

Legacy Business Registry Staff Report

HEARING DATE JUNE 24, 2019

COMIX EXPERIENCE

Application No.: LBR-2018-19-061
Business Name: Comix Experience
Business Address: 305 Divisadero Street and 2381 Ocean Avenue
District: Districts 5 and 7
Applicant: Brian Hibbs, Head Cheese
Nomination Date: May 20, 2019
Nominated By: Supervisor Vallie Brown
Staff Contact: Richard Kurylo
legacybusiness@sfgov.org

BUSINESS DESCRIPTION

Comix Experience is a comic book and graphic novel store, opened by Brian Hibbs at 305 Divisadero Street in April 1989. At the time, there were approximately 24 different comic book shops in San Francisco, and today there are just eight left. Comix Experience is the oldest comic book store in San Francisco in the same location with the same owner. Hibbs is a major figure in the comic book industry, writing a monthly business column on the Comics Industry and Business Ethics, entitled TILTING AT WINDMILLS; judging the Eisner awards; sitting on the Board of Directors for the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund; and, cofounding ComicsPRO, the industry's retailer trade group.

During the first five years of Comix Experience, there were 63 different author events, and later they focused on one or two special events per year. In 2014, Hibbs bought Gary Buechler's "Comics Outpost" at 2381 Ocean Avenue and renamed it "Comix Experience Outpost." Comics Outpost may in fact predate Comix Experience, but Hibbs does not have supporting documents to demonstrate the ownership history.

In 2015, Comix Experience began two Graphic Novel of the Month Clubs (GNCs) to keep the store financially viable. One club is aimed at young readers and one is aimed at adults. Each month, the staff collectively votes on what they think are the best new releases of the month, always a creator-driven work. They then bring the creators out to San Francisco to do a public signing and a private question and answer event for the membership. Comix Experience livestreams these across the world (the business has members in 27 states, currently, and three countries) and creates a living archive of contemporary work and creators. The archive currently contains well over 100 hours of video, with more being added each month.

The business is located on the west side of Divisadero Street between Page and Oak streets in the Divisadero corridor.

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, the applicant has operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years:



305 Divisadero Street from 1989 to Present (30 years)
2381 Ocean Avenue from 2014 to Present (5 years)

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

Yes, the applicant has contributed to the history and identity of the Divisadero corridor 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:

- Comix Experience is associated with the comic book and graphic novel genres of literature.
- The Divisadero Street property is located within the California Register-eligible Buena Vista North Historic District. The neighborhood north of Buena Vista Park consists primarily of two- and three-story residential buildings that were constructed during the late 19th and early 20th century. The area exhibits a predominant "Victorian-era" and "Edwardian-era" architectural character, and includes styles such as Italianate, Stick-Eastlake, Queen Anne, Craftsman, and Edwardian.

The Ocean Avenue Street property is located within the California Register-eligible Ingleside Terrace Historic District. Ingleside Terraces consists of single-family homes that were constructed as part of the Ingleside Terraces housing tract. Ingleside Terraces is comprised of one- and two story, detached single-family houses that exhibit architectural styles such as Craftsman, Period Revival, Spanish Colonial Revival, and Mediterranean.

Both properties have Planning Department Historic Resource status codes of "A" (Historic Resource Present) because of their locations within the eligible historic districts.

- There have been a number of features and articles on Hibbs and the store, both within and outside the industry. TILTING AT WINDMILLS was the anchor feature of Krause Publications' "Comics & Games Retailer Magazine" that ran well over 100 issues in the 1980s and 1990s. Currently, it runs on national comics news website The Comics Beat. Comix Experience has been nominated multiple times for the Will Eisner "Spirit of Comics" award, as well as winning at least seven different "Best of the Bay" awards from the SF Bay Guardian reader polls. The store is regularly featured on podcasts on comics. Comix Experience has also been featured in the San Francisco Chronicle in October 2005 regarding their successful lawsuit against Marvel Comics over the company's returns policy.

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

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

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION

The Historic Preservation Commission recommends that Comix Experience 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.





SAN FRANCISCO

OFFICE OF SMALL BUSINESS

CITY AND COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO
LONDON N. BREED, MAYOR

OFFICE OF SMALL BUSINESS
REGINA DICK-ENDRIZZI, DIRECTOR

Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business:

- Window displays.
- Graphic Novel-of-the-Month Clubs.
- Reader- and creator-focused business model.
- Video archives.

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.

- Comic book store.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the San Francisco Small Business Commission include Comix Experience currently located at 305 Divisadero Street and 2381 Ocean Avenue in the Legacy Business Registry as a Legacy Business under Administrative Code Section 2A.242.

Richard Kurylo, Program Manager
Legacy Business Program



Small Business Commission Draft Resolution

HEARING DATE JUNE 24, 2019

COMIX EXPERIENCE

LEGACY BUSINESS REGISTRY RESOLUTION NO. _____

Application No.: LBR-2018-19-061
Business Name: Comix Experience
Business Address: 305 Divisadero Street and 2381 Ocean Avenue
District: Districts 5 and 7
Applicant: Brian Hibbs, Head Cheese
Nomination Date: May 20, 2019
Nominated By: Supervisor Vallie Brown
Staff Contact: Richard Kurylo
legacybusiness@sfgov.org

ADOPTING FINDINGS APPROVING THE LEGACY BUSINESS REGISTRY APPLICATION FOR COMIX EXPERIENCE, CURRENTLY LOCATED AT 305 DIVISADERO STREET AND 2381 OCEAN 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 in 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 June 24, 2019, the San Francisco Small Business Commission reviewed documents and correspondence, and heard oral testimony on the Legacy Business Registry application; therefore





SAN FRANCISCO

OFFICE OF SMALL BUSINESS

CITY AND COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO
LONDON N. BREED, MAYOR

OFFICE OF SMALL BUSINESS
REGINA DICK-ENDRIZZI, DIRECTOR

BE IT RESOLVED that the Small Business Commission hereby includes Comix Experience in the Legacy Business Registry as a Legacy Business under Administrative Code Section 2A.242.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Small Business Commission recommends safeguarding the below listed physical features and traditions at Comix Experience:

Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business:

- Window displays.
Graphic Novel-of-the-Month Clubs.
Reader- and creator-focused business model.
Video archives.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Small Business Commission requires maintenance of the below listed core physical feature or tradition to maintain Comix Experience on the Legacy Business Registry:

- Comic book store.

I hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution was ADOPTED by the Small Business Commission on June 24, 2019.

Regina Dick-Endrizzi
Director

RESOLUTION NO. _____

- Ayes -
Nays -
Abstained -
Absent -





SAN FRANCISCO

OFFICE OF SMALL BUSINESS

CITY AND COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO
LONDON N. BREED, MAYOR

OFFICE OF SMALL BUSINESS
REGINA DICK-ENDRIZZI, DIRECTOR

**Legacy
Business
Registry**

Application Review Sheet

Application No.: LBR-2018-19-061
Business Name: Comix Experience
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District: Districts 5 and 7
Applicant: Brian Hibbs, Head Cheese
Nomination Date: May 20, 2019
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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

305 Divisadero Street from 1989 to Present (30 years)
 2381 Ocean Avenue from 2014 to Present (5 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: May 23, 2019

Richard Kurylo
Program Manager, Legacy Business Program



**Member, Board of Supervisor
District 5**



City and County of San Francisco

Vallie Brown

Monday May 20, 2019

Office of Small Business
Small Business Commission
City Hall, Suite 110
San Francisco, CA 94102

To whom it may concern:

I am writing to nominate Comix Experience, located at 305 Divisadero Street, for the Legacy Business Registry Program.

