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COMMISSION MINUTES Thursday, March 11, 2021 2:00 p.m.

**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: 2:01 PM by President **Louie**. Commissioners present: **Alarcon, DiCostanzo, Marez, Samarjian, Thomas**. Also present: General Manager Arturo Chavez, Assistant General Manager Edgar Garcia, El Pueblo Staff Ailene Ignacio, El Pueblo Staff Darlene Lopez, and Deputy City Attorney Cheryl Soriano.

1. WELCOMING REMARKS.

Commissioner Louie welcomed those in attendance and announced that Commissioner Gerlie Collado was reappointed to a regional planning commission. He asked Mr. Chavez to assist in the creation of a certificate of appreciation for former Commissioner Collado's service.

2. ESTABLISHMENT OF QUORUM.

Commissioners Garcia and Ibarra were absent. A quorum was established.

3. GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT.

Public Speaker: Lisanne Magdaleno Lee.

4. COMMUNITY REPORTS.

4.1 Commissioner Louie welcomed Stephen Nichols, Senior Lead Officer (SLO) of the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) to the meeting. SLO Nichols shared his ten (10) years' experience assigned to Central Division, Chinatown. He was invited to address any concerns, introduce himself to those unfamiliar with him, and to see how LAPD and the Stakeholders of El Pueblo could work together. Commissioner Louie inquired about the role of a Senior Lead Officer, officer assignments to El Pueblo, and what assets are available to El Pueblo. SLO Nichols explained that the role of a Senior Lead Officer

is to act as a liaison between LAPD and the community. They are assigned to a specific area, in SLO Nichols' case, he is assigned to Chinatown which encompasses about forty percent (40%) of the entire Central Division. He is in the area as often as possible, about three (3) to four (4) times a week, in a foot beat capacity. He noted that due to reduced resources and funding the usual foot beat and bicycle patrols in the area have been reassigned. Commissioner Louie shared that security has been of concern at El Pueblo for quite a while. He asked if SLO Nichols had any thoughts as to how to improve security on site. SLO Nichols agreed that security has always been an area of concern at El Pueblo and that he did know some areas in which there could be improvement. He explained that the COVID-19 pandemic has given security a reprieve of sorts with fewer visitors on site. He said that when Los Angeles moves into a less restrictive tier security will need to be enhanced. He said crimes like shoplifting, assault and battery, and criminal trespass must be addressed by security to LAPD. SLO Nichols shared that a new reporting system has launched at lapdonline.org allowing the public to file police reports online. He encouraged Merchants to utilize this system. He noted this will have multiple benefits including freeing up LAPD resources, empowering the Merchants, generating documents to create a paper trail on crimes committed, and establishing a trend to identify chronic offenders. He stated he would be happy to distribute cards with this information to Merchants. Commissioner Louie shared that at previous meetings with LAPD, they found that there was a disparity between crimes reported on site and those in the LAPD records. He noted there was a clear lack of reporting. This new system, created in the last six (6) months, he believed would be a step to assuring activities are reported. Commissioner Alarcon thanked SLO Nichols for the vital information.

Public Speaker: Pete Martinez.

Commissioner DiCostanzo thanked SLO Nichols for his time and asked his perspective on how well El Pueblo's contracted security interacts with LAPD. He also noted that there is a dedicated LAPD force monitoring the El Puente Bridge Housing on site. SLO Nichols stated that El Pueblo's security are the first responders on site. He stated that LAPD are the ones who respond and provide back up. He felt that security at El Pueblo was adequate for pandemic circumstance, but reiterated his concerns for when Los Angeles' restrictions begin to lift. He suggested a meeting between security at El Pueblo and LAPD would be appropriate when restrictions change. He felt this would allow Allied Security and LAPD to come to a consensus on needs and expectations moving forward. Commissioner DiCostanzo commended his proactive approach and asked how the interface between security and LAPD works. SLO Nichols explained that security must call 911 for LAPD assistance. Commissioner DiCostanzo asked if there was a more expeditious form of communication. SLO Nichols said he would share his cell phone number with security, but noted that dialing 911 would be the best option. He noted that stories about dialing 911 and being put on hold or slow answers, can be true. He noted that the best option would be to have multiple individuals call 911 to flag the event faster. DiCostanzo stated he would like to team with the Department to enhance security for guests and Merchants. SLO Nichols noted that El Pueblo is vulnerable given its proximity to Union Station and the Metropolitan Detention Center. He shared that El Pueblo holds a special personal meaning to him as he was married at La Plaza United Methodist Church. Commissioner Louie shared that SLO Nichols is always welcome at El Pueblo's Commission meetings.

