

Other Avenues

Section 4: Written Historical Narrative

CRITERION 1

- a. **Provide a short history of the business from the date the business opened in San Francisco to the present day, including the ownership history. For businesses with multiple locations, include the history of the original location in San Francisco (including whether it was the business's founding and or headquartered location) and the opening dates and locations of all other locations.**

As the name implies, Other Avenues is a different kind of business. Chiefly, its structure is different than most food stores. There is no one boss; instead, OA (as Other Avenues is known) is owned by a group of co-workers who manage the business together. Each co-owner receives a wage and a share of the annual surplus, if any, leaving the assets to benefit the community.

OA began in 1975 as a small neighborhood store run as a “not for profit” business by a volunteer staff who were part of a grass-roots movement called the Food Conspiracy. This movement was part of a wave of San Francisco cooperatives that arose in the ‘60s in reaction to the ‘50s, when postwar chemical technology was recycled into national agriculture in the form of pesticides, mechanization, and agrichemicals.

OA’s storefront opened on January 1st, 1975 at 4035 Judah Street with the goal of making whole, natural food accessible to the masses. Markup was just enough to cover spoilage and cover rent (which wasn’t much at the time). In the early years, most people who shopped at OA also volunteered. It was not uncommon to see a sign on the door that said, “Today’s volunteer did not show up, so the store is closed.” Weekly meetings were open to both shoppers and workers, and issues such as inventory, scheduling, and product selection were discussed by everyone.

OA has proved its resilience on many occasions. In the late ‘70s rising rent in San Francisco led to a dearth of available free volunteer labor for the store. On the brink of closure, OA was rescued by a garage sale, a bake sale and a concert that paid the rent and bought a pickup truck for delivering vegetables. At that time there were many Middle Eastern immigrants living in the Sunset, and often in the morning a group of Arab women sang in front of the store, in anticipation of buying the day’s fresh produce.

In 1982, buoyed by increased sales (and a small annual surplus) the store moved across the street into its current location at 3930 Judah Street. OA hired more staff while retaining its core of volunteer workers. Sales didn’t improve as much as hoped, and again community members came to the rescue with loans. OA still had no firm business structure at the time, and there was little division between staff and shoppers.

In 1987, OA restructured into a “hybrid consumer co-op,” and adopted a Board of Directors that included workers and consumers. Yet the numbers still weren’t promising and an accountant suggested OA close, but again its loyal staff and customers raised enough to keep it open.

In the late ‘90s, the building that housed OA went up for sale so a community member stepped in with a checkbook and bought it to secure the store. After years of struggle, OA was finally stable and booming. Workers were running the business effectively, and community Board Members deferred to the workers on all business decisions. To reflect what had become reality, Other Avenues legally incorporated as a Worker-Owned Cooperative in fall 1999.

In 2008, after 28 years in the space, the workers of Other Avenues decided to buy the building themselves. In true cooperative form, Rainbow Grocery Co-op, Cheeseboard Collective, Arizmendi Bakery, Veritable Vegetable, and OA’s own members pitched into the hat for a down payment. Today OA is more successful than ever, with a bright eye towards the future.

- b. **Describe any circumstances that required the business to cease operations in San Francisco for more than six months?**

N/A. OA has never ceased operations for more than six months.

c. Is the business a family-owned business? If so, give the generational history of the business. AND d. Describe the ownership history when the business ownership is not the original owner or a family-owned business.

OA is not family-owned, but worker-owned. When OA opened in 1975, it was run by volunteers from the grassroots Food Conspiracy movement. There was little distinction between the staff and shoppers in its early days. OA has always been called a co-op by our patrons and the Outer Sunset community. However, we officially incorporated as a worker-owned cooperative in 1999. Before that period, OA functioned as a hybrid community membership co-op managed by its workers.