When Brian Hibbs opened Comix Experience in 1989, it was one of twenty-four different comic book stores in San Francisco; only eight of those twenty-four stores are open today. What makes Comix Experience a unique comic shop, is its steadfast commitment to engaging with the community in the Divisadero Corridor and across the City. The store has shaped the lives of neighbors and artists alike. Brian and his staff promote literacy by offering “graphic novel book-clubs” for youth and adults. They continue to partner with local schools, promoting PTAs and preschools with extensive donations of comics for fundraisers. More than a few local artists have seen their careers advanced because of the many community events that Comix Experience has hosted to promote those artists and their work.

Comix Experience has been in business at 305 Divisadero for 30-years. It is well known for having beautiful window displays that showcase the store and promote the vast collection of comic books and graphic novels inside. Although the business does not classify as a family-owned business, Brian Hibbs has been the sole proprietor since 1989. He hopes to one day pass his store on to his son or convert it to a worker-owned collective so that it can live-on past him.

It is for the above reasons that I wish to nominate Comix Experience to the Legacy Business Registry Program. Should you have any questions in regard to Comix Experience, please contact Brian Hibbs by email at: brian@comixexperience.com.

Should you have any further questions related to this letter, please do not hesitate to reach out to my office at (415) 554-7630 or BrownStaff@sfgov.org. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Vallie Brown".

Vallie Brown
Supervisor, District 5
City and County of San Francisco

Section One:

Business / Applicant Information. 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.

NAME OF BUSINESS:		
Comix Experience		
BUSINESS OWNER(S) (identify the person(s) with the highest ownership stake in the business)		
Brian Hibbs		
CURRENT BUSINESS ADDRESS:		TELEPHONE:
305 Divisadero St, 94117		((415))863-9258
		EMAIL:
		brian@comixexperience.com
WEBSITE:	FACEBOOK PAGE:	YELP PAGE
https://www.comixexperience.com/	https://www.facebook.com/ComixExperience/	https://www.yelp.com/biz/comix-experience-san-francisco

APPLICANT'S NAME	
Brian Hibbs	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Same as Business
APPLICANT'S TITLE	
Head Cheese	
APPLICANT'S ADDRESS:	
[REDACTED]	
TELEPHONE:	
[REDACTED]	
EMAIL:	
brian@comixexperience.com	

SAN FRANCISCO BUSINESS ACCOUNT NUMBER:	SECRETARY OF STATE ENTITY NUMBER (if applicable):
0185343	

OFFICIAL USE: Completed by OSB Staff	
NAME OF NOMINATOR:	DATE OF NOMINATION:

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
305 Divisadero Street	94117	4/1/1989
IS THIS LOCATION THE FOUNDING LOCATION OF THE BUSINESS?	DATES OF OPERATION AT THIS LOCATON	
<input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	4/1/1989 - Present	

OTHER ADDRESSES (if applicable):	ZIP CODE:	DATES OF OPERATION
2381 Ocean Avenue	94127	Start: Dec. 2014
		End: Present

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 and a business deemed not current in 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 the Business Assistance Grant.

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.

Brian Hibbs

4/1/2019

Name (Print):

Date:

Signature:



COMIX EXPERIENCE

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.

Comix Experience, a comic book and graphic novel store, opened at 305 Divisadero Street on a Saturday in April 1989, on April Fool's Day! The owner, Brian Hibbs, was just 21 years old when he opened the store. He was living around the corner just a block away on Page and Broderick streets, which made his daily commute pretty easy back then. For about the first six months or so, he worked every day solo, but eventually his friend Tom Vernale started to cover Sundays for him so he wouldn't go insane.

Brian started the store with just \$10,000 and his comics collection, a feat that certainly couldn't be repeated today. Back then, there were (as Brian recalls) 24 different comic book shops in San Francisco. Today there are just eight left, which is sad, and Brian owns 25% of them. Comix Experience is the oldest comic book store in San Francisco in the same location with the same owner.

During the first five years of Comix Experience, there were 63 different author events. After that, the business slowed down quite a bit with the events (due to burn-out doing them), only doing one or two a year and making sure they were *really* special.

In December of 2014, Brian bought Gary Buechler's "Comics Outpost" at 2381 Ocean Avenue at San Leandro Way and rechristened it "Comix Experience Outpost." Comics Outpost actually has a history that may predate Comix Experience if it could be traced through its five or six owners, but Gary never gave Brian the historical documents to prove that. Both stores are considered a single business and would therefore both be listed on the Legacy Business Registry.

In 2015, Comix Experience began two Graphic Novel of the Month Clubs (GNCs) to keep the store financially viable. The two URLs for the clubs are www.graphicnovelclub.com/start and www.graphicnovelclub.com/kids. There are two clubs – one aimed at young readers and one aimed at adults. Each and every month, the staff collectively votes on what they think is the best new releases of the month. It's always a creator-driven work and never some piece of licensed junk just to be "commercial." Since all of the staff has a voice and vote, only the best material is selected. They then bring the creators out to San Francisco (the business has a travel budget thanks to the wide success of the clubs) to do a public signing, as well as doing a private Q&A event for the membership. Comix Experience livestreams these across the world (the business has members in 27 states, currently, and three countries) and creates a living archive

of contemporary work and creators. It's genuinely the most exciting thing Brian does – talking to creators about their craft and building a library of interviews for the ages, all the while building San Francisco as a significant hub for Comix Experience's chosen medium. The archive of the video meetings of the GNC is at <https://www.comixexperience.com/archives> -- there are well over 100 hours of video there now, with more being added each and every month!

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

Comix Experience has been in business for 30 years in the same space, and hasn't closed for more than about 75 days total in those 30 years. The store is even open most Christmas days! In 1997, a guest upstairs at the Metro Hotel ran the sink all night, and all of that hot water drained, all night long, into the store, completely destroying the Comix Experience store below it; but even literally replacing half of the floor (and pouring new concrete for it) the store re-opened within six or seven weeks, and the store still sold new comics and subscription pickups out of Gamescape at 335 Divisadero Street, so there was no interruption of business.

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

The business is not technically a family-owned business, defined here as any business in which two or more family members are involved and the majority of ownership or control lies within a family. Brian Hibbs is the sole proprietor. Assuming Brian's son doesn't want to take over the business (it is uncertain he will, though he's only 15), Brian's intention over the next 20 years would be to convert the business to a worker-owned collective so he can retire, and it will live past him.

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

Brian Hibbs has been the sole owner of Comix Experience since it was founded in 1989.

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.

Not applicable.

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 305 Divisadero Street is classified by the Planning Department as Category A, Historic Resource Present, with regard to the California Environmental Quality Act. The building is a contributor to the Eligible Buena Vista North Historic District.

The historic resource status of the building at 2381 Ocean Avenue is also classified by the Planning Department as Category A, Historic Resource Present, with regard to the California Environmental Quality Act. The building is a contributor to the Eligible Ingleside Terrace Historic District.

CRITERION 2

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

Comix Experience has been an anchor for the Divisadero Street neighborhood long before “NoPa” was even a glint in a real estate broker’s eye. The business brought art, creativity and inclusivity for the medium of comics for 30 years now, and store’s best efforts are in front of us. In particular, Comix Experience has a history of mounting engaging and beautiful window displays in their 6 foot(ish) bay window.

The Ocean Avenue location is the southernmost comics store in San Francisco, and is situated almost exactly between City College of San Francisco and San Francisco State University. It now serves as really the only place to buy comics for a huge number of neighborhoods, including Balboa Terrace, Ingleside and Lakeside. The next closest store is in the Inner Sunset, and there's not another one south of San Francisco until Pacifica. The Ocean Avenue store is one of the last bastions for reading comics for the southern side of the city.

