COMMISSION MINUTES  
Thursday, June 11, 2020  
2:15 p.m.  
Biscailuz Building Gallery  
125 Paseo de la Plaza  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

*Members of the public who wish to speak to the Commission during the meeting must submit a “Request to Speak” form to the Board Secretary prior to the commencement of the public comments for each agenda item of interest. Comments by the public on matters not identified on the agenda, but within the subject matter jurisdiction of the Commission will be heard during the item designated as “Public Comments Period.” The length of public speaking time is two minutes, unless the presiding officer grants some other amount of time.

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Meeting called to order at 2:15 p.m. by President Louie. Commissioners present: Alarcon, Collado, Samarjian, Vasquez. Quorum. Also present: General Manager Arturo Chavez, Linda Duran, Darlene Lopez, and Deputy City Attorney Cheryl Soriano.

1. WELCOMING REMARKS.

Commissioner Louie began by recognizing the passing of George Floyd. He stated that Mr. Floyd’s death has created a pivot point in the history of dealing with institutionalized, systemic racism within communities. He stated that El Pueblo has historically been a place of public discourse and called for a moment of silence in recognition of the significance of George Floyd’s passing.

2. ESTABLISHMENT OF QUORUM.

Role was called with Commissioners Louie, Alarcon, Collado, Samarjian, and Vasquez present. Quorum Established.

3. REVIEW AND POSSIBLE APPROVAL OF MINUTES.

3.1. Regarding the minutes of April 16th, 2020: Commissioner Vasquez motioned for approval. Commissioner Samarjian seconded. All approved and the motion carried.

3.2. Regarding the minutes of May 14th, 2020: Commissioner Alarcon motioned for approval. Commissioner Collado seconded. Ms. Soriano advised a roll call vote. Commissioner Louie, yes; Commissioner Samarjian, yes; Commissioner Alarcon, yes; Commissioner Vasquez, yes;
Commissioner Collado, yes. Motion carried. Commissioner Louie asked Ms. Soriano if it would be possible to approve motions so long as there are no objections. Ms. Soriano explained that most Commissions have been performing roll call votes during telephonic meetings for clarity.

4. GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT.

1. Lisanne Magdaleno Lee: Ms. Magdaleno Lee shared with the Commission that a new City Council Ad Hoc Committee had been formed addressing COVID-19 through neighborhood investment and recovery. She stated that this committee had requested $5 million in relief for street vendors to help with equipment and permits to meet regulations. She suggested that this could easily be applied to Olvera Street Merchants.

Commissioner Louie asked Mr. Chavez to take note of this suggestion and see if it could apply.

Commissioner Vasquez shared that the Mayor’s office hired a consultant to help businesses.

2. Greg Berber, La Luz Del Dia, W-1: Mr. Berber shared a general update on his restaurant’s sales, which are still at 90% down. He stated that the City has relied on a visitorship of two (2) million visitors to Olvera Street and wondered if only two-hundred thousand (200,000) could be expected this year. He stated, that without visitors, the Merchants’ rent will be unsustainable. He called for an addendum to be made compensating for these unprecedented situations and that if Councilman Huizar’s motion does not carry through Council, there will be no way for El Pueblo to benefit from the Merchants’ businesses.

3. Edward Flores, Juanita’s Café, E-20: Mr. Flores stated that he agreed with Greg Berber and began by saying the City needs to look at a different way to collect and determine rent. He saw sales beginning to go up over the weekend, but that these took a sudden dip due to the demonstrations occurring nearby. Many Merchants are concerned and uneasy about reopening at this time and have made the personal decision to not reopen at this time. The presence of demonstrators on Olvera Street could prove detrimental to business along with the homeless population on Olvera Street. He warned that one bad incident could tarnish the image of Olvera Street.

