buddha Lounge is located within the boundaries of the National Register-eligible Chinatown Historic District. The district is culturally significant for its association with the Chinese and Chinese American communities in San Francisco, as well as architecturally significant for its unique masonry buildings constructed following the 1906 Earthquake and Fire. Although the site is not listed on a local, state, or federal historic resource registry, it has been surveyed several times. During the National Register Survey (1997), the property was identified as an eligible contributor to the National Register-eligible Chinatown Historic District and received a status code of "3D." The property was also identified as a district contributor in the Chinatown Survey (1994), and it received a rating of "C" (Contextual Importance) in the Foundation for San Francisco Architectural Heritage Survey (1978).
- Buddha Lounge has been featured in numerous travel blogs and local publications including the San Francisco Chronicle, KQED, and SF Gate. The business was even identified as one of Anthony Bourdain's favorite businesses in San Francisco.

## CRITERION 3

**Is the applicant committed to maintaining the physical features or traditions that define the business, including craft, culinary, or art forms?**

Yes, Buddha Lounge is committed to maintaining the physical features and traditions that define the business.

## HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION

The Historic Preservation Commission recommends that Buddha Lounge, Inc. qualifies for the Legacy Business Registry under Administrative Code Section 2A.242(b)(2) and recommends safeguarding of the below listed physical features and traditions.

Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business:

- Exterior neon sign
- Vase-shaped entryway
- Mural of Buddha.

## CORE PHYSICAL FEATURE OR TRADITION THAT DEFINES THE BUSINESS

Following is the core physical feature or tradition that defines the business that would be required for maintenance of the business on the Legacy Business Registry.

- Bar.

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## STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the San Francisco Small Business Commission include Buddha Lounge, Inc. currently located at 901 Grant Ave. in the Legacy Business Registry as a Legacy Business under Administrative Code Section 2A.242.

Richard Kurylo and Michelle Reynolds  
Legacy Business Program

### Legacy Business Program

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# Small Business Commission

Resolution No. \_\_\_\_\_

April 25, 2022

## BUDDHA LOUNGE, INC.

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*District:* District 3  
*Applicant:* Shannon Kwan, CEO  
*Nomination Letter Date:* March 1, 2022  
*Nominated By:* Supervisor Aaron Peskin  
*Staff Contact:* Richard Kurylo  
legacybusiness@sfgov.org

**Adopting findings approving the Legacy Business Registry application for Buddha Lounge, Inc., currently located at 901 Grant Avenue.**

**WHEREAS**, in accordance with Administrative Code Section 2A.242, the Office of Small Business maintains a registry of Legacy Businesses in San Francisco (the "Registry") to recognize that longstanding, community-serving businesses can be valuable cultural assets of the City and to be a tool for providing educational and promotional assistance to Legacy Businesses to encourage their continued viability and success; and

**WHEREAS**, the subject business has operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years; or

**WHEREAS**, the subject business has operated in San Francisco for more than 20 years but less than 30 years, has had no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years, has significantly contributed to the history or identity of a particular neighborhood or community and, if not included on the Registry, faces a significant risk of displacement; and

**WHEREAS**, the subject business has contributed to the neighborhood's history and identity; and

**WHEREAS**, the subject business is committed to maintaining the physical features and traditions that define the business; and

**WHEREAS**, at a duly noticed public hearing held on April 25, 2022, the San Francisco Small Business Commission reviewed documents and correspondence, and heard oral testimony on the Legacy Business Registry application; therefore

**BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Small Business Commission hereby includes Buddha Lounge, Inc. in the Legacy Business Registry as a Legacy Business under Administrative Code Section 2A.242.

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**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the Small Business Commission recommends safeguarding the below listed physical features and traditions at Buddha Lounge, Inc.

Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business:

- Exterior neon sign
- Vase-shaped entryway
- Mural of Buddha.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the Small Business Commission requires maintenance of the below listed core physical feature or tradition to maintain Buddha Lounge, Inc. on the Legacy Business Registry:

- Bar.

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I hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution was ADOPTED by the Small Business Commission on April 25, 2022.

---

Katy Tang  
Director

RESOLUTION NO. \_\_\_\_\_

Ayes –  
Nays –  
Abstained –  
Absent –

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## Legacy Business Registry

# Application Review Sheet

*Application No.:* LBR-2021-22-18  
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**CRITERION 1:** Has the applicant has operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years?

☒ Yes ☐ No

901 Grant Ave., 1951 to Present (71 Years)

**CRITERION 2:** Has the applicant contributed to the neighborhood's history and/or the identity of a particular neighborhood or community?

☒ Yes ☐ No

**CRITERION 3:** Is the applicant committed to maintaining the physical features or traditions that define the business, including craft, culinary, or art forms?

☒ Yes ☐ No

**NOTES:** N/A

**DELIVERY DATE TO HPC:** March 9, 2022

Richard Kurylo and Michelle Reynolds  
Legacy Business Program

### Legacy Business Program

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Member, Board of Supervisors  
District 3



City and County of San Francisco

**AARON PESKIN**  
佩斯金 市參事

March 1, 2022

Director Katy Tang  
San Francisco Office of Small Business  
City Hall, Room 110  
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place  
San Francisco, CA 94102

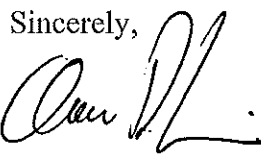
Dear Director Tang:

I am writing to nominate Buddha Lounge at 901 Grant Avenue for inclusion on the Legacy Business Registry.

