



## Legacy Business Registry

# Application Review Sheet

*Application Number:* LBR-2025-26-021  
*Business Name:* San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus  
*Business Address:* 170 Valencia St.  
*District:* District 8  
*Applicant:* Chris Verdugo, CEO  
*Nomination Date:* December 10, 2025  
*Nominated By:* Supervisor Rafael Mandelman

**CRITERION 1:** Has the applicant has operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years?

☒ Yes ☐ No

815 Duboce Ave., #3 from 1978 to 1982 (4 years)  
P.O. Box at 2261 Market St. from 1985 to 1990 (5 years)  
400 Castro St. from 1990 to 2000 (10 years)  
4050 18th St. from 2000 to 2004 (4 years)  
1800 Market St. from 2004 to 2011 (7 years)  
398 11th St., #300 from 2012 to 2015 (3 years)  
526 Castro St. from 2015 to 2018 (3 years)  
170 Valencia St. from 2019 to Present (6 years)

**CRITERION 2:** Has the applicant contributed to the neighborhood's history and/or the identity of a particular neighborhood or community?

☒ Yes ☐ No

**CRITERION 3:** Is the applicant committed to maintaining the physical features or traditions that define the business, including craft, culinary, or art forms?

☒ Yes ☐ No

**FEATURES OR TRADITIONS:** Music

**NOTES:** NA

**DELIVERY DATE TO THE HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION:** December 10, 2025

Richard Kurylo and Michelle Reynolds  
Legacy Business Program

### Legacy Business Program

Office of Small Business  
City Hall Room 140  
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place  
San Francisco, CA 94102  
(415) 554-6680  
[legacybusiness@sfgov.org](mailto:legacybusiness@sfgov.org)  
[www.legacybusiness.org](http://www.legacybusiness.org)





## **RAFAEL MANDELMAN**

December 10th, 2025

Re: Nomination of the San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus to the San Francisco Legacy Business Registry

Dear Director Tang,

I am writing to nominate the San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus for inclusion in the Legacy Businesses Registry.

Founded in 1978, the San Francisco's Gay Men's Chorus is the nation's first openly gay chorus, known not only for their musical achievements but also their community activism and engagement. The Chorus presents an annual season of concerts while also regularly performing at City events, large-scale conferences, street festivals, and corporate events. They serve over 300 active Chorus members, 99% of whom identify as LGBTQ+, and more than 2000 alumni members, with over 20,000 audience members from the Bay Area and beyond who attend their performances.

Inspired by a speech from Supervisor Harvey Milk encouraging queer people to come out of the closet in order to oppose anti-gay political efforts, Jon Reed Sims, a music teacher, began recruiting for a gay and lesbian performing arts group in 1978 to provide music for the local Gay Freedom Day Parade. They performed publicly for the first time at a candlelight vigil for Supervisor Milk and Mayor George Moscone on November 27, 1978, and held their first formal concert in December of 1978. Since then, the Chorus has performed in San Francisco City Hall, at the AIDS Memorial Garden in Golden Gate Park, across the nation on multiple tours, and at countless events across the city, with notable guest performers including Kristin Chenoweth, Joan Rivers, Jennifer Holliday, and Patti LuPone. In 2023, the Chorus opened the Chan National Queer Arts Center in the Mission neighborhood, becoming the first LGBTQ+ Chorus in the nation to own and operate their own venue.

The San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus has inspired more than 250+ queer singing groups worldwide, and are a vital part of queer history. They first gained prominence throughout the City in 1979 for a public standoff with the San Francisco Chronicle, which had refused to publish cover art featuring a drawing of two men kissing. During the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s and 1990s, the Chorus was instrumental in humanizing queer people throughout the city, singing at the funerals of those who died of HIV/AIDS and advocating for research, funds, and medical intervention. The Chorus' legacy of activism continues to this day: they performed at City Hall when gay marriage was legalized in San Francisco; continue to raise awareness and funds for AIDS health services and research; operate an educational program, RHYTHM, that mentors LGBTQ+ youth in low-income and Title I middle and high schools; and support queer artists around the City through the Chan National Queer Arts Center, which they founded in 2023. That which our City values most-- art, courage, and community-- are core to the San Francisco's Gay Men's Chorus.

President, Board of Supervisors  
District 8



City and County of San Francisco

**RAFAEL MANDELMAN**

I am proud to support their application as a Legacy Business.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "RJM".