Presently, OA is worker-owned, meaning only applicants who are approved by the Board of Directors after a 6-month trial period become co-owners. Currently, 15 worker-owners (and BoD members) manage the business democratically using the super-consensus model. Five members—Tulasi Johnson, Darryl Dea, Jeremy Greco, Luke Larson and Chris Julian—have been at OA for 10+ years.

e. When the current ownership is not the original owner and has owned the business for less than 30 years, the applicant will need to provide documentation of the existence of the business prior to current ownership to verify it has been in operation for 30+ years. Please use the list of supplemental documents and/or materials as a guide to help demonstrate the existence of the business prior to current ownership.

See attached supplemental newsletters, articles, and photos.

f. Note any 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.

OA's building is not registered on any local, state, or federal historic registry.

CRITERION 2

a. Describe the business's contribution to the history and/or identity of the neighborhood, community or San Francisco.

Around 2009, OA along with local businesses Java Beach Café and Corner Cup organized the community to challenge Starbucks in opening a storefront on the corner of 45th and Judah. As community residents and business owners, we were concerned not only about traffic congestion at the corner, but with draining money out of the local economy and away from independent businesses. OA helped to gather 4,000 signatures to petition against the coffee chain, and convinced the Planning Commission to deny Starbucks' application. In place of Starbucks, the independently-owned juice bar Judahlicious opened on the corner. In the next few years other independent small businesses such as Trouble Coffee, Mango Medley, Outerlands restaurant, and Mollusk Surf Shop opened.

b. Is the business (or has been) associated with significant events in the neighborhood, the city, or the business industry?

OA opened its doors in 1975 by the participants of the Food Conspiracy, a grass roots organization of food buying clubs dedicated to buying and distributing wholesale food among themselves. Driven by the spirit of sustainable communities and started in members' garages, the clubs expanded and opened over a dozen SF storefronts like OA, along with a large warehouse and other supporting organizations. Collectively calling themselves "The People's Food System," with the motto "Food for people, not for profit," these stores thrived for over a decade. By the 1990s, due to rising rents and lack of volunteers with free time to donate, most of the Food Conspiracy co-op stores had closed their doors. Yet OA remains open today, preserving the legacy of the People's Food System.

More recently on January 20th, 2017, OA closed in protest of President Trump's inauguration. The workers posted a sign on the front door that read, "Other Avenues will be closed in the spirit of passive resistance on Inauguration Day, Friday January 20." We were featured in the SF Chronicle (see attached) and on a local NBC telecast.

c. Has the business ever been referenced in an historical context? Such as in a business trade publication, media, or historical documents?

OA has been featured all over the local media. A full list of articles can be found at: <https://www.otheravenues.coop/press-and-awards/>. Among the highlights include a feature in SF Weekly, several features in Edible SF, and a few pieces on cooperatives in the SF Chronicle by *Hippie Food* author Jonathan Kauffman.

OA won Best Co-op Award from the San Francisco Bay Guardian's Small Business Awards in 2005, and received a California Small Business Award from Leland Yee's office for the 12th Assembly District in 2006. We also were named 2018 Small Business of the Year for the Sunset District by Supervisor Katy Tang this past May.

d. Is the business associated with a significant or historical person?

Shanta Nimbark Sacharoff has been working at OA since its founding in 1975 as part of the Food Conspiracy movement. After serving the OA/Outer Sunset community and the co-op network for over 36 years, Shanta retired this past May 2018. She is the author of three books, has hosted a number of cooking classes, and has been a vocal leader in the co-op movement. This past May, Supervisor Katy Tang acknowledged Shanta's contribution to OA and the larger SF community at our Small Business of the Year award ceremony.

e. How does the business demonstrate its commitment to the community?

OA remains a neighborhood and community-responsive business. Now, instead of becoming a co-op "member" and voting for or serving on the Board of Directors, community supporters can purchase a Red Discount Card which entitles the holder to a discount similar to that offered to community "members" in the past. We also offer generous store discounts to various community members: seniors, former volunteers and worker-owners, local business owners, SF Bike Coalition members, and SF Vegetarian Society members.