Established in 1951 and located in the heart of Chinatown, Buddha Lounge is a favorite local dive bar, known for its quirky atmosphere and affordable "Buddha Beers" and Grand Martinis. It was originally owned by multiple partners until 1999, when brothers William and Phillip Kwan purchased Buddha Lounge. In 2016, Philip's daughter Arleen became the sole owner preserving their family legacy and ultimately remodeling the interior with bright colors and patterns. Mark the bartender is known to play Liars Dice with regulars, and still buzzes patrons into the basement restroom, a relic of days past.

Buddha Lounge has long been known for its iconic signage illuminated in historic neon. Local preservationist groups like San Francisco Neon use it as an example of Chinatown's historically vibrant nightlife scene, including it as a landmark site on walking tours and events.

Buddha Lounge would benefit greatly from inclusion on the Legacy Business Registry, and it is my honor to nominate this Chinatown institution.

Sincerely,  
  
Aaron Peskin

# Section One:

## Business / Applicant Information.

Please provide the following information:

- The name, mailing address and other contact information of the business;
- The name of the person who owns the business. For businesses with multiple owners, identify the person(s) with the highest ownership stake in the business;
- The name, title and contact information of the applicant;
- The business's San Francisco Business Account Number and entity number with the Secretary of State, if applicable.

<b>NAME OF BUSINESS:</b>	
Buddha Lounge, Inc.	
<b>BUSINESS OWNER(S)</b> (Identify the person(s) with the highest ownership stake in the business):	
Shannan Kwan	
<b>CURRENT BUSINESS ADDRESS:</b>	<b>TELEPHONE NUMBER:</b>
901 Grant Avenue San Francisco, CA 94108	415-362-1792
	<b>EMAIL ADDRESS:</b>
	Buddhalounge.sf@gmail.com
<b>MAILING ADDRESS – STREET ADDRESS:</b>	<b>MAILING ADDRESS – CITY AND STATE:</b>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Same as Business Address	
	<b>MAILING ADDRESS – ZIP CODE:</b>
<b>WEBSITE ADDRESS:</b>	
<b>FACEBOOK PAGE:</b>	
<b>TWITTER NAME:</b>	
<b>APPLICANT'S NAME:</b>	<b>APPLICANT'S TELEPHONE NUMBER:</b>
Shannan Kwan	
<b>APPLICANT'S TITLE:</b>	<b>APPLICANT'S EMAIL ADDRESS:</b>
CEO	Buddhalounge.sf@gmail.com
<b>SAN FRANCISCO BUSINESS ACCOUNT NUMBER:</b>	
0004069	
<b>SECRETARY OF STATE ENTITY NUMBER (If applicable):</b>	
C0806419	



## Section Two:

### Business Location(s).

List the business address of the original San Francisco location, the start date of business and the dates of operation at the original location. Check the box indicating whether the original location of the business in San Francisco is the founding location of the business. If the business moved from its original location and has had additional addresses in San Francisco, identify all other addresses and the dates of operation at each address. For businesses with more than one location, list the additional locations in section three of the narrative.

ORIGINAL SAN FRANCISCO ADDRESS	ZIP CODE	START DATE OF BUSINESS
901 Grant Avenue San Francisco, Ca	94108	10/17/51
IS THIS LOCATION THE FOUNDING LOCATION OF THE BUSINESS?	DATES OF OPERATION AT THIS LOCATION	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		

OTHER ADDRESSES (If applicable)	ZIP CODE	DATES OF OPERATION
		Start:
		End:

OTHER ADDRESSES (If applicable)	ZIP CODE	DATES OF OPERATION
		Start:
		End:

OTHER ADDRESSES (If applicable)	ZIP CODE	DATES OF OPERATION
		Start:
		End:

OTHER ADDRESSES (If applicable)	ZIP CODE	DATES OF OPERATION
		Start:
		End:

OTHER ADDRESSES (If applicable)	ZIP CODE	DATES OF OPERATION
		Start:
		End:

OTHER ADDRESSES (If applicable)	ZIP CODE	DATES OF OPERATION
		Start:
		End:

OTHER ADDRESSES (If applicable)	ZIP CODE	DATES OF OPERATION
		Start:
		End:

## Section Three:

### Disclosure Statement.

#### San Francisco Taxes, Business Registration, Licenses, Labor Laws and Public Information Release.

This section is verification that all San Francisco taxes, business registration and licenses are current and complete, and there are no current violations of San Francisco labor laws. This information will be verified. A business deemed not current with all San Francisco taxes, business registration and licenses, or has current violations of San Francisco labor laws, will not be eligible to apply for grants through the Legacy Business Program.

In addition, we are required to inform you that all information provided in the application will become subject to disclosure under the California Public Records Act.

Please read the following statements and check each to indicate that you agree with the statement. Then sign below in the space provided.