Rafael Mandelman  
President, San Francisco Board of Supervisors



# Legacy Business Registry Application



## Business Information

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**Business name:** San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus

**Business owner name(s):** Chris Verdugo, CEO

*Identify the person(s) with the highest ownership stake in the business*

**Current business address:** 170 Valencia St., San Francisco, CA 94103

**Business phone number:** 415-865-3650

**Business email:** development@sfgmc.org

**Mailing address (if different than above):**

**Website:** www.sfgmc.org

**Link to social media:** www.facebook.com/SFGMC

**Link to social media #2:**

**7-digit San Francisco Business Account Number (BAN):** 0953541

## Contact Person Information

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**Contact person name:** Chris Verdugo

**Contact person title:** CEO

**Contact phone number:** 415-865-3650

**Contact email:** chris.verdugo@sfgmc.org

## Business Locations

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Address	Zip Code	From	To
815 Duboce Ave., #3	94117	1978	1982
P.O. Box at 2261 Market St.	94114	1985	1990
400 Castro St.	94114	1990	2000
4050 18th St.	94114	2000	2004
1800 Market St. (GLBT Center)	94102	2004	2011
398 11th St., #300	94103	2012	2015
526 Castro St.	94114	2015	2018
170 Valencia St.	94103	2019	Present

## Applicant Disclosures

### San Francisco Taxes, Business Registration, Licenses, Labor Laws and Public Information Release.

This section is verification that all San Francisco taxes, business registration, and licenses are current and complete, and there are no current violations of San Francisco labor laws. This information will be verified. A business deemed not current with all San Francisco taxes, business registration, and licenses, or has current violations of San Francisco labor laws, will not be eligible to apply for grants through the Legacy Business Program.

In addition, we are required to inform you that all information provided in the application will become subject to disclosure under the California Public Records Act.

Please read the following statements and check each to indicate that you agree with the statement. Then sign below in the space provided.

- ☐ I am authorized to submit this application on behalf of the business.
- ☐ I attest that the business is current on all of its San Francisco tax obligations.
- ☐ I attest that the business's business registration and any applicable regulatory license(s) are current.
- ☐ I attest that the Office of Labor Standards and Enforcement (OLSE) has not determined that the business is currently in violation of any of the City's labor laws, and that the business does not owe any outstanding penalties or payments ordered by the OLSE.
- ☐ I understand that documents submitted with this application may be made available to the public for inspection and copying pursuant to the California Public Records Act and San Francisco Sunshine Ordinance.
- ☐ I hereby acknowledge and authorize that all photographs and images submitted as part of the application may be used by the City without compensation.
- ☐ I understand that the Small Business Commission may revoke the placement of the business on the Registry if it finds that the business no longer qualifies, and that placement on the Registry does not entitle the business to a grant of City funds.

Name:

Signature:



Date:

# San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus

## Written Historical Narrative

### Introduction

#### **a. Describe the business. What does it sell or provide?**

The San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus creates extraordinary music and experiences that build community, inspire activism, and foster compassion at home and around the world. Since 1978, the Chorus has served as an inspirational organization through an accomplished mix of high-caliber musical performances, activism, community building, empowerment, and inclusiveness. The Chorus presents an annual season of concerts while regularly performing at city events, corporate engagements, and in Bay Area schools with its educational programs.

The Chorus opened the Chan National Queer Arts Center in 2023, establishing a new performing arts venue in the Mission neighborhood and becoming the first LGBTQ+ Chorus in the nation to own and operate their own venue.

#### **b. Describe whom the business serves.**

The Chorus has been established as an icon among LGBTQ+ organizations, while also drawing a significant non-LGBTQ+ audience. The Chorus serves the following:

- 300+ active Chorus members, 99% of whom identify themselves as LGBTQ+
- An alumni community of 2,000+
- 20,000+ audience members from the Bay Area and beyond who are uplifted, educated, and inspired by their performances annually
- 4,000+ Bay Area students who are served annually by the Chorus' RHYTHM (Reaching Youth Through Music) program, focused on youth identity-affirming and anti-bullying education
- The San Francisco Community through the Chan National Queer Arts Center, public performances, and serving as a visible stalwart of cultural achievement and artistic excellence in the city of San Francisco

Through the Chan National Queer Arts Center, the Chorus is serving the Mission, SOMA, and Castro districts with frequent performances encouraging foot traffic to nearby businesses, restaurants, bars, and organizations. The Chorus performs in venues such as Davies Symphony Hall, the Curran Theatre, the Sydney Goldstein Theater, and the Castro Theater.

#### **c. In about 2-5 words (15-30 characters), describe what the business is known for.**

The nation's first openly gay chorus.

## **Criterion 1: The business has operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years**

### **a. Provide a short history of the business, including locations and owners.**

The San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus has been a powerful voice of change since its founding in 1978. Jon Reed Sims, a music teacher by profession, became inspired to start a gay chorus after hearing Supervisor Harvey Milk deliver a speech in which Milk encouraged queer people to come out of the closet in order to oppose anti-gay political efforts of the time. Sims recruited members for a gay and lesbian performing arts group, by way of flyering the city's telephone poles, with a goal of providing more music for the local Gay Freedom Day Parade.

