COMMISSION MINUTES
Thursday, July 08, 2021
2:15 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.

*As a covered entity under Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act, the City of Los Angeles does not discriminate on the basis of disability and upon request will provide reasonable accommodation to ensure equal access to its programs, services and activities.

Meeting called to order at: 2:15 p.m. by President Louie. Commissioners present: Alarcon, Garcia, Núñez, Thomas. Also present: General Manager Arturo Chavez, Assistant General Manager Edgar Garcia, El Pueblo Staff Linda Duran, El Pueblo Staff Emily Wooten, and Deputy City Attorney Cheryl Soriano.

1. WELCOMING REMARKS

Commissioner Louie welcomed those in attendance in celebration of the Fourth of July.

2. ESTABLISHMENT OF QUORUM

Commissioners Ibarra, Marez, Samarjian, and Thomas were absent. A quorum was established.

Commissioner Louie suggested moving the nomination and election of officers to the next Commission meeting allowing more time for newer Commissioners to consider possible nominations. Commissioner Wirfs inquired about the protocol for the Commission's elections and leadership. Commissioner Louie shared that there is not a historic protocol of rotation, but shared he felt a need to integrate newer members into leadership positions. He shared that Commissioners have served as many as three (3) terms or as few as one (1) term.

Commissioner Samarjian joined the meeting at 2:17 p.m.

Commissioner Núñez inquired if any Commissioners had been nominated or nominated themselves for President or Vice President for the current election. Commissioner Louie was not aware of any Commissioners already nominated for the positions.

Commissioner Thomas joined the meeting at 2:19 p.m.
Commissioner Alarcon wholeheartedly supported Commissioner Louie’s recommendation to move this item to the next meeting. She felt it would give the newer Commissioners an opportunity to learn the process and discuss with their fellow Commissioners. Commissioner Núñez agreed with Commissioners Louie and Alarcon’s reasoning. She requested that Staff forward the Commissioners’ contact information to one another.

Public Speaker:

Edward Flores: Good Afternoon Commissioners. Edward Flores from Juanita’s Café. I was thinking- I was going to say this during Public Comment, but this probably can be put in now at this time. I was thinking that we should entertain the idea of actually having meetings in person now and perhaps having the election actually take place in person as well. I know it’s not necessary to actually see each other, however, I think because it is pertaining to the elections that it effects the Merchants here on Olvera Street as well who is elected. I would think that perhaps it would be better just to have the meeting in person and actually have the election in person.

Commissioner Louie moved the nomination and election of Commission Officers to the next scheduled meeting without objection.

3. GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

Public Speakers:

Lisanne Magdaleno Lee: Good Afternoon Commissioners, this is Lisanne Magdaleno Lee from E-5. Just a question, I wanted to go ahead and request today’s meeting. I will send payment for that and send in payment for the last meeting on 6-10. We had discussed transparency briefly regarding Public Comment before and how it is not published to the Minutes and I understand that some callers that call in that keep going on and on, we know who that is. But it seems like it’s not transparent for the City to not put—they just put the name of the person, but not what they spoke about and that seems one sided. We get to hear the City Attorney’s position, the El Pueblo position, but you don’t get to hear the public speaker comments, which is usually a Merchant. So I’m just making note of that and thank you.

Rosario Calatayud Serna: Good Afternoon Commissioners. My name is Rosario Calatayud Serna and I’m an administrator, I’m an educator, and I’m a consultant for my company: Art Space HP, here in Los Angeles. I’ve worked for organizations like El Museo del Barrio in New York City and the New York Foundation for the Arts. I’m calling today because I’m a new addition to the Mexican Cultural Institute or MCI for short. Where I’m consulting in the areas of strategy and programing and I’m supporting to guide the organization through the next phase and the work they’ve been doing thirty (30) years now in Los Angeles. During these months it’s come to my attention that for whatever reason MCI has not been taken into account for any future planning at El Pueblo, despite being included in the Strategic Plan in the past and despite the fact that the organizations rightful home is the gallery space in El Pueblo. So I’m a little perplexed that the Commission is moving forward with an RFP for programing despite the fact that MCI has already been providing programing that uplifts Mexican culture and heritage at El Pueblo. Even through the pandemic MCI was invited to participate and hosted various talks and lectures. So I’m wondering why the organization hasn’t been heard by the Commission, why is the organization being pushed aside and not granted its request to present its work to the Commission. I don’t really see-- any other organization which requests a special meeting they were to be granted this. The organization now has support of over four hundred (400) individuals who are ready to defend the work, so today I urge the Commission and I ask to provide a full and transparent pathway for MCI to be heard and to continue its work at El Pueblo, as a flagship
organization of Mexican culture and heritage here in the City of Los Angeles, which is the work that the Commission has already identified that is absolutely necessary for the wellbeing of El Pueblo and the City of Los Angeles. Thank you.

Edward Flores: Good Afternoon Commissioners, Edward Flores, Juanita’s Café. I had brought this up several times in the past regarding the homelessness and what appears to be increasing incidents that have been happening here. You will recall, Commission President and General Manager, I sent some photographs, we had seemed to have some nudity here on the street three (3) people on three (3) different occasions a couple of weeks ago. We had one (1) yesterday morning as well. I had three (3) incidents of patrons being accosted yesterday morning, and we had, on Tuesday afternoon, an all-out street brawl here in Parking Lot #3 or just outside of Parking Lot #3 on the sidewalk, where blood was drawn and people were beating each other senseless. I was able to obtain some video of that and I will be forwarding stills from that since it’s a very large file, but it just seems it is escalating and it seems to be on some level a lack of control taking place here and its getting out of hand. When we’re getting to a point where we want to increase visitorship here, but the people that are coming are getting exposed to more and more of this. I’m not the person with the answers regarding this. I don’t know if we need more security or what needs to be done, there’s experts that know how to do this and what needs to be done. But it’s getting pretty bad here and Merchants have been speaking about that amongst themselves that something needs to take place ASAP, because it’s getting out of hand and happening when visitorship is increasing. So perhaps we can look into what we can do about this. Thank you.

Rosalio Muñoz: [Technical issues occurred and left Mr. Muñoz’s comment unintelligible.]

4. COMMUNITY REPORTS

Public Speaker:

Emily Martinez: Commission President, Commissioners, Emily Martinez: independent Merchant. The homeless issues are getting very bad. Several months ago, I mentioned to a couple of supervisors and I’m saying it publically now, we need more security posted at the North end of the street. By the time we call them, they’ve gone or the situation has disappeared but we need to have permanent security at the North end of the street by the taquitos. The other issue is also another public comment, I remember about ten (10) or twelve (12) years ago, Commissioner Louie you were here and so was Commissioner Marez, there were concerns about transparency and that discussion was brought up then about putting everything down in the Minutes. That worked fine, and then the last administration—certain words or sentences were removed, that was under past General Manager Chris Espinosa. And now we’re in an administration where you’re just eliminating what people say in Public Comments but yet the City Attorney or a visitor or somebody else—all their wording is said. That’s one reason why we need a Commission Secretary which we had, we had two (2) in the past. But there’s no transparency in what is going on here in regard to the Minutes. How can we vote, how can you vote when you don’t know what the person in the comments has stated? So this is not right what is going on and it should be changed so that everything that someone says is written down. You really shouldn’t be able to vote on it, because there are no comments written from the person in Public Comments. Thank you.

Valerie Hanley of the Olvera Street Merchants Association Foundation (OSMAF) was advised to speak on the Merchant rental discussions during Item 6.2.
Public Speaker: Rosalio Muñoz: Hi, this is Rosalio Muñoz. What I get on my laptop and what I get on the call is a little different so there was a little confusion. Once I got the Agenda and the Minutes by email after I had received a notice that the meeting was canceled, I studied them and decided we need leadership to our pueblo and the election of new officers and the new budget. [Ms. Soriano requested that Mr. Muñoz mute his laptop due to heavy feedback]. We are starting a fiscal year with a new budget and starting the process of new officers, we need to establish a new normal without the limitations of the pandemic period. A new normal that improves upon the years before as well. Looking at the Agenda and Minutes I have many thoughts about what I would like to say here, but how can I possibly do this within the two (2) minutes so I will ask additional public input under other items. I would like to raise two (2) topics right now, one is the myth that El Pueblo is the start of our City and also strategic planning. First, the pueblo is not the City’s birthplace, Yaanga, the original village here of the Tongva is the birthplace of civilization- of human habitation at this spot. We must renew strategic planning for El Pueblo for the edification of our City, planning that begins to correct institutional deficits of our society dramatized during the pandemic. 

5. GENERAL MANAGERS REPORT

Mr. Chavez began his report discussing the 2020-2021 budget. He noted that the majority of Merchants are open at this time, including three (3) of the four (4) large restaurants on site. Three (3) of the museums have reopened as of June 10, 2021 with substantial attendance. Additionally, the Department has allowed strolling musicians to return to Olvera Street. Mr. Chavez shared that the Department intends to reopen the Plaza Kiosko the weekend of July 10, 2021. He shared the Department is looking over the volunteer entertainment previously on site to move forward with entertainment on a regular basis. Mr. Chavez noted the return of tourist vans and buses, including a promotional vehicle providing free ice cream to visitors. The 2020-2021 fiscal year ended on June 20, 2021. With the help of a General Fund appropriation and a General Fund loan the Department met approximately ninety-one percent (91%) of the targeted budget. This can be largely attributed to an increase in Facilities use fees which created a two-hundred and seventy-four percent (274%) increase of the target goal. Parking met sixty-seven percent (67%) of the target. Rent and Common Area Maintenance (CAM) fees only met three point six percent (3.6%) of the projected target due to the Merchant rent waiver. Mr. Chavez noted that the Department will be able to repay the General Fund loan of six-hundred and fifty thousand dollars ($650,000).

Mr. Chavez noted that work on the Parking Lot #2 restrooms is fully funded and the Department is awaiting Department of General Services (GSD) work dates. Funding has also been identified for the restrooms under the Plaza Kiosko.

Mr. Chavez noted issues with the Merchant Advisory Committee nominations. He shared that not all Merchants were able to be nominated to this body because only the primary signatory on the contracts was eligible. This has been expanded to include all signatories on the contract. Those ballots will go out within the next two (2) weeks.

On March 11, 2021 Commissioner Thomas provided the El Pueblo tree report. Mr. Chavez reiterated the concerns presented in this report and shared that the Department spoke with the City Forestry Officer, Rachel Malarich, and were able to secure a review with Leon Boroditsky, a Tree Risk Assessment Qualification (TRAQ) certified Arborist with the Department of Recreation and Parks. Mr. Boroditsky reviewed the trees at El Pueblo and outlined two (2) possibilities. First, a tree trimming and second, an arboricultural services evaluation. Mr. Chavez shared that a report was completed in August 2020 that did not recommend removal. He noted that, now, as of June 28 2020, there are two (2) bids, one (1) for tree trimming and the other for the tree evaluation. The Department, he shared, would be working with the Bureau of Street Services to assist with funding. Mr. Chavez said the tree evaluation
is relatively low priced and shared the Department would move forward as quickly as possible. The tree trimming, he said, comes with a higher price, noting assistance would be needed to move forward.

Finally, Mr. Chavez provided a security update for the Commission. He stated there has been an uptick in security incidents in the previous months. The month of June saw three-hundred and seventy (370) incidents reported based on Allied reports and Merchant and Visitor calls. The majority of incidents were transient related, with the highest incidents of loitering and sleeping, panhandling, and trespassing. Mr. Chavez noted a few serious issues, including attempted break-ins, public nudity, and trash can fires. Mr. Chavez also shared that there was an attempted kidnapping at the Gallery Restrooms that was averted by Allied Security and LAPD. He noted that most of the issues are common to public spaces, sharing that El Pueblo has twenty-four (24) hour security on site. The Department meets with LAPD on a regular basis and are attempting to address some of these issues, but would require additional funding.

Commissioner Louie inquired if Mr. Chavez had an update on some of the recommendations made for security including circulation assurance, the possibility of security cameras, and budget issues. Mr. Chavez shared that Allied Security will implement the use of an app to assure officer circulation around El Pueblo. He noted discussions with Allied regarding contracting and allocation of budget. Commissioner Louie recalled that security cameras have been discussed multiple times by the Commission over the past decade. He expressed that this may be the time to implement them and requested the Department take time to investigate further. Mr. Chavez shared that cameras have been discussed and noted that further investigation would take place regarding possible cost and monitoring. Commissioner Louie continued to state that one of the primary issues with LAPD is under-reporting. He recalled the new system allowing the public to submit police reports virtually and hoped this system would help justify additional manpower being allocated to El Pueblo. Mr. Chavez shared that the physical cards with information about this system had been distributed to the Merchants. Commissioner Louie suggested the Department follow up with person to person discussions with each Merchant to assure that this system is utilized. Mr. Chavez emphasized that the El Pueblo’s incident reports have been shared with LAPD at meetings. Commissioner Louie noted that LAPD shared that, while incident reports are helpful, crime reports are the basis for LAPD deployment.

Commissioner Beserra Núñez thanked the General Manager for his report. She acknowledged the challenges of the past year, and commended Mr. Chavez for his hard work and progress achieved in spite of the budget challenges. She continued to thank Commissioner Thomas for his work on the tree report. She followed up on the notion of security camera installation and was glad to hear it was being pursued. She encouraged Merchants who take the time to comment publicly at Commission meetings also take time to report these incidents directly to LAPD. Commissioner Beserra Núñez noted that security cameras may be cost effective in the long run as a major deterrent to crime and a supplement to the limited LAPD presence.

Commissioner Wirfs left the meeting at 2:58 p.m.

Commissioner Thomas thanked the General Manager for the update on the trees. He inquired if Mr. Chavez would be able to share any information on the company who would be doing the work. He shared that he has experience with many urban forestry companies noting that some are more reputable than others. He also inquired about the cost of these services. Mr. Chavez noted that the City goes for the lowest bid and expressed that he would be happy to share this information shortly.

Commissioner Louie requested an additional update on strategic planning and the historic cultural programing request for proposal (RFP) discussed previously. Mr. Chavez noted that staff have gone through the Minutes to see which Commissioners indicated interest in participating. He noted there was
not a specific list for interest in the strategic planning meetings. Mr. Chavez shared that more information should be available on the RFP discussion at the next meeting. Commissioner Louie noted that Commissioners Marez, Alarcon, and Beserra Núñez had expressed interest in participating in the RFP discussion. Mr. Chavez noted that Commissioner Marez also expressed interest in the strategic plan. Commissioner Louie requested that all Commissioners think of short and long term objectives that they would like to achieve over the next twelve (12) months to five (5) years.

Commissioner Louie continued to inquire how much money had been allocated for the Plaza Kiosko restrooms and if any ADA access would be created. Mr. Chavez noted that there is no ADA access to these restrooms as they are underground. To update these restrooms, Mr. Chavez stated the Department is looking at a range of one hundred to two hundred thousand dollars ($100,000 - $200,000). Commissioner Louie inquired about the renovation timing on the Lot #2 restrooms. Mr. Chavez shared that he hoped renovation would begin last month, but the Department was awaiting GSD scheduling.

Public Speakers:

Rosalio Muñoz: A couple of questions: How will the budget information be made available to the public? I’m particularly interested related to cultural activities. Also, particularly last week, last meeting there was talk of a possible curator for the Pueblo and what that might entail and where that is in the budget. Also, I think that in the report there should be reports of communication from the community, from organizations, in particular, I am on the Mexican Cultural Institute community advisors and a representative in that regard and we have sent a communication to the Pueblo about what our status is and bringing input on what we feel was mistreatment of the Institute, and also how to correct the information about that. And we will be pursuing that in the future. I know there’s a lot of other things you have to do and you’re working away on them and that’s admirable, but on this issue we haven’t had all that much going and I truly believe that MCI can get some good programing starting next week or next month, but in any event we’ll keep in communication flowing.

Edward Flores: Good Afternoon Commissioners, Ed Flores, Juanita’s Café. Couple of things: the bathrooms, whoever you get to do it, please don’t get the ones that did the ones in the Gallery. I’ve never seen a group of individuals work so dang slow, I mean we had price over runs, snafus, you name it and it happened. Any kind of delay that was possible happened there. That building across the way behind the Terminal Annex got built in the same time as it took to build these bathrooms, nearly two (2) years. Which is an absolutely ridiculous amount of time, so we definitely need to look at somebody else a little more competent. On another note, regarding the security cameras, that’s a brilliant idea. Way back when Chris first came on we talked about blanketing El Pueblo in Wi-Fi, there’s plenty of Wi-Fi cameras that can be set up in multiple locations that work on either solar power or long life batteries. And you can carry around a mobile device, such as a phone, and monitor off your phone actually and see the cameras there. Also utilize them for recording so that we can see incidents that take place when eyes are not actually on those things and we can see break-ins, tagging, and so forth to actually have an idea of who is doing these things. That would be a very good option to use cameras mounted with a Wi-Fi system set up on those and, in fact, even Merchants could monitor them as well on their own devices, to be looking out when security is not able to be watching at all times. And so I think that this would be a very good fix for that using some kind of system integrated in that regard. Just wanted to make a recommendation. Thank you.

Emily Martinez: Hi, Emily Martinez, E-7, independent Merchant. I think I would like to see something done this year from the Commission and security is a number one priority. Who will be securing the restrooms in the future when they’re finished? You have some in the Breezeway taking care of that which is good. And Security Cameras- we’ve been talking about this for years. Are we going to talk
about it for more years? The Federal Government gave the City of LA over a billion dollars and I can't believe that we can't get some of that money, or more if we've gotten any, to take care of the birthplace of Los Angeles. Well obviously there were Native Americans here before, but this is the birthplace- this is where everybody comes and I would like to see something done about this because we just keep talking about it. We've been talking about cameras for over fifteen (15) years. Also business is still not good, especially during the week, a lot of shops don't open and many of those busses that all of you see out there- they're layovers. Especially some of those school buses, they take them to City Hall so they can attend the meetings or they go somewhere else- the Disney Concert Hall- and then they all come to Olvera Street and layover. Europe is not open yet to bring visitors to Los Angeles, that I'm aware of. My sister lives there, and right now, Europeans are not coming to America at the moment. So business is still bad, we depend on our local and people visiting from other parts of the United States. On the weekends its busier, but on the weekdays it's very bad and we're nowhere near 2019. And 2019 and 2018 and 2017 before, they were not good either, but we're not anywhere near that. Security and the security guards should be a top priority because what our visitors are seeing is embarrassing and they look at the Merchants and they blame us. It's not our fault. We need good, top security and the cameras should be done, that's another priority as well. Thank you.

6. DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION ITEMS

6.1 Commissioner Alarcon motioned to approve the El Pueblo Commission Meeting Minutes of June 10, 2021. Commissioner Beserra Núñez seconded the motion.

Public Speakers:

Rosalio Muñoz: On the Minutes, there's several additions that were not in there. I don't know about corrections. But I know in the discussions that were held about the RFP and the consultation of Commission members with the General Manager- that there was discussion about the provisions of the Brown Act and what is the best way to approach the accountability or how open that is to the public and discussion. So I think that should be noted in the meeting itself. I second the mention, I think it might have been twice by other speakers, that the discussion that comes in the public discussion that is brought forward should be referred to. It's obvious to me for example in the last two (2) meetings that the testimony about dangerous and threatening incidents have prompted the attention of the Commission. And I think have added to the interest and the knowledge and looking for alternatives and for more police protection, which stimulated from the community, especially from the Merchants. So those are very important things that are not acknowledged in the records of the group. That diminishes the importance, it's not enough respect for the Civic participation and discussion that the community brings. So that is input on the Minutes that I wanted to make. Thank you.

Emily Martinez: Again, the Minutes, if I had to call in and say something I said wasn't written down or anything I can't do it because you're not writing everything. And when we had our Commission assistants or secretaries they translated everything. The packet would have been five (5) pages, ten (10) pages, twenty (20)- however long the Minutes. But it's not fair that I hear a Merchant, Lisa Magdaleno, requesting a copy of the Minutes, whereas if you had printed it all out on the email she could have downloaded it and not have to go pay to get something that anywhere else you go the Minutes are printed with everything that is said. So I would ask you to again consider putting what the Public Comments is because it's not right that you're voting on this. I'm sorry- this is not transparent. And that way, that anybody that wants information they can go to it, especially the Merchants- we shouldn't have to go and pay for this transcription or the tapes on this. That should be on the table when we go to meetings, whether on the table or on the internet, on the email we can print it out at least we have it. So I ask you again, to review this because this is not transparency and some of you Commissioners that have worked in the community you know what I'm talking about. That people are
able to say I didn’t – you didn’t put down what I said or you said it incorrectly. Thank you.

Lisanne Magdaleno Lee: I’m going to chime along here- the Minutes are incorrect because this is a dishonest representation of transparency, of issues presented at this Commission meeting. You’re not giving the full subject matter- as the other gentleman said, respect. Because on the last meeting I asked what is the jurisdiction of the Commission, it was loosely defined by City Attorney Soriano so that helped clarify what I’ve been asking for, but that should be in the Minutes. Because if somebody else comes in here or a new Commissioner is looking at this then it’s in the Minutes and you can see it. What can this Commission do and not do? Can they approve a long term contract? No, they can only approve three (3) years. Can they approve any kind of rent reduction not going to Council Budget and Finance? No, they can’t it has to go to Council for a vote. It is a violation of the Brown Act because you’re not giving the representation of the public and they’re getting a different view of what this Commission is doing and the City of Los Angeles Thank you.

Vote: Louie, Yes; Alarcon; Yes; Garcia, Yes; Beserra Núñez, Yes; Samarjian, Yes; Thomas, Yes. The motion carried.

6.2 Mr. Chavez introduced the presentation and discussion related to the rent proposal from the El Pueblo merchants for Fiscal Year 2021-2022. He stated that the presentation would be coming from a group of Merchants, he noted that this group did not represent all contracts represented on Olvera Street. Management and this group of Merchants have been in negotiations on the topic of rent. Mr. Chavez stated that as of April 2020, there has been no rent collected from the Merchants per Council motions and actions. There was an additional arrangement made for the months of March, April, and May of 2020. Mr. Chavez stated, considering that this is a new fiscal year as of July 1st, rent was set to be due. Merchants visited his office and indicated that the economy and tourism had not yet recovered. He requested a representative from these Merchants address the Commission. Mr. Chavez noted that just before the meeting another Merchant submitted an alternative proposal. Mr. Chavez stated Valerie Hanley would speak on behalf of the group of Merchants who had been in discussion with Management.

Commissioner Louie noted that typically the negotiations for Concession Agreements would occur directly with the General Manager and the City Attorney. He continued that the General Manager would then issue a recommendation to the Commission for consideration. Commissioner Louie clarified that this presentation was an effort to keep the Commissioners apprised of the discussion and look for possible direction as the Commission may not negotiate leases themselves. Commissioner Beserra Núñez inquired if the Commission could make recommendations. Ms. Soriano confirmed that the Commission is able to provide input, but that the ultimate decision would come from the City Council. Commissioner Alarcon asked Ms. Soriano what format any recommendations may be presented in. Ms. Soriano shared a few ways the Commission may make recommendations. She stated that the Commission could take a vote to make a recommendation. She noted, as always, Commissioners may provide their own individual input to the Department or Councilmembers. All of this, she said, could be written or incorporated as part of either the Department’s report or as a cover letter indicating the Commission’s action. She noted, in any case, whatever occurs will be provided to City Council either through a Departmental report or a cover letter. Commissioner Louie reminded those present that there are several groups of Merchants who may have additional desires to negotiate on their own behalf.

Valerie Hanley shared that she is speaking representing approximately forty-one (41) businesses with a few still waiting to sign on. She shared that they initiated talks with Management regarding the upcoming rents and presented a proposal to the General Manager. Ms. Hanley said they wanted the Commission to be aware of the discussions and hoped they would give direction to the Department and make the City Council aware of their direction. She noted that visitation has seen some improvement on the weekends, however she said this has not always translated to increased sales. She stated that
most Merchants are at a thirty-five to forty-five percent (35%-45%) range of their 2019 sales. Ms. Hanley noted several issues fueling uncertainty including Covid19 variants causing the City and County to backtrack on lifting of restrictions. She also indicated that the County has extended the eviction moratorium through September 2021. Ms. Hanley stated there are no international visitors to El Pueblo and shared an increased aggressiveness in incidents involving transients. A few museums have reopened, and Ms. Hanley acknowledged the Departments efforts to hire more Museum Guides. She stated many of the Merchants rely on Olvera Street as their sole source of income and noted that most Merchants have not been able to receive additional financial assistance. She said that the Merchants are asking the Commission’s support to keep the negotiations going with Management and allowing for a percentage of rent and common area maintenance (CAM) fees to be paid increasing over a period of time.

Mr. Chavez reminded the Commission that any changes would go through the City Council. He noted that the Department is run through a special fund to be paid out to the City. The Department has felt the impact of the pandemic in similar ways, including an impact to LAPD funding. Mr. Chavez stated it is important to note that the Department needs to be able to continue with operations based on rent resources, parking, and special events. He shared that if the Department may once again be required to take loans from the General Fund if revenue goals are not met.

Commissioner Alarcon suggested the collective efforts of the Commission body to support the General Manager to continue the negotiations. She spoke of Mr. Chavez previous negotiations and work with City Council on the rent waivers. She emphasized that this is not an easy endeavor, but she spoke of previous accomplishments and her confidence in Mr. Chavez leadership. Commissioner Thomas inquired about the percentage of rent waiver. Commissioner Louie expressed that he sensed the exact rate is what is in negotiation. Commissioner Louie outlined three (3) items including, (1) encouraging Management to continue negotiations, (2) that the General Manager uses good judgement to ensure that the Department is solvent and that it is within its budget and (3) that the merchants suggestion that they continue negotiations is supported. He noted that a percentage of rent may not be the only path of negotiation on the rents. Mr. Chavez stated that the Department was seeking direction from both the Merchants and the Commission and hoped to keep the Commission aware of the proceedings. Mr. Chavez noted that the Department must be fiscally responsible to assure operations. He shared that the Department would come back to the Commission with a full report.

Commissioner Beserra Núñez thanked Mr. Chavez for enlightening the Commission on the budget challenges. She reiterated her fellow Commissioners’ confidence in Mr. Chavez’s leadership. Commissioner Louie reiterated proposed guidance including (1) that Management continue negotiations, (2) that the City and Department’s financial wellbeing be a priority in those negotiations, and (3) that the suggestion of a percentage of rent reduction appears to be a viable alternative to be included in the continued negotiations. Commissioner Thomas requested Commissioner Louie repeat his recommendations due to a technical issue. Ms. Soriano clarified that, as only instruction was given, a vote was not required.

Commissioner Louie experienced technical difficulties and asked Commissioner Alarcon to take over leadership of the meeting if he lost connection.

Public Speakers:

Emily Martinez: Thank you Commissioners and our General Manager. We are self-sustaining on Olvera Street and I don’t think Valerie had just mentioned how difficult it is. You do not know how difficult it is. Many of you get your checks and we depend that maybe there’s a few that might survive this but most of us depend on sales on a daily basis and they are not there. Like it was or it could be and General
Manager you can put your thinking cap on, you’re our Solomon, go and try to get the money for us. The City should be taking care of us, I’m sorry to put it in that way. We’re what made Olvera Street what it is and it’s going to be very difficult and we need help with the rents. So I think the City in the past has taken money from our budget, because we had budget little money left and they took it, I don’t think it ever got paid back, that’s fine, we’re all the City. But the City should be helping us with the money they’ve been receiving from the federal government and its going to be very difficult for everyone. I don’t know if any of you are self-employed to see how difficult it is when you have to pay rent, you have to pay your apartment, you have to pay this and that an example was that the County and State and Federal have seen that it’s going to be difficult for people to get back on their feet. So whatever help you can do you should do it for the Merchants. Because it is very difficult and it seems good because we have buses out there and that’s the most we’ve seen, we have the tour buses there, they are layovers from Antelope Valley Transit and everything so you need to help us, the City needs to help the Merchants, and I want to thank Arturo for the parking work with the Merchants and we appreciate that, could have been a little less, but thank you anyway.

Edward Flores: The things that we’ve been asking for, like cameras, PA Systems, Security upgrades, we’ve been asking for these things for years. Years back when we were paying full rent and still didn’t get these items. When there was actually an abundance of revenue, even surpluses, we never got these things. It always comes off as sounding as us being unreasonable asking for things now when we’re not paying rent. The truth is we’ve been asking for these items for years. One source of revenue that we should be asking for is the money that was lost when they took Lot #5 away and the Mayor’s office and the Council office told us that they would replenish those funds, we never got that money. My understanding was about $175,000 a year and we never got that money. There are years of that money that they owe us, that’s a heck of a lot that could be spent on Olvera Street and upgrades and so forth. And then finally, regarding the negotiations for the rents. You know, it’s not unreasonable what we’re asking for to start off with some discount and then go increasing along the way as business and the economy get moving along. So that’s really what we’re asking for and the Merchants that are in this particular group of 41 we represent about 70% of the Merchants on the Street, a significant majority, and those others that are also negotiating is well within their rights but ultimately everyone’s going to end up with the same type of deal, because whenever we get the terms of any kind of negotiation that takes place here, whatever the most favorable terms are that would seem to get extended to everybody regardless of what group they are in or who they represent they always get the most favorable terms extended to everybody so regardless of you being in this group or that group whatever gets to be determined is going to get extended out to everybody else. Thank you.