- ☒ I am authorized to submit this application on behalf of the business.
- ☒ I attest that the business is current on all of its San Francisco tax obligations.
- ☒ I attest that the business's business registration and any applicable regulatory license(s) are current.
- ☒ I attest that the Office of Labor Standards and Enforcement (OLSE) has not determined that the business is currently in violation of any of the City's labor laws, and that the business does not owe any outstanding penalties or payments ordered by the OLSE.
- ☒ I understand that documents submitted with this application may be made available to the public for inspection and copying pursuant to the California Public Records Act and San Francisco Sunshine Ordinance.
- ☒ I hereby acknowledge and authorize that all photographs and images submitted as part of the application may be used by the City without compensation.
- ☒ I understand that the Small Business Commission may revoke the placement of the business on the Registry if it finds that the business no longer qualifies, and that placement on the Registry does not entitle the business to a grant of City funds.

Shannan Kwan

10/26/2020

Name (Print):

Date:

Shannan Kwan

Signature

Digitally signed by shannan  
kwan  
Date: 2020.10.26 18:36:19  
-07'00'

## **BUDDHA LOUNGE**

### **Section 4: Written Historical Narrative**

#### **CRITERION 1**

**a. Provide a short history of the business from the date the business opened in San Francisco to the present day, including the ownership history. For businesses with multiple locations, include the history of the original location in San Francisco (including whether it was the business's founding and or headquartered location) and the opening dates and locations of all other locations.**

Buddha Lounge ("The Buddha") was established on October 17, 1951. It is located on 901 Grant Avenue on the corner of Grant Avenue and Washington Street in the heart of San Francisco's Chinatown. Buddha Lounge is known as a local dive bar for many tourists and locals alike, who come for entertainment, cocktails, and games of dice and casual dive bar atmosphere.

The Buddha was originally owned between five partners – Walter F. Lee, Paul M. Kwan, Shut Chi Tse, Franklin M. Lan, and Charles F. Wong.

On December 27, 1976, the partners incorporated the business to an S Corp now legally known as Buddha Lounge, Inc.

On April 7, 1999, Paul M. Kwan's sons William Kwan and Philip Kwan purchased Buddha Lounge, Inc. from the five original partners.

Upon William's passing, his brother and sister-in-law, Philip and Arleen Kwan, purchased William's 50% ownership on July 17, 2010.

On July 20, 2011, Philip and Arleen Kwan's daughter Shannan Kwan was elected to the Board of Directors to serve as Vice President.

Upon Philip's passing in 2016, Buddha Lounge, Inc. is now a female, minority-owned entertainment business owned and operated by Arleen Kwan and Shannan Kwan.

**b. Describe any circumstances that required the business to cease operations in San Francisco for more than six months?**

Buddha Lounge has not ceased operations for more than six months despite government mandated closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**c. Is the business a family-owned business? If so, give the generational history of the business.**

The business has been family-owned since April 7, 1999. On that day, brothers William Kwan and Philip Kwan purchased Buddha Lounge, Inc. from five partners. When William died in 2010, ownership passed to Philip and his wife Arleen. Philip and Arleen's daughter was elected to the Board of Directors in 2011. When Philip died in 2016, Arleen became the co-owner with her daughter Shannan Kwan.

**d. Describe the ownership history when the business ownership is not the original owner or a family-owned business.**

The ownership history of Buddha Lounge is as follows:

1951 to 1976:	Walter F. Lee, Paul M. Kwan, Shut Chi Tse, Franklin M. Lan, and Charles F. Wong
1976 to 1999:	Buddha Lounge, Inc., co-owned by Walter F. Lee, Paul M. Kwan, Shut Chi Tse, Franklin M. Lan, and Charles F. Wong
1999 to 2010:	Buddha Lounge, Inc., co-owned by William Kwan and Philip Kwan
2010 to 2106:	Buddha Lounge, Inc., co-owned by Philip Kwan and Arleen Kwan
2016 to Present:	Buddha Lounge, Inc., co-owned by Arleen Kwan and Shannan Kwan

**e. When the current ownership is not the original owner and has owned the business for less than 30 years, the applicant will need to provide documentation of the existence of the business prior to current ownership to verify it has been in operation for 30+ years. Please use the list of supplemental documents and/or materials as a guide to help demonstrate the existence of the business prior to current ownership.**

Documentation of the existence of the business verifying it has been in operation for 70+ years at the same location is provided in this Legacy Business Registry application.

**f. Note any other special features of the business location, such as, if the property associated with the business is listed on a local, state, or federal historic resources registry.**

The historic resource status of the building at 901 Grant Avenue is classified by the Planning Department as Category A, Historic Resource Present, with regard to the California Environmental Quality Act. The property was noted as having "Contextual Importance" in a 1978 survey by the Foundation For San Francisco Architectural Heritage and "Contributory" in a 1994 Chinatown survey. The property appears to be eligible for the National Registry as a contributor to a National Registry-eligible district through a 1997 survey evaluation.

## **CRITERION 2**

**a. Describe the business's contribution to the history and/or identity of the neighborhood, community or San Francisco.**

Established in 1951, Buddha Lounge is a popular iconic spot in San Francisco's Chinatown, both for locals and for visiting tourists. The exterior of the business is extremely photogenic, both during the day for its impressive doorway and at night for its bright neon sign, contributing to Chinatown's nightlife. It's also well known for being a friendly and inviting place where people can have a drink or learn new games.