OA promotes, supports, and hosts a number of community events. Some, such as the Sunset Community Festival and SF World Vegetarian Day are organized by other groups and attended by OA. Others, such as educational workshops, are held at OA and hosted by worker-owners. We sponsor classes on health and healing, nutrition, and cooking regularly. We also regularly donate to non-profits, giving over \$7,000 in 2017.

f. Provide a description of the community the business serves.

OA serves a robust and diverse community, one rooted in the Outer Sunset. We are a true community hub for those who live and work nearby, with a devoted and loyal following. Many of the original volunteers and worker-owners still shop at the store; this imbues OA with a unique sense of shared space for both worker-owners and shoppers. In the past decade, OA has served a growing number of young professionals as well as families with young children who've moved to the Outer Sunset in search of cheaper rent. Of course, we serve the large Chinese, Russian, and Italian populations closely associated with the area as well. This community has changed over time, but OA is the kind of store not separate from the people who buy from it, and so it follows that we will always be in some gradual flux that mirrors the neighborhood. We're an organism that adapts, and adapts again when the circumstances change.

g. Is the business associated with a culturally significant building/structure/site/object/interior?

No.

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

Other Avenues is not just a health food store, but a community center where shoppers feel comfortable shopping, socializing, and attending community events organized by the workers. On a practical level, where else will people have access to fresh organic produce, local products, fresh bread, dairy, and bulk foods all under the same roof? OA is the only food co-op serving the west side of the city and one of the last small locally-owned groceries in SF.

The city would lose a business dedicated to the welfare of its workers through ample benefits, a living wage, and entrepreneurship education through its running. OA is one of two remaining cooperative groceries, along with Rainbow Grocery Co-op in the Mission.

CRITERION 3

a. Describe the business and the essential features that define its character.

Other Avenues is defined by its commitment to quality natural foods and products, including organic produce, supplements, cheese, wine & beer, eco-friendly supplies for living, and a large bulk section. Our produce is 100% certified organic and we support small, local vendors on our shelves. Our main goals are to maintain a thriving business; to provide food and supplies for sustainable living; to provide exemplary service to the community; to support organic and local farms, cooperatives, and other small businesses; and to serve as a model of workplace democracy for the community.

What we feature on our shelves represents OA best. We emphasize organic, sustainable, vegetarian, and fair trade products. We avoid products with artificial flavors, preservatives, GMO ingredients, and unnecessary packaging. Our commitment to quality, local, and organics preserves our identity as a business and help customers understand the political implication of our choices as consumers.

b. How does the business demonstrate a commitment to maintaining the historical traditions that define the business, and which of these traditions should not be changed in order to retain the businesses historical character? (e.g., business model, goods and services, craft, culinary, or art forms)

Our long-standing historic values include offering organic produce, providing a living wage to all workers, upholding a commitment to vegetarian living, and promoting sustainability. Although our structure has changed throughout the years, we are at the core a place where all workers are owners and all worker-owners have a vote in the business. This alternative business model of consensus-based decision-making has been vital to our success. As a collective, we work to maintain the health of our business, so we can provide an enriching environment for workers and the surrounding community. As said in our mission statement, “Healthy Business, Healthy People, Healthy Planet.”

c. How has the business demonstrated a commitment to maintaining the special physical features that define the business? Describe any special exterior and interior physical characteristics of the space occupied by the business (e.g. signage, murals, architectural details, neon signs, etc.).

We are committed to maintaining the storefront mural completed by Carlo Grünfeld and other OA volunteers in 1995. It proudly displays our organic produce next to Ocean Beach, looking north to Mount Tam, seaside pelicans, and Seal Rock. Carlo Grünfeld helped OA renovate the mural in 2014.

d. When the current ownership is not the original owner and has owned the business for less than 30years; the applicant will need to provide documentation that demonstrates the current owner has maintained the physical features or traditions that define the business, including craft, culinary, or art forms. Please use the list of supplemental documents and/or materials as a guide to help demonstrate the existence of the business prior to current ownership.

N/A. Other Avenues is 100% worker-owned, and will continue to pass ownership as collective members are hired.