Helen Amelga, Deputy Area Director for Council District 14, shared that a colleague attended a meeting with Merchants, but did not have an update to share beyond that. She shared her e-mail helen.amelga@lacity.org with those in attendance. Mr. Chavez noted discussion of this meeting would be discussed in the General Manager's rent waiver report.

5. GENERAL MANAGERS REPORT.

Mr. Chavez began his report discussing operations and the 2020-2021 budget. The Department is at

sixty-five percent (65%) of revenue targets. Most of the revenue has come from facilities usage due to increased filming rentals. The increased filming activity on site has also increased parking revenue as the four (4) active parking lots are regularly rented by film crews. The Department received appropriated funds from the City. He noted that the Department still has expenditures and that sixty-five percent (65%) of the Department's target is not bad, given the circumstances.

Mr. Chavez continued to address the 2021-2022 budget. He shared an explanation of the City's budget cycle with Commissioners. The City of Los Angeles faces a seven hundred million dollar (\$700,000,000) deficit for the 2020-2021 fiscal year and another four hundred million dollar (\$400,000,000) deficit for the 2021-2022 fiscal year. President Biden passed a package with Los Angeles set to receive about one billion, three hundred fifty million dollars (\$1,350,000,000). Mr. Chavez noted that in a meeting with the City Attorney's Office [CAO] last week it was noted that these funds would serve to make the City's budget whole. Mr. Chavez stated that 2021-2022 budget discussions would be continuing with the Mayor's Office and the CAO. When asked by Commissioner Louie, Mr. Chavez explained that the funds received by the Department from the General Fund were an appropriation not a loan.

The majority of security incidents at El Pueblo in February 2021 involved loitering/sleeping and panhandling. About one hundred and seventy-four (174) total incidents were reported by Allied Security for the entire month. That is down from the one hundred and ninety-two (192) reported in February 2020. Mr. Chavez noted that more visitors are attending on the weekends with La Placita Church beginning to hold events once again. There have been about fifty (50) puestos and small restaurants open on the weekend. He shared that the Department is in discussion with LAPD to increase the number of guards on site. He hoped that will be approved in the next week.

Mr. Chavez attended a Merchant meeting hosted by the Olvera Street Merchants Association Foundation (OSMAF) the previous night, Wednesday, March 10, 2021. He stated about forty (40) Merchants were present. They received an update from CD14 on a possible Merchant rent waiver. CD14 did indicate that they would take the information shared with them back to the Councilmember. The rent waiver recommended by the Commission has been submitted to the City Council and CD14. City pandemic rent protocols are still in place, but a direct waiver must wait for Council action. He hoped this would be addressed soon. When asked by Commissioner Louie, Mr. Chavez reiterated the previous motions and actions taken by Council regarding Merchant rent. Mr. Chavez stated that the Commission has done what it can to move this item through to Council. Commissioner Louie also stated that the Commission would assist CD14 in any additional ways. Commissioner DiCostanzo asked Mr. Chavez what the procedure would be to revive the motion on rent waivers brought by the former Councilmember. Mr. Chavez shared that the best course of action would be a new motion. Commissioner Alarcon thanked Mr. Chavez for taking the lead. Commissioner Thomas inquired about the resources included for Los Angeles in the Federal relief package. Mr. Chavez stated that all Departments are looking at the funds and discussions will continue. He shared the most important aspect of the funds is that it would give the City breathing room and help with job security.

Public Speakers: Public Speaker 1, Edward Flores.

6. DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION ITEMS.

6.1 Mr. Chavez noted a correction was needed on the Commission Meeting Minutes of February 25, 2021. He stated that Section 5.5 should be corrected to read that the El Pueblo Park Association received the Haynes Grant. Commissioner Louie also requested to amend Section 6.1 noting that he was comfortable with approving the previous minutes subject to the fact that the public could review the Zoom recording of the meeting. Commissioner Alarcon motioned to approve the minutes of February 25, 2021 as so amended by Arturo Chavez and Commission President Louie. Commissioner Marez

seconded.

Public Speakers: Public Speaker 1, Lisanne Magdaleno Lee.

