Thursday, June 25, 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 2:18 p.m. by President Louie. Commissioners present: Marez, Collado, Garcia, Vasquez. Quorum. Also present: General Manager Arturo Chavez, Linda Duran, Darlene Lopez, and Deputy City Attorney Cheryl Soriano.

1. WELCOMING REMARKS.

1.1. Commissioner Louie introduced the newest Commissioner Fabian Garcia. Commissioner Garcia is an alumnus of the University of California: Santa Barbara. He served as the senior regional programming coordinator for the Mayor’s office. He consulted for the United States for International Development in Mexico, Guatemala, and El Salvador. Currently Commissioner Garcia serves as the Director of Government Relations for Homeboy Industries.

2. ESTABLISHMENT OF QUORUM.

Commissioners Alarcon, DiCostanzo, and Samarjian not present. No Quorum.

5. COMMUNITY/GOVERNMENT REPORTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS. (Taken out of order)

Commissioner Vasquez inquired what the Neighborhood Council was and what its purpose was. Commissioner Louie explained that this refers to the Historic Cultural North Neighborhood Council. Valerie Hanley, Paul Hanley, and Norma Garcia represent El Pueblo at the Council. Ms. Valerie Hanley shared that the Council had just had the first meeting in months regarding encumbering of funds. She stated that El Pueblo representatives were not asked for any input on the agenda.
Rudy Torres, a member of the 51st Assembly District Republican Party County Committee and member of the Knights of Columbus was recognized.

4. GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT.

1. Emily Martinez, Margarita’s, C-7: Ms. Martinez inquired why El Pueblo does not have a history director. She called for a history director to approve signage and work on Olvera Street. She noted that the sun clock was cleaned by previous Management which removed its patina. She shared that some Merchant signs were not in keeping with the historic ambience of El Pueblo.

3. REVIEW AND POSSIBLE APPROVAL OF MINUTES.

Due to an insufficient number of votes to pass, Ms. Soriano stated that approval should be held for the next meeting.

5. COMMUNITY/GOVERNMENT REPORTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS. (Continued)

5.1 Commissioner Louie told the Commission that, as many of them are relatively new, he felt it best to introduce them to the Partners on site. He began by introducing Marianna Gatto, Executive Director of the Historic Italian Hall Foundation. Ms. Gatto explained to Commissioners that the Italian American Museum of Los Angeles operates out of the historic Italian Hall built in 1908. She shared that the area was once home to a large Italian and Italian American population. The Italian American Museum of Los Angeles features an award-winning permanent exhibition both in person and online. She stated that the museum emphasizes technology and has taken the opportunity during the pandemic to update the permanent exhibition. The museum presents two (2) temporary exhibitions every year; Ms. Gatto explained that due to the current circumstances the next exhibition has been delayed until January 2021. Ms. Gatto explained that the Historic Italian Hall Foundation has spent over $140,000 on improvements to the building. They present a number of cultural educational programs including workshops, film screenings, and lectures, many of these have been delayed due to COVID19. Since the beginning of the Stay-At-Home orders, the Italian American Museum of Los Angeles has increased its online presence, creating programming to engage the public online. The Historic Italian Hall Foundation also actively fundraises and hosts a yearly upscale food and wine tasting event in October named Taste of Italy. Ms. Gatto explained that they are projected to lose considerable revenue due to COVID19, as many fundraising events will not be permitted. Ms. Gatto explained that the museum caters to the public and has an active docent group that provides free tours. They have a small staff, hosting several interns every year, with office space in both the Biscailuz Building and in the Italian Hall. Ms. Gatto stated that the Historic Italian Hall Foundation has already purchased equipment and supplies needed for museum and office reopening, as well as planned a deep cleaning of the museum space. She stated that the museum is ready to launch a reservation system to help with visitor contact tracing. Ms. Gatto stated she hoped to reopen in early July, taking aggressive measures to do so. However, after speaking with Management earlier that day, reopening would not take place until later in the summer. She stated she opened to meet with El Pueblo staff in the coming week to further coordinate on reopening. Ms. Gatto concluded that if not all museums are ready to open at once, it would be prudent to allow those that are to reopen. She stated that many visitors come early in the morning and proceed to Olvera Street for lunch. Ms. Gatto wished to see the Italian American Museum of Los Angeles resume its role to the public and aid in the overall recovery of the Park. Commissioner Louie inquired as to what was needed for the Italian American Museum of Los Angeles to have a soft opening. Ms. Gatto explained that the museum needs to finalize some areas in which the City has oversight such as the facility, cleaning, and Museum Guides. She called on the City and the Partners to approach reopening in a collaborative way.
6. GENERAL MANAGERS REPORT.

