



CITY OF FORT LAUDERDALE

2<sup>nd</sup> Draft

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES  
CITY OF FORT LAUDERDALE  
CENTRAL CITY REDEVELOPMENT ADVISORY BOARD  
WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 2025 - 6:00 P.M.  
TOWER 101 – 11TH FLOOR CONFERENCE ROOM  
101 NE 3 AVENUE, FORT LAUDERDALE, FL 33301

Board Members	Present/Absent	Cumulative Attendance September 2024-August 2025	
		Present	Absent
Kimber White, Chair	P	3	0
Christopher Casey	P	2	1
Fiona Johnson ( <i>Arr. 6:23 p.m.</i> )	P	3	0
Thomas Mabey	P	2	1
Christine Jones	P	1	1
Thomas Manos	A	1	2
Jason Ross	A	1	2
Nikola Stan	P	3	0
Bobby Tinoco, Vice Chair	P	3	0
Olga Zamora ( <i>Arr 6:11 p.m.</i> )	P	3	0

**Staff:**

Tania Bailey-Watson, CRA Senior Administrative Assistant  
Cija Omengebar, CRA Planner/Liaison

**Others:**

Mel Lenet, Call of Africa  
Troy Liggett, Middle River Terrace Association  
Steve Schwartz, Art of Tea  
Leetal Schwartz, Art of Tea  
K. Cruitt, Recording Secretary, Prototype Inc.

**I. Pledge of Allegiance**

Board members recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Chair White welcomed Christine Jones as the newest Member of the Board.

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

The meeting was called to order at 6:01 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**

Steve Schwartz, Owner & CEO of the Art of Tea, along with his wife Natal, provided additional insight on their vision of expanding their business which caters to high-end hospitality clients. Mr. Schwartz highlighted project benefits and their timeline; he also outlined ways their business would align with CRA objectives. This funding request includes \$125,000 in commercial façade improvements, and \$425,000 in property and business improvements; their target operational date is the middle of the first quarter of 2026. Project details may be found in the public record.

Mr. Stan expressed appreciation for the project. He noted that he had anticipated more details on the retail aspect of their plans, and a greater understanding of how funds would be spent on the exterior of the warehouse. Mr. Schwartz referred Mr. Stan to Exhibit G, and acknowledged his concerns.

During the discussion that ensued with other members, Mr. Schwartz clarified the following:

- The showroom would be used as a café at times; for events, and other activations “a couple times per week.”
- The retail component would include the ability for people to walk in and purchase tea or pick up orders; he anticipated their business being able to help drive incremental local traffic and highlighted that their products are “beautifully packaged” for retail sales.
- The café would not be feasible until the fourth quarter [of 2026].
- A big part of their business is gifting; retail sales occur at their Los Angeles facility.
- A minimum of seven new permanent jobs were anticipated, to include shipping, operations, business development, account management, and marketing positions.

Chair White commended Mr. Schwartz on the project. He explained the importance of a Work, Live, Play environment for that section of the CRA, and acknowledged that Art of Tea would address the Live and Work aspects; he was concerned about their ability to contribute to the important retail or ‘Play’ aspect. Mr. Schwartz reiterated that the tea bar would drive that when customers come to pick up orders, and attend tastings which he felt would be similar to those hosted by wineries. Mr. Schwartz used a Cold Stone Creamery analogy to explain the interactive tea experience customers would have when they come to build their own blends, and cited collaborations with the yoga, pottery, and art studios as ways to mutually expand business in the community. The couple added that their expansion plans include a larger retail presence when they launch new matcha and chai slushy products along with other innovative products; location was “intentionally” chosen to facilitate that.

Chair White expressed concern about bringing increased commercial traffic into an area which was already congested. Mr. Schwartz clarified they expected standard UPS truck deliveries daily; a 20-foot truck once per month; and a 40-foot truck once per quarter. He anticipated that the larger trucks would park on the side street, as opposed to NE 13 Street.

Mr. Schwartz clarified for Ms. Johnson that while client event activations would be curated for larger gatherings, retail sales would eventually be open to persons living in the community without an appointment.

Ms. Zamora expressed appreciation for the presentation, then shared that community members had already expressed concerns with ingress and egress on 13 Street. Mr. Schwartz committed to requesting that their vendors use the side street. He also clarified that their preference is to hire local employees that could be “coached up” as is part of their company culture; some staff from their Los Angeles office would assist with training; they typically use LinkedIn and Indeed to recruit staff.

Mr. Schwartz clarified for Mr. Mabey that their activations would be a combination of private and public events; the outdoor seating would be for the use of retail customers.