One of the things Comix Experience has always been is a “tastemaker store.” Generally speaking, if Comix Experience gets behind a work or an author, they’ll rapidly spread throughout the rest of the comics community because of the store’s passions in promoting that work. In some ways, Comix Experience “made” Neil Gaiman’s career through SANDMAN (Comix Experience is even mentioned in the introductions of the graphic novel collections) in the 1990s, and the store has been instrumental in many cartoonist’s career paths ever since. This is now even truer with the Graphic Novel Clubs, as Comix Experience has given both newcomers as well as industry veterans a huge “signal boost” with their profile and selections.

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

Owner Brian Hibbs is a major figure in the comic book industry, writing a monthly business column on the Comics Industry and Business Ethics, entitled TILTING AT WINDMILLS, for most of those three decades (the column is also collected in two books, published by IDW Publishing). Brian has judged the Eisner awards (essentially the Oscars for comics), sat on the

Board of Directors for the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund (a First Amendment-driven organization) and co-founded ComicsPRO (“Professional Retailer Organization”) – essentially the industry’s retailer trade group (www.comicspro.org). Brian launched a class action lawsuit against Marvel Comics for breaking their terms of sale that won retailers all over the world a collective million dollars (<https://www.sfgate.com/business/article/Take-that-mighty-Marvel-2566256.php>).

Comix Experience opened right before the premiere of Tim Burton’s “Batman” movie – which premiered on June 23, 1989 – resulting in “the summer of Batmania.” This made it a fortuitous time to open a new comic book store. Even better was that the screenwriter of the film, Sam Hamm, lived here in the city, and Brian was able to convince him to come and do a signing. Brian encountered a guy who had made a fanmade Burton-inspired Batman costume, with “armwings” that could open – it was pretty spectacular. That guy gave out fliers at the film’s premiere at the Coronet Theatre (R.I.P.), and Comix Experience had an insane turnout. That really sold Brian on creator events as the core of building a community as a retail location.

Sam Hamm wasn’t actually the store’s first signing: the first were two local artists: Erik Larsen and Chris Marrinan. Erik would go on to be one of the seven founders of Image Comics, which has gone on to change comics and the viable options for creator-owned work to succeed commercially in America. In the first five years of Comix Experience, there were 63 different author events, probably a third of which there are no surviving records.

In 2015, Comix Experience began two Graphic Novel of the Month Clubs (GNCs) to keep the store financially viable. The two URLs for the clubs are www.graphicnovelclub.com/start and www.graphicnovelclub.com/kids. The GNCs are the purest expression of both the business’ community and its legacy.

Comix Experience also works extensively with the San Francisco Unified School District to get the clubs into the schools. They’re up to a dozen schools now, and next year Brian is hopeful they will finally fully cover the district.

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

There have been any number of features and articles on Brian and the store over the years, both within and outside the industry. TILTING AT WINDMILLS was the anchor feature of Krause Publications’ “Comics & Games Retailer Magazine” that ran well over 100 issues in the 1980s and 1990s. Currently, TaW runs on national comics news website The Comics Beat (<https://www.comicsbeat.com/category/tilting-at-windmills/>).

Comix Experience has been nominated multiple times for the Will Eisner “Spirit of Comics” award, as well as winning at least seven different “Best of the Bay” awards from the SF Bay Guardian (R.I.P.) reader polls. The store is regularly featured on podcasts on comics. Here’s just one recent example: <https://sktchd.com/podcast/off-panel-179-comics-experience-with-brian->

[hibbs/](https://ballotpedia.org/City_of_San_Francisco_Minimum_Wage_Increase_Referred_Measure,_Proposition_J_(November_2014)). More recently, the founding of the Graphic Novel Clubs in the wake of Prop J ([https://ballotpedia.org/City_of_San_Francisco_Minimum_Wage_Increase_Referred_Measure,_Proposition_J_\(November_2014\)](https://ballotpedia.org/City_of_San_Francisco_Minimum_Wage_Increase_Referred_Measure,_Proposition_J_(November_2014))) got the business featured in BOTH Mother Jones (<https://www.motherjones.com/kevin-drum/2015/05/small-businesses-exemptions-minimum-wage/>) and The National Review (<https://www.nationalreview.com/2015/05/meet-progressive-comic-book-store-owner-whos-not-sure-he-can-survive-san-franciscos/>) in a single week, which was a neat trick.

Comix Experience has also been featured in the San Francisco Chronicle in October 2005 regarding their successful lawsuit against Marvel Comics over the company's returns policy. Comics retailers worldwide benefited from Comix Experience standing up to Marvel as a result of a settlement reached in the case.

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

There were 63 different author events during the first five years of Comix Experience. Among them were Neil Gaiman's first American signing ever – the store went on to have him back five more times over the years – as well as luminaries like Harlan Ellison, Sergio Aragones, Grant Morrison, Jim Lee, Geoff Johns, Dan Clowes, Raina Telgemeier, Garth Ennis, Jeph Loeb, etc., though most names are probably pretty foreign to the non-comics reading public. Suffice it to say, there are very few names on Brian's list of people they'd be honored to host that they haven't been able to host. A significant number of the events (though probably not even a third of them) can be found, along with a selection of the amazing window displays, at <https://www.comixexperience.com/evidence>.

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

Brian Hibbs is really proud to support local PTAs and preschools with extensive donations of comics for fundraisers – nearly two dozen in 2018 alone. The store has also explicitly set itself up as an inclusive and welcoming space for people of all colors, creeds, races, sexual orientations and genders, supporting every community's access to, and education about, the possibilities of comics as a communication media.

Comix Experience employees speak and lecture at local schools extensively, and even do an annual address to California College of the Art's comics MBA course each year.

But, more than anything else, Brian and the Comix Experience team is most proud of the Kid's GNC and the range and scope of work and especially creators of all races, ages, sexes, etc. to show kids that anyone (especially them!) can make comics.

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

We serve people. Not specific ones. All people, from 8 to 80. All genders; all colors of the rainbow. While the main store primarily attracts from around the Divisadero corridor, the store

is so physically central in the city that it attracts folks from all over. Comix Experience Outpost is the southern-most comics shop in town, and also draws customers from all along the Peninsula.

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

The consistent use of the giant bay windows as an artistic spotlight for Divisadero makes Comix Experience a key “cultural” component of the Divisadero corridor. The window display is about 8 feet by 6 feet, and probably 5 feet deep – that's some bad-ass display work, perhaps in the top ten of window displays in San Francisco. There's a reasonable selection to be found about a third down the page at <https://www.comixexperience.com/evidence>.

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

Anything that encourages literacy and art appreciation are among the greatest things that society can do. And Graphic Novel of the Month Clubs (which couldn't possibly exist without the physical store) are adding strongly to both the overall national cultural conversation, as well as the depths of San Francisco's art communities in some truly profound ways.

Everything Comix Experience has been able to do, they've done while not being able to control pricing themselves. Like books, all comics come with a cover price pre-printed. It's not really possible to sell things for MORE than the cover price, so unlike most San Francisco businesses, if expenses increase, they can't simply raise their prices to compensate. This is, I'm sure you appreciate, a pretty large barrier to maintaining a business in the city.

The thing that makes San Francisco actually “San Francisco” is small, independent, art-focused businesses like Comix Experience.

CRITERION 3

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

Comix Experience is a reader-and creator-focused comic book (and graphic novel) store, which puts diversity of voices as the store's guiding principles. Comix Experience exists to promote the MEDIUM of comics to all people, not merely specific GENRES of material. The business especially thrives on finding new, exciting voices and helping them spread far beyond their doors.

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)

Again, the Graphic Novel Clubs, both in the curation of excellent new work by diverse voices, and in the preservation of those voices for future generations via the membership Q&A and the video archives, will be Comix Experience's longest lasting legacy. Neither goal could possibly happen without a robust commercial business standing behind them. And we're now at a point where the business could no longer stand without the Graphic Novel of the Month Clubs supporting them, so it seems like a properly healthy symbiotic relationship that will never go away.