6.a. Mr. Chavez shared with the Commission that he had met with Merchants several times. The last meeting was on Friday, June 19, 2020. The Merchants submitted a request to the Commission regarding several things. Mr. Chavez stated that Merchant concerns revolved around three major areas: 1) Security, 2) fencing, 3) parking. Additionally, Merchants had requested procedures for those who would not be returning, signage regarding smoking restrictions, and an announcement system. Mr. Chavez stated that El Pueblo Staff had measured the distance required for fencing and had not yet received estimates for the cost. He continued to share that a dedicated Security guard is under consideration and that General Services Parking was looking for a cost estimate on the Merchants’ parking requests. He stated there is no reopening date yet, but said mid-July was a possibility.

Commissioner DiCostanzo entered the meeting at 2:50PM.

6.b. Mr. Chavez stated that in LA County retail may now be open for business at fifty (50%) percent capacity. Mr. Chavez had arranged meetings with Merchants to assist in the protocol for reopening established by Appendix B. He stated that sixteen (16) establishments had reopened. El Pueblo staff has ordered signage and sanitizer for Olvera Street, but were awaiting delivery. He shared with the Commission that plans have the reopening of the Biscailuz Building for July 6, 2020 at twenty-five percent (25%) capacity. El Pueblo’s partners are currently set to return on July 20, 2020. He stated that there are several requirements to be met. These protocols must be filled out and publicly posted, however Mr. Chavez noted that there is no approval process in place by either the County or the City.

6.1 Mr. Chavez told the Commission that the Committee is currently holding meetings for the Mayor’s proposed budget. This process usually begins in December, however due to COVID19, the process has just begun. He stated that El Pueblo’s first meeting was on June 22, 2020 where the Committee requested information on the impact of furloughs on the Department. These furloughs are scheduled to begin July 1, 2020; the Department will be able to maintain its core functions. Partner Departments, such as GSD and Rec and Parks would be more impacted and may impact El Pueblo through delays in maintenance and repairs. The Budget and Finance Committee inquired about the impact on Merchants. Mr. Chavez stated that Councilman Krekorian recognized the unique character of the Olvera Street Merchants and called for aid and requested a report in ninety (90) days.

6.2 Commissioner Louie stated that the objective is to get the motion regarding Merchant rent out of the Budget and Finance Committee to the Council to be approved. Mr. Chavez stated that the only motion currently in front of the Committee is from Councilman Huizar calling for the waiver of two (2) months rent. Commissioner Vasquez stated that this amount of time was insufficient. The Commission discussed the notion of a Councilmember introducing a second motion. It was concluded that the Commission could send a request to the Council and Committee. Commissioner Vasquez inquired to when the Commission would be aware if the motion was up for discussion. Mr. Chavez said that they would know as soon as the agenda is released.

6.3. A creation of a contingency plan to address the economic impact of COVID-19 was requested at the previous Commission meeting by Commissioner Vasquez. Mr. Chavez reiterated that the Council Committee had requested a report back within ninety (90) days which would satisfy Commissioner Vasquez’s request as well.
6.4. On Saturday, June 20, 2020 a group of eighty (80) to one hundred (100) people bound the statue of Father Junipero Serra, located in Father Serra Park, with ropes and tore it from its pedestal. Allied Security was blocked by peaceful protestors. The hands and head of the statue were spray painted red. The statue was removed and safely stored by Rec and Parks. The City has no policy regarding decommissioning or returning statues. Cultural Affairs has assigned someone to assess the damage and cost of repairs.

Mr. Chavez told the Commissioners that the recommendations from the Merchants directly tie into the reopening of Olvera Street and the impact of COVID-19 and said that any recommendations from Commission should be sent to the Council.

Commissioner Louie praised Mr. Chavez on the amount of work he is faced with. He acknowledged the difficult situation Mr. Chavez has been faced with and encouraged him to continue his good work. Commissioner Louie then inquired about writing a letter on behalf of the Commission to submit to the City Council. Ms. Soriano clarified the use of “Ad Hoc.” She stated that the meetings that have been held have been Department Meetings. The convening of an “Ad Hoc Committee” would require Commission action and would be subject to the Brown Act. She suggested making it an action item to formally discuss and create a committee. Commissioner Vasquez stated as City Council District 14 now lacks leadership and inquired who the Commission should communicate with. Ms. Joella Hopkins of CD14 addressed these concerns. The staff of CD14 remain available and are working on behalf of their constituents via proxy when needed. The Commission shared with Ms. Hopkins that they would like to see the motion out of committee and amended. Ms. Hopkins told the Commission that her recommendation was to be aggressive in their follow-up. She stated that the motion has lasted so long because of their consistency and vocal support. Commissioner DiCostanzo suggested a motion to discuss how to be persistent. He stated that when the Council sought a location for the bridge housing, El Pueblo was available. He said this was their turn to support El Pueblo. Commissioner DiCostanzo motioned to formally request Staff and the Commission craft a letter to be sent posthaste to address the motion sitting in Budget and Finance and have it amended immediately.