Mel Lenet, on behalf of Call of Africa, thanked the Board for hearing the presentation. He enthusiastically supported the project which he felt would be a great enhancement to the community; help with regentrification; and a good fit for CRA objectives on NE 13 Street. He was hopeful that on-street parking would be extended to further benefit the area.

Troy Liggett felt that the project would be a great improvement to the neighborhood, and the request for \$125,000 for streetscape/landscaping would fit the CRA mission. He recommended that a written commitment for the retail component be required for the business portion of the grant. In addition, Mr. Liggett expressed concern with the waiver request that would allow an extra \$200,000 in funding; he believed \$550,000 was close to the annual CRA allocation.

Mrs. Schwartz shared that they are limited by “available funds,” so it would take longer to build out the retail aspects as presented in the short term. Mr. Schwartz highlighted that CRA support would fund the beautiful designs presented; that would be necessary for the retail concept to succeed. He affirmed that their intent is to open up to the public, and the external cost included the outdoor café-style seating area.

Ms. Omengebar addressed the third point raised by Mr. Liggett by highlighting that the maximum for the PBIP is \$225,000, and explained CRA rationale behind the waiver request for that focus area. She highlighted that sufficient funding is available for this request, which represented only 28% of the overall project construction cost; up to 90% of improvement costs could have been eligible. Members were reminded that the current incentive budget includes rolled-over funds since 2018, and this was only the second of two projects that qualified. It was clarified that Call of Africa, the first project approved, is a full retail business.

Ms. Johnson noted that no cost details were provided for the retail or the exterior spaces in the contractor quote. Mr. Schwartz clarified that the funds would be used for the showroom, office, internal, and external enhancements; they would not be spent in the warehouse.

Chair White acknowledged what while the contribution requested was only 28% of improvement costs, it was a great deal of money for the CRA considering that such a small percentage of their business would be retail-focused; he was not comfortable recommending approval. Mr. Schwartz reiterated their request was for the showroom, tasting areas and to cover increasing construction costs; \$125,000 would help with the external façade.

**Motion** by Mr. Tinoco, seconded by Ms. Zamora, to recommend approval of the full \$550,000. The motion failed in a 4/4 roll vote; Mr. Casey, Ms. Jones, Mr. Stan, and Chair White were opposed.

**Motion** by Ms. Johnson, seconded by Mr. Tinoco, to recommend approval of \$325,000 for property and business improvement and \$125,000 for the commercial façade to include an outside seating area for a total of \$450,000. The motion failed in a 4/4 roll vote; Mr. Casey, Ms. Jones, Mr. Stan, and Chair White were opposed.

**Motion** by Mr. Casey, seconded by Ms. Jones, to recommend approval of \$125,000 plus \$225,000. In a roll vote, the motion passed unanimously.

There was a brief recess between 7:51 pm and 7:54 p.m.

#### **IV. Central City Rezoning - Senate Bill 180 Summary**

Ms. Omengebar referred Members to the October 15, 2025 meeting summary generated by the Planning Department in the back-up. She anticipated that this topic would be the first item on the November 19, 2025 Planning and Zoning Board (PZB) meeting agenda. Continued, and more thorough discussion was expected in light of Senate Bill (SB) 180. Members shared their observations of the October 15, 2025 meeting and potential implications of the Bill.

Ms. Omengebar stated that the summary had been distributed to the community from the Central City Rezoning email account. Discussion ensued on how best to communicate concerns to the PZB and City Attorney regarding the potential impact of the Bill on the plan as proposed.

Ms. Zamora stated that, given the three scenarios the City had presented with SB180, she was in full favor of the rezoning with the opt-in option, because Sunrise Boulevard needed “a lot of TLC from Home Depot to Northwest 14<sup>th</sup>.”

The intent and merits of the Bill were debated in light of the needs of the three CRA districts. Alternate recommendations were considered in the event they were necessary at the PZB meeting on November 19, 2025.

#### **V. Old Business Updates**

Ms. Omengebar pointed Members to the eight project updates listed in the back-up.

Members discussed their understanding of revised term extensions after the recent Commission meeting.

Mr. Casey asked Ms. Omengebar to follow up on the installation of the light poles for the NE 4 Avenue project.

#### **VI. New Business Suggestions**

The following were identified as potential discussion items for the next meeting:

- Budget Presentation by the CRA Business Manager
- Central City and Northwest CRA: Rent and Meeting Facilities

#### **VII. Approval of Minutes – October 1, 2025 Regular Rescheduled Meeting**

Ms. Zamora observed a spelling error on the first line of Page 4. Additionally, she clarified that she had mis-spoken when she stated that NW 7 Avenue needed to be resurfaced between Andrews Avenue and 16 Street; she meant NW 7 Avenue, from Sunrise Boulevard to NW 16 Street.