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.).

The business has a long history of using their window display bay to brighten and enlighten Divisadero Street.

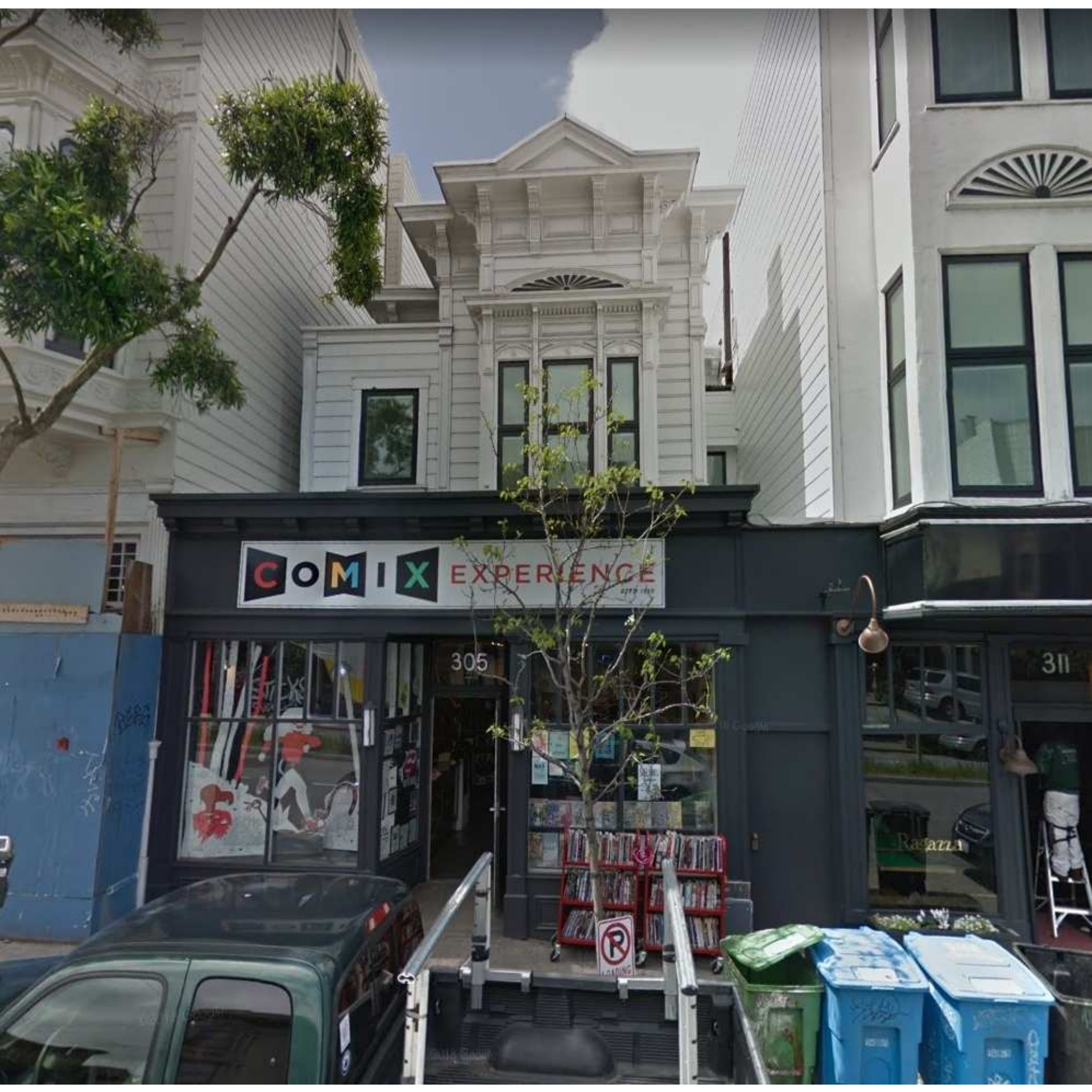
d. When the current ownership is not the original owner and has owned the business for less than 30years; the applicant will need to provide documentation that demonstrates the current owner has maintained the physical features or traditions that define the business, including craft, culinary, or art 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.

Not applicable.

COMIX EXPERIENCE

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COMIX EXPERIENCE
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NEW COMIX













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<https://www.sfgate.com/business/article/Take-that-mighty-Marvel-2566256.php>

San Francisco Chronicle

Take that, mighty Marvel!

David Lazarus

Published 4:00 am PDT, Wednesday, October 5, 2005



Marvel Entertainment

COSTUME18D-C-13FEB03-DD-HO Marvel Comics HULK STAND HANDOUT
PHOTO/VERIFY RIGHTS AND USEAGE. Photo: HANDOUT



Chronicle / Lacy Atkins

Brian Hibbs, owner of a San Francisco comic store, Comix Experience, sued Marvel Comics over the company's returns policy. This week, retailers worldwide will benefit from standing up to Marvel as a result of a settlement reached in the case. Photographer: Atkins, Lacy.

The pantheon of superheroes includes such fearless do-gooders as Spider-Man, the X-Men and Captain America. And now there's another defender of truth and justice at their side.

Brian Hibbs.

Who?

Hibbs, 38, owns a San Francisco shop called Comix Experience. He stood up against mighty Marvel Entertainment, the nation's largest comic-book publisher, and prevailed in a lawsuit charging the company with failing to uphold its contract with retailers.

As a result of the case being settled, thousands of comic sellers worldwide will qualify this month for a week or two of free Marvel comics -- a windfall worth on average \$2,000 per store.

"That might not sound like much," Hibbs told me. "But when you're a small business, that's your electricity bill for six months."

A spokeswoman for Marvel declined to comment on the issues raised in the lawsuit or the settlement terms.

The case centered on returns of unsold comics. Typically, a comic-book retailer buys his inventory at a wholesale price of as much as 55 percent off the roughly \$3 cover price.

In return for that discount, the retailer agrees to swallow any unsold copies. But Marvel, as with other leading comic publishers, previously made allowances for returns under certain circumstances (the contract has since been changed).

One such circumstance, according to the company's former agreement with sellers, was to take back all unsold copies if a particular issue arrived late in stores.

Another was if different writers or artists ended up working on a specific comic instead of the ones promoted in advance to readers -- a key point for collectors.

Hibbs said he started noticing in 2000 that some lesser-known Marvel titles were arriving late to his store on a fairly routine basis. Then the tardiness expanded to the company's biggest names, including Spider-Man and the X-Men.

"This started becoming a big issue," Hibbs said. "When a comic doesn't ship when someone's expecting it, people will spend their money on another title. We were starting to see unsold books really mounting up."

To a lesser extent, he said, comics went unbought around the same time because a writer or artist had been switched. Hibbs recalled a handful of Spider-Man issues that came with unexpected names attached.

The way it's supposed to work, he said, is that the distributor of the comics will enclose a return form with the next shipment for any unsold issues resulting from a late delivery or editorial changes. But Hibbs said no return forms were ever included for Marvel titles.

He said he contacted Marvel to ask what the holdup was. "They did everything they could to stall us and give us the runaround," Hibbs said.

"I think the management at Marvel saw us as a captive audience and that we had no power," he said. "They thought they could get away with ignoring their own contract."

They were wrong.

Hibbs found an attorney who saw merit in his case and, in 2002, filed a class-action lawsuit against the New York publishing house. The suit worked its way through the system and, finally, a settlement was reached in August 2004.

"It took a year for the court to approve it," said Nancy Ledy-Gurren, Hibbs' attorney. "It became final on Sept. 30 of this year, and Marvel now has 30 days to issue its credits."

Under the terms of the settlement, more than 5,000 comic-book sellers are eligible for a credit toward future Marvel purchases to cover a percentage of losses incurred between January 1998 and March 2003.