Sims' group, The San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus, spawned a variety of musical offshoots, including a concert band, jazz band, swing choir, string orchestra, ragtime ensemble, and a trombone ensemble. Every group shared Sims' founding commitment to promote gay and lesbian culture. Thanks to Sims, hundreds of queer folks across the Bay Area found mainstream acceptance through the universality of music.

Sims founded Golden Gate Performing Arts, Inc., an organization that sought to unify the various musical groups under the same umbrella. Member groups included the San Francisco Lesbian and Gay Men's Community Chorus (later known as Lesbian/Gay Chorus of San Francisco, now known as the Queer Chorus of San Francisco), Lambda Pro Musica orchestra (a now-defunct strings section), David Kelsey & Pure Trash, Varsity Drag, the FLAG Corps, and the San Francisco Tap Troupe (1979). Many of these organizations either spun off into their own 501(c)3 designation or ceased to exist, leaving the San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus as the only entity still operating under the Golden Gate Performing Arts umbrella.

The Chorus was nomadic for much of its existence, with small administrative offices leased over the years in the Castro neighborhood and surrounding areas, as well as listing Chorus members' personal addresses as the Chorus' registered address:

- 815 Duboce Avenue, #3 from 1978 to 1982
- P.O. Box at 2261 Market Street from 1985 to 1990
- 400 Castro Street from 1990 to 2000
- 4050 18th Street from 2000 to 2004
- 1800 Market Street (offices at the GLBT Center) from 2004 to 2011
- 398 11th Street, #300 from 2012 to 2015
- 526 Castro Street from 2015 to 2018
- 170 Valencia Street from 2019 to present

The Chorus relied on San Francisco schools, hospitals, businesses, and churches to host their weekly rehearsals and present their concert seasons. Rehearsal spaces included Mission High School, the Kanbar Performing Arts Center at 44 Page Street, and the Baha'i Center at 170 Valencia Street.



It was not until 2019 when the Chorus was able to purchase the building at 170 Valencia Street that a permanent home was established. The Chorus is the first LGBTQ+ Chorus in the nation to own and operate their own performing arts venue.

**b. Provide the ownership history of the business in a consolidated year-to-year format.**

A number of artistic directors and conductors have led the Chorus over the years:

Oct. 1978:	Jon Reed Sims
Nov. 1978 to Jan. 1982:	Dick Kramer
1982:	Robert Erickson; Dale Richard; Claude Zetty
1982 to 1984:	Ernie Veniegas
1985:	Charles Baker; Dennis Coleman; Vance George
Aug. 1985 to June 1989:	Gregg Tallman
July 1989 to July 2000:	Dr. Stan Hill
Aug. 2000 to Dec. 2010:	Dr. Kathleen McGuire
2011 to 2022:	Dr. Timothy Seelig
2022 to Present:	Jacob Stensberg

The Chorus' current CEO is Chris Verdugo, a position he has held since 2016.

**c. Describe any circumstances that required the business to cease operations in San Francisco for any significant length of time.**

Not applicable.

**Criterion 2: The business has contributed to the neighborhood's history and/or the identity of a particular neighborhood or community**

**a. Describe the business' contribution to the history and/or identity of the neighborhood, community, business sector, or San Francisco as a whole.**

San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus was the first LGBTQ+ chorus in the nation to openly proclaim "gay" in their name. Their formation inspired a global LGBTQ+ choral movement that now comprises more than 250 singing groups worldwide, and which led to the formation of the Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses (GALA Choruses), an international membership group.

The Chorus was instrumental in humanizing gay people during the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s and 1990s, singing at funerals of those who died from HIV/AIDs, and advocating for research, funds, and medical intervention throughout the epidemic. Locally, the Chorus has contributed to San Francisco's history and identity time and time again, showing up to sing at City Hall in 2004 when same-sex marriages became legalized; performing at the opening of the AIDS Memorial Garden in Golden Gate Park attended by Speaker Emerita Nancy Pelosi and other

dignitaries; and, since 1990 and until its renovation began in 2024, hosting one of San Francisco's most popular annual holiday events, Home for the Holidays at the Castro Theater, providing a joyful holiday celebration for those who either can't be with their families or were outright rejected by their families for being queer.

**b. Is the business associated with significant people or events, either now or in the past?**

In 1978, less than a month after their first rehearsal, the Chorus of already more than 100 singers was pulled toward a more serious subject.