4. Vivien Bonzo, Casa La Golondrina, W-17: Ms. Bonzo shared severe concerns about the homeless population being allowed to come on to Olvera Street and that Security is not allowed to touch them. The homeless have become a factor for the neighborhood with all sales dropping. She stated that there has been no support or consideration in terms of rent. She suggested that there be a fence, that can be decorated and made attractive. Also, that the barricades would give Merchants a fighting chance. Ms. Bonzo worried that the homeless will be a serious problem for reopening and expressed concerns over the responsibility over workers’ compensation and that business owners are responsible if workers get sick.

5. COMMUNITY/GOVERNMENT REPORTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS. None.

6. GENERAL MANAGERS REPORT.

6.1. Mr. Chavez explained that at the previous Commission meeting it was requested he provide a report on the non-profit partners and space occupied on Olvera Street. He provided a list to all Commissioners that included eight (8) non-profits on site, with only six (6) having Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) on file. (1) The Historic Italian Hall Foundation (HIHF) occupies 7,410 sq.ft. at the Italian Hall and 390 sq. ft. in the Biscailuz building. HIHF has an MOU on file that requires “in kind” services and fundraisers. (2) Council of Mexican Federations in North America (COFEM) has 915 sq. ft. in the Biscailuz building and 100 sq. ft of storage. COFEM has no MOU on file, but provides “in-kind” services. Commissioner Louie inquired how difficult it would be to obtain an MOU. Mr. Chavez stated that it would require a motion. Commissioner Louie stated that
The Strategic Plan ends in 2020 and inquired if the Commission would be moving forward with the creation of a new one. Mr. Chavez explained that the Strategic Plan had been created by the previous Management. He stated that there was originally $120,000 in place to create a new plan, but those funds, along with $2 million for Pico House renovations, were swept due to the pandemic. Mr. Chavez agreed that there is a need to strategize moving forward, but suggested a new fully encompassing General Plan would be preferable to a Five (5) year Strategic Plan. He explained to the Commissioners that funding is required to bring in an outside entity to assist in the creation of the plan. The Commissioners discussed the possibility of scheduling a special meeting to solely discuss the plans. Commissioner Samarjian suggested that the Commission create a contingency strategy for 2020, explaining that the best practice would be not to embark on the planning process with the current level of ambiguity. Commissioner Louie requested to see a copy of El Pueblo’s budget for the 2020-2021 fiscal year. Mr. Chavez explained that it was currently going through the committee approval process and was still an open document. Commissioner Louie requested a line by line breakdown of the El Pueblo budget. Ms. Soriano explained that the budget documents are available online if he wished to see them.
Public Speakers:

1. Valerie Hanley, Casa California, W-10: Ms. Hanley shared that she previously spoke with the General Manager and Commissioners about reserving a space on Olvera Street for the Olvera Street Merchants Association Foundation (OSMAF). She stated that OSMAF needs storage space and formally requested allocation of space around the Breezeway restrooms for their use. She concluded by imploring that the Commission to fight for the Merchants and to push whomever they could in the City to assist them.

Commissioners Louie and Vasquez discussed with Ms. Soriano what would be appropriate for the Commission to do regarding rent terms and waivers. Ms. Soriano explained that it would need to be agendized for discussion and that the Commission could initiate the process by making formal recommendations to the City Council.

2. Vivien Bonzo, Casa La Golondrina, W-17: Ms. Bonzo warned that without the support of the Commission, many of the larger businesses on Olvera Street would close. She requested that the Commission make a motion and act. She continued that the rent should not go up, but understood that Mr. Chavez was bound by the contract. She brought up Hardship policies as precedent for adjusting the rent. She stated that she felt the City did not want to negotiate on rent and that the role of the Commission, as managers of the Monument, had been obscured.

Commissioner Louie explained that an Ad Hoc Committee had been formed to discuss Merchant concerns and COVID-19. Commissioner Vasquez said she was unaware of these meetings, continuing that the Commission needs to be advocates and shared that she did not feel they were doing enough.