The agreement specifies that Marvel denies any wrongdoing.

Still, the company changed its contract with retailers in 2003. It no longer allows returns even if a title ships late. However, Marvel has granted comic sellers more latitude to adjust their orders at the last minute, thus giving stores greater control over inventory.

"They never said this change was a result of the lawsuit," observed Rory Root, owner of Comic Relief, a Berkeley comic-book store. "But there's no doubt in anyone's mind that this was the case."

He said the settlement with Marvel is a big boon to comic merchants, who are often in business as a labor of love and tend to scrape by on relatively slim profit margins.

"Comics retailing has always been an undercapitalized business," Root said. "As a David-versus-Goliath thing, this was a pretty big case."

Marvel has enjoyed steady success since emerging from bankruptcy in 1998. Its Spider-Man and X-Men franchises have become blockbuster movies, and the company last month said it had secured \$525 million in financing to produce other films based on its characters.

In April, Marvel announced it had reached a settlement with its chairman emeritus, Stan Lee, who had sued over royalties from movies based on characters he co-created, including Spider-Man and the Hulk. Terms of the settlement weren't disclosed.

Marvel went public in 1998. Its main rival, DC Comics, is owned by media giant Time Warner.

At Comix Experience, Hibbs said he's feeling really good about the outcome of his case.

"In Spider-Man, we learn that with great power comes great responsibility," he said. "I feel like I helped Marvel understand that."

<https://www.nationalreview.com/2015/05/meet-progressive-comic-book-store-owner-whos-not-sure-he-can-survive-san-franciscos/>

NATIONAL REVIEW

POLITICS & POLICY

When Minimum-Wage Hikes Hit a San Francisco Comic-Book Store

BY Ian Tuttle
May 1, 2015



Brian Hibbs (far right) with his Comix Experience staff.

“I’m hearing from a lot of customers, ‘I voted for that, and I didn’t realize it would affect you.’”

So says Brian Hibbs, owner and operator of Comix Experience, an iconic comic-book and graphic-novel shop on San Francisco’s Divisadero Street, of the city’s new minimum-wage law.

San Francisco’s Proposition J, which 77 percent of voters approved in November, will raise the minimum wage in the city to \$15 by 2018. As of today, May 1, Hibbs is required by law to pay his employees at Comix Experience, and its sister store, Comix Experience Outpost on Ocean Avenue, \$12.25 per hour. That’s just the first of four incremental raises that threaten to put hundreds of such shops out of business.

Hibbs opened Comix Experience on April Fools’ Day, 1989, when he was just 21 years old. Over two-and-a-half decades, the store has become a must-visit location for premier comic-book artists and graphic novelists, and Hibbs has become a leading figure in the industry, serving as a judge for the prestigious Will Eisner Comic Industry Awards and as a member of the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund’s board of directors. He notes with pride that his store has turned a profit each year — no small task — since its very first year.

But that may not last. Hibbs says that the \$15-an-hour minimum wage will require a staggering \$80,000 in extra revenue annually. “I was appalled!” he says. “My jaw dropped. Eighty-thousand a year! I didn’t know that. I thought we were talking a small amount of money, something I could absorb.”

He runs a tight operation already, he says. Comix Experience is open ten hours a day, seven days a week, with usually just one employee at each store at a time. It’s not viable to cut hours, he says, because his slowest hours are in the middle of the day. And he can’t raise prices, because comic books and graphic novels have their retail prices printed on the cover.

What is a small-businessman to do?

Hibbs is not the first person to encounter this problem. On February 1, San Francisco’s renowned science-fiction bookstore Borderlands Books published the following on its website:

Although all of us at Borderlands support the concept of a living wage in princip[le] and we believe that it’s possible that the new law will be good for San Francisco — Borderlands Books as it exists is not a financially viable business if subject to that minimum wage. Consequently we will be closing our doors no later than March 31st.

Its plight eventually drew the attention of *The New Yorker*, and a crowdfunding campaign thought up by concerned customers found some 300 sponsors, all of whom agreed to pay \$100 to help keep the store afloat until at least March 31, 2016.

Hibbs has considered doing the same but notes two problems: “By saying, ‘Give me money,’ you’re sort of saying you’re not viable.” Furthermore, “There’s a limitation on how much crowdfunding can be done. When you’re the tenth one, I don’t know if it’s going to be easy for you.”

“Despite being a progressive living in San Francisco, I do believe in capitalism. I’d like to have the market solve this problem.”

Hibbs is not inclined to circumvent the market: “Despite being a progressive living in San Francisco, I do believe in capitalism. I’d like to have the market solve this problem.” That applies not just to his plight, but to the question of the minimum wage: “We’re for a living wage, for a minimum wage, in principle. . . . But I think any law that doesn’t look at whether people can pay may not be the best way to go.”

“Why,” he asks, “can’t two consenting people make arrangements for less than x dollars per hour?”

And the problem goes still deeper. While forcing hundreds of Bay Area small businesses to close, cut staff, or overhaul their practices, San Francisco lawmakers have given multimillion-dollar tax breaks to lure or keep technology giants such as Twitter and Zoosk. “There’s lots of room for the rich and the powerful,” Hibbs observes, “but, really, they’re not doing anything to help small business.”

It threatens the whole economic ecosystem of San Francisco, Hibbs argues: “We’re the reason businesses like Twitter want to be here — because of arts and culture. Without stores like mine, without stores like Borderlands, this city would be a poorer place. We’re selling art, commodities, people’s dreams. To have fewer places to have those things on sale, I think, diminishes San Francisco.”

So how is Hibbs addressing the squeeze on his own business? He and his staff have launched a curated “Graphic Novel-of-the-Month Club.” Subscribers will receive a new graphic novel each month, handpicked by the staff, as well as an invitation to monthly book-club meetings, visits from and after-hours events with featured writers and artists, and various other goodies. For those not located in the Bay Area, the novels will be shipped and in-store events will be streamed, so that club members nationwide and internationally can participate.

It’s a solution that Hibbs and his staff think reflects their core values: It allows the market to solve the problem, it draws upon the staff’s comic-book and graphic-novel expertise, and it fosters community.

Hibbs and his staff are upfront about the reasons for the club — and they have been encouraged by the response. They say they need 334 subscribers to remain solvent with the new minimum wage, and in the first month they are 40 percent of the way toward that goal. If they get more than their target number of subscribers, Hibbs plans to divvy the extra cash as raises or bonuses.

Hibbs's employees — students, aspiring artists, and just plain and simple comic-book lovers — know that “the value of their work is respected here,” he says. And he knows that that work should be appropriately compensated. He has been able to do it for a quarter-century by dint of a passion and acumen for his business.

Continuing to do so in spite of San Francisco's overzealous progressivism does not require superhuman strength, but it might be nigh heroic nonetheless.

Ian Tuttle is a William F. Buckley Fellow at the National Review Institute.

<http://www.sfweekly.com/culture/comix-experience-fosters-the-next-generation-of-fans/>

SF WEEKLY

Comix Experience Fosters the Next Generation of Fans

Comic books have re-entered pop culture, and the 29-year-old Divisadero Street store is there to guide new and established fans to the best of it.

Ida Mojadad

Wed Dec 5th, 2018 11:13am



Comix Experience is nearing its 30th anniversary on Divisadero Street. (Photo by Nuala Sawyer)

After several minutes of trying to sort out a deal on a recent afternoon, Comix Experience owner Brian Hibbs tells a prospective seller with a box of old comic books over the phone that it sounds like a waste of time. Leave it at that, and Hibbs may sound jaded after nearly 30 years of running the Divisadero Street bookstore, and five years of owning the Comix Experience Outpost on Ocean Avenue.