**Motion** by Mr. Tinoco, seconded by Mr. Casey, to approve the October 1, 2025 minutes as corrected. The motion passed unanimously in a voice vote.

Mr. Mabey was thanked for his service by Chair White; he would be relocating to another state and this was his last CCRAB meeting.

**Adjournment**

There being no further business before the Board, the meeting was adjourned at 8:30 p.m.

[Minutes prepared by K. Cruitt, Prototype, Inc.]



# 900 NE 13th St.

Proposed renovations and improvements of existing warehouse/office building

11,000 SF



ART OF TEA

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

- 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 Pier 66, Disney, Carnival, the White House, Caesar's Palace, and Nobu, as well as sells DTC on [artoftea.com](http://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





# 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, originally based in LA, 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

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## (existing)



# Exterior

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## (proposed)



# Exterior

(propos



# Interior stir



# 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 and tea tasting events and gifting.
- Increased awareness to the area via a coordinated press, social media, and influencer marketing strategy driving local traffic to the area.



# Project Timeline

- **Design Phase:** May - August 2025 (architectural planning, design discussions, contractor scoping)
- **Permitting:** August - October 2025 (submit and 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)

# 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



# NEW Slides for 11/5



ART OF TEA

# Local Partnerships & Events Ideas to Involve Community



**Event:** Partnership with nextdoor neighbor **Mingo Makes It Pottery Studio** for monthly "Sip and Mold" for their customers + AOT local customers in their space.



**Event:** Partnership with nextdoor neighbor **We Take the Cake** (cake bakery) for a monthly cake & tea tasting event in AOT space for the local community.



**Wholesale:** Sell tea to nextdoor neighbors like **Milk Money** in which local customers can stop into Milk Money and purchase a cup of tea or a custom blended mocktail/cocktail with our Iced Teas.



**Event:** Host local yoga studio teacher from **Yoga Factory** for an ongoing class in AOT space with iced tea refreshments served after the exercise.



**Event:** Partner with **Lauderdale Run Club** and have them start at AOT parking lot, and end at AOT for refreshments and a tour of our facility to see how tea is made after the run.



**Wholesale:** Already partner with **Carnival Cruises** as tea partner on-board, but will now be able to offer their customers "excursions" to the new Art of Tea HQ to see how tea is made, driving foot traffic to 15th St.

# Events

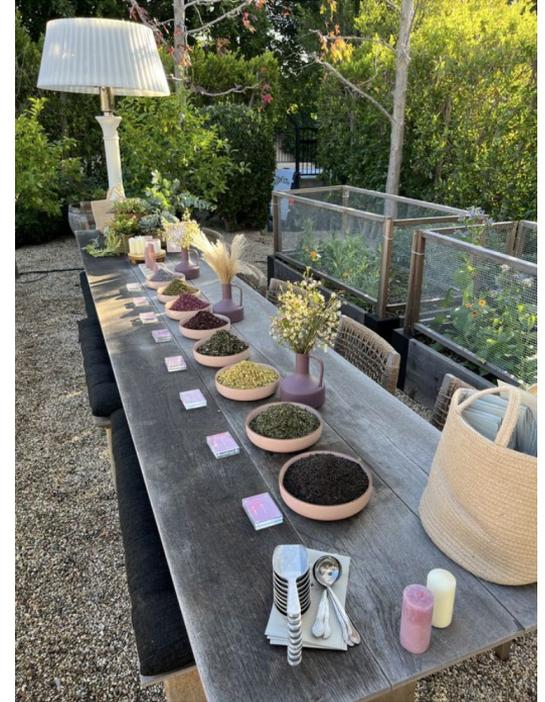
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Zoetry Tea Blending