7. DISCUSSION ITEMS.

7.1. Mr. Chavez discussed the reopening of Olvera Street, sharing that meetings had been held with Merchants and that they would need to comply with a list of requirements to reopen. He shared that the Department had created a one-way flow of traffic along each side of Olvera Street and that staff has assisted Merchants with filling out the required forms. He explained that the City has moved into “Phase 3” of reopening, but “Phase 4” will allow public gathering, a necessity at El Pueblo.

Public Speakers:

1. Vivien Bonzo, Casa La Golondrina, W17: Ms. Bonzo complimented Mr. Chavez on his coordination with the Merchants. She expressed concern that the homeless population would deter visitors from coming back to Olvera Street and that the City should ect the Merchants and provide the level of security promised when the City first placed storage trailers for the homeless population on site.

2. Edward Flores, Juanita’s Café, E-20: Mr. Flores expressed concern about the demonstrations occurring around City Hall. He shared his concern about looting, explaining that Merchants would be easily overrun and stripped of merchandise and requested more protection than is currently provided.

3. Valerie Hanley, Casa California, W-10: Ms. Hanley underlined for the Commission that the Merchants have many concerns regarding reopening. With uncertainty around visitorship, many Merchants do not know if they will be able to pay employees. Even with a small amount of rent forgiveness, Merchants would still face a deficit. The businesses are not sustainable without rent forgiveness. She expressed concern that the Council motion was dead and requested that the Commission put this issue on a future agenda for discussion.
4. Lisanne Magdaleno Lee: Ms. Magdaleno Lee stated she had not received any of the information provided to Merchants regarding reopening. She reminded the Commission of her eviction case regarding space E-5 and restated the information she provided earlier in the meeting about the new Ad Hoc Committee and its request for emergency funds.

5. Gina Rodriguez, Mr. Churro, E-12C: Ms. Rodriguez thanked Commissioner Vasquez for her passion. She expressed concern over the intentions to develop Olvera Street, but stated she would not let this happen. She reminded the Commissioners that they have connections and voices and requested for the Commission to help the Merchants.

8. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS.

Commissioner Vasquez requested information regarding Hardship provisions. Mr. Chavez said he would investigate and check in. Commissioner Louie explained in the past the term “hardship” had been applied to establishing rents ten (10) years ago. He continued that this was used when paying the market rate of rent would be considered a “hardship” and Merchants were afforded the opportunity to pay a reduced rate, the reduction would be increased if they allowed their records to be assessed. Commissioner Louie stated he would like to explore some of these topics in depth and e Commissioners’ interest.

9. REQUESTS AND MOTIONS FOR FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS.

Commissioner Vasquez requested a motion to waive all rents for Olvera Street. Commissioner Louie stated that a motion was already placed and recommended to the City Council. Commissioner Vasquez stated that she felt that motion was null and void due to the amount of time passed. She moved to review hardship rent policies and also moved to create a contingency plan to address the economic impact of COVID-19 on Olvera Street. Commissioner Louie suggested she meet with Mr. Chavez to discuss these matters.

Public Speakers:

1. Lisanne Magdaleno Lee: Ms. Magdaleno Lee restated her request from the May 14th, 2020 meeting to have the status of E-5 placed on the next agenda, stating that the eviction was invalid and that she needed access to her business. She also requested recordings of the meeting in progress and the previous meeting.

Commissioner Louie advised Ms. Magdaleno Lee to bring her requests for recordings directly to the Department instead of before the full Commission. Commissioner Vasquez suggested live streaming the Commission meetings to the El Pueblo Facebook page.

2. Vivien Bonzo, Casa La Golondrina, W-17: Ms. Bonzo thanked Commissioner Vasquez for her motions. She referenced the Airport tenant lease renegotiations and suggested a percentage rent rate. She stated that these were included in their proposals to the Commissioners along with a period of rent forgiveness.

10. ADJOURNMENT. – 3:47 PM