Vote: Louie, Yes; Alarcon, Yes; DiCostanzo, Abstained; Marez, Yes; Samarjian, Yes; Thomas, Yes. The motion carried.

6.2 Mr. Garcia presented Board Report 21-006 regarding the status of El Pueblo Historical Monument 2016-2020 Five Year Strategic Plan. Mr. Garcia encouraged those in attendance to utilize the YouTube link to view the presentation. This presentation was prompted by a request made by the Commission on January 8, 2021. The 2016-2020 Five Year Strategic Plan was approved by the Commission on February 11, 2016. Three (3) of the current Commissioners were present for the approval. It was created through a collaborative effort of the Commission, Merchants, the public, and previous General Manager Chris Espinosa. Mr. Garcia read the El Pueblo mission statement aloud: "El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historical Monument promotes, safeguards, and preserves the City's birthplace and culturally diverse heritage through the effective management of its commercial and historical resources events." He went on to share the vision statement outlined in the previous strategic plan as well: "El Pueblo will be recognized as an iconic destination in Los Angeles and regarded internationally as a top tier historical site that supports local culture and inspires repeat visitation." The previous Five Year Strategic Plan outlined five (5) themes with a total of sixty-three (63) separate objectives. His report collapsed the previous categories of "pending" and "ongoing" into "Pending" denoted by blue. "In Progress" was represented by green. Red represented "Completed" projects. Mr. Garcia created a new category, "Infeasible," denoted by yellow indicating projects that could no longer occur. He noted that many projects denoted in blue are pending as they have been halted by COVID-19 restrictions. About nine percent (9%) of the outlined objectives are no longer feasible. Twenty-five percent (25%) have been completed and sixty-seven percent (67%) are active or on temporary hold. Mr. Garcia's hope was that this presentation could be part of a discussion on what any future plans may look like. He noted this could be used as a guiding document for collaboration on the development of the next strategic plan. Commissioner DiCostanzo thanked him for the presentation and taking the time to revisit the project and denote obstacles. He noted that several of the items would be perpetually in progress. Commissioner Louie suggested categorizing objectives that would be ongoing indefinitely and identify new strategic objectives. He recalled that the previous General Manager had taken the lead in the creation of the plan and wondered if Mr. Chavez would take the lead. Commissioner Louie suggested the possibility of bringing in an outside consultant to develop a new plan, but recognized the constraints on the Department's budget. He noted this could be a future agenda item for discussion. Commissioner Marez thanked Mr. Garcia for his efforts and requested that a copy of the previous plan be sent to the Commissioners for their review. He hoped that with new Management and new Commissioners the new document would be better than before with timed goals. Mr. Chavez felt this would be a good foundation for the future plan. He noted the Commissioners should look at the objectives and decide what they would like to invest in. Commissioner Marez recalled that during the creation of the previous plan objectives were put in numeration as they were aware some items would take longer. Commissioner Louie felt the proper approach would be to place the strategic plan as a discussion to action item.

Public Speaker: Public Speaker 1.

6.3. Mr. Garcia assisted Commissioner Thomas in presenting a history of the landscaping of El Pueblo and the Commissioner's personal evaluation of the present landscaping. Mr. Garcia expressed his debt to the DWP Associates non-profit who maintain a website with many historic images of El Pueblo and the Plaza. He first showed the earliest rendering of the Plaza created in 1847. He noted the initial location of the Plaza at its 1781 founding is a mystery with the current plaza forming in the 1820s. The earliest group allowed to landscape the originally rectangular plaza was the Los Angeles Water Works

Company under the leadership of William Dryden. The native Sycamore trees held an important role for the native Tongva community of Yaangna. He progressed through images of the Plaza as more landscaping took place. By the 1870s, the Plaza took on the circular shape known today. Los Angeles Water Works installed a fountain at the center of the Plaza where the Kiosko stands today. The Plaza was terraced with three (3) separate levels and rod iron fencing. In one image, the now towering Moreton Bay Fig trees are seen the same height as a small boy standing nearby. Mr. Garcia concluded his presentation with a comparison of aerial images of the Plaza in 1924 and the present day. He noted that El Pueblo's Plaza is the most intact plaza space surviving in California.

