



**SPECIAL MEETING
HISTORIC LANDMARK COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES
MAYOR'S CONFERENCE ROOM – 10TH FLOOR
AUGUST 11, 2011
5:00 P.M.**

The El Paso Historic Landmark Commission held a Special Meeting in the 10th Floor Conference Room, City Hall Building, 2 Civic Center Plaza, August 11, 2011, 5:00 p.m.

Chair Riccillo called the meeting to order at 5:08 p.m.

The following Commissioners were present:

Mr. Joe Riccillo, Chair
Mr. Hugo Gardea, Vice-Chair
Ms. Stephanie Fernandez
Mr. Joel Guzman
Mr. Ricardo Gonzalez
Mr. Randy Brock
Mr. Jim Booher
Mr. David Berchelmann

The following City Staff were present:

Ms. Debbie Hamlyn, Deputy City Manager, Community Services
Mr. Robert Almonte, City Attorney's Office, Assistant City Attorney
Ms. Providencia Velázquez, Planning, Historic Preservation Officer
Mr. Tony De La Cruz, Planning, Planner

SWA Representatives:

Ms. Ying Hung
Mr. Gerdo Aquino



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I. Presentation regarding the proposed redesign of San Jacinto Plaza.

Staff Contact: Providencia Velázquez, (915) 541-4027, velazquezpx@elpasotexas.gov

Ms. Hamlyn thanked the Historic Landmark Commissioners for calling this special meeting to present the most recent redesign of the San Jacinto Plaza plan. She also thanked Mills Property for their working with the city in funding the proposed San Jacinto Plaza design and selection of SWA in the redesign of the Plaza. Mills Property requested that the City of El Paso hold public meetings and gather public comment. During those public meetings, SWA presented a number of concept plans of the redesign of the Plaza. From those public comments and suggestions came ideas that were incorporated into the design.

Following the conclusion of those public meetings, SWA presented their final proposed plan to City Council. At that City Council meeting, Council heard additional public comment and suggestions regarding the design, the traditional look of the design, the "Los Lagartos" sculpture, etc. During that same time, Dover Kohl & Associates submitted their comments and suggestions. In their findings, Dover Kohl & Associates noted that the Plaza is located in the Downtown historic district.

Council Members were very excited about SWA's concept plan; however, Council Members were also very sensitive to the comments and suggestions from members of the public. Council Members directed Ms. Hamlyn and staff to meet with Dover Kohl & Associates to review the concept plan; however, Council requested that staff retain as much creativity as possible and to incorporate a more traditional look.

Simultaneously, the conservator for the "Los Lagartos" sculpture was contracted to review the current condition of the sculpture. Ms. Hamlyn noted the conservator performed a detailed analysis of the sculpture to determine if the sculpture could remain outdoors. The City recently received the conservator's findings. Due to the extent of the water and sun damage the sculpture is in need of restoration. The conservator determined that the "Los Lagartos" sculpture may remain outdoors;

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however, in order to remain outdoors the sculpture must first be removed, restored and then returned to the Plaza *in a protected/shaded location*.

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Per the conservator's findings, with proper care and treatment, should the sculpture survive five years outdoors in the elements, the sculpture could remain. If not, the sculpture would be removed and stored indoors to prevent further deterioration.

Today, Ms. Hamlyn explained, SWA representatives will present the original concept plan and the re-adaptation of the plan per staff and Dover Kohl & Associates comments and the conservator's findings. Next week, Ms. Hamlyn will post on the web comments from today's meeting, comments from staff, from Dover Kohl & Associates and the conservator's findings. In approximately two or three weeks a City Council Sub-Committee meeting will be held.

At this time, Ms. Hamlyn introduced Mr. Gerdo Aquino and Ms. Ying Hung of SWA.

Mr. Aquino and Ms. Hung gave a PowerPoint presentation.
(Copy of presentation on file.)

COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

1. Commissioner Booher thanked SWA for the presentation. He found the proposed redesign reflected comments and suggestions stated at the last public meeting. He then commented on the following:
 - a. Restrooms;
 - b. Acknowledgement of Mills Avenue and the Plaza as a stronger node, softened edges in terms of the grid;
 - c. 12 Travelers project; and
 - d. Interpretative Wall and opportunities for Public Art.

2. Vice-Chair Gardea also thanked SWA for their paying more respect to the historic pedestrian paths and commented on:
 - a. The bellbottom layout to the walkways;
 - b. Width of the proposed walkways;
 - c. Three foot elevation drop from the edge of the Plaza to the top step;
 - d. City of El Paso Transportation Department and encroachments;



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- e. Planting mature trees; and
 - f. "The Devil is in the Details" comment – café, retail kiosk, stage, etc and how those elements will be manifested and constructed.
3. Commissioner Berchelmann commended SWA on their new conceptual design. He added it looks very nice and does pay respect to the history of the Plaza.
- a. Regarding the proposed relocation of the "Los Lagartos" sculpture, that location will require an immediate canopy of mature trees;
 - b. Seating – will it be secured into the ground or picked up and stored at night;
 - i. If picked up and stored at night:
 1. Will there be on-site storage underground or
 2. Storage facilities across the street?
 - c. Refurbishing an El Paso street car to be used as a retail kiosk; and
 - d. Nighttime lighting and its effect on the trees, surrounding buildings, public art and interpretive wall, safety, etc.
4. Commissioner Fernandez really liked the proposed concept design and the incorporation of the senses. Per the renderings, Commissioner Fernandez envisioned spring and summer activities; however, what activities/design concepts/flexibility will be available during the winter season, minus the tree canopies?
- Mr. Aquino proposed focusing on the lighting component from October through February; connecting the right programming to the seasons.
5. Commissioner Guzman thanked and commended SWA for incorporating the comments and suggestions of the Commissioners. He preferred the rectangular, linear walkways rather than the proposed curved walkways.
6. Chair Riccillo thanked and commended SWA for incorporating staff, Dover Kohl & Associates and the Historic Landmark Commission comments so quickly.

