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Restoring, Reimagining Arts Funding: Councilmembers & Prebys Foundation Announce Plan to Refill Arts Budget

CITY, COUNTY LEADERS ALSO INTRODUCE VISION FOR REGIONAL COLLABORATION ON ARTS FUNDING

SAN DIEGO — City Council President Pro Tem Kent Lee, joined by Budget Chair Henry Foster III, County Supervisor Monica Montgomery Steppe, representatives of the Prebys Foundation, arts and culture leaders, and labor partners, today announced a proposal to restore nearly all of the City of San Diego’s arts and culture funding in the Fiscal Year 2027 budget while launching a long-term effort to secure sustainable regional investment in the arts.

“Arts are essential to our city,” said Council President Pro Tem Kent Lee. **“Music, film, artistic expression – this is what makes us human, and it’s what transforms a city into a community. Our arts programs create jobs, attract visitors, and help define what it means to be a San Diegan. This is not about funding some abstract luxury, it’s about protecting one of San Diego’s greatest strengths.”**

The proposal would restore approximately \$10.35 million in funding for San Diego’s arts and culture sector in the upcoming City budget — supporting local theaters, music organizations, community festivals, cultural institutions, and arts programs that serve neighborhoods across the city.

“Arts and culture belong in all of San Diego and this funding supports local artists, small businesses, jobs, and the community spaces that keep our neighborhoods connected,” said Councilmember Henry L. Foster III, Chair of the Budget Committee. **“In District 4, the San Diego Black Arts and Culture District shows why this work matters by honoring history, creating opportunity, and making sure culture isn’t forgotten. As Budget Chair, I truly believe this proposal is a responsible way to protect funding that matters to our residents and our local economy.”**

The restoration plan includes three key components:

Adoption of recommendations from the City’s Independent Budget Analyst to allocate \$6 million in Transient Occupancy Tax revenue to arts and culture programs;

Restoration of \$1.3 million in grant programs that support local artists, community events, cultural festivals, and neighborhood-based arts initiatives; and
A \$3 million commitment from the Prebys Foundation to match the City's continued investment in San Diego's cultural and arts communities.

City leaders expressed their gratitude to the Prebys Foundation for its partnership and leadership in supporting the region's arts and culture sector.

“Our investment is intended to encourage the City to restore arts funding, honor the competitive grants process already underway, and strengthen regional support for arts and culture,” said Grant Oliphant CEO and President, Prebys Foundation. **“For decades, San Diego’s artists and cultural organizations have been promised a reliable source of public funding. It is time to deliver on that promise, and today marks an important step forward.”**

In addition to restoring much of the arts funding that was proposed to be cut from the upcoming budget, city and regional leaders announced plans to explore the creation of a regional alliance dedicated to advancing long-term arts and cultural investment.

“Arts and culture are essential to the identity, vibrancy, and economic vitality of our region,” said Vice Chair Monica Montgomery Steppe of the County Board of Supervisors. **“The County has been focused on building a strong and sustainable foundation for arts and culture well before the current budget discussion. I’m encouraged to see leaders from across government, philanthropy, and the arts community coming together around a shared commitment to support the creative ecosystem that enriches all of our communities.”**

The effort would bring together local governments, philanthropy, business leaders, tourism stakeholders, labor organizations, and arts and cultural institutions to develop a more stable and sustainable funding model for the region.

“Year after year, it’s the same budget battle over the arts. We envision a better way, a collaboration where our whole region works together to support the arts,” Lee said. **“We want to secure the level of investment the arts deserve and create a system that does not force organizations to rebuild their future one budget cycle at a time.”**

Leaders said a regional approach could help grow investment in arts and culture, strengthen the region's cultural economy, expand access to arts programming in every community, and ensure future generations continue to benefit from a vibrant creative sector.

The coalition is calling on the City Council to approve the arts funding restoration as part of next week's budget actions and urging Mayor Gloria to sign the proposal into law.

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