On November 27, 1978, the night of the group's fifth ever rehearsal, marked the assassinations of Supervisor Harvey Milk, the first openly gay elected official in California, and San Francisco Mayor George Moscone. Moved by the city's sense of loss, the Chorus followed the candlelight vigil march onto the steps of San Francisco City Hall and, in an emotional moment, began singing. Just like that, the Chorus made their first public appearance—one rooted not just in the idea of a celebration of identity, but committed to the true work of the community, of calling for justice and working for solidarity.

Following this performance, the Chorus held their first formal concert in December 1978. The group credits a significant portion of their publicity and resulting sold-out shows those first few years to a public standoff with the San Francisco Chronicle which, in 1979, refused to publish the cover art for their "Lovers Too" concert that featured a drawing of two men kissing. The Chorus protested by blocking the entrance to the newspaper's office and, in the end, was able to generate significant press and community support. (The Chronicle would prove to be a great ally and champion of the Chorus later on!)

Since then, the Chorus has performed in San Francisco City Hall, at the AIDS Memorial Garden in Golden Gate Park, has toured the nation on multiple occasions, and has performed at countless events across the city.

The Chorus has performed with numerous musical luminaries such as conductor Kent Nagano, the San Francisco Symphony, Tony Award-winning composer Stephen Schwartz, opera composer Jake Heggie, the San Francisco Opera, composer Holly Near, and performing luminaries such as Kristin Chenoweth, Joan Rivers, Jennifer Holliday, and Patti LuPone.

**c. How does the business demonstrate its commitment to the community?**

The San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus is committed to providing an artistic outlet by and for the LGBTQ+ community. Beyond public performances, the Chorus provides a structured community for its members, with affinity groups helping to develop deep relationships and friendships. Interest groups range from social outings, to supportive groups for those exploring sobriety, to a book club, to support groups for those struggling with illness. Notably, the Chorus was founded during the devastating AIDS epidemic of the 1980s, which greatly impacted its members. As AIDS took its toll, Chorus members used concerts as a way to bring a sense of urgency to the public. The group's music became more somber and began including AIDS requiems. The Chorus also became a place for members to talk openly about HIV and AIDS. To

this day, the Chorus works as history-keepers of that time, commissioning and performing AIDS-related music and presenting concerts to raise awareness and funds for AIDS health services and research. The Chorus dedicates each concert to their “Fifth Section,” as the organization has lost over 300 members to the disease.

The Chorus’s education program, RHYTHM (Reaching Youth Through Music), which focuses on low-income and Title I middle and high schools in the Bay Area, works to build empathy in schools and empowers and celebrates LGBTQ+ youth and encourages allyship. Through a four-part workshop tailored to the needs of the school community, the program culminates in an assembly performance featuring students and members of the Chorus and provides free tickets to Chorus shows for participating youth.

The Chorus performs around the city at events such as the Pride Flag raising over City Hall during Pride Month, mayoral inaugurations, large-scale conferences, street festivals, and corporate events. Through the Chan National Queer Arts Center, the Chorus has maintained a focus on hiring local queer artists to perform and display art in the Center’s gallery, and has engaged local, independent artisans and store owners to sell their products at concerts at the Center.

The Chorus is a member of the Valencia Corridor Merchants Association and has recently collaborated with the Office of Economic Workforce Development and the Into the Streets organization on the recent Valencia Night Market entertainment zone effort.

**d. Has the business ever been referenced in the media, business trade publication, and/or historical documents?**

The San Francisco Gay Men’s Chorus has been referenced in the media numerous times over the years. Following are three notable media references:

- [Rebel song: A history of gay men's choruses](#)  
Advocate  
September 8, 2025
- [SF Gay Men's Chorus opens new home](#)  
Bay Area Reporter  
November 1, 2023
- [This Gay Men's Chorus Is Taking a Stand Against Hate in the Best Way](#)  
Oprah.com  
September 12, 2017

**e. Has the business ever received any awards, recognition, or political commendations?**

The San Francisco Gay Men’s Chorus has received the following awards, recognition, and political commendations:

- Audience Award from the Tribeca Film Festival for the documentary *Gay Chorus, Deep South* (2016), documenting the Chorus's tour of states in the Deep South in the wake of the 2016 election
- Key to the City from City of San Francisco from Mayor Dianne Feinstein (1981)
- Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services: Issues in Practice, Policy, and Research. The official journal of the Caucus of the LGBT Faculty & Students in Social Work. Volume: 14; Hilliard, Russell E. "The San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus: A Historical Perspective on the Role of a Chorus as a Social Service," (October 29, 2002)
- Certificate of Commendation from Dianne Feinstein and the U.S. State Senate (2018)
- Certificate of Honor & Grand Marshal of the SF Pride Parade from Mayor Edwin Lee & the City and County of San Francisco (2017)

**f. How would the community be diminished if the business were to be sold, relocated, shut down, etc.?**

If the San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus ceased to exist, the city would lose a piece of its history and a piece of its soul. San Francisco has long been a city of acceptance and welcome, especially for queer people, and if the city were to lose such a cultural cornerstone as the Chorus, it would lose its status as a beacon of hope and welcoming for LGBTQ+ people everywhere.