Although Hibbs worries about the comic book industry, he can't hide his enthusiasm for it and the cultural moment it's in. Whether that benefits his stores or not, he just wants people to see this medium for what it is: an innovative art form unlike the rest.

"Comics are a medium, not a genre — superheroes are a genre," Hibbs says to the skeptics. "It's a uniquely American way of telling a story."

Three years ago, Comix Experience began exposing people to the best of the medium with **two graphic-novel-of-the-month clubs**, one for adults and **then one for kids**. For \$25 a month, members are sent a book of the staff's choosing — and about 80 percent of the time, the author comes to the store so readers may ask questions and discuss the work they just consumed. If a would-be audience member can't make it in person, the talk is streamed on the store's **YouTube page**.

The roughly 450 members drive most of the 30 or so events Comix Experience hosts each year. Hibbs feels that kind of community fostering open to all is dwindling on Divisadero Street, which houses an increasing amount of fitness studios and restaurants.

"It's literally, right now, the difference between life and death," Hibbs says. He launched the book club to offset minimum wage increases and after a friend, who wasn't particularly enthusiastic about comics, told him, "If you put a book in my hand every month, I would buy it."

So he did. Some recent books from the adult club span genres and include: Western adventure *Coyote Doggirl* by *BoJack Horseman* production designer Lisa Hanawalt, hockey comedy *Check, Please!* by Ngozi Ukazu, and epic fantasy *Mage* by Matt Wagner.

Kids belonging to the club recently dove into Brenna Thummler's *Sheets*, which Hibbs says challenges them by approaching death in a sweet, brave manner without scaring them away — yet it appeals to adults, too. Comics and graphic novels geared toward children have taken off, which is a turnaround from the past 20 years when the industry chased them away.

Nonfiction books are also big sellers as of late and have their own wall for "people who think that comics are too juvenile," Hibbs says. *Persepolis*, Marjane Satrapi's graphic memoir of growing up during the Iranian Revolution is a consistent favorite, as is historical comic *Hip Hop Family Tree* by Ed Piskor.

In October, the city's Office of Economic and Workforce Development chose Comix Experience as **one of 11 independent bookstores to receive a total of \$103,000 in grants** to remain competitive with online retailers. Hibbs says he'll put it largely toward growing the monthly book clubs, especially as bringing in kids instills a spirit of fandom among a new generation.

A fair amount of comics' newfound popularity is owed to films and television. The Marvel Cinematic Universe is a behemoth that boosted shows like *Jessica Jones* and *Luke Cage*, plus a horror revival of Archie Comics that includes the *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* — all of which has led to a “microbump” of new visitors seeking the original source material.

But Hibbs worries about corporate executives from the top comic publishers Marvel, D.C., and Image riding that demand too far by producing a glut of mediocre or subpar books that will turn fans away in the next couple years. He doesn't bother ordering many of them because no one wants them.

“They're killing the golden goose,” Hibbs says. “It's not right or fair to the consumers.”

The superhero genre ultimately accounts for roughly 15 percent of what Comix Experience stocks. Sorting through all the comics and graphic novels can be daunting, and that's where his staff, not a deluge of Amazon listings, come in.

Much of the store's activity centers around the Divisadero Street location since the Outpost on Ocean Avenue is hardly centrally located, though worth visiting alone for the “We've got issues” tagline. Despite public doubts about what would become of the Outpost as the five-year lease was set to expire in December, Hibbs recently signed a three-year extension.

As long as Comix Experience Outpost breaks even, Hibbs intends to keep it open for the precise reason he took over ownership of the store in 2013, then called Comic Outpost: “No one wants to see a [comic] store close.” His ownership of the Divisadero Street store will reach the 30-year mark on April 1, 2019.

“I was a small child who didn't have the foggiest idea what I was doing but it worked out,” Hibbs says of being 21 at the time he started out. “You don't make money owning a comic book shop — you do it because you love it. It's stores like this that are the lifeblood of the community.”

Comix Experience, 305 Divisadero St., 415-863-9258 and Comix Experience Outpost, 2381 Ocean Ave., 415-239-2669, comixexperience.com

<https://boundingintocomics.com/2019/03/01/comic-shop-veteran-brian-hibbs-proposes-a-ten-point-plan-to-save-the-comic-book-industry/>



Comic Shop Veteran Brian Hibbs Proposes a Ten Point Plan to Save the Comic Book Industry



Spencer Baculi
March 1, 2019

From February 21st to the 23rd, the 13th ComicsPRO annual meeting took place in Charlotte, NC. ComicsPRO is a trade organization for direct-market comic book retailers, and the annual meetings provide an opportunity for said retailers to discuss various topics, from alternative distribution sources to tips on stocking and selling titles aimed at children. During a panel titled *Industry Discussion*, **ComicsBeat columnist** and **Comix Experience owner** Brian Hibbs proposed a ten-point plan to help save the comic market.

The comic book retail market has been in crisis for some time, as record numbers of **comic book stores face or have fallen victim to closures** and comic book sales numbers have seen significant struggles in enticing new readers and old fans alike. Hibbs preempted **his speech** by acknowledging this stark reality:

I'd like to thank Marco and the Board of Directors for inviting me to speak here at the ComicsPRO annual membership meeting. There's a pretty big part of me that is surprised by this: I've got some small reputation as a Bomb Thrower. To therefore be invited up, as the first speaker of the meeting, tells me that there's trouble in periodicals and the Direct Market.

National sales are very poor – there are comics in the national top 100 that aren't even selling twenty thousand copies. A significant number of stores have closed — perhaps as many as 10% of outlets.

And, as far as I know, every person in this room is working significantly harder — with many of us barely hanging on as our margins have cratered.

The cause for this reality, according to Hibbs, are the very people in attendance at the ComicsPRO meeting:

Honestly, publishers and creators will only do what they think they can get away with. I'm going to spend a bit talking about publisher behavior in a minute, but, to a person, we enabled those behaviors! THEY can't and won't publish material unless WE buy it! Every single order form we turn in is a vote for the future that we want, and a lot of us have been voting actively against our best interests for many years.

I can't especially blame the publishers for trying to meet our "demand": if you could get an extra 20% in sales by paying \$500 to an artist, and doing a plate change at the printer, why wouldn't you? But, as with absolutely everything in the post-Heroes World Direct Market, we lack absolutely anyone willing to stand up and say "No, that's a little too far"; to protect us against our own worst impulses. All Markets need brakes and guardrails.

Hibbs then explains that the two biggest issues facing the industry at the publisher level are content...:

We have, as I see it, two major problems at the publisher level: one of content, and one of the amount of product. In terms of content, while I think that we're at a golden age of comics right now, with more amazing material being published than ever before, the base level of quality of our core periodical product in the direct market – the driver of sales and success in our market, both in the superhero universe material as well as most licensed and creator-owned titles – is at a near-historical nadir.

I am not at all convinced that over the last two decades or so that even the minimum amount of effort has been put into developing editorial staff and support at the largest publishers. Most Editors are desultory at best at that skill set: instead publishers have been emphasizing traffic management and corporate synergy as the most important skills to develop. Comics are written to fill arbitrary holes in production schedules, rather than to be the best stories they can be. Creators are encouraged to write for page counts of pre-scheduled collections, rather than crafting each individual periodical release to be satisfying in and of itself, and only allowing the best of that material to go on to permanent book format collection.

...as well as the absurd amount of products being pushed on readers:

There are also, plainly, entirely too many SKUs in the market. At the front of the process how did we enter a world where they're offering us twelve different "Spider-Man" branded comics in a single four week period? When exactly did we cross the Rubicon that suggested that bi-weekly or faster production was the right way to make comics, how customers actually want to purchase comics? Please listen: we are destroying and devaluing our "Blue Chip stocks" rather than drawing in the vast muggle audience to purchase our products.

