



**CITY OF FORT LAUDERDALE**  
**City Commission Agenda Memo**  
**CRA BOARD MEETING**

**#26-0083**

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**TO:** CRA Chairman & Board of Commissioners  
Fort Lauderdale Community Redevelopment Agency

**FROM:** Rickelle Williams, CRA Executive Director

**DATE:** February 17, 2026

**TITLE:** Resolution Approving a Central City Community Redevelopment Area Property and Business Improvement Program Incentive Forgivable Loan in the Amount of \$225,000 and a Non-Residential Façade Program Forgivable Loan in the Amount of \$125,000 to The Art of Tea, LLC, for the Build-out of a Commercial Warehouse to Consolidate Retail, Warehousing and Operational Processes at 900 NE 13 Street; Authorizing the Executive Director to Execute Any and All Related Instruments; and Delegating Authority to the Executive Director to Take Certain Actions – **(Commission District 2)**

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**Recommendation**

Staff recommends the Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) Board of Commissioners approve a Central City Community Redevelopment Area (CCCRA) Property and Business Improvement Program (PBIP) Incentive Forgivable Loan in the amount of \$225,000 and a Non-Residential Façade (Façade) Program Forgivable Loan in the amount of \$125,000 to The Art of Tea, LLC, for the build-out of a commercial warehouse to consolidate retail, warehousing and operational processes at 900 NE 13 Street; authorize the Executive Director to execute any and all related instruments; and delegate authority to the Executive Director to take certain actions.

**Background**

The Art of Tea, LLC is an award-winning, Los Angeles-based organic tea purveyor, recognized for its handcrafted tea blends, sustainable sourcing practices, and strong brand presence in the specialty beverage industry. The company was founded in 2004 by Steve Schwartz, and is based on a passion for wellness, Ayurveda (traditional Indian holistic health system), alternative medicines, and the ancient ritual of tea. Since its inception in Los Angeles, the company has grown from a small startup into an internationally recognized brand known for its handcrafted organic and specialty teas. The Art of Tea, LLC products are distributed to luxury hotels, high-end restaurants, spas, as well as to individual customers throughout the United States and internationally. As part of its strategic growth plan, the company is expanding operations to Fort Lauderdale, with the goal of establishing this Central City location as its East Coast distribution center. The renovated facility will house experiential retail space, warehousing, and operational

functions, creating a vital and versatile space for both the company and the local community, encouraging foot traffic and supporting the area's economic and commercial vitality. This type of experiential retail not only activates the building with customer-facing activity but also draws visitors into the district. It blends education, product sampling, and direct sales—an approach that aligns with modern retail trends and strengthens the district's mix of uses.

The Art of Tea, LLC is requesting a forgivable loan in the amount of \$350,000 to support the build-out and renovation of its recently acquired 22,915 square foot property located at 900 NE 13 Street. The company purchased the building in April 2025 for \$4.25 million and it is committed to making a significant investment in both the facility and the CCCRA. This investment will accelerate the build-out process and allow the company to begin generating economic activity and employment in the area. The proposed project aligns with the CRA's objectives by activating a key commercial property, enhancing job creation, and fostering local business development within the Central City area.

The renovation of the existing building will include demolition of existing internal structures, followed by a comprehensive buildout, including the construction of modern office and meeting spaces, production and testing rooms, product packing and conveyor spaces, storage and loading areas. Upgrades will also include new structural framing, drywall installation, painting, modernized restrooms, as well as updated plumbing, electrical, and Heating Ventilation Air Conditioning (HVAC) systems. The space will be outfitted with custom millwork, enhanced lighting, and specialized production equipment, such as three (3) compartment sink and hand-wash sinks, air compressors, production tables, and storage racks, as well as terrace seating, a new parking lot and modern landscaping. The Art of Tea, LLC plans to transform the site into its East Coast flagship location, consolidating warehousing, production, quality control, administrative offices, and dedicated client event activation areas under one roof. Architectural plans and professional renderings of the project are attached as Exhibit 3.

The Central City Redevelopment Advisory Board (CCRAB) initially reviewed a \$550,000 funding request on October 1, 2025. At that meeting, the board voted not to support the request and invited the applicant to return with additional information that incorporated a retail component.

At the following CCRAB meeting on November 5, 2025, The Art of Tea, LLC presented additional details regarding its proposed showroom and its customer-facing experiences including a retail component. Retail-based activities include regular client event activations and the ability for people to walk in to purchase products or to pick up advanced placed orders. Following this presentation, the advisory board considered three (3) separate funding motions:

- A motion to recommend \$550,000, which resulted in a 4-4 tie vote and failed.
- A motion to recommend \$450,000, which also resulted in a 4-4 tie vote and failed.
- A motion to recommend \$350,000, which passed unanimously.

The CCRA recommended funding in the total amount of \$350,000 consists of \$225,000 from the Property and Business Improvement Program and \$125,000 from the Non-Residential Façade Program.

The overall project cost, including the property acquisition, is \$6,604,437.33. The total construction project cost is estimated at \$1,932,704. Of this amount, the CRA will contribute \$350,000, representing 18% of the total cost, while the Developer will cover the remaining \$1,582,704 using private funds.