If the Chan National Queer Arts Center closed, the city would lose a much-needed venue for queer art and artists to perform and experiment, and the nation would suffer the loss of one of the largest queer choruses in the world owning and operating their own building, losing a huge sense of permanence for the Chorus.

### **Criterion 3: The business is committed to maintaining the physical features or traditions that define the business**

**a. Is the business associated with a culturally significant building, structure, object, signage, mural, architectural detail, neon sign, or any other special physical feature that defines the business?**

The San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus owns and operates the Chan National Queer Arts Center at 170 Valencia Street, a historically significant building that was designed by architect Harold Stoner in 1930 for the fraternal society the Independent Order of Foresters. The roughly 23,000-square-foot building was last owned by the Baha'i Faith who used the place as a house of worship since 1976. The Chorus purchased the building in 2019 and opened in the fall of 2023 as the Chan National Queer Arts Center. Historical Art Deco aspects of the building have been preserved.

**b. In a few words, describe the main business activity you commit to maintaining.**

Uplifting audiences through inspiring and joyful concerts.

**c. What is the plan to keep the business open in the long term beyond the current ownership?**

The San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus is always working to secure stable long-term funding with donors, both annual fund donors and legacy donors contributing through charitable bequests. Long-term, the Chorus hopes to build out an endowment, rely on its board of directors for responsible financial stewardship of the organization, and pursue interest-free loans with financial institutions to stabilize mortgage payments on the Chan National Queer Arts Center.

**d. What challenges is the business facing today?**

The San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus is a nonprofit and faces the threat of the current federal administration's potential revocation of 501(c)3 status, as well as the targeting of gender identity and the LGBTQ+ community. The Chorus recently had annual funding from the National Endowment for the Arts terminated as the mission of the Chorus "no longer aligns with the administration's priorities," which poses both a financial challenge as well as an existential threat. Institutional funders are withdrawing grants and support for LGBTQ+ organizations, for fear of supporting "DEI efforts," which have been targeted by the federal government.

Additionally, inflation and the cost of owning and operating a building in the city of San Francisco requires regular increases in operating costs and therefore a higher demand for individual contributions to the organization.

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**Legacy Business Program staff will add the following details:**

**a. Features or traditions that define the business and should be maintained for the business to remain on the Legacy Business Registry.**

Chorus group.

**b. Other special features of the business location, such as if the property associated with the business is listed on a local, state, or federal historic resources registry.**

The Planning Department Historic Resource Status of the building at 170 Valencia Street is "A - Historic Resource Present." The building is listed on the California Register and is a contributor to a district determined eligible for the National Register by consensus through the Section 106 process.













## SF Gay Men's Chorus opens new home

by **BAR staff** | Wednesday, November 1, 2023

Share this Post:



Photo: Rick Gerharter

Danny Sullivan plays the piano in the newly remodeled Grand Hall of the Pansy L. Chan and Terrence D. Chan National Queer Arts Center (The Chan) during a community open house October 30. The San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus, which purchased the building at 170 Valencia

Street in 2019 for \$9.6 million, has spent the last three years remodeling it, thanks to a \$15 million capital campaign, a news release stated.

The chorus stated that The Chan will become a new home for artists, arts leaders, and activists to meet, spark collaborations, and develop new projects to further enhance the LGBTQ arts field. This includes serving as a performance venue where other gay choruses and community-based organizations from around the world can present their work to the public.

"The Chan National Queer Arts Center transcends the essence of a mere building; it embodies a vibrant community and a living narrative of our queer heritage in San Francisco and beyond," stated artistic director Jacob Stensberg. Former San Francisco supervisor Matt Haney, now a member of the state Assembly, secured \$250,000 to support the new center, the release noted.





# Small Business Commission

Resolution No. \_\_\_\_\_

January 26, 2026

## SAN FRANCISCO GAY MEN'S CHORUS

*Application Number:* LBR-2025-26-021  
*Business Name:* San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus  
*Business Address:* 170 Valencia St.  
*District:* District 8  
*Applicant:* Chris Verdugo, CEO  
*Nomination Date:* December 10, 2025  
*Nominated By:* Supervisor Rafael Mandelman  
*Staff Contact:* Richard Kurylo and Michelle Reynolds  
legacybusiness@sfgov.org

### **Adopting findings approving the Legacy Business Registry application for San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus, currently located at 170 Valencia St.**