Publishers are treating the customers as "super fans" who are bottomless ATM machines. But every working retailer in this room can tell you that this doesn't match the reality of our customers: the people who want (or even can afford) this endless barrage of material clumping down the pipeline is narrowing and hollowing out month after month, and is soon going to hit a number that is probably not sustainable for any of us. I still clearly remember the days when I couldn't order less than ten copies of anything Marvel might produce: I'm even talking Star Comics like Planet Terry and Royal Roy. If it had the Marvel logo on it, it sold. But today? At my store there's almost a quarter of Marvel's output from month to month I no longer have the customer interest to even shelf a single copy.

[...]

I say to you: we do not need plans or programs that are aimed at selling more comics to the same customers – they really can't afford and don't want any more titles to buy – our focus as an industry should be on making our periodical releases more attractive to more new readers, and to grow our base, not simply exploit the existing one.

Hibbs does not solely offer up a grim appraisal of the market's current state, as he also provides an optimistic "ten point plan" which, if adopted, Hibbs hopes can save and protect the retail market:

We retailers are asking you now to do all of the stuff that you should have been doing for decades to protect us:

I am calling today for the following ten point plan:

1. Stop mixing SKUs for things like minimum orders and chart reporting. Combining SKUs defeats critical economic Darwinism needed for a healthy marketplace, and sends clearly distorting messages about how and what is selling. Each and every line item should stand on its own individually, and if there are variant covers that do not, or cannot, meet those paltry \$2500 wholesale orders, then it should not be allowed access to the national marketplace. There's absolutely no reason to waste everyone's time, energy and bandwidth for individual covers that less than 200 accounts are purchasing. Publishers should handle those sales directly with those retailers without involving the national marketplace

2. By the same token, I call again for all sales charts to include a "penetration index" – a simple percentage of how many accounts are purchasing a specific SKU. SKUs that don't reach (and this is a number from a hat for a talking point) approximately one store in three probably don't deserve national distribution.

3. All "Meet-or-Exceeds" must go away, immediately. Tying one product to another is not only immoral, and creates an environment of "haves" and "have nots", but I also strongly believe it is against Federal Law.

4. There needs to be a creation of a threshold of what the native sales of a base title must sell (or be projected to sell) that limits the number of variants that are allowed. I suspect the number is

something like “one for every twenty thousand copies sold”, but, again, numbers from a hat. If you sell 20k or over, you can have a variant cover, 40k and over, you can have two, and so on. Below those numbers you don’t deserve any. And there is no universe outside of once-in-a-lifetime events like ACTION #1000, where any single comic should have ten or more covers.

5. If that’s not enough, I also think there should only be a certain percentage of a publisher’s line that should be allowed to be variants. Again, as a from-the-hat number, I’d suggest a possible number like 25% of their total output.

6. I call for all shipping information to appear on invoices in a box-by-box format. Shipping is an entire black box at Diamond with very few (or very poor) methods for retailers to understand what this major expense genuinely entails. Frankly, it’s time for Diamond to entirely reevaluate how they handle discounts and shipping because as things currently stand, in most cases (including virtually every single “exclusive” publisher) it is actually cheaper to buy most backlist product anywhere but Diamond because almost every other distribution option includes 100% free, or steeply discounted, shipping.

7. FOC needs to be 100% firmly bolted down and locked no later than noon on Fridays. This includes each and every cover. Absolutely no changes should be added after this time, and every listing that doesn’t include all art and all information should then be 100% returnable (even if that’s out of Diamond’s end)

8. Without a truly exceptional and out of the ordinary reason, every comic should be listed in PREVIEWS for initial order. Comics that first get listed on FOC for the first time would then be fully 100% returnable, as we have no way to poll customer data to determine the proper orders.

9. I call for a “Data Summit” in which all stakeholders come together to have an extensive conversation about how why and when to assign “Series Codes” to products. Such codes have far reaching implications for the working retailer’s ability to properly order comics, to track data, and to make meaningful conversions to our customers. Diamond regularly, and without reason, assigns series codes to one-shots, while not establishing them for things that are clearly series. This causes endless problems which have to be worked out individually by retailers at great time and individual expense.

10. Finally, I call for the first THREE issues of any new series to be fully, no fee, no hoop, returnable from ALL publishers. This includes one-shots and mini-series. The only way I see to encourage publishers to be cautious and sober about what they put on to the market (and how they promote it) is to make sure there is a financial incentive to do so, and I think that returns are the mechanism with which to do that – where we are all sharing skin in the game

Though the changes are radical, the discussion and the ComicsPRO event’s emphasis on factual market data and trends will hopefully cause retailers to address the issues as a collective rather than staying the course. There is hope that these changes will be adopted: fellow ComicsPRO attendee and DC co-publisher Dan DiDio **announced a cutback** on the number of titles they would be publishing. Whether this announcement by DC signals an industry-wide trend or stands as an individual action has yet to be seen.

<http://cbldf.org/2019/04/retailer-spotlight-comix-experience-turns-30-today/>



Retailer Spotlight: Comix Experience Turns 30 Today!

April 1, 2019

By [Patricia Masticolo](#)



Comix Experience in San Francisco is the type of local comics shop that fans envision when thinking of their dream neighborhood. On a basic level, it's well lit, laid out with intention, utilizes display racks as well as copious bookshelves and spinners to highlight its wide selection of new and classic titles. Since there is a hobby gaming retailer nearby, they don't waste any space on gaming products and use that opportunity to fit even more comics in the area. The staff is extraordinarily friendly and knowledgeable. For those inclined to research ahead of time, staff profiles including favorite comics can be found on the shop's website, making it easier to figure out whose recommendations to seek.



Comix Experience is owned by Brian Hibbs, who is an active member of the comics community. He writes a regular column for *The Beat*, entitled [“Tilting at Windmills”](#) that has been collected into two volumes and published by IDW. Brian has sat on the CBLDF Board, judged the Eisner Awards, and is one of the founding members of the ComicsPRO Board of Directors.



On top of all that Brian also founded a Graphic Novel Club (well actually two) a few years ago that is above and beyond what most people imagine when they think of a book club. People (or institutions) can join the [Graphic Novel Club for Adults](#) or the [Kids' Graphic Novel Club](#) aimed at middle readers. The selections are either stand-alone works or the first volume in a new series, so no previous knowledge is required (and they offer alternate selections in case that month's choice doesn't appeal to all readers). According to their website, subscription in the club offers:

- Our curated pick for **the best new graphic novel of the month** for your club type
- **Monthly live-streamed book club meetings and social events featuring the writer and/or artist of that month's selection...**most months the authors/artists are live, in-person; other months they join us via live video chat
- **Amazing swag** related to each month's selection, including exclusive [signed bookplates](#) and posters



And it is not just limited to San Francisco locals. [Anyone can subscribe](#) and opt to have their books shipped to them. So if you don't have your own LCS, or maybe you're interested in interacting with other people in the comics community – you can join in each month from the comfort of your own home. Also, anyone (not just subscribers) can [access an archive](#) of past creator talks on their website. They have conversations with Tillie Walden, Jillian Tamaki, Jeff Lemire, Nate Powell, Neil Gaiman, and far too many more to list here.



If you are in the San Francisco area though, or you're planning a trip there in the future, going into Comix Experience is an experience you cannot miss. In the well-organized space, you can opt to browse by age range or genre, with sections for manga, horror, new comics, teen, and more. They utilize endcaps and spinner racks to display highlighted works and offer rotating selections of staff picks.



It isn't just about the books though, the store itself is an interesting piece of art. The front window is regularly redone to coordinate with signings, new releases, and other major events in the comics realm. You can check out a [scrolling slideshow on their website](#) of past windows. Even the bathroom is covered in the loving graffiti of creators who've come by to talk or sign.