Commissioner Thomas said it was a pleasure to see the old images of the Pueblo and noted that trees are an important aspect of history. Commissioner Thomas is a Certified Arborist with the International Society of Arboriculture. He explained that he has been working as an expert arborist for thirty (30) years, as such it is his professional and ethical obligation to make people aware of potential issues with the trees on site. He began with an image of the fallen Moreton Bay Fig from 2019. He said this tree served as a reminder of the need for mindful management of the trees and an opportunity to envision the future of the space. He stated that various factors all contribute to a tree falling. The Moreton Bay Fig trees at El Pueblo are Australian trees that have not evolved defense mechanisms for this part of the world. Additionally, these trees do not typically live beyond one hundred (100) years in the wild. The Moreton Bay Figs at El Pueblo are over one hundred years old. He noted that throughout the trees' lifespan there have been several site and grade changes, he explained that disturbing the roots of a tree inevitably contributes to failure of the tree. He stated that climate change, with hotter, dryer summers, contributes to early death of trees. Commissioner Thomas showed a close-up image of the space once occupied by the fallen tree. He proposed removing any remaining roots and adding additional soil to give any new plantings space to grow. Commissioner Thomas moved on to discuss the three (3) remaining Moreton Bay Fig trees. He noted quite a bit of branch die back, which he shared was an indicator of something wrong with the tree. Moreton Bay Figs are evergreen trees and should have full canopies year-round. Large metal braces were installed in the trees, Commissioner Thomas stated this is done as an extreme step to prevent falling limbs. He compared these metal bars to metal objects left with in a body by a surgeon. He expressed concern for public safety as visitors will often gather under the northern tree. He noted that concrete was recently replaced around the eastern facing tree. He reminded the Commission that disturbing the roots of a tree weakens its system. Commissioner Thomas moved on to discuss three empty tree wells in front of the Biscailuz Building, noting these would be easily rectified. Moving on to the Native Garden he noted a Fichus tree is overwhelming the native Oak tree next to it. These Fichus trees are known as "strangler" trees. He suggested trimming back the Fichus to allow the Oak tree room to grow. Commissioner Thomas suggested the removal and replacement of two [2] dead Pepper trees along Main Street. Finally, he noted a large Fichus tree along the entrance to Olvera Street which he stated was in good condition, but suggested thinning and directional pruning to train it away from the building to avoid property damage. He summarized his findings as (1) a need to replace the Moreton Bay Fig trees, (2) the need to fill empty tree wells, (3) the thinning of the Fichus trees, and (4) removal of dead Pepper trees. With the need to replace the Moreton Bay Fig trees, Commissioner Thomas noted there is an opportunity for the future. Commissioner Thomas recommended planting Coastal Live Oaks; a native tree that has been known to live to over one thousand (1,000) years old. These Coastal Live Oaks grow to the same stature as the Moreton Bay Figs with more benefits. He suggested bringing in a Tree Risk Assessment Qualification [TRAQ] certified arborist to generate a report on the trees. He noted that the City has some TRAQ certified arborists on staff. He shared his e-mail, aaron@northeasttrees.org.

Commissioner Samarjian left the meeting at 3:59 PM.

Commissioners Louie and DiCostanzo praised the thorough report from Commissioner Thomas and Mr. Garcia. Commissioner Thomas confirmed for Commissioner DiCostanzo that pruning the trees is a

typical intervention for trees under stress. Commissioner Louie stated that a previous report from a City arborist had confirmed the trees were sick and inquired what size of replacement tree would be appropriate. Commissioner Thomas recommended a fifteen (15) gallon tree standing about eight (8) feet tall. He noted anything smaller would be vulnerable, but anything too large would be extremely expensive and at risk of root damage. He noted that these landscaping updates would be the Commissioners' legacy. Commissioner Thomas reminded his fellow Commissioners that the towering Moreton Bay Figs were just a few feet tall in 1870 and that two hundred (200) years from now what plant could still be standing. When asked Mr. Chavez told Commissioner Louie that the Commission could instruct the department to follow up with an arborist for a full study and that they could instruct the department to trim and remove trees as needed. Commissioner Louie requested Commissioner Thomas create a formalized motion to bring back at the next Commission meeting.

Public Speakers: Public Speaker 1, Edward Flores, Jim Jang.

7. NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL COMMENTS. None.

8. COMMISSION BUSINESS. None.

10. ADJOURNMENT.

Commissioner DiCostanzo motioned to adjourn. Commissioner Alarcon seconded. Vote: Louie, Yes; Alarcon, Yes; DiCostanzo, Yes; Marez, Yes; Thomas, Yes. The meeting adjourned at 4:14 PM.