MALIN + GOETZ Popup



Rare Beauty Influencer  
Tea Blending

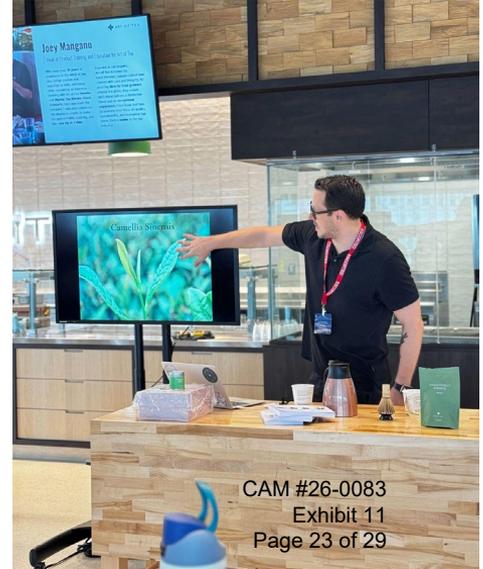
# Events



CAM #26-0083  
Exhibit 11

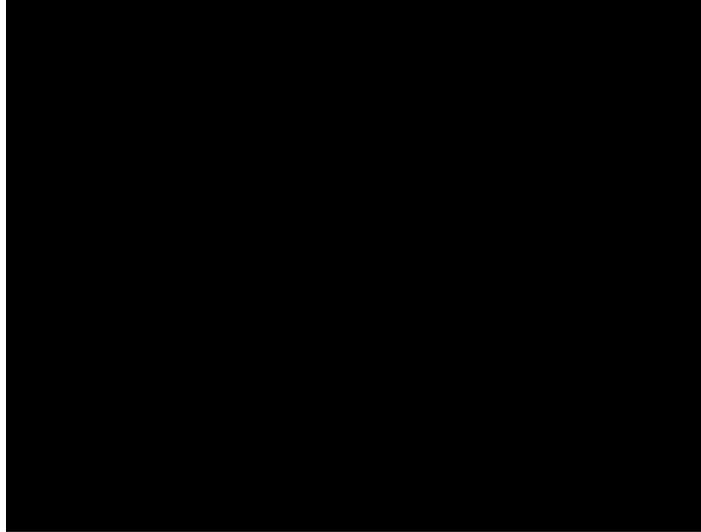
# Trainings

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# Retail

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CAM #26-0083

Exhibit 11

Reply to artofteala... Page 24 of 29



# Road to Retail at Art of Tea FLL

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**Q1/Q2 2026:** Operational opening. Curated Tea Tasting Events onsite.

**Q3 2026:** Buy retail products online, pick up in “store”.

**Q4 2026:** Local customers can purchase exclusive line of retail products on-site and come to tea tastings.



# Why FLL?

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- **Already an established West Coast brand with retail in Erewhon in addition to Wholesale and DTC, now bringing AOT to Florida to better serve the 80% of U.S. population which lives east of the Mississippi.**
- **Have established Wholesale partnerships with large FL-Based Brands**, including Princess Cruises, Holland America Cruiseline, Carnival Cruises, Pier Sixty-Six, Nobu, and more. Once we are up & running on NE 13th St., we will encourage their customers to come check out our space (will drive local traffic)
- **NE 13th St. is an up & coming area with art, cool local businesses, etc., and a great place for our employees to have lunch or go nearby for dinner. Like the “Williamsburg” of FL. We see a lot of potential.**
- **Founder & CEO moved his family to the South FL area to be closer to some of our larger WHS clients (Carnival Cruises, Princess Cruises, Nobu, etc.) and Fell in LOVE with the area and is an active member of the community.**

# Proudly Serving

Google



THE PENINSULA  
HOTELS



**GORDON  
RAMSAY**



IHG  
HOTELS & RESORTS

**CAESARS  
PALACE**



# CRA Objectives

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- “Our overall goal is to eliminate slum and blight...foster dynamic and vibrant commercial and residential environments and expand economic opportunities.”
  - “These programs and projects include business attraction/retention, affordable housing, infrastructure development, community facilities and other endeavors that promote an improved and safer neighborhood environment and restoration of community pride.”
- “To effect positive redevelopment, the CRA:
  - Orchestrates orderly and progressive business development initiatives.
  - Facilitates infrastructure and other public improvements to stimulate private investment.
  - Encourages the creation of affordable housing.
  - Produces events and seminars that foster economic development and build a community.
- **NON-RESIDENTIAL FACADE IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (NRFIP):**
  - **NRFIP Objective:** To eliminate slum and blight, remove deterioration; update exteriors of existing buildings in a manner that improves conditions of non-residential areas. (up to \$125k)
- **PROPERTY AND BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (PBIP)**
  - **PBIP Objectives:** Eliminate slum and blight, remove deterioration, retrofitting and rehabilitation of structures to remove undesirable uses, improve the “energy efficiency” of existing buildings in the CRA, or renovations designed to bring the structure into compliance with the current building codes. (Up to \$225k, but we are requesting \$550k)
    - PBIP Eligible Project Costs:
      - All costs associated with interior and exterior renovation of existing non-residential buildings including interior improvements, restoration, rehabilitation, and permanently attached fixtures or systems
      - Architectural, engineering, permit fees, application fees, property taxes, tax liens, City liens and property insurance.
    - PBIP Funding Conditions:
      - Job Creation and Retention Requirements: Job creation and/or job retention or another approved performance indicator may be a requirement for assistance provided through this program

# Thank You CRA!



ART OF TEA