



CITY OF FORT LAUDERDALE

**APPROVED MINUTES  
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES  
CITY OF FORT LAUDERDALE  
CENTRAL CITY REDEVELOPMENT ADVISORY BOARD  
WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 1, 2025 - 6:00 P.M.  
TOWER 101 – 11TH FLOOR CONFERENCE ROOM  
101 NE 3 AVENUE, FORT LAUDERDALE, FL 33301**

<b>Board Members</b>	<b>Present/Absent</b>	<b>Cumulative Attendance September 2024-August 2025</b>	
		<b>Present</b>	<b>Absent</b>
Kimber White, Chair	P	2	0
Christopher Casey	P	1	1
Linda Fleischman	P	2	0
Fiona Johnson ( <i>Arr. 6:21 p.m.</i> )	P	2	0
Thomas Mabey	A	1	1
Christine Jones	A	0	1
Thomas Manos	A	1	1
Jason Ross	A	1	1
Nikola Stan	P	2	0
Bobby Tinoco, Vice Chair	P	2	0
Olga Zamora	P	2	0

**Staff:**

Joshua Carden, Cultural Affairs Officer, CSD  
 Cija Omengabar, CRA Planner/Liaison  
 Eleni Ward-Jankovic, CRA Housing and Economic Development Manager  
 Clarence Woods, CRA Manager

**Others:**

Rachel Walden, Executive Assistant for the Art of Tea  
 Troy Liggett  
 Moshe  
 K. Cruitt, Recording Secretary, Prototype Inc.

**Communication to the City Commission:**

None.

**I. Pledge of Allegiance**

Board members recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

**II. Call to Order & Determination of Quorum**

The meeting was called to order at 6:14 p.m. Roll was called, and it was noted that a quorum was present.

**III. CRA Funding Request – Art of Tea, 900 NE 13 Street: \$550,000**

Ms. Eleni Ward-Jankovic, CRA Housing and Economic Development Manager introduced the project and associated funding request. She noted that Art of Tea is based in Los Angeles; this location was intended to be their East coast hub for international distribution of their product;

current plans did not include a storefront; and a CRA contribution of \$550,000 would represent 28% of the total renovation cost. The overall cost of the project cost, including property acquisition, was \$6.6 million.

Ms. Rachel Walden, Executive Assistant for the Art of Tea, presented the project; a copy of her deck may be found in the public record. Ms. Walden highlighted that while they received a permit for demolition, the work had not begun and their plan was to launch in the first quarter of 2026.

Ms. Walden fielded several questions regarding the building layout and business plan from the Board; she clarified that while Art of Tea planned to host promotional events, they would not be selling directly to consumers; this would be a manufacturing, wholesale, and distribution center. In response to concerns regarding parking, Ms. Walden indicated that customers would not be picking up their product; Art of Tea would arrange coordinated shipping dates.

Landscaping was discussed; Ms. Walden confirmed they would be adding trees. Ms. Zamora recommended selecting trees and landscaping native to Florida.

Both Staff and Ms. Walden fielded questions regarding the amount of funding that had been requested. Chair White indicated that he could not recommend approval of \$550,000 or more for the Art of Tea project, considering the amount awarded to Call of Africa which met all requirements; he also expressed concerns due to budget given that the year had just begun.

Troy Liggett noted that, speaking on behalf of himself, he endorsed the business but did not think it belonged on that block of NE 13 Street because the project did not have a store-front that could contribute to the retail element there. Chair White agreed, and highlighted that the objective for this Board was to attract more retail in line with a "Work-Live-Play" community. He expressed concern that this project did not fit in; he could not see this Board moving the project forward at \$550,000 because it would not bring any foot traffic to the area. Additionally, he felt there were already enough warehouses and the project would not improve the quality of life in the neighborhood. There was general agreement from some members.

Ms. Omengabar noted that the project qualified for funding under the incentive program; the business was putting in substantial improvements; and would add value to the existing warehouse which was dilapidated. She highlighted that Staff had to follow the process of bringing the project forward; requested funds represented only 28% of improvements; the applicant was an established business and expected to stay five years or longer.

Discussion continued around the details of the application, and included consideration of supporting only the commercial façade components. Ms. Walden stated that she needed to request full funding because it was important for them to be able to invite top clientele so they could experience their brand. She clarified that their business plan may consider a retail component later on, but could not do so now. Ms. Walden also stated that they already indebted to the banks for the building and other expenses.

**Motion** by Mr. Stan, seconded by Mr. Casey, to reject the proposal [for \$550,000 as presented]. In a roll vote, the motion passed with 6 votes in favor and 1 (Mr. Tinoco) opposed.

