

LOCAL NEWS

# Sausalito grants rent reprieve for arts nonprofit



The former Bank of America building stands along Bridgeway in Sausalito on July 30, 2021, before the Sausalito Center for the Arts rented it from the city. (Alan Dep/Marin Independent Journal)



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Sausalito will keep the rent low for its tenant, the Sausalito Center for the Arts – for now.

The nonprofit rents a city-owned building at 750 Bridgeway, where the rent was set to rise from \$4,029 to \$11,095 per month in March. The center asked the City Council to amend the lease to keep rent the same.

When the lease was negotiated in 2022, the initial rent was set around \$11,000. City leaders cut the center a break for 18 months so it could raise more funds and get set up.

At the council's meeting on Tuesday, Vice Mayor Joan Cox asked if the center could accommodate any rent increase at all, considering it signed a lease knowing the increase would come.

"Certainly you had some business plan in place to plan to accommodate a large increase," Cox said. "If not a large increase, what increase can you accommodate and what would you offer?"

Ron Albert, an arts center board member, said if the city took on a "more conventional" lease agreement where maintenance and upkeep was covered by the landlord, then more funds could go toward rent. The center has a "triple net" lease, which requires it to pay property taxes, insurance and maintenance costs.

Albert said the center needs to spend more than \$300,000 on repairs and improvements on the building.

Council members asked staff to complete a study of all city-owned buildings and leases in order to determine a policy. In the meantime, the council voted to keep the art center's rent at \$4,029 for six months.

The \$7,066 difference will come out of the city's general fund to cover the costs of the building, according to Councilmember Jill Hoffman.

Hoffman said she understands the community's passion for the arts, but said the council has to balance that with the financial needs of the city.

"I think we do need to have some sort of process in order to treat people fairly," Hoffman said. "Nobody should have special access to staff time or city finances or city assets over any other group."

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“It was just incredible and overwhelming,” Pakdel said. “If they increase the rent, it will absolutely damper our growth.”

Pakdel said the center has hosted 58 events, including 13 exhibitions, since February 2023. She said the center’s efforts have drawn 554 artists, 316 volunteers and 32,000 visitors, offering a significant impact on the economy of the city.

Pakdel said the building, a former bank, is old and needs renovation. New roof tiles, electrical systems, sprinklers and other repairs are the responsibility of the arts center, Pakdel said.

Albert said the center has spent more than \$125,000 on maintenance, upgrades and repairs on the building.

The council chambers were packed for the hearing Tuesday, mostly with arts center supporters. More than 300 letters were sent to the council, mostly in support of the center and its request to keep the rent low. Pakdel said the rent issue has resulted in numerous donations and pledges of support for the center.

City resident Melissa Cornelius wrote to the City Council in support of the art center’s request, stating artists and historic work are being driven out of the area by high rent.

“Art keeps Sausalito salty,” Cornelius wrote. “Is the intention to strip Sausalito from its history, and what visitors expect and treat as a special ‘gem’ in the bay? I hope you will reconsider a more modest increase in line with other real estate increases to show local artists that they are valued.”

Debra and Robert Hayes, also city residents who support of the center, wrote that the higher rent would only make the center less accessible. The letter noted that art is a public service and important for all people in Marin County.

“If the rent is raised, it would make exposure to the arts only available to people of the highest income,” the letter read. “It is so important for people of all incomes to be able to show and to appreciate all kinds of art.”

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