Buddha Lounge supports BeChinatown, a coalition of community leaders, residents, merchants, and property owners working together on a common vision to be part of the community. One neighborhood project included the installation of Chinese lanterns that light up Waverly Place and Ross Alley, making the street and alley safer and cleaner. Many locals and visitors have complimented on how beautiful and attractive Waverly Place and Ross Alley have become with the Chinese lanterns.

**b. Is the business (or has been) associated with significant events in the neighborhood, the city, or the business industry?**

Buddha Lounge has been a very popular annual spot during Santa Con and especially during the Chinese New Year Parade celebrations and among community fairs such as the Flower Festival, the Ten-Ten Parade, and Moon Festival.

**c. Has the business ever been referenced in an historical context? Such as in a business trade publication, media, or historical documents?**

Buddha Lounge has been mentioned on many media platforms such as Yelp, Airbnb, and Travelocity. Thrillist has named Buddha Lounge one of the top 30 dive bars in the United States. Buddha Lounge has also been prominently featured in online travel blogs. Following are some notable articles:

- “‘Anyone Who Doesn't Have a Great Time in San Francisco is Pretty Much Dead to Me:’ Anthony Bourdain's Love Story With SF”  
By Riya Bhattacharjee  
NBC Bay Area  
June 8, 2018  
<https://www.nbcbayarea.com/news/local/anyone-who-doesnt-have-a-great-time-in-san-francisco-is-pretty-much-dead-to-me-remembering-anthony-bourdains-favorite-spots-in-sf/176289/>
- “Beloved San Francisco dive bars that are surviving”  
By Greg Keraghosian  
San Francisco Chronicle  
September 27, 2018  
<https://www.sfgate.com/bars/slideshow/Beloved-San-Francisco-dive-bars-that-are-surviving-185356.php>

- “Inside San Francisco's high stakes underground dice scene”  
By Dan Gentile  
San Francisco Chronicle  
July 27, 2019  
<https://www.sfgate.com/local-donotuse/article/San-Francisco-underground-dice-scene-exposed-14188244.php>
- “A Neon Sign Tour of San Francisco's Chinatown”  
By Samuel Getachew  
KQED  
Feb 11, 2021  
<https://www.kqed.org/arts/13892619/a-neon-sign-tour-of-san-franciscos-chinatown>
- “Dive Bars, Dice Games & Karaoke in Chinatown”  
SF Date Night  
<https://www.sfdatenight.com/dates/chinatown-dive-bar>
- “What Are the Coolest Must-Experience Bars Near Chinatown?”  
By SF Insider  
San Francisco Chronicle  
<https://sfinsider.sfgate.com/what-are-the-coolest-must-experience-bars-near-chinatown/>

**d. Is the business associated with a significant or historical person?**

Not applicable.

**e. How does the business demonstrate its commitment to the community?**

Buddha has donated to BeChinatown for their installation of Chinese lanterns that light up the streets for safety. The bar has also donated to the Buddhist Temple of San Francisco.

**f. Provide a description of the community the business serves.**

Buddha Lounge provides entertainment that enriches friendships, new and old. The bar is known for its unique entrance, authentic Chinese “3 Penis Whiskey,” Buddha beer, juke box, dice games, and colorful bartenders. Patrons range from tourists to local San Franciscans to hipsters. Buddha Lounge is a gathering hole and stopping place for friends, neighbors, locals and visitors, old and young alike.

**g. Is the business associated with a culturally significant building/structure/site/object/interior?**

The Buddha Lounge boasts a distinctive sign that proudly displays the name of the bar with a cocktail in bright neon colors that illuminate Chinatown's night. The outer exterior has a bright green façade with yellow detailing, which evokes traditional Chinese art patterns. The inviting doorway is shaped in a notable vase-like shape, which is reminiscent of a traditional clay vessel for Chinese rice wine.

The interior has been noted as kitschy but warm and inviting. The area above the bar is decorated with paper lanterns for an endearing quality, while the walls are adorned with a more traditional painted mural.

The mural of Buddha, however, triggered an international incident. According to a 1967 San Francisco Chronicle report, the Buddha Lounge's mural of a cross-legged Buddha, which exists to this day, was such a source of protest in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), that the American ambassador to the island nation expressed "deep regret" about it. "That picture was painted in 1951 when the bar opened," said the bar's owner at the time, Walter Lee. "We've never had any trouble about it." Lee said the mural was copied from a picture in Life magazine.<sup>1</sup>

**h. How would the community be diminished if the business were to be sold, relocated, shut down, etc.?**

The Buddha Lounge patrons bring business not only to the establishment but also to the San Francisco Chinatown community by patronizing other neighboring businesses as well. If the business was sold, relocated, or shut down, it would displace a number of employees, many of whom patrons have come to see and call their friends.

### **CRITERION 3**

**a. Describe the business and the essential features that define its character.**

Established in 1951, Buddha lounge has a distinguished entrance and a tile ceiling overhang. The bar is known as a friendly place where patrons can learn to play dice games with the bartenders. It is also known for its distinctive "Lucky Buddha Beer," which is imported from China and comes in a glass Buddha shaped bottle. Buddha Lounge attracts tourists, San Francisco residents, and many hipsters from the financial district.

