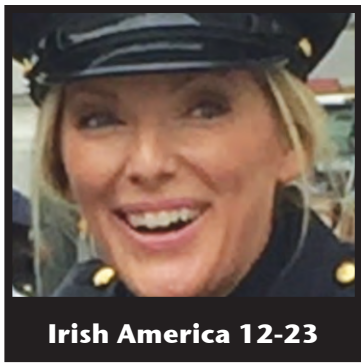




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# The Irish Herald

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**Exciting plans are afoot to rebuild the United Irish Cultural Center at 45th Avenue and Sloat in San Francisco. After serving the Bay Area Irish community for 46 years the building would need significant maintenance and upgrades to stay operational, and the Board are proposing that a complete rebuild is the best way forward. For more information please see pages 15,16 and 17 inside. (The picture above is a conceptual rendering of the new Irish Center, courtesy of Studio BANAA).**

## Taioseach Confirms: "The End Of This Is Within Our Grasp"

**T**HROUGHOUT THE MONTH of May, Covid deaths, hospitalizations and cases continued to fall in both the Republic of Ireland and the north of Ireland. The improvement in the situation has led to both jurisdictions relaxing restrictions as the whole island starts to reopen for business after 15 months of lockdown, bringing much needed relief for businesses and people.

In the Republic, the case numbers had fallen to around 400 a day by the end of the month and there were slightly fewer than 100 Covid patients in hospital, of which less than 40 were in Intensive Care Units. Deaths had also dropped dramatically. In the north the situation was even better.

The numbers reflect the rapid expansion of the vaccination program in the Republic. By May 31, half of all adults had been given at least one shot of the vaccine and 20 percent had been fully vaccinated. In the north, the 68 percent of adults had received at least one shot and 43 percent were fully inoculated. In the Republic 300,000 shots were administered in the last week of May alone.

The government's target of offering at least one shot to

80 percent of adults by the end of June, which at one point looked in serious jeopardy, now seems plausible once more. The government have set a new target of 60 percent of adults (2.5 million people) being fully vaccinated by the end of July.

Announcing the reopening plans at Government Buildings on May 28, Taoiseach Micheál Martin told the nation: "The end of this is within our grasp."

Martin said Ireland was taking "definite steps towards normal times," and he outlined a significant gradual easing of restrictions in the coming months.

"Now the challenge is to keep moving forward safely, remembering all the time our determination to make sure that when we reopen each part of our society and economy, it stays open," he said.

"This is an important time for us all. After the trauma of the last fifteen months we are finally taking definite steps towards enjoying normal times with friends and loved ones again. We're almost back to a point where we can just enjoy the ordinary extraordinary moments in our lives. The sense of hope, excitement, and relief is palpable.

**Continued on page 3 inside**

## Inquest Finds British Army Responsible For Ballymurphy Massacre



**The Families of the 11 victims killed by the British Army's Parachute Regiment between August 9 and August 11, 1971, rejoice after a coroner's inquest finally clears their relatives' names, and puts the blame for the tragedy squarely at the feet of the soldiers. Read the full story on page 7 inside.**





• UNITED IRISH CULTURAL CENTER •

# Visionary Redevelopment Proposal Reveals New Look For Irish Center

by Liam Reidy, President, United Irish Cultural Center, (lreidy@irishcentersf.org)

WHAT AN EXCITING MONTH we have had at the Center! The whole Irish American community is buzzing with optimism since the public meeting on May 7 during which we revealed a bold new visionary proposal to rebuild the Center. While the Building Working Group committee explored several options this past spring, the option to redevelop the existing site was the concept that made most sense. A new building provides the community with a greater variety of spaces devoted to cultural programming uses that is currently not available. One of the options during the period of discovery and brainstorming was to sell the existing building and move elsewhere in the city or develop a new center outside the city. This option did not enthruse or energize the group. Neither did the idea of remodeling the center or adding couple of more floors to the existing structure. The reasoning was the high cost of rehabbing the building and tearing everything back to the studs to structurally support the addition of any new floors on top of the existing structure.

Pre-construction cost analysis for the new building comes in at \$45-50 million dollars. The grand redevelopment plan proposed by Redmond Lyons and his committee calls on the entire community to contribute and participate with their Time,

Talent or Treasure. Many in the community will be able to donate money to help rebuild, but there are others who have graciously already offered their time and talents to the committee to rebuild the Center.

Whatever happens, there is a mountain of work to be done in the meantime, so roll up your sleeves!

The conceptual plan to redevelop the Irish Center was developed by Dane Bunton and Nastaran Mousavi, Principal Architects at Studio BANAA, San Francisco. Both architects had provided some “pro-bono” work last year to the Board as part of an effort to repurpose some of the spaces at the Center, when we explored the concept of a remodel to the existing structure. Earlier this year we reached back out to the firm to get their input on a new building redesign.

The new conceptual building provides almost 100,000 square feet of space. Our current building is a 20,000 square feet facility. However, nothing is set in stone yet as to what will eventually be built, and the next step is a meeting with the San Francisco Department of City Planning.

The new building will consist of two floors underground and six floors above ground level. The subterranean areas are made up of one floor of dedicated parking with room for 30 vehicles, while the second floor houses an aquatics center with a

5 lane pool, saunas, kiddies pool and locker rooms.

The above ground structure will house a dedicated museum on the ground floor at street level, with a bar, restaurant and gallery or entertainment venue. On the second floor, the St Patrick’s room occupies the entire footprint of the building with a stage, bar, and kitchen. The third floor consists of a dedicated library and genealogy center. The fourth floor consists of Irish dance studios, music, language and conference rooms, administration and office space. The fifth floor consists of a gym and exercise studio and sports hall. The sixth floor houses the rooftop restaurant, garden and observation deck. The new building provides for more space dedicated to cultural programming, the library and Irish arts.

The May 7 meeting was well attended by a large cross section of the community, and the message about a proposed new building was well received overall.

The same sentiment was present at the General Members meeting on May 13, during which the membership voted unanimously to proceed with the rebuild concept and to take it through to the next phase. For more information about the plan for the future of the Irish Center go to [www.irishcenter2025.org](http://www.irishcenter2025.org)

A capital campaign com-

mittee is being currently being established to help fundraise for the project. If you would like to get involved email: [campaign@irishcentersf.org](mailto:campaign@irishcentersf.org).

**Around the Center**

After an absence of the more than two decades, an Irish dance Feis returns to the Center on Sunday June 27, as we host the 2021 John and Maureen Kennelly Memorial Feis. Competitions start at 8am and will run throughout the day.

We celebrate the one year anniversary of Wawona Gates on Saturday June 19 and all local Irish dance schools are invited to participate to dance on the outside dance stage from 2.00-3.45pm.

Our Irish Summer camp starts June 7 at the Collins Center, St Cecilia’s Church. Kids will have a chance to learn how to play the drums, tin whistle or keyboards, speak Irish, participate in drama, storytelling, multi-media production, art classes, and even hip hop! On Friday June 25 there will be a concert featuring all the campers at the Irish Center.

The Irish Dance exhibition organizing group spearheaded by Anne Cassidy Carew is busy collecting memorabilia and documenting Irish dance stories at the moment. The group will continue their efforts through the summer in time for the fall presentation. If you have a story to tell or something to contribute you can reach Anne at

[acarew@irishcentersf.org](mailto:acarew@irishcentersf.org)

We have great music lined up for Wawona Gates in June. The Kevin Roche trio play on June 5. On June 12 we host Ivor Collins, Bryan Lynch and Eoin O’Sullivan. The first year anniversary of Wawona Gates occurs on June 19 and sees the return of Fret & Fiddle from Pacifica. On June 26, we welcome back the Boys of Malin, Felim Egan (accordion), Darcy Noonan (fiddle) and Eamonn Flynn (keyboards).

Many thanks to all those who came out to Wawona Gates and volunteered or participated in the Dowling Library Fundraiser during the Kentucky Derby on May 1. There was plenty of colorful fascinators, and style on display during the afternoon of fun. The big winner on the day was the Library.

A special word of congratulations to all the students who received Leo T Walsh scholarships last month. A combined total of \$40,000 was disbursed by the committee to graduating 8th Grade students and High School Seniors heading off to college in the fall. Special thanks to Peggy Nevin and Carmelle Reiser for co-ordinating this years efforts. Many thanks to all the donors and sponsors of the Awards—without you there would be no cause for celebration!

Safe travels to all those who are traveling this summer! Stay Safe!

**Some of photographs of the attendees at the May 7 Public meeting on the future of the Irish Center.**  
*Photos courtesy of Kevin Kelleher and Emily Trinh.*



Clockwise from top left:  
Jim Fogarty, Rose O’Connor, Martin Falvey.  
Marty Halloran addresses the audience.  
Liam Reidy, UICC President.  
Gerry Cassidy.  
Eamonn Flynn in a pensive mood.  
Mark Burke, UICC Vice-President.  
Redmond Lyons, Chair of the Rebuilding Committee.  
Lynn Buckart and Diarmuid Philpott.



• UNITED IRISH CULTURAL CENTER •

# The Genesis Of The Irish Center 2025 Project

by Liam Reidy



COUNTY MAYO NATIVE, REDMOND LYONS, has been very vocal in recent years about renovating or redeveloping the United Irish Cultural Center. Back on October 25, 2018, Redmond went on the record at a public UICC meeting to boldly suggest that knocking the existing structure and starting over might be the best way forward. As soon as he had said this, the room fell silent for several seconds, as the enormity of what he had suggested soaked in.

I was in the audience that night, and it was the first time I had ever heard anyone say something as brazen as erasing our beloved Center. It certainly had never crossed my mind as a way to “fix” what was wrong at the Center, but I really didn’t know the motivation or drive behind such an outlandish idea.

Redmond’s provocative suggestion was made the night the Board at the Irish Center announced that it was closing the Bar and Restaurant. The UICC membership had hardly the stomach to deal with the closing of the hospitality wing of the Center, let alone to entertain ideas of demolishing the building. To many it all seemed too much to deal with and the Center closed anyway on December 31, 2018. It was a difficult and sad time for everyone in the Irish American community.

## Motivation to Remodel or Rebuild

Shortly after the October 2018 meeting, I reached out to Redmond and met him on a couple of occasions to dig deeper into his thoughts for the future of the Center. He spoke passionately about completely transforming the existing space, by adding dedicated cultural space for the Irish arts, music, theatre, and dancing. With limited space already, he said we would have to add a few floors to the existing structure or maybe a completely new building. Should the plan be to remodel then we would have to do a major overhaul of all the facility systems; electrical, plumbing, fire alarm, elevator, HVAC, roof and exterior facade.

Like many of us down through the years, he said with a smile on his face “we might even add a few windows to the St Patricks room!”

At the end of it all, he felt the community could rally behind any effort to renovate or rebuild the Center.

At the end of one of our coffee meet ups, I can remember him cautioning me that he would be soon be retiring and that we would have to eventually stop meeting up for coffee and actual do something about the Center! I told him I



*“The building should be left free and clear to the community when it is finished and there should be no debt after it’s built.”*

—REDMOND LYONS



The conceptual renderings of the new Irish Center building on these pages are courtesy of Studio BANAA.

Above: Exterior Bird’s Eye View looking to the south-east.

Below: Exterior Lobby at Street Level (45th and Wawona Corner)

Next page, from the top:

The proposed interior of the Emerald Pub, showing the reuse of the glue lams that are currently in the St. Patricks room.

The interior of the rooftop restaurant.

The new St Patrick’s Room.

The new gym.

was contemplating on getting involved at UICC Board level and I asked him give me a year to figure it out, and see what would be the best course of action to move forward.

So I joined the Board in January of 2019, after some encouragement from the President at the time, Anne Cassidy Carew. For much of 2019, it was all about steadying the ship and getting the UICC back on a path to financial stability after a brutal year in 2018, when the UICC was hemorrhaging an average of \$6,700 a week. That in itself was an interesting statistic given that 2018 was also the first year the UICC functioned as a 501c3 nonprofit public charity organization.

## Strong Fiscal Control

So with a lot of belt tightening, regular events to get people back to the Center, membership engagement, and with the help of many volunteers, we ended the 2019 financial year in the black. Operations at the Center managed to pay all the bills when they came due, and we were able to save the \$150,000 in members dues for a rainy day. During the year we had some memorable nights, including the return of “Fight Night” on a balmy July evening, our first annual Oktoberfest that fall, and a packed house for a Wolfe Tones concert in November. We ended the year in great financial health for the first time in several years.

With the dawn of 2020, the Center was getting ready to celebrate 45 years on 45th Avenue. Early year momentum saw many concerts and sessions at the UICC, and the Grand Marshals St Patrick’s Day dinner signaled a good year ahead. However, we couldn’t have been more wrong.

## Covid-19 Outbreak

Much has been written here in these pages about the impact of Covid-19 on the UICC during the past 15 months. On March 12, 2020 the local Department of Public Health shut down all event spaces across the city. Now, for the second time in two years, we were been excluded from our own building. The first time was for economic reasons, and now being forced out by a global health crisis. Would we resurface at the other side of the pandemic? We didn’t even know when that would be likely. By early April, newly appointed Treasurer Craig Viehweg made a startling statement to the Board “that having reviewed the UICC’s finances, that without raising another dollar in 2020, the UICC would run out of money in mid-October 2020.” That was an eye opening statement on a zoom call. So progress at the UICC stalled out again at the end of the first quarter. Further staff reductions were made to shore up the finances and extend the financial runway beyond mid-October.

## Creative Responses to Covid

So the UICC went into a huddle to make some play calls during the early part of the lockdown. Weekly zooms meetings lasted for hours, discussing to how to deal with the situa-

tion of no revenue coming into the UICC but still having huge fixed costs that needed to be paid on a monthly basis.

Out of all the innovative and creative ideas that were hashed about grew two simple enterprises that worked in adherence to pandemic restrictions. Wawona Gates became our outdoor dining experience and an Irish Shoppe that sells all your favorite Irish tea, bread making ingredients, crisps, sweets, chocolate bars, biscuits and soda drinks imported from Ireland.

## St. Patrick’s Appeal

In conjunction with our new businesses, John Ring, a long time UICC supporter and former Board member, along with his childhood pal Tom McKeon (current Board member) dreamed up the concept of the St Patrick’s Appeal which would essentially allow all Board members, UICC staff and our wider UICC community to fundraise on behalf of the Center. It was a huge success and raised \$170,000. We had over 500 individual contributors during the campaign. We ended the year in a stellar financial position, and added many more new members to the membership roster.

## Tangible Assets

Towards the end of last year, the Board felt it necessary and wise to make some investments to the building, after the success of the St Patricks, Appeal. So, I reached out for advice to my friend Redmond Lyons once again. Last October we spent several hours on the roof, doing some proactive roof drain cleaning work in advance of the winter rains, and some additional plumbing repairs in the building. Naturally enough the conversation drifted to the future of the Irish Center. We both felt that a rebuild of the Center may never happen now following the global health crisis. So, we looked at the possibility of a new roof, maybe installing solar panels, maybe a structural upgrade of the building could be warranted and be a genuine good use for the St Patricks Appeal funds.

We really didn’t know what the future held. I told Redmond that I felt like we had spun our wheels as a Board for the past two years, and that the future of the Center was unsustainable, due to the large volume of Board and volunteer time required to keep the Center financially healthy. I said we should hold off on any major facility improvements for now and revisit the idea of revamping the Center after Christmas, by bringing more people to the table to discuss it in greater detail and see what the viable options were.

## Exploratory Meeting

Redmond and I spoke in early January and decided to organize a meeting for later that month to test the waters among several Board members, contractors, and interested community leaders.

County Clare native Leo Cassidy was also heavily involved in these early discussions and has been instru-



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mental in driving the project forward from the start.

And so the UICC Strategic Planning Working Group met for the first time to discuss the future of the Irish Center. In those early meetings, we discussed four options related to the UICC Building.

- No Action
- Remodel and add another floor(s)
- Sell the building and move elsewhere
- Start over with a rebuild.

Those present at the early meetings included: Jimmy Driscoll, Martin Connolly, Redmond Lyons, Joe McFadden, Marty Halloran, Cyril Hackett, Con Lyons, Leo Cassidy, Aengus McCarthy, Séamus Canning, and Pat Uniacke. UICC Board members in attendance were Mark and Molly Burke, Craig Viehweg, Brian Gaffney, Josephine Brogan and Tom McKeon.

**A Consensus View**

After several meetings, the group narrowed the options down to one choice and that was to start over with a completely new building. The consensus was unanimous. There were multiple advantages which include: increased space for Irish arts, and cultural programming, greater footprint for an expanded library and genealogy center, possible aquatics facility, sports hall and gym. Several smaller entertainment venues could be housed within the shell of a new building. In addition, there would be dedicated dance, music and language classrooms as well as offices for other local Irish American organizations. The St Patrick's room would be retained, as well as the option for a restaurant on the roof top.

A new building would be more attractive to rent out to our members for special family events such as weddings. Collectively this seemed the best way to forward and got people excited about the future possibilities.

So we engaged San Francisco based Studio BANAA architects Dane Bunton and Nastaran Mousavi, to develop some conceptual designs and renderings for a new building at the corner of 45th and Wawona. Both architects had previously undertaken some "pro bono" work last year for the Board when were entertaining the idea of remodeling the UICC.

The concept design right now spans eight floors and encompasses almost 100,000 square feet.

**Initial Feedback**

There was a very positive response to the proposal design revealed for the first time to the public on May 7, the result of many months of meetings between the Builders working group and architects. The UICC members voted unanimously on May 13 to proceed to the San Francisco Department of Planning for feedback on the ambitious plan to transform the site.

While we may have arrived this juncture, somewhat fortuitously, it is certainly an exciting time in the history of the Irish Center.

**Footnote**

And by the way, if you are wondering if the roof at the Irish Center leaked this winter, the answer is No!



**\$5 Million Fundraising Goal Set for Sept 1**

REDMOND LYONS was very forthright when he spoke publicly at the May 7 meeting at the UICC, where plans were revealed for a complete rebuild of the Irish Center.

Lyons focused on three major points during his speech.

- How would the new Irish Center be built?
- Who is going to fund it?
- Will the building be sustainable?

Lyons called on community wide cooperation between union and non-union contractors, UICC members, partners, and volunteers to help build the center like they did back in the early 1970s. He stated "if the entire community is not fully behind this rebuilding effort then the project will not be successful." Lyons also stressed "that the building should be left free and clear to the community when it is finished and that there should be no debt after it's built."

Lyons also told the audience "that the Irish-American community must raise \$5 million by September 1, and if this goal was not met, the project would not be going ahead."

The reasoning behind that lofty target was that if we can't raise 10 percent of the projected cost quickly, then we will never raise the ultimate amount. It is also important for granting agencies and foundations to see that the community is fully behind the endeavor. It is also hoped that capital support can be secured from the Irish government down the road.

Redmond also pointed out that "an important feature of the new building is that it is sustainable in the long run. A sustainability report is underway to examine how economically successful the building can be once it has opened."

**Consul General Offers Support**

WESTERN US CONSUL GENERAL ROBERT O'Driscoll spoke at the May 7 meeting in full support of the new vision being proposed for the United Irish Cultural Center. O'Driscoll said "that this was potentially a historical moment in the history of our community here in San Francisco."

He continued "That the proposal outlined this evening is part of a long Irish heritage and tradition of the Irish providing meeting places for their communities down through the years here in San Francisco. The proposal outlines a vision for a modern and dynamic Irish Center, and it turns the page on the next chapter and proud volume of stories of the Irish in this city. The Center envisioned here has the potential to be a home for the Irish into the 21st century and also to be a meeting point of Irish culture and the multitude of other nation-leading cultural and artistic institutions and communities that call the Bay area and California home."

O'Driscoll also stated "that the Irish government has in the past supported similar rebuilds for Irish Centers overseas in New York and London, and that with if there was collective support united in a common vision for the future then it would most likely receive capital support down the road."

O'Driscoll ended by saying "I'm so excited about this project and the legacy it might leave for the generations of Irish Americans that will follow."