Since Comix Experience first opened their doors on April 1, 1989, they've been an exemplary model of positive involvement in the comics community and a beacon to passionate readers with a multitude of interests. Congratulations to Brian Hibbs and the whole staff of Comix Experience on thirty years of retailer excellence and here's looking forward to thirty more!



If you happen to be wandering around San Francisco today, both [Comix Experience](#) and [Comix Experience Outpost](#) are offering 30% off in celebration of their anniversary. Make sure to drop by and get yourself something to commemorate the occasion.

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Videos



<https://youtu.be/3MN51tWFMkU>

Comix Experience

The above video was shot during our 21st anniversary party in 2010

Published in 2017



<https://vimeo.com/216087704>

Comix Experience Outpost

Ocean Avenue's very own Comix Experience Outpost. Interviews with employees Julie and Cam

Published in 2017

Certificate of Honor

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS City and County of San Francisco

The Board of Supervisors of the City and County of San Francisco hereby issues, and authorizes the execution of, this Certificate of Honor in appreciative public recognition of distinction and merit for outstanding service to a significant portion of the people of the City and County of San Francisco by:

Comix Experience

I would like to extend our highest of commendations and appreciation for the Comix Experience's role in the San Francisco community on their 30th Anniversary. Your presence on Divisadero Street is an example of a community oriented anchor that helps shape the lives of others through reading and fun. Your support of literacy and engagement for children and others through partnerships with middle schools in the San Francisco Unified School District is inspiring. On behalf of the Board of Supervisors, and the City and County of San Francisco, Comix Experience, I commend you.

Vallie Brown

Supervisor Vallie Brown
San Francisco Board of Supervisors
April 1, 2019

Norman Yee
Sanora Lee Young
Anderson May
Curry
Jillay Rose
Alan H. ...
...

Filing Date: May 23, 2019
Case No.: 2019-012009LBR
Business Name: Comix Experience
Business Address: 305 Divisadero Street (primary address)
Zoning: Divisadero Street NCT (Neighborhood Commercial Transit) Zoning District
40-X Height and Bulk District
Block/Lot: 1218/006
Applicant: Brian Hibbs, Owner
305 Divisadero Street
San Francisco, CA 94117
Nominated By: Supervisor Vallie Brown, District 5
Staff Contact: Shelley Caltagirone - (415) 558-6625
shelley.caltagirone@sfgov.org

BUSINESS DESCRIPTION

Comix Experience is a comic book and graphic novel store, opened by Brian Hibbs at 305 Divisadero Street in April 1989. At the time, there were approximately 24 different comic book shops in San Francisco, and today there are just eight left. Comix Experience is the oldest comic book store in San Francisco in the same location with the same owner. Hibbs is a major figure in the comic book industry, writing a monthly business column on the Comics Industry and Business Ethics, entitled TILTING AT WINDMILLS; judging the Eisner awards; sitting on the Board of Directors for the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund; and, co-founding ComicsPRO, the industry's retailer trade group.

During the first five years of Comix Experience, there were 63 different author events, and later they focused on one or two special events per year. In 2014, Hibbs bought Gary Buechler's "Comics Outpost" at 2381 Ocean Avenue and renamed it "Comix Experience Outpost." Comics Outpost may in fact predate Comix Experience, but Hibbs does not have supporting documents to demonstrate the ownership history.

In 2015, Comix Experience began two Graphic Novel of the Month Clubs (GNCs) to keep the store financially viable. One club is aimed at young readers and one is aimed at adults. Each month, the staff collectively votes on what they think are the best new releases of the month, always a creator-driven work. They then bring the creators out to San Francisco to do a public signing and a private question and answer event for the membership. Comix Experience livestreams these across the world (the business has members in 27 states, currently, and three countries) and creates a living archive of contemporary work and creators. The archive currently contains well over 100 hours of video, with more being added each month.

The business is located on the west side of Divisadero Street between Page and Oak streets in the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood. It is within the Divisadero Street NCT (Neighborhood Commercial Transit) Zoning District and a 40-X Height and Bulk District.

STAFF ANALYSIS

Review Criteria

1. *When was business founded?*

The business was founded in 1989.

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

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

- i. Comix Experience has operated continuously in San Francisco for 30 years.
- ii. Comix Experience has contributed to the history and identity of the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood and San Francisco.
- iii. Comix Experience 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 associated with the comic book and graphic novel genres of literature.

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

Yes. The Divisadero Street property is located within the California Register-eligible Buena Vista North Historic District. The neighborhood north of Buena Vista Park consists primarily of two- and three-story residential buildings that were constructed during the late 19th and early 20th century. The area exhibits a predominant "Victorian-era" and "Edwardian-era" architectural character, and includes styles such as Italianate, Stick-Eastlake, Queen Anne, Craftsman, and Edwardian.

The Ocean Avenue Street property is located within the California Register-eligible Ingleside Terrace Historic District. Ingleside Terraces consists of single-family homes that were constructed as part of the Ingleside Terraces housing tract. Ingleside Terraces is comprised of one- and two-story, detached single-family houses that exhibit architectural styles such as Craftsman, Period Revival, Spanish Colonial Revival, and Mediterranean.

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

No. However, both properties have Planning Department Historic Resource status codes of "A" (Historic Resource Present) because of their locations within the eligible historic districts.

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

No.

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

Yes. There have been a number of features and articles on Hibbs and the store, both within and outside the industry. TILTING AT WINDMILLS was the anchor feature of Krause Publications' "Comics & Games Retailer Magazine" that ran well over 100 issues in the 1980s and 1990s. Currently, it runs on national comics news website The Comics Beat. Comix Experience has been nominated multiple times for the Will Eisner "Spirit of Comics" award, as well as winning at least

seven different “Best of the Bay” awards from the SF Bay Guardian reader polls. The store is regularly featured on podcasts on comics. Comix Experience has also been featured in the San Francisco Chronicle in October 2005 regarding their successful lawsuit against Marvel Comics over the company's returns policy.

Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business

Location(s) associated with the business:

- 305 Divisadero Street
- 2381 Ocean Avenue

Recommended by Applicant

- Window displays
- Graphic Novel-of-the-Month Clubs
- Reader- and creator-focused business model
- Video archives

Additional Recommended by Staff

- None



SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT

Historic Preservation Commission Draft Resolution No.

HEARING DATE: JUNE 19, 2019

Case No.: 2019-012009LBR
Business Name: Comix Experience
Business Address: 305 Divisadero Street (primary address)
Zoning: Divisadero Street NCT (Neighborhood Commercial Transit) Zoning District
40-X Height and Bulk District
Block/Lot: 1218/006
Applicant: Brian Hibbs, Owner
305 Divisadero Street
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Nominated By: Supervisor Vallie Brown, District 5
Staff Contact: Shelley Caltagirone - (415) 558-6625
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Planning
Information:
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ADOPTING FINDINGS RECOMMENDING TO THE SMALL BUSINESS COMMISSION APPROVAL OF THE LEGACY BUSINESS REGISTRY NOMINATION FOR COMIX EXPERIENCE CURRENTLY LOCATED AT 305 DIVISADERO STREET, BLOCK/LOT 1231/014 (PRIMARY ADDRESS), AND 2381 OCEAN AVENUE, BLOCK/LOT 6903/011.

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 June 19, 2019, 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 Comix Experience 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 Comix Experience.

Location(s):

- *305 Divisadero Street*
- *2381 Ocean Avenue*

Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business:

- *Window displays*
- *Graphic Novel-of-the-Month Clubs*
- *Reader- and creator-focused business model*
- *Video archives*

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 2019-012009LBR to the Office of Small Business June 19, 2019.

Jonas P. Ionin
Commission Secretary

AYES:

NOES:

ABSENT:

ADOPTED: