



Office of the City Manager

CONSENT CALENDAR
December 2, 2025

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council
 From: Paul Buddenhagen, City Manager
 Submitted by: Scott Gilman, Director, Health, Housing, and Community Services
 Subject: Companion Report: Affordable Housing for Artists Report

RECOMMENDATION

Receive the Keeping Creativity Local: A Strategic Response to Affordable Housing for Artists report. Should the Council wish to move forward with any of the report's policy recommendations, refer them to the budget process for evaluation of resource needs, feasibility, and prioritization through the Reweighted Range Voting (RRV) process.

FISCAL IMPACTS OF RECOMMENDATION

There are no direct fiscal impacts associated with receiving the report. Should the City Council wish to pursue any of the report's recommendations, each item would require additional staff analysis to determine fiscal implications, staffing resources, and potential funding sources prior to implementation.

This report provides a preliminary analysis of the recommendations.

CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS

The Housing Advisory Commission and the Civic Arts Commission jointly developed the "Keeping Creativity Local" report, which identifies seven strategies to improve access to affordable housing for low-income artists and cultural workers.

Staff appreciates the commissions' collaborative effort and focus on housing's key role in supporting arts and culture. This sector is important to Berkeley's diversity and character.

While several of these strategies align with existing City efforts to expand affordable housing opportunities and access, they would also require new policy development, funding commitments, and/or legislative action.

Staff recommends that the Council refer specific items for further evaluation through the City's established prioritization and budget processes. This will ensure appropriate coordination with ongoing housing, zoning, and economic development initiatives.

Staff identified the following recommendations for Council to consider for each recommendation below.

1. Adopt an ordinance implementing AB 812 to allow up to 10% of Below Market Rate (BMR) units within cultural arts districts to be set aside for low-income artists.

Refer to the budget process and City Manager for analysis. Implementation would require review by the City Attorney and Planning Department to assess consistency with existing inclusionary housing and fair housing laws.

2. Integrate policies to incentivize affordable housing and affordable commercial space for artists in the San Pablo Specific Plan and Corridors Zoning Update.

Refer to the budget process and City Manager for analysis. Staff time from Planning and HHCS would be required to research potential policies and integrate them into the planning process for the zoning and specific plan updates.

The San Pablo Specific Plan and Corridors Zoning Update are scheduled for Council consideration in *Spring 2026*.

3. Place an affordable housing bond measure on the 2028 ballot.

Refer to the budget process and City Manager for analysis. Council would need to formally adopt an action to place an initiative for voter consideration on the November 2028 ballot.

4. Partner with regional arts and housing organizations to identify sites for artist housing and provide technical assistance or predevelopment funding.

The City does not currently practice land banking, which is the practice of buying land as an investment and holding it for future use without specific plans for its development. Consider designating a priority or preference for artists as part of any future Housing Trust Fund Request for Proposals. There are no planned Request for Proposals at this time.

5. Implement strategies from the Berkeley Social Housing Study.

Staff presented the social housing study to Council at a work session on September 30, 2025. Council may refer any recommendations from the Social Housing study to the budget referral process.

6. Adopt a standardized process for designating local cultural districts and applying for State cultural district designation.

On December 3, 2024, City Council referred to the City Manager and the Civic Arts Commission to: “Consider common standards for locally designated cultural districts, including but not limited to Overlay Zones, and implementation of cultural district designation within the boundaries of Area Specific Plans, including but not limited to the Adeline Corridor and San Pablo Corridor Specific Plans.”

The Civic Arts Commission has included in its FY 2026 Work Plan to develop common standards for locally designated cultural districts and has begun discussing the topic with the goal of sending policy recommendations to Council by the end of the fiscal year.

In partnership with community stakeholders, the Civic Arts Program submitted an application to the California Arts Council for state designation of the Black Arts & Culture District in August 2025. The selection process is highly competitive and will only result in the designation of ten new cultural districts throughout the State of California.

7. Preserve funding for a Guaranteed Basic Income pilot project and explore inclusion of low-income artists and cultural workers.

The \$50,000 previously budgeted to explore a Universal Basic Income/Reentry (Guaranteed Basic Income) pilot remains unencumbered and is on the City’s FY 2026 carryforward list for review in Fall 2025. If carryforward is approved, staff will complete a short feasibility and scope analysis. The analysis would include consideration of adding low-income artists and cultural workers as an eligibility category.

BACKGROUND

In 2023, the Civic Arts Commission sought collaboration with the Housing Advisory Commission to address the issue of housing affordability for artists. In July 2023, the two commissions formed a joint subcommittee to develop affordable housing strategies for artists and cultural workers, recognizing their unique role in community character and prosperity. Over two years, the subcommittee studied ways to address the critical need for artist housing culminating in a final report.

The Housing Advisory Commission and the Civic Arts Commission approved recommending that the report be submitted to the City Council for its approval at their respective July 2025 meetings. The report is included as Attachment 1.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE IMPACTS

There are no identifiable environmental effects, climate impacts, or sustainability opportunities associated with receiving this report.

The environmental sustainability and climate impacts of any recommendation will be considered if Council chooses to advance them for further study.

RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION

Staff supports the report's intent and acknowledges the importance of preserving the city's creative workforce. The staff recommendation for council to receive the report and refer selected items for advancement to the citywide Budget and RRV process, provides a procedural framework for Council consideration and advancement of these selected items within the City's established planning, fiscal, and prioritization processes.

This approach allows the City to balance support for the arts and housing with other competing housing and community development priorities in a fiscally sound manner.

ALTERNATIVE ACTIONS CONSIDERED

Council could choose to adopt and refer specific recommendations from the "Keeping Creativity Local" report at this time. However, immediate implementation of the recommendations would require staff capacity assessment, dedicated fiscal support, and coordination with some ongoing initiatives and reprioritization of others. Some recommendations may require additional substantial dedicated budget allocations to move forward.

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