Per the San Francisco Chronicle, "the bar is a delightful, dimly lit Chinatown classic with an eclectic mix of locals and curious tourists. Mark the bartender is known to play Liars Dice with anyone who dares challenge him, and you'll want to stay on his good side. That's because to access the restroom, you'll need him to buzz you through a wire door which leads to a sketchy-looking stairway to the basement. There are no draft beers at Buddha Lounge, but items to

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<sup>1</sup> San Francisco Chronicle, September 27, 2018, <https://www.sfgate.com/bars/slideshow/Beloved-San-Francisco-dive-bars-that-are-surviving-185356.php>

order here are the Buddha Beer, which comes in a Buddha-shaped bottle, and the Chinese Mai Tai.”<sup>2</sup>

**b. How does the business demonstrate a commitment to maintaining the historical traditions that define the business, and which of these traditions should not be changed in order to retain the businesses historical character? (e.g., business model, goods and services, craft, culinary, or art forms)**

Buddha Lounge will not change the exterior or interior physical characteristics of the space, which are a critical component of the bar’s reputation. Many people love dive bars from the past, and Buddha Lounge is happy to fill that niche.

**c. How has the business demonstrated a commitment to maintaining the special physical features that define the business? Describe any special exterior and interior physical characteristics of the space occupied by the business (e.g. signage, murals, architectural details, neon signs, etc.).**

Buddha Lounge is committed to maintaining the bright neon sign that proudly and loudly displays the name of the bar and a cocktail glass, the inviting doorway in the shape of a vase, and the mural of Buddha.

**d. When the current ownership is not the original owner and has owned the business for less than 30 years; the applicant will need to provide documentation that demonstrates the current owner has maintained the physical features or traditions that define the business, including craft, culinary, or art forms. Please use the list of supplemental documents and/or materials as a guide to help demonstrate the existence of the business prior to current ownership.**

Buddha Lounge has been family-owned for three generations. Documentation that demonstrates the business has been a bar for 30+ years is included in this Legacy Business Registry application.

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<sup>2</sup> San Francisco Chronicle, September 27, 2018, <https://www.sfgate.com/bars/slideshow/Beloved-San-Francisco-dive-bars-that-are-surviving-185356.php>









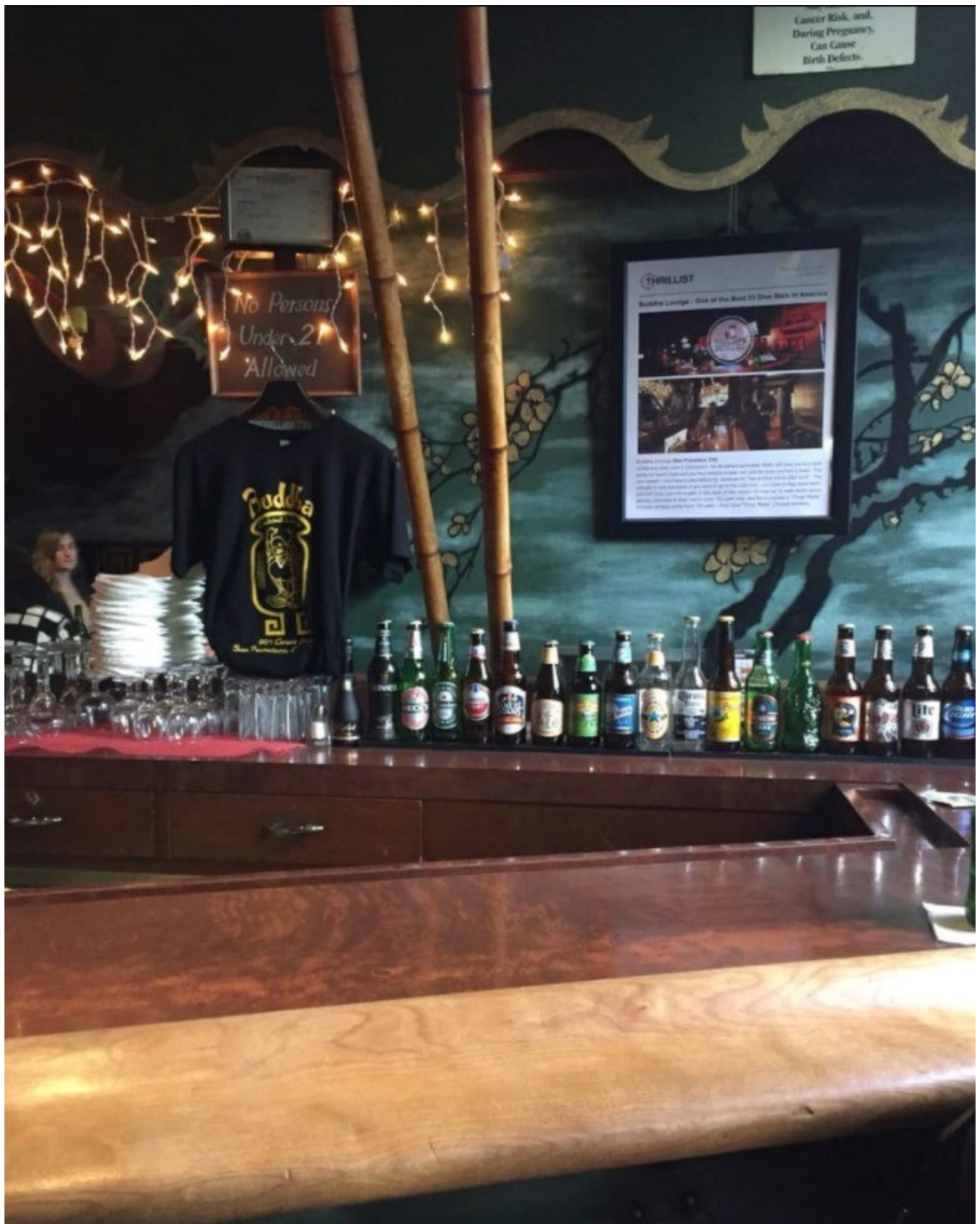




















CHINESE PRESS Friday, October 12, 1951

### Opti-Mrs. Club Plans 'Fall Fantasy' Benefit

SAN FRANCISCO.—Acts for "The Fall Fantasy," a night club benefit show, staged by the Opti-Mrs. Club Women's Auxiliary of the Chinatown Optimist Club, are being rehearsed for their presentation at the "Club Shanghai," 453 Grant Avenue, October 22. It is announced by Mrs. Wing Wy, president of the club.

Given for the benefit of the Girls Work Fund, the evening's entertainment will start with a dinner at 6:30. Night club acts will follow with all 24 members of the club taking part, assisted by the Chinatown Optimist Club.

Scheduled are a choral group, dance routines including Hawaiian, Broadway and barnyard styles, a quartet and several soloists. With music arranged by Wing Wy, Tony Wing will direct the routines.

The evening will conclude with ballroom dancing to the music of Larry Cannon and his five-piece orchestra.

### Square and Circle Club

SAN FRANCISCO.—Climaxing the Square and Circle Club's "Burrhead Casino" benefit carnival, held last Saturday and Sunday at the YWCA was the program of entertainment and raffles for prizes on Sunday, October 7. Winners and their prizes were:

1. Hoffman 16" television set—won by Rodney Chian, 1415 Bay street.
2. GE radio clock—by Ernest Yuen, 718 California street.
3. Sunbeam coffeemaker—by K. Yuen, 1543 Sacramento street.

No contestant in the TV Parts Contest, an added feature of the carnival, named the exact number of parts 667, in the Juella television model displayed at the carnival, although five persons tied for the closest guess at 650 parts.

Sidney Tom of 1080 Clay street was the first of the five named called out to be present, and was awarded a beautiful modern lamp contributed by the Ti Sun Co., 1123 Grant Avenue.

Other participants in Sunday's program were the Leung and Dancing Dolls and Lincoln Leung, Alice Wong, and Pearl Joe.

All proceeds of the two-day carnival will go towards welfare causes supported by the Square and Circle Club.

### CSCA Halloween Ball

BERKELEY, Calif.—The first Halloween Ball given by the University of California Chapter of the Chinese Students Christian Association will be at St. John Hall, on Park Lane, in El Cerrito on October 27. All those attending the ball are to be dressed as something or someone other than themselves. Prizes are to be awarded for the best costumes. Entertainment is also on the agenda.

### Methodist Church

SAN FRANCISCO.—The Methodist Episcopal Church will present a kitchen dinner Saturday, October 20. Admission is a kitchen utensil for their newly fixed up kitchen. The public is invited to this affair, which begins at 8 p.m., at the church. Refreshments, games dancing, and fun will take place.

YUkon 2-6125  
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### Galileo Students in 'KYA School Hour'

SAN FRANCISCO.—Three Galileo High School students—Yvonne and Susan Chin and Stanley Kase—will be featured in a new project, the "KYA School Hour," to be launched over radio station KYA at 5:30 p.m. this Sunday.

Yvonne Chin will be accompanied by her sister Susan in presenting Luke Wah Park's song "My Country." The song is unusual in that it has Chinese words set to Western music.

Immediately before the performance of the song, Stanley Kase will read a translation of the words which express very beautifully, through his and emotions common to men of every land under the sun.

### St. Mary's Glee Club In Musical Comedy

SAN FRANCISCO.—The Saint Mary's Chinese Glee Club will give a performance of the musical comedy, "The Bamboo Boy," an American version of an Oriental operetta, at the Saint Mary's Chinese Mission auditorium, Stockton and Clay streets, on Saturday, October 20, at 3:30 p.m. and 8 p.m. Admission prices are: Night performances—adults, \$1.00; children, 50 cents; matinee—adults, \$1.00; children, 25 cents.

Musical director for the musical is Miss Anna Faller, aided by dramatic directors, Frank Jue and Tony Wong; business and publicity, Peter Poon, Eugene Yip, Annie Lew, and Karl Wong.

Leading roles of the operetta include Ah Liu, the beautiful daughter; Annie Low; Ah Len, the mother; Jean Low; Ah Ma, the sister of Ah Liu; Della Mock; Anna, the old pessimistic nurse; Shirley Young; Tu Chen Cho To, young man; Herbert Lee; Ah Wong, the father; Paul Poon; Ahing To, the blind prophet; Peter Poon.

A special dance number will be given by Roberta Chiu. Musical background will be handled by Frances Wong.

The Glee Club, which has been in existence only a year, has appeared on the Bill Weaver Radio Show, Armand Girard Show, on television, and at many different charity functions during the Christmas season. This year the club, combined with the Treasure Island Choir, consisting of servicemen and women, sang their Easter masses together.