Ms. Soriano returned to Commissioner Louie’s inquiry regarding action. She stated that the Commission President could transmit a letter or create a motion to request Merchant rent be waived. Ms. Soriano stated that a new motion could be placed on the next agenda, but that a letter would be the most expedient way of communicating the Commission’s opinion to Council. She also reminded the Commission and those listening that nothing bars Commissioners and Merchants from calling the Budget and Finance Committee meeting and making a public comment. Ms. Hopkins concurred that a letter would lend credibility to the motion in Committee. Commissioner DiCostanzo stated that he thought the motion should cover four (4) months of rent at a minimum. He shared concerns that if Merchants are not given any direction or idea of what to expect, more will leave. Commissioner DiCostanzo stated he would wait to make a formal motion until after public comment.

Public Speakers:

1. Christina Mariscal, My Rosa Enterprises, E-14: Ms. Mariscal shared with the Commission that she reached out to her contacts for large events and received three (3) quotes for fencing. She requested communication from Management with Merchants like the communication with Partners. Ms. Mariscal called for a detailed plan and for promotion of El Pueblo to visitors. She shared that she is on the board of the Olvera Street Merchants Association Foundation (OSMAF) and that the organization has over thirty-three thousand (33,000) followers on Instagram and Facebook who want to know what the plan is for reopening.

2. Valerie Hanley, Casa California, W-10: Ms. Hanley explained that the Commissioners received
a letter from the Merchants outlining steps they believe would be the minimum required to reopen. She emphasized a past request for a PA system which would allow the Merchants to play music and make announcements to Olvera Street visitors. Ms. Hanley stated the Merchants would like to place seating in the Kiosko once it is fenced off to allow visitors to enjoy weekend entertainment while social distancing.

3. Emily Martinez, Margarita’s, E-7: Ms. Martinez stressed the importance of public Ad Hoc committee meetings so that all Merchants could be heard. She stated she does not agree with many of the ideas presented by the other Merchants, including fencing and sale percentage-based rents. She reiterated her call for a historical director to protect the historical nature of the Monument.

4. Rudy Torres: Mr. Torres commented on the removal of the Father Serra Statue. He questioned LAPD’s response time. He wanted to know who the reporting party was, who the victim was, and when the statue would be replaced.

Mr. Chavez informed Mr. Torres that the victim was Rec and Parks property. He stated that LAPD took a report as the incident occurred within a matter of minutes. As to the status of the statue, Mr. Chavez shared that it was currently under discussion between the City and the Archbishop.

5. Vivien Bonzo, Casa La Golondrina, W-17: Ms. Bonzo told the Commissioners that OSMAF has done the majority of the work in negotiation with the City. She said that some Merchants have already left, and many are reaching retirement age and unable to comprehend the requirements of the lease when selling to new buyers. Ms. Bonzo offered the knowledge of the Merchants to advise the Commission and Management on what is feasible.

6. Ginette Rondeau, Casa Belen, C-25: Ms. Rondeau stated that she has received a notice indicating three (3) months rent due. She shared that for many of the Merchants receiving a notice of past rent due and the notion that rent may be raised in July is terrifying. She said that the Commissions support was appreciated, amid the uncertainty of the COVID-19 situation.

7. Pablo Sanchez, Andrea’s Gift Shop, C-8: Mr. Sanchez stated that he has not seen any posts on social media regarding Olvera Street and the Merchants call for rent forgiveness. He called for more outreach and said that the public must be involved to amplify the Merchants’ message.

8. Edward Flores, Juanita’s Café, E-20: Mr. Flores stated that some of the Merchants are not as involved. He stated that they are all in harmony, however, regarding rent forgiveness. He reiterated the call for fencing as a precaution to control the entry of unhoused individuals. He believes that the fencing will help encourage more visitors.

9. Gina Rodriguez, A La Mexican Imports and Hecho con Carino, C-4 and W-7B: Ms. Rodriguez called for a lower parking rate to encourage visitation. She called for two (2) hours of free parking or validation to be provided until the end of the year. She said visitors do not have much money to spend, and that they would spend too much on parking. She requested coordination with El Pueblo Staff to link from the El Pueblo website to the Olvera Street websites.

10. Emily Martinez, Margarita’s, C-7: Ms. Martinez spoke again to respond to an inquiry from Commissioner Louie. She stated that she was not a part of the Merchant group who presented a letter to Commissioners and was not aware of the contents of the letter.