Board Members explained the rationale for their decision to Ms. Walden; she acknowledged that she was previously aware of plans for rezoning the area.

Ms. Johnson offered a motion to reduce the total to \$450,000, however, there was no second in support of it.

**Motion** by Mr. Tinoco, seconded by Ms. Zamora, to table a decision on this proposal until the Art of Tea returns with a revised plan that includes retail. The motion passed unanimously in a voice vote.

#### IV. Beacon Project Discussion

##### Public Art and Placemaking Selection Process

Joshua Carden, Cultural Affairs Officer, provided an overview of the Public Arts Ordinance which, he noted, had not been in place when the Beacon sculpture was initially created. He also reviewed the project planning process specific to the Beacon. Mr. Carden was willing to share the results of the survey which revealed an overall “want” from the community for it to be “joyous,” and indicative of “unity.” He added that no direction was given on a desire for a local, national, or international artist; he viewed the outcome as inconclusive. Mr. Carden highlighted that there were 62 applicants, and the proposals were “abstract” in nature, with short narrative statements of how the artists would address the project. He explained the following:

- The requirements and selection process
- The Public Arts and Placemaking Board (PAPB) was at the “artist shortlist stage” for the Beacon Project
- Once renderings, budgets, and proposals of the three selected artists are received, those options would be presented to the neighborhood and the CCRAB for feedback
- Artist interviews would follow; any concerns expressed by the community would be incorporated into the questions asked
- The PABP would then formally transmit their recommendation to the City Commission for approval; this would result in a formal agreement.

Mr. Carden clarified that the 62 applications included over 1,200 pages and was primarily comprised of past work, as opposed to proposed work specific to the project. Public notice would be citywide, and include community feedback initiative using Survey Monkey, as had been done previously. The PAPB is scheduled to shortlist three artists on October 20, 2025 at 1:00pm in a public meeting; artists would have one month to submit their packages. Members of the public could submit comments either online or via email to him prior to the meeting; those comments would be read at that meeting.

#### V. Board Discussion: Rezoning PZB, October 15

##### o Content of Formal Letter

Ms. Omengabar opened discussion on the letter to the Planning and Zoning Board which had been drafted in support of the mixed-use zoning district proposal.

**Motion** by Mr. Tinoco, seconded by Ms. Zamora, to present the letter to the Planning and Zoning Board as drafted. The motion passed unanimously in a roll vote.

##### o Selection of a Representative

Ms. Omengebar clarified that Staff would be present to answer any historical or technical questions that the Planning & Zoning Board might have.

**Motion** by Mr. Stan, seconded by Ms. Johnson, that Mr. Tinoco represent the CCRAB at the Planning and Zoning Board meeting on October 15, 2025, with the mandate that he read the formal letter into the record, and not make additional comments; all other Board Members to agree to refrain from making comments if they attend. In a roll vote, the motion passed with 6 in favor and 1 (Ms. Zamora) opposed.

#### **VI. Old Business Update**

Ms. Omengebar stated that lights had been ordered for the NE 4 Avenue Complete Street Project; they should arrive by November. As requested by the Board, she will follow up and also obtain formal confirmation that the vendor had ordered the lights.

Ms. Omengebar stated that she had been very busy with background work for the rezoning project since the last meeting, and that the other projects are “in progress.” Ms. Zamora and Chair White commended her and Staff in general for their public outreach efforts in support of the CRA rezoning project, especially the public notices that had been posted and 9-page letters which had been mailed in English, Spanish, and Creole.

Discussion ensued on the timeframe for release of the Ordinance; Ms. Omengebar agreed to inquire about, and inform Members, when the Ordinance would be released.

Ms. Johnson observed that there were many pending applications for the Commercial Incentive Program, and that one had withdrawn. Ms. Omengebar explained the applicant already had a tenant for that property; he planned to submit an application for another property that he owned.

Mr. Stan requested an update on Homes Inc. on 5<sup>th</sup> Terrace. Ms. Omengebar stated that it had become necessary for them to obtain new bids.

#### **VII. New Business Suggestions**

Mr. Casey recommended that the CRA consider branded lighting on street signs, to build neighborhood identity, similar to those in the Lake Ridge, Flagler Village and Victoria Park communities. Mr. Woods stated that could be considered under the Capital Improvement Master Plan. Ms. Omengebar advised that Procurement is still in the selection phase for that project,

and their target was November or sooner. She added that Land Use Plan Amendment is also still with Procurement.