Although NE 13 Street falls within the CCCRA Focus Area, making the project eligible for up to ninety percent (90%) funding under the CRA's PBIP and Façade program guidelines for renovation or new construction, the Developer has opted to use a contractor of its own choosing. As a result, the project qualifies for only sixty percent (60%) funding of the eligible costs under the programs. Nonetheless, the CRA's contribution amounts to just eighteen percent (18%) of the overall project cost.

Both the Property and Business Improvement Program Incentive and the Non-Residential Façade Incentive Programs seek to eliminate slum and blight by attracting new businesses to the CRA and retaining and allowing existing businesses to expand within the CRA. The maximum incentive funding allowed under the PBIP program is \$225,000, and under the Commercial Façade program it is \$125,000. The Developer's construction cost estimate for this project exceeds these program limits. The CRA Board, at its own discretion, can increase the funding, as this project will have a positive economic impact on the community.

The company currently employs twenty-seven (27) individuals in various capacities and is committed to initially creating at least seven (7) more full-time positions in the production, marketing, business development and management areas, with training and advancement opportunities.

The Art of Tea, LLC is enthusiastic about becoming a part of the Fort Lauderdale business landscape and is committed to being a positive presence in the CCCRA. This includes not only transforming the property into a modern, functional, and sustainable facility, but also creating new employment opportunities and contributing meaningfully to the ongoing revitalization of the area. The Developer has selected Fort Lauderdale as the location for its East Coast hub, a strategic decision aimed at enhancing national distribution capabilities. The recent purchase of the property at 900 NE 13 Street will allow the company to consolidate experiential retail, warehousing, and operational functions in one location. This expansion will enable improved shipping efficiency and reduced freight costs for East Coast and Caribbean clients, better fulfillment and logistics infrastructure; the creation of local employment opportunities; and long-term contributions to the CCCRA's revitalization goals.

The project is consistent with the Central City Community Redevelopment Plan, which identifies neighborhoods within the CRA to be revitalized and redeveloped. This area of the city has the potential to serve as a major source of investment and employment for

the surrounding community. The CRA Plan identifies strategic objectives, goals and measurements that include targeting and attracting businesses, retail uses and industries to establish a presence in the redevelopment area and create jobs for area residents. In addition, it calls for investing in development projects that create job opportunities for area residents, promote public private partnerships and investment in the redevelopment area.

Consistency with the Central City CRA Community Redevelopment Plan

The Central City CRA Community Redevelopment Plan is designed, in part, to encourage rehabilitation of existing, usable and viable structures, in addition to, construction of new retail and office facilities, as well as attraction of new employers and job opportunities within designated commercial and development areas. Consistent with Section V. Redevelopment Strategy, subsection B. Economic Development, the Plan supports the use of CRA incentive programs to fund projects that create a lasting impact within the redevelopment area, including the redevelopment of existing facilities to be occupied by employers that contribute to the local economy. The proposed project aligns with these objectives by providing direct physical improvements that help establish a new business, attract new users, expand employment opportunities, and strengthen a diverse and appealing business corridor that contributes to the long-term prosperity of the area.

Resource Impact

There is a fiscal impact to the CRA in the amount of \$350,000 in Fiscal Year 2026 in the accounts listed below.

<i>Funds available as of January 6, 2026</i>					
ACCOUNT NUMBER	COST CENTER NAME (Program)	CHARACTER/ ACCOUNT NAME	AMENDED BUDGET (Character)	AVAILABLE BALANCE (Character)	AMOUNT
20-121-1521-552-40-4203-CRA092608	Property and Business Improvement Program FY 26	Other Operating Expense/Redevelopment Projects	\$298,112	\$298,112	\$225,000
20-121-1521-552-40-4203-CRA092607	Commercial Façade Improvement Program CC FY 26	Other Operating Expense/Redevelopment Projects	\$325,000	\$325,000	\$125,000
<b>TOTAL AMOUNT ►</b>					<b>\$350,000</b>

Strategic Connections

This item is a FY 2026 Commission Priority, advancing the Bolster Thriving Communities initiative.

This item supports the *Press Play Fort Lauderdale 2029* Strategic Plan, specifically advancing:

- The Business Growth and Support Focus Area, Goal 6: Build a diverse and attractive economy

This item advances the *Fast Forward Fort Lauderdale 2035* Vision Plan: We Are Community, We Are Prosperous, and We Are United

This item supports the Advance Fort Lauderdale 2040 Comprehensive Plan specifically advancing:

- The Neighborhood Enhancement Focus Area
- The Future Land Use Element
- Goal 2: Sustainable Development: The City shall encourage sustainable, smart growth which designates areas for future growth, promotes connectivity, social equity, preservation of neighborhood character and compatibility of uses.

### **Attachments**

Exhibit 1 - Location Map

Exhibit 2 - Broward County Property Appraiser Information and Photos

Exhibit 3 - Architectural Plans and Renderings of Proposed Build Out

Exhibit 4 - CRA Application and Supplemental Responses

Exhibit 5 - Sunbiz Information and Articles of Organization

Exhibit 6 - Contractor Quote

Exhibit 7 - Cost and Funding Breakdown

Exhibit 8 - PBIP Agreement

Exhibit 9 - Non-Residential Façade Agreement

Exhibit 10 - Minutes of CCRAB Meeting dated October 1, 2025

Exhibit 11 - Minutes of CCRAB Meeting dated November 5, 2025

Exhibit 12 - Resolution

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