**WHEREAS**, in accordance with Administrative Code Section 2A.242, the Office of Small Business maintains a registry of Legacy Businesses in San Francisco (the "Registry") to recognize that longstanding, community-serving businesses can be valuable cultural assets of the City and to be a tool for providing educational and promotional assistance to Legacy Businesses to encourage their continued viability and success; and

**WHEREAS**, the subject business has operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years; or

**WHEREAS**, the subject business has operated in San Francisco for more than 20 years but less than 30 years, has had no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years, has significantly contributed to the history or identity of a particular neighborhood or community and, if not included on the Registry, faces a significant risk of displacement; and

**WHEREAS**, the subject business has contributed to the neighborhood's history and identity; and

**WHEREAS**, the subject business is committed to maintaining the physical features and traditions that define the business; and

**WHEREAS**, at a duly noticed public hearing held on January 26, 2026, the San Francisco Small Business Commission reviewed documents and correspondence, and heard oral testimony on the Legacy Business Registry application; therefore

**BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Small Business Commission hereby includes San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus in the Legacy Business Registry as a Legacy Business under Administrative Code Section 2A.242.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the Small Business Commission recommends safeguarding the below listed physical features and traditions at San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus.

#### Legacy Business Program

Office of Small Business  
City Hall Room 140  
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place  
San Francisco, CA 94102  
(415) 554-6680  
legacybusiness@sfgov.org  
[www.legacybusiness.org](http://www.legacybusiness.org)





Physical features or traditions that define the business:

- Providing inspiring and joyful concert repertoire.
- Continuation of their legacy of supporting our LGBTQ communities.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the Small Business Commission requires maintenance of the below listed core physical feature or tradition to maintain San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus on the Legacy Business Registry:

- Music.

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I hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution was ADOPTED by the Small Business Commission on January 26, 2026.

---

Katy Tang  
Director

RESOLUTION NO. \_\_\_\_\_

Ayes –

Nays –

Abstained –

Absent –

**Legacy Business Program**

Office of Small Business  
City Hall Room 140  
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place  
San Francisco, CA 94102  
(415) 554-6680  
[legacybusiness@sfgov.org](mailto:legacybusiness@sfgov.org)  
[www.legacybusiness.org](http://www.legacybusiness.org)





# LEGACY BUSINESS REGISTRY EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**HEARING DATE: January 7, 2026**

*Filing Date:* December 10, 2025  
*Case No.:* 2025-012178LBR  
*Business Name:* San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus  
*Business Address:* 170 Valencia Street  
*Zoning:* NCT-3 – Moderate Scale Neighborhood Commercial Transit Zoning District  
40-X,50-X Height and Bulk District  
*Cultural District:* Castro LGBTQ Cultural District  
*Block/Lot:* 3502/013  
*Applicant:* Chris Verdugo  
170 Valencia Street  
*Nominated By:* Supervisor Mandelman  
*Located In:* District 5  
*Staff Contact:* Heather Samuels – (625) 652-7545  
[Heather.Samuels@sfgov.org](mailto:Heather.Samuels@sfgov.org)

**RECOMMENDATION:** Adopt a Resolution to Recommend Approval

## Business Description

San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus was the first LGBTQ+ chorus in the nation to openly proclaim "gay" in their name. Having started in 1978, the Chorus has served as an inspirational organization through an accomplished mix of high caliber musical performances, activism, community building, empowerment, and inclusiveness. The Chorus presents an annual season of concerts while regularly performing at city events, corporate engagements, and in Bay Area schools with its educational programs. The Chorus opened the Chan National Queer Arts Center in 2023, establishing a new performing arts venue in the Mission neighborhood and becoming the first LGBTQ+ Chorus in the nation to own and operate their own venue.

In 1978, less than a month after their first rehearsal, the Chorus of already more than 100 singers was pulled toward a more serious subject. On November 27, 1978, the night of the group's fifth ever rehearsal, marked the assassinations of Supervisor Harvey Milk, the first openly gay elected official in

California, and San Francisco Mayor George Moscone. Moved by the city's sense of loss, the Chorus followed the candlelight vigil march onto the steps of San Francisco City Hall and, in an emotional moment, began singing. Just like that, the Chorus made their first public appearance, one rooted not just in the idea of a celebration of identity, but committed to the true work of the community, of calling for justice and working for solidarity. Following this performance, the Chorus held their first formal concert in December of 1978. The group credits a significant portion of their publicity and resulting sold-out shows those first few years to a public standoff with the San Francisco Chronicle which, in 1979, refused to publish the cover art for their "Lovers Too" concert that featured a drawing of two men kissing. The Chorus protested by blocking the entrance to the newspaper's office and, in the end, was able to generate significant press and community support.