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PUBLIC COMMENT

Chair Riccillo opened the floor to public comment. He allowed two minutes for each speaker and requested members of the public be respectful and succinct.

1. Mr. Jesús B. Ochoa, representing El Paso – Juarez – Las Cruz Inc. organization, spoke in opposition to the proposed design. He requested the Plaza be redesigned as it originally was.
 - a. He suggested the City seize the parking lot north of the park, by eminent domain, construct a dome and have the El Paso Symphony play there.
 - b. He stated surely there is a way to permanently preserve the Jimenez sculpture.
2. Mr. Al Soto stated he kind of likes the proposed design; however, he proposed relocating the “Los Lagartos” sculpture ten (10) feet to the west, nearer the proposed water park. He was worried that the sculpture would be too close to the Christmas tree.
3. Mr. Miguel Juarez concurred with Mr. Ochoa’s comments. He felt this was a great opportunity to bring back El Paso’s history. He remembers the excitement of coming to the Plaza to see the live alligators. He stated that is what we need to recreate; perhaps a little bit of both history and excitement.
 - a. He stated that he had submitted over 85 comments, in the form of a petition, to the Mayor yesterday and wondered if those comments had been incorporated into the proposed design presented today.
 - b. He commented on city ordinances regarding the San Jacinto Plaza’s exemption from historic guidelines.

To Mr. Juarez, Ms. Hamlyn responded, all comments (internal staff, Dover Kohl & Associates, the Historic Landmark Commission and the conservator) were incorporated into the design and would be posted on the web.



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To Mr. Juarez, Mr. Almonte commented on city ordinances as they pertain to the San Jacinto Plaza.

4. Ms. Norma Chavez, private citizen, commented on the following:
 - a. There are fifteen (15) historical markers located within the San Jacinto Plaza and that the city ordinances have no capacity to override the State or the Federal Government.
 - b. Regarding the historical marker requirements, the "Los Lagartos" group may petition the Department of Interior.
 - c. Additionally, the "Los Lagartos" group had concerns regarding the proposed restoration and relocation of the Jimenez sculpture and the five year reassessment and/or possible removal of the sculpture.

Ms. Chavez thanked everyone for their hard work adding this is a sensitive issue for everyone. She urged support establishing a new, updated Plaza that will serve as a public space for everyone.

5. Mr. Armando (inaudible) stated he really likes the proposed concept.
 - a. He concurred with Mr. Ochoa's comment regarding bringing back a little more flavor.
 - b. He likes the flared entrances to the Plaza.
 - c. He had concerns regarding the proposed water park:
 - i. Does the water stay on all the time?
 - ii. Where does the water go?
 - d. Size of the area in front of the proposed stage at the center of the Plaza;
 - e. Biggest concern is the Jimenez sculpture, he would like some assurance that the sculpture will be returned following the restoration.

Ms. Hung and Mr. Aquino explained the intricacies of the proposed water park. Mr. Aquino explained approximately 200 to 300 people can occupy the space in front of the stage.



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Ms. Hamlyn commented on the Trustee's Plan and Agreement between the City and the Trustee. She assured everyone the sculpture would be brought back to the Plaza.

Discussion closed to Commissioners.

To Staff, Vice-Chair Gardea researched the ordinance creating the Downtown Historic District which states the non-contributing properties are not subject to guidelines. He found the ordinance had been repealed.

1. He requested staff ensure the ordinance was in fact repealed.
2. Additionally, the ordinance language states the non-contributing properties are not subject to guidelines; however, the language does not state they do not require a Certificate of Appropriateness.

Mr. Almonte suggested staff place an item on the next HLC agenda for further discussion.

Chair Riccillo commented on the conceptual design and the budget. He stated that sometimes the design changes due to the budget, conditions or the materials chosen. Although Commissioners do not have purview, he explained, Commissioners would like to see the design as it progresses.

Ms. Hamlyn would gladly oblige Commissioners and added it is the City's desire, collectively, that this be a community project. Should Council approve the conceptual design, the design process will take place with continued oversight and review. City Council, City Manager and Staff are very sensitive to the Historic Landmark Commission's comments, input and suggestions regarding the overall design.

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Commissioner Booher asked Ms. Hamlyn as you define and develop the schematics and design, will the budget be in concert with the conceptual design?

Commissioner Guzman left the meeting. (6:40 p.m.)

To Commissioner Booher, Ms. Hamlyn responded once the concept is approved, staff will sit down and look at the scope of the project to determine the various phases of construction. Additionally, the City has some monies budgeted and are looking into holding a 2012 bond election.

Chair Riccillo asked if Commissioners had any further discussion. There being none.

MOTION:

Motion made by Chair Riccillo, seconded by Commissioner Berchelmann and **UNANIMOUSLY CARRIED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING AT 6:40 P.M.**

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