### Arts and Crafts Class

An arts and crafts class which began October 1, is open to the public at the YWCA. Classes are every Thursday, at 8 p.m. Teaching is Miss Barbara Yong, a graduate of the University of California. The cost is two dollars for eight lessons.

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### Cocktail Bar

**Young Adult Group**  
SAN FRANCISCO.—The Young Adult Group, a social dancing club, will offer a variety show tonight to reveal the hidden talents of some of the club members and friends (charge). All young adults are invited. This will be in place of the regular daily invited. Social dancing will follow with instructions and in free off follow the show.

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## GRAND OPENING!

OCTOBER 17

# BUDDHA LOUNGE

Your Hosts: JACK YOUNG, JAMES CHIN



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**BUDDHA LOUNGE**

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Food // Bars &amp; Breweries

## Beloved San Francisco dive bars that are surviving

Greg Keraghosian

Sep. 27, 2018

Despite all of San Francisco's changes, these dive bars are surviving and thriving decades after they arrived.



---

Akiko I/Yelp

### Buddha Lounge (1 of 2)

When a dive bar can trigger an international incident, you know it belongs on this list. According to a 1967 Chronicle report, the Buddha Lounge's mural of a cross-legged Buddha, which exists to this day, was such a source of protest in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), that the American ambassador to the island nation expressed "deep regret" about it.

“That picture was painted in 1951 when the bar opened,” said the bar’s owner, Walter Lee, at the time. “We’ve never had any trouble about it.” Lee said the mural was copied from a picture in Life magazine.



— ErikaC/Yelp

### **Buddha Lounge (2 of 2)**

Today, the bar is a delightful, dimly lit Chinatown classic with an eclectic mix of locals and curious tourists. Mark the bartender is known to play Liars Dice with anyone who dares challenge him, and you’ll want to stay on his good side. That’s because to access the restroom, you’ll need him to buzz you through a wire door which leads to a sketchy-looking stairway to the basement.

There are no draft beers at Buddha Lounge, but items to order here are the Buddha Beer, which comes in a Buddha-shaped bottle, and the Chinese Mai Tai.



# LEGACY BUSINESS REGISTRY EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**HEARING DATE: April 6, 2022**

*Filing Date:* March 9, 2022  
*Case No.:* 2022-002232LBR  
*Business Name:* Buddha Lounge  
*Business Address:* 901 Grant Avenue  
*Zoning:* CVR (CHINATOWN- VISITOR RETAIL) Zoning District  
50-N Height and Bulk District  
*Block/Lot:* 0193/011  
*Applicant:* Shannan Kwan  
901 Grant Avenue  
*Nominated By:* Supervisor Aaron Peskin  
*Located In:* District 3  
*Staff Contact:* Alessandro Hall – (628) 652-7336  
[Alessandro.hall@sfgov.org](mailto:Alessandro.hall@sfgov.org)

**Recommendation:** Adopt a Resolution to Recommend Approval

## Business Description

Buddha Lounge is a beloved local bar located at 901 Grant Avenue in San Francisco's Chinatown neighborhood. Established by five partners - Walter F. Lee, Paul M. Kwan, Shut Chi Tse, Franklin M. Lan, and Charles F. Wong - in 1951, the bar was later purchased by William and Phillip Kwan in 1999. It has remained a family business ever since and today Buddha Lounge is proudly co-owned by mother and daughter Arleen and Shannan Kwan.

For the last 71 years, Buddha Lounge's warm atmosphere and unique charm have welcomed generations of Chinatown residents, San Franciscans, and tourists. Outside the bar, Buddha Lounge's bright neon sign proudly bears its name and illuminates Grant Avenue at night. To enter, customers pass through a brightly colored, vase-shaped opening that evokes the traditional clay vessels used to store Chinese rice wine. Once inside, patrons can enjoy "Lucky Buddha Beers" (beer in Buddha-shaped glass bottles) or Chinese Mai Tais, listen to music on the jukebox, or play Liars Dice with the bartender, all under the warm glow of paper lanterns. The bar also features a mural of Buddha, which was painted when it opened in 1951.

Buddha Lounge has also contributed greatly to the Chinatown community. The bar is a generous supporter of BeChinatown, a coalition of neighborhood residents and merchants involved in community improvement projects. The group helped install Chinese lanterns in several neighborhood alleys, improving visibility and safety for pedestrians. Buddha Lounge is also a longtime sponsor of the Buddhist Temple of San Francisco. The bar has been featured in numerous media publications, and even landed on Anthony Bourdain's list of favorite places in San Francisco.

Buddha Lounge is located in a Category A (Historic Resource Present) structure on the northwest corner of Grant Avenue and Washington Street. It is within the CVR (Chinatown-Visitor Retail) zoning district, a 50-N Height and Bulk District, and the National Register-eligible Chinatown Historic District. Buddha Lounge is committed to maintaining the physical features and traditions that help define the business including its exterior neon sign, vase-shaped entryway, and mural of Buddha in the interior.

## Staff Analysis

### Review Criteria

**1. *When was business founded?***

The business was founded in 1951.

**2. *Does the business qualify for listing on the Legacy Business Registry? If so, how?***

Yes. Buddha Lounge qualifies for listing on the Legacy Business Registry because it meets all of the eligibility Criteria:

- a. Buddha Lounge has operated continuously in San Francisco for 71 years.
- b. Buddha Lounge has contributed to the history and identity of the Chinatown neighborhood and San Francisco.
- c. Buddha Lounge is committed to maintaining the physical features and traditions that define the organization.

