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From the San Francisco Business Times:

<https://www.bizjournals.com/sanfrancisco/news/2023/09/21/landing-leidesdorff-san-francisco-mayor-downtown.html>

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San Francisco transforms downtown alleyway into new hangout spot



The Landing at Leidesdorff, centered at the intersection of Leidesdorff and Commercial streets in the San Francisco Financial District, is a nearly \$400,000 investment in art enhancements, seating, event programming, cleaning and staffing to turn an underutilized alleyway into a place for people to hang out beyond the usual work hours. Mayor London Breed and partners such as the Downtown SF Partnership hope the project can be a model for reinvigorating emptier corners of downtown for visitors and locals.

MU-PING CHENG



By [Alex Barreira](#) – Staff Reporter, San Francisco Business Times
Sep 21, 2023

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A downtown San Francisco community benefit district is channeling about \$385,000 of city funds into an overlooked alleyway in the Financial District in the hopes it will serve as a model for activating more of the area beyond work hours.

Landing at Leidesdorff is meant to transform the intersection of Leidesdorff and Commercial streets with public art, lighting, lounge seating and regular event programming. It's the first pilot program inspired by a [143-page report released last year by urban design firm Sitelab](#) in collaboration with the Downtown SF Partnership CBD.

Using funds from a grant provided by Mayor London Breed's office and the Office of Economic and Workforce Development, the district's changes to the intersection include two large murals evoking San Francisco's history – including the alley's namesake, oft-forgotten 19th-century city founder William Alexander Leidesdorff – as well as expanded outdoor seating accommodating about 60 people, string lighting, new plantings, tables and chairs.

Weekly programming such as exercise classes and live music, along with regular cleaning and the presence of the benefit district's welcome ambassadors, is aimed at further livening the space.

"San Francisco can no longer follow the status quo," said Robbie Silver, executive director of the Downtown SF Partnership, gathered with city officials and stakeholders at an event Thursday to christen the space. "While businesses are back in their office, we need innovation, arts and culture, we need to change the prolonged perception problem for people to want to stay downtown."

For traditional commercial corridors, that means becoming more "multi-use" and encouraging engagement outside of the typical 9 to 5.

Laura Crescimano, principal and co-founder of Sitelab, emphasized the importance of spaces like Landing to serve as "linkage" points between other nearby attractions such as

Chinatown, the Transamerica Building, and the Embarcadero Center on different sides.

The team's next transformation site is at California and Market streets, where the cable car line ends and thousands of visitors enter downtown via the Embarcadero BART station. Thinking along the lines of the red stairs leading into Times Square, Silver is hoping for signage and other attractions as a kind of "welcoming" for people into downtown. The district and Sitelab are in the process of fundraising, looking for about \$400,000 for work there.



One of the murals spans two sides of the wall at the PG&E substation building at the intersection and depicts the life and legacy of Liedesdorff, a Black and Jewish sailor and entrepreneur who helped settle the area that would become San Francisco under Spanish territory and later helped create the city's first hotel and public school, dying as one of the territory's wealthiest men.

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Tristen Philippart de Foy, managing partner at the new bar Heartwood that opens onto Commercial St., called the Landing "a truly unique and groundbreaking project" for a time when San Francisco "has a need for bold new concepts." Other nearby businesses whose outdoor seating is expanded by the Landing's new chairs and tables include Wayfare Tavern, Tlaloc Sabor Mexicano and Mixt.

City officials hope the murals can also catch on as an attraction for tourists, eliciting a curiosity for the city's history or an excuse to take out the selfie stick. One of the murals

spans two sides of the wall at the PG&E substation building at the intersection and depicts the life and legacy of Leidesdorff, a Black and Jewish sailor and entrepreneur who helped settle the area that would become San Francisco under Mexican rule and later helped create the city's first hotel and public school, dying in 1848 as one of the territory's wealthiest individuals.

A ground mural from Sitelab depicts the former site of the Long Wharf – once a hub of commercial activity in the days when San Francisco's shoreline once began at the eastern end of Commercial St. – and includes a stanza from Bohemian San Francisco poet George Sterling's poem, "The Cool, Grey City of Love."

In attendance at the Landing event Thursday was Thor Kaslofsky, a great-great-great-grandnephew of Leidesdorff and – coincidentally – also Breed's executive director of the Office of Community Investment and Infrastructure.