11. Valerie Hanley, Casa California, W-10: Ms. Hanley shared that there are usually thirty-six (36) to forty (40) Merchants attending the meetings with Management. She stated that this group has contacted all the Merchants they could to invite them, but when Merchants could choose to not participate. She invited all Merchants who disagreed to participate in the meetings.

Commissioner Louie explained that OSMAF had been involved for many years and that two (2) other groups had met with Management. He stated that he attempted to set up the Ad Hoc committee so the meetings would be public, and all could be involved.
12. Christina Mariscal – My Rosa Enterprises E-14: Ms. Mariscal reminded those listening that they are looking to open Olvera Street safely and securely. She acknowledged that some Merchants may not agree with the plans presented, but welcomed discussion.

13. Greg Berber, La Luz del Dia, W-1: Mr. Berber requested the Commission call for no rent during the closure with six (6) months forgiveness to follow. Moving forward, he requested a three percent (3%) rent rate based on gross sales. Mr. Berber explained that his business went from serving twenty-five hundred (2,500) patrons a week to just three-hundred and fifty (350). He reminded the Commission that the Merchants were asked to change and adapt to the situation, but asked that the City change and adapt in turn. He stated that he strongly believed that the requirements for reopening outlined by Merchants would benefit both the Park and Stakeholders.

Commissioner Louie introduced retired LAPD officer Stephen Saletros. Commissioner Louie stated that Mr. Saletros worked around El Pueblo for many years.

14. Stephen Saletros: Mr. Saletros explained his relationship with El Pueblo and history of his service to the City. He expressed concern over LAPD’s response time and stated it was unacceptable that only a report was taken. He asked the General Manager if there was an intervention on the part of the Mayor telling LAPD to stand down. He asked if there was a dedicated foot beat on Olvera Street with the bridge shelter on site. He concluded that he was concerned and inquired why there was a failure to respond.

Mr. Chavez stated that LAPD did respond to the incident and that he was called directly by the Captain. He stated that LAPD has been extremely limited due to the protests occurring throughout the City. He said the incident occurred quickly and that Staff has been following up with LAPD.

15. Mike Mariscal, My Rosa Enterprises, E-14: Mr. Mariscal said he was proud to be an Olvera Street Merchant. He shared that his family has been on Olvera Street for six (6) generations, with it putting food on his family’s table for ninety (90) years. He stated that most Merchants will not be able to return. He stated that Olvera Street is not ready to reopen and that the safety of all those who work on and visit Olvera Street should be the number one priority. He reiterated the calls for rent forgiveness and emphasized the need to focus on long term solutions for survival. He wondered if Olvera Street would make it to ninety-one (91) years and told the Commission that they must get this right.

7. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS and 8. QUESTIONS AND MOTIONS FOR FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS. (taken together)

Commissioner DiCostanzo made a motion that the El Pueblo Commissioners craft a letter to be signed by the Commission President to encourage or solicit that the motion before the Budget and Finance Committee be heard immediately and amended for a period of six (6) months beginning in March to be revisited for an extension at the end of the six (6) month period. Commissioner Vasquez noted that this would put the end date in August, she suggested that they request six (6) months in addition to the two (2) already called for in the motion. Commissioner Marez was dropped from the call and reconnected. Commissioner Vasquez seconded Commissioner DiCostanzo’s amended motion. Vote Roll Call: DiCostanzo, Yes; Marez, Yes; Garcia, Yes; Vasquez, Yes; Collado, Yes; Louie, Yes. Motion Passes.

Commissioner Louie requested that Ms. Hopkins and Mr. Chavez provide support on the creation of the letter to ensure it was as effective as possible.

Commissioner Vasquez made several requests for future agenda items. First, she requested that video of the Commission meetings be made available to the public. Ms. Soriano said that the request can be
made with the Department and they would be in touch with the Commissioner to address the concern. Second, Commissioner Vasquez shared that while reviewing the Commission by-laws there was a discrepancy with the number of Commissioners required. She requested that Ms. Soriano review the by-laws regarding Commissioner numbers and the number of terms Commissioners may serve concurrently. Third, Commissioner Vasquez requested that Mr. Chavez review the current LAPD contract. Finally, Commissioner Vasquez asked Ms. Soriano to investigate the requirements and process involved with renaming Father Serra Park. She also stated she would be interested in creating an Ad Hoc committee to move that process forward once she knows the steps required.

Commissioner Marez congratulated Commissioner Vasquez on her completion of a master’s program at UCLA. He also thanked Commissioner Louie for his remarks acknowledging the memory of George Floyd at the previous meeting.

8. ADJOURNMENT.

Commissioner Louie called for a roll call to commence meeting adjournment. DiCostanzo, Yes; Marez, Yes; Vasquez, Yes; Collado, Yes; Garcia, Yes; Louie, Yes. Meeting adjourned at 4:42 PM.