**3. *Is the business associated with a culturally significant art/craft/cuisine/tradition?***

Yes. The business is known for serving "Lucky Buddha Beers," which are imported from China and come in Buddha-shaped glass bottles.

**4. *Is the business or its building associated with significant events, persons, and/or architecture?***

Yes. Buddha Lounge is located within the boundaries of the National Register-eligible Chinatown Historic District. The district is culturally significant for its association with the Chinese and Chinese American communities in San Francisco, as well as architecturally significant for its unique masonry buildings constructed following the 1906 Earthquake and Fire.

5. *Is the property associated with the business listed on a local, state, or federal historic resource registry?*

No. Although the site is not listed on a local, state, or federal historic resource registry, it has been surveyed several times. During the National Register Survey (1997), the property was identified as an eligible contributor to the National Register-eligible Chinatown Historic District and received a status code of “3D.” The property was also identified as a district contributor in the Chinatown Survey (1994), and it received a rating of “C” (Contextual Importance) in the Foundation for San Francisco Architectural Heritage Survey (1978).

6. *Is the business mentioned in a local historic context statement?*

No, not as of the date of this Executive Summary.

7. *Has the business been cited in published literature, newspapers, journals, etc.?*

Yes. Buddha Lounge has been featured in numerous travel blogs and local publications including the San Francisco Chronicle, KQED, and SF Gate. The business was even identified as one of Anthony Bourdain’s favorite businesses in San Francisco.

### Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business

Location associated with the business:

- 901 Grant Street (1951 – Present)

Recommended by Applicant

- Exterior neon sign
- Vase-shaped entryway
- Mural of Buddha

Additional Recommended by Staff

- None

### Basis for Recommendation

The Department recommends the Historic Preservation Commission adopt a resolution recommending the business listed above be adopted by the Small Business Commission to the Legacy Business Registry.

### ATTACHMENTS

Draft Resolution

Legacy Business Registry Application:

- Application Review Sheet
- Section 1 – Business / Applicant Information
- Section 2 – Business Location(s)
- Section 3 – Disclosure Statement
- Section 4 – Written Historical Narrative
  - Criterion 1 – History and Description of Business

- Criterion 2 – Contribution to Local History
  - Criterion 3 – Business Characteristics
- Contextual Photographs and Background Documentation





# HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION RESOLUTION NO. 1232

**HEARING DATE: APRIL 6, 2022**

*Case No.:* **2022-002232LBR**  
*Business Name:* Buddha Lounge  
*Business Address:* 901 GRANT AVENUE  
*Zoning:* CVR (CHINATOWN- VISITOR RETAIL) Zoning District  
50-N Height and Bulk District  
*Block/Lot:* 0193/011  
*Applicant:* Shannan Kwan  
901 Grant Avenue  
*Nominated By:* Supervisor Aaron Peskin  
*Located In:* District 3  
*Staff Contact:* Alessandro Hall – (628) 652-7336

ADOPTING FINDINGS RECOMMENDING TO THE SMALL BUSINESS COMMISSION APPROVAL OF THE LEGACY BUSINESS REGISTRY NOMINATION FOR BUDDHA LOUNGE CURRENTLY LOCATED AT 901 GRANT AVE, BLOCK/LOT 0193/011

WHEREAS, in accordance with Administrative Code Section 2A.242, the Office of Small Business maintains a registry of Legacy Businesses in San Francisco (the "Registry") to recognize that longstanding, community-serving businesses can be valuable cultural assets of the City and to be a tool for providing educational and promotional assistance to Legacy Businesses to encourage their continued viability and success; and

WHEREAS, the subject business has operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years; and

WHEREAS, the subject business has contributed to the City's history and identity; and

WHEREAS, the subject business is committed to maintaining the traditions that define the business; and

WHEREAS, at a duly noticed public hearing held on April 6, 2022, the Historic Preservation Commission reviewed documents, correspondence and heard oral testimony on the Legacy Business Registry nomination.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Historic Preservation Commission hereby recommends that Buddha Lounge qualifies for the Legacy Business Registry under Administrative Code Section 2A.242(b)(2) as it has operated for 30 or more years and has continued to contribute to the community.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Historic Preservation Commission hereby recommends safeguarding of the below listed physical features and traditions for Buddha Lounge.

*Location(s):*

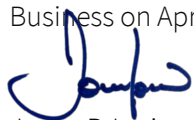
- 901 Grant Avenue (1951 – Present)

*Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business*

- Exterior neon sign
- Vase-shaped entryway
- Mural of Buddha

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Historic Preservation Commission's findings and recommendations are made solely for the purpose of evaluating the subject business's eligibility for the Legacy Business Registry, and the Historic Preservation Commission makes no finding that the subject property or any of its features constitutes a historical resource pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15064.5(a).

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Historic Preservation Commission hereby directs its Commission Secretary to transmit this Resolution and other pertinent materials in the case file 2022-002232LBR to the Office of Small Business on April 6, 2022.



Jonas P. Ionin  
Commission Secretary

AYES: Wright, Black, Foley, Johns, So, Nageswaran, Matsuda

NOES: None

ABSENT: None

ADOPTED: April 6, 2022