Ms. Zamora stated that NW 7 Avenue needed to be resurfaced between Andrews Avenue and 16 Street. Mr. Woods indicated that would be addressed in the CIP. Ms. Zamora was encouraged to follow-up via email to her Commissioner.

Ms. Fleischman was thanked for her service; this would be her last meeting.

**VIII. Approval of Minutes – September 9, 2025 Regular Rescheduled Meeting**

**Motion** by Ms. Fleischman, seconded by Ms. Zamora, to approve the September 9, 2025 minutes as distributed. The motion passed unanimously by a voice vote.

**IX. Adjournment**

There being no further business before the Board, the meeting was adjourned at 8:22 p.m.



## 900 NE 13th St.

Proposed renovations and improvements of existing warehouse/office building

11,000 SF



ART OF TEA

# Who We Are

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Art of Tea is a tea importer and wholesaler that has been in business for 20+ years.

The company was originally based in LA, and is now expanding our HQ to Fort Lauderdale.

We blend, pack, and custom craft the world's finest organic teas and botanicals.

Our teas are carefully selected directly from growers, each one offering a unique story.



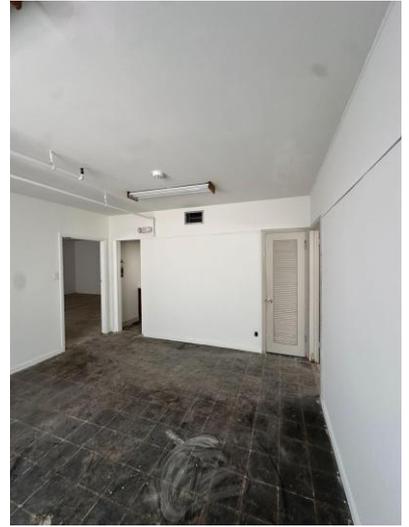
# Exterior (existing)



# Exterior (proposed)



# Interior (existing)



# Interior (proposed renderings)



# Project Benefits Overview

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- Creation of at least 7+ new jobs and office space added for operations, shipping, marketing, production, and business development roles
- Transforming a vacant warehouse into an active business hub with elevated design & landscaping, and operated by company that has already been in business in CA for 20+ years
- Expanding Fort Lauderdale's reputation as a hub for wellness and sustainability
- Reduced lead times to wholesale partners and retail customers by 50-60%, which will generate further economic growth for the business and new tax revenues (Pier 66, Princess Cruises, Carnival Cruises, Pura Vida)
- Increased foot traffic to the area through hosting events in the space in partnership with local businesses
- Increased awareness to the area via a coordinated press, social media, and influencer marketing strategy



# Project Timeline

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- **Design Phase:** May - August 2025 (architectural planning, design discussions, contractor scoping)
- **Permitting:** August - October 2025 (submit at secure city permits, prepare for interior demolition and build-out)
  - *Already approved for demolition permit*
- **Construction and Launch:** October/November 2025 - February 2026 (renovations and equipment installation, operational launch in Q1 2026)

# Owner & CEO (based in South Florida, new member of CCA)

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- Steve Schwartz is a best-selling author, Master Tea Blender, and the Founder of Art of Tea.
- His mother's brain cancer diagnosis and Western medicine's failure to cure her led Steve on a wellness journey to learn Ayurveda, which resulted in a passion for preventative medicine and the impact plants can have on the body and mind.
- Art of Tea has created custom blends for well-known brands like Disney, Carnival, the White House, Caesar's Palace, and The Peninsula Hotel, as well as sells DTC on [artoftea.com](https://artoftea.com)
- The brand has been in business since 2005, with Steve evolving the business model, putting an emphasis on high-quality product & experience, and growing the team sustainably.
- Committed to creating impact, building a great culture, and delivering excellence



# Contractor

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Selected contractor, Alberto Sbarra of [Arquigreen](#), has been operating in the South Florida area for 24+ years and has managed and completed numerous successful residential and warehouse projects.



# Project Costs & CRA Funding Requests

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- **Overall Project Costs: \$6,604,437.33**
  - **Land/Building Acquisition: \$4,250,000**
    - Bank Loan: \$3,908,000
    - Owner Equity: \$200,000
  - **Construction Loan requested from bank (TBC): \$1.25M**
  - **CRA Funds requested: \$550,000**
    - Commercial Facade Improvement: \$125,000
    - Property and Business Improvement: \$425,000
  - **Other project costs:**
    - Commercial Insurance
    - Equipment purchasing
    - Application, Architect, and Permit Fees



# Thank You CRA!



ART OF TEA