The Chorus was instrumental in humanizing gay people during the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s and 1990s, singing at funerals of those who died from HIV/AIDs, and advocating for research, funds, and medical intervention throughout the epidemic. Locally, the Chorus has contributed to San Francisco's history and identity time and time again, showing up to sing at City Hall in 2004 when same-sex marriages became legalized; performing at the opening of the AIDS Memorial Garden in Golden Gate Park attended by Speaker Emerita Nancy Pelosi and other dignitaries; and, since 1990 and until its renovation began in 2024, hosting one of San Francisco's most popular annual holiday events, Home for the Holidays at the Castro Theater, providing a joyful holiday celebration for those who either can't be with their families or were outright rejected by their families for being queer.

## Staff Analysis

### Review Criteria

**1. When was business founded?**

The business was founded in 1978.

**2. Does the business qualify for listing on the Legacy Business Registry? If so, how?**

Yes. San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus qualifies for listing on the Legacy Business Registry because it meets all of the eligibility Criteria:

- a. San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus has operated continuously in San Francisco for 47 years.
- b. San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus has contributed to the history and identity of the Castro/Mission neighborhood and San Francisco.
- c. San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus is committed to maintaining the physical features and traditions that define the organization.

**3. Is the business associated with a culturally significant art, craft, cuisine, or tradition?**

Yes. The business is associated with choral singing.

**4. Is the business or its building associated with significant events, persons, or architecture?**

Yes. The Chorus has performed with numerous musical luminaries such as conductor Kent Nagano, the San Francisco Symphony, Tony Award-winning composer Stephen Schwartz, opera composer Jake Heggie, the San Francisco Opera, composer Holly Near, and performing luminaries such as Kristin Chenoweth, Joan Rivers, Jennifer Holliday, and Patti LuPone.

Additionally, the San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus owns and operates the Chan National Queer Arts Center at 170 Valencia Street, a historically significant building that was designed by architect Harold Stoner in 1930 for the fraternal society the Independent Order of Foresters. The roughly 23,000-square-foot building was last owned by the Baha'i Faith who used the place as a house of worship since 1976. The Chorus purchased the building in 2019 and opened in the fall of 2023 as the Chan National Queer Arts Center. Historical Art Deco aspects of the building have been preserved.

**5. Is the property associated with the business listed on a local, state, or federal historic resource registry?**

Yes, the site is listed as a Category A building. This art deco building was originally constructed as the Independent Order of Foresters Hall by the Architect Harold Stoner.

**6. Is the business mentioned in a local historic context statement?**

No, not as of the date of this Executive Summary.

**7. Has the business been cited in published literature, newspapers, journals, etc.?**

Yes. There have been a number of features and articles featuring this business. In September of 2017, Oprah.com features the Chorus in an article entitled "This Gay Men's Chorus is Taking a Stand Against Hate in the Best Way". The Bay Area Reporter featured the Chorus in November of 2023 titled "SF Gay Men's Chorus opens new home". Lastly, the Advocate featured the Chorus in September of 2025 in an article titled "Rebel Song: A History of Gay Men's Choruses".

**Racial and Social Equity Analysis**

On July 15, 2020 the San Francisco Historic Preservation Commission adopted [Resolution No. 1127](#) centering Preservation Planning on racial and social equity. Understanding the benefits, burdens, and opportunities to advance racial and social equity that proposed Preservation Planning documents provide is part of the Department's Racial and Social Equity Initiative. This is also consistent with the Mayor's Citywide Strategic Initiatives for equity and accountability and with the Office of Racial Equity, which required all Departments to conduct this analysis.

The Legacy Business Program is deeply intertwined with these goals. One of the primary purposes of the Legacy Business Program is to maintain San Francisco's cultural fabric and to foster civic engagement and pride by assisting long-operating businesses remain in the city. The Legacy Business Registry was established to recognize longstanding, community-serving businesses that are valuable cultural assets of the city. These businesses, ranging from restaurants to art galleries to tire shops to community shelters, are key to sustaining the racial and social diversity in San Francisco and adding to the identity and character of our city and the many communities within it.



The San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus is committed to providing an artistic outlet by and for the LGBTQ+ community. Beyond public performances, the Chorus provides a structured community for its members, with affinity groups helping to develop deep relationships and friendships. Interest groups range from social outings to supportive groups for those exploring sobriety, to a book club, to support groups for those struggling with illness. Notably, the Chorus was founded during the devastating AIDS epidemic of the 1980s, which greatly impacted its members. As AIDS took its toll, Chorus members used concerts to bring a sense of urgency to the public. The group's music became more somber and began including AIDS requiems. The Chorus also became a place for members to talk openly about HIV and AIDS.

### **Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business**

#### **Location(s) associated with the business:**

Current Locations:

- 170 Valencia Street (2019 to Present)

Previous (No Longer Extant) Locations:

- 815 Duboce Avenue, 3 (1978 to 1982)
- P.O. Box at 2261 Market Street (1985 to 1990)
- 400 Castro Street (1990 to 2000)
- 4050 18th Street (2000 to 2004)
- 1800 Market Street (2004 to 2011)
- 398 11th Street, #300 (2012 to 2015)
- 526 Castro Street (2015 to 2018)

#### **Recommended by Applicant**

- Providing inspiring and joyful concert repertoire.

#### **Additional Recommended by Staff**

- Continuation of their legacy of supporting our LGBTQ Communities

### **Basis for Recommendation**

The Department recommends the Historic Preservation Commission adopt a resolution recommending the business listed above be adopted by the Small Business Commission to the Legacy Business Registry.

## Attachments

Draft Resolution

Legacy Business Registry Application:

- Application Review Sheet
- Section 1 – Business / Applicant Information
- Section 2 – Business Location(s)
- Section 3 – Disclosure Statement
- Section 4 – Written Historical Narrative
  - Criterion 1 – History and Description of Business
  - Criterion 2 – Contribution to Local History
  - Criterion 3 – Business Characteristics
- Contextual Photographs and Background Documentation



## HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION DRAFT RESOLUTION NO. ###

**HEARING DATE: JANUARY 7, 2026**

*Case No.:* 2025-012178LBR  
*Business Name:* San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus  
*Business Address:* 170 Valencia Street  
*Zoning:* NCT-3 – Moderate Scale Neighborhood Commercial Transit Zoning District  
40-X,50-X Height and Bulk District  
*Cultural District:* Castro LGBTQ Cultural District  
*Block/Lot:* 3502/013  
*Applicant:* Chris Verdugo  
170 Valencia Street  
*Nominated By:* Supervisor Mandelman  
*Located In:* District 5  
*Staff Contact:* Heather Samuels – (625) 652-7545  
[tina.tam@sfgov.org](mailto:tina.tam@sfgov.org)

**ADOPTING FINDINGS RECOMMENDING TO THE SMALL BUSINESS COMMISSION APPROVAL OF THE LEGACY BUSINESS REGISTRY NOMINATION FOR SAN FRANCISCO GAY MEN'S CHORUS CURRENTLY LOCATED AT 170 VALENCIA STREET, BLOCK/LOT 3502/013.**

**WHEREAS**, in accordance with Administrative Code Section 2A.242, the Office of Small Business maintains a registry of Legacy Businesses in San Francisco (the "Registry") to recognize that longstanding, community-serving businesses can be valuable cultural assets of the City and to be a tool for providing educational and promotional assistance to Legacy Businesses to encourage their continued viability and success; and

**WHEREAS**, the subject business has operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years; and

**WHEREAS**, the subject business has contributed to the City's history and identity; and

**WHEREAS**, the subject business is committed to maintaining the traditions that define the business; and

**WHEREAS**, at a duly noticed public hearing held on January 7, 2026, the Historic Preservation Commission reviewed documents, correspondence and heard oral testimony on the Legacy Business Registry nomination.

**THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that the **Historic Preservation Commission hereby recommends** that the San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus qualifies for the Legacy Business Registry under Administrative Code Section 2A.242(b)(2) as it has operated for 30 or more years and has continued to contribute to the community.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the **Historic Preservation Commission hereby recommends** safeguarding of the below listed physical features and traditions for San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus.

**Current Locations:**

- 170 Valencia Street (2019 to Present)

Previous (No Longer Extant) Locations:

- 815 Duboce Avenue, 3 (1978 to 1982)
- P.O. Box at 2261 Market Street (1985 to 1990)
- 400 Castro Street (1990 to 2000)
- 4050 18th Street (2000 to 2004)
- 1800 Market Street (2004 to 2011)
- 398 11th Street, #300 (2012 to 2015)
- 526 Castro Street (2015 to 2018)

**Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business**

- Providing inspiring and joyful concert repertoire.
- Continuation of their legacy of supporting our LGBTQ Communities

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Historic Preservation Commission's findings and recommendations are made solely for the purpose of evaluating the subject business's eligibility for the Legacy Business Registry, and the Historic Preservation Commission makes no finding that the subject property or any of its features constitutes a historical resource pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15064.5(a).

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the **Historic Preservation Commission hereby directs** its Commission Secretary to transmit this Resolution and other pertinent materials in the case file to the Office of Small Business on January 7, 2026.

Jonas P. Ionin  
Commission Secretary

AYES:

NOES:

ABSENT:

Resolution No. ###  
January 7, 2026

CASE NO. 2025-012178LBR  
San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus

RECUSE:

ADOPTED: January 7, 2026