Lisanne Magdaleno Lee: Thank you, Linda. Just a quick note. As I’m reading this regarding the reduction of the rent I’m still on a percentage or partial percentage of what we’re talking about, the street isn’t at fully being opened, you don’t have tourists, you don’t have the schools coming in, you don’t have the museums open, so even going into this negotiation to discuss something with the City if you’re not open fully how do you expect these people, the Merchants, to pay 25%, 20%, 15% you’re not fully open. Olvera Street is a different venue it is an event space it is, you have festivals there and it hasn’t been like that and even before that because of the homeless issue with bridge housing it went down the tubes with Mayor Garcetti’s bridge housing he put through and that was a nightmare with naked people running around and the schools didn’t want to come. I know personally several teachers that said there’s no way I’m going down there with the way it was prior to Covid. So, by even asking for a percentage I think you need to weigh in what a full opening is and look over at Santa Monica or the pier area to see what’s going on down there cause that’s not fair to ask these people. Yes, they had the rent waiver thank you so much to the City Council for doing that for the Merchants of Olvera Street. That’s wonderful. But even expecting them to come in and do a percentage of whatever the rent is they’re not getting the people to come in so you see what I’m saying you’re going around in circles here and if the variant hits you’re going to be stuck with this again and lastly I’m sorry if I go over because you are going to the
City Council with this I have a suggestion, is there a way to amend this contract, because there was no force majeure issued into the contract before, we found that out. That doesn't apply here. Now is there dialogue that can go with the City Attorney's office and with the El Pueblo Department to put in language like that because we will have this again the way these variants are going.

Greg Berber: Good Evening Commissioners, Greg Berber from La Luz del Dia Restaurants. I just want to remind everyone that we are a hyper niche marketplace, a Mexican marketplace. Many other businesses can pivot to different items and different foods, different preparations to try to survive the current economy we are in. For us, we’re stuck with what we presented when we signed our lease, on our leases it shows what we’re supposed to sell and the only things we can sell. Me, I base my sales, in terms of survivability on the weekends. Because in the past years the weekends are always okay for the balance of the week, Monday through Thursday, and we are still not at a level where I can pay my full rent and if I can’t pay my full rent that means I will have to close. And if I close then that means there are less customers that will come to the street to support the other businesses which will then in turn cause them to close. And if rents from Merchants is one of the biggest incomes for the street, for El Pueblo, how is El Pueblo going to pay their expenses if there’s no Merchants left. We are the human resource that is part of this cultural landscape and if the City does not support us, then that means there will be no more El Pueblo. If there’s no more El Pueblo, then what is the City supporting they need to make sure that this cultural icon, Olvera Street, remains. Please know that we need this support. Thank you.

Commissioner Alarcon thanked Mr. Berber for his input and comments. She stated it is important and vital that, as Commissioners, they hear everyone’s voice. She reiterated that this comes full circle and expressed that it was evident that all parties needed each other to survive this experience. She said it has hit with a financial impact, cultural impact, and all types of unprecedented impacts. She felt negotiations were key and that it was important to make it work for everyone. She encouraged everyone to continue voicing their experience and negotiating. She thanked the General Manager and Merchants for their work together.

Commissioner Louie asked that Commissioner Alarcon to chair the remainder of the meeting.

Commissioner Thomas asked where the City would find the resources to keep El Pueblo going. He complimented Mr. Berber’s description and his contextualization of the ripple effect. He shared that the Commission is committed to finding resources to assure El Pueblo continues.

Mr. Chavez shared that he appreciated the comments and shared that there have been several attempts from the City and Department to secure funding. Unfortunately, he said, some of these funds were not available to El Pueblo.

Commissioner Beserra Núñez thanked all of the Merchants and community members who have made comments. She shared that she is new to El Pueblo and continues to learn the structure and interconnections. She hoped to assure the Merchants that all the Commissioners, the General Manager, the Administration and staff are very concerned with the survival of El Pueblo and Olvera Street. She said the Merchants are key to the continuation of our legacy, cultural heritage, tourism, and economic development. She wondered if the Mayor’s office would be aware of other avenues to acquire resources.

Commissioner Wirfs rejoined the meeting at 4:02 p.m..

Commissioner Samarjian left the meeting at 4:03 p.m.
7. NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL COMMENTS

Valerie Hanley shared that there were no community impact statements impacting El Pueblo.

8. COMMISSION BUSINESS

Commissioner Beserra Núñez inquired if these items would be placed on the July 22, 2021 Agenda.

Commissioner Wirfs shared a meeting would be convened on July 21, 2021 by the working group regarding the Anti-Chinese Massacre Memorial. He stated a report back on this meeting might be well received by the Commission.

9. ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Alarcon adjourned the meeting at 4:11 p.m.