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MUSEUMS & CULTURAL AFFAIRS

The City of El Paso Hispanic Cultural Center Subcommittee  
Wednesday, January 13, 2016 – 1:00 p.m.  
City Hall, Main Conference Room

MINUTES

1. **Call to Order.** Meeting was called to order at 1:11 p.m.
2. **Roll Call.**

| <u>Board Member</u>   | <u>Present</u> | <u>Absent</u> |
|-----------------------|----------------|---------------|
| Rafael Adame          | X              |               |
| Jesus "Cimi" Alvarado | X              |               |
| Ruben Chavez          | X              |               |
| Yolanda Clay          | X              |               |
| Luis Cortinas         | X              |               |
| Fermin Dorado         |                | X             |
| Jaime Esparza         | X              |               |
| Rosa Guerrero         | X              |               |
| Hector Gutierrez      | X              |               |
| Carlos Hisa           |                | X             |
| Enrique Moreno        | X              |               |
| Barbara Perez         |                | X             |
| Cindy Ramos-Davidson  |                | X             |
| Gustavo Reveles       |                | X             |
| Silvestre Reyes       |                | X             |
| Belen Robles          | X              |               |
| Maya Sanchez          |                | X             |
| Nestor Valencia       | X              |               |
| Theresa Ware-Asbury   |                | X             |

Others present: Tracey Jerome, Ben Fyffe, Brie Franco, Misty Monteros, Mimi Quintanilla, Hugo Saldaña and Carl Daniel.

3. **Public Comment.** The following members of the public commented: Ray Carrasco
4. **Discussion and Action on Approval of Minutes for September 10, 2015 and September 16, 2015.** Chair requested a motion to approve the minutes of September 10, 2015 and September 16, 2015. Luis Cortinas moved to accept; Rafael Adame seconded; all members voted in favor, none opposed, and motion passed unanimously.
5. **Presentation and Discussion on Preliminary Abraham Chavez Theatre Programmatic Study.** Ben Fyffe provided members with a brief background of the project, noting that final recommendations were taken to City Council on October 27<sup>th</sup>, and the last recommendation was the potential reuse of the Abraham Chavez Theatre as the proposed Cultural Center. At that time, City Council requested staff conduct a programmatic study to explore feasibility and how this space would work and function as a cultural center. At that point, we were given a very aggressive timeline of 120 days and the services of two consultants were procured; local architectural firm, Carl Daniel Architects; and Quintanilla Schmidt Consulting. Ben turned the floor over to Mimi Quintanilla, Principal at Quintanilla Schmidt Consulting, to walk the group through how she took the foundational documents, looked at local data and put that together to explore

what the space usage needs would be in order to accomplish what members articulated. She worked in tandem with the architects to create a potential development of the space.

Mimi began by saying when she was first contacted for the program feasibility study last fall, she was pleased to find out that so much foundational information had been developed. She accessed meeting minutes to get the flavor of discussions in the meetings, the AMS research and planning report, she looked at demographics of the community and the report from the subcommittee to Council was part of the foundation of her research. Her research and methodology were significantly informed by reviewing subcommittee materials and meeting minutes. The AMS report is very extensive and contains a lot of information that may be considered extraneous, but it was very helpful in her positioning of the cultural center and the aspirations of the community and also to point out the niche that the cultural center would play in the role of the community and the region. Both reports were used as a jumping off point to investigate what types of programs, activities and facilities would best fill the group's aspirations and the niche. Mimi's methodology included a SWOT analysis that included a framework of recommendations sensitive to the community's vision for the Hispanic Cultural Center. She used meeting minutes, public input and feedback, and prior reports to develop the SWOT analysis and also the internal and external factors that influence the development of the Hispanic Cultural Center. She noted that most weaknesses and threats can be transformed into strengths and opportunities; the key is a well-conceived and well-executed strategic plan, and most importantly, a strong fundraising campaign. An environmental scan of local institutions located near the Chavez Theatre site was conducted. A majority of the institutions receive major municipal funding for their operational budget and two of the institutions, for the most part, are privately funded through grants, donations, tuition, and other earned income while also receiving grant funding from the City of El Paso through the Museums and Cultural Affairs Department. Regional and national interviewees were program representatives of their respective institutions. The list was informed by the information compiled by subcommittee members and the AMS report from January 2015; additionally, Mimi supplemented it with institutions she knew of that focus on Mexican American arts and cultural programming as part of their mission.

Theatre arts professionals were contacted for space usage estimates and programming needs. A diagram of programs and facilities identified for the Hispanic Cultural Center was built using meeting minutes, the AMS report, her own experience, and information from the environmental scan and interviews. Spaces are identified as public, or open to all visitors; public/private, open to those involved in specific activities and programs; back of house/support spaces, needed to run the operation of the center; and other considerations, such as things that would need to be kept in mind for the operational and planning purposes of the center. Mimi noted she worked with Carl Daniel and Hugo Saldaña from the firm CDA to estimate spaces that would be appropriate based on the articulated program priorities from subcommittee members and meeting minutes. Public/private spaces take into consideration estimates and several factors: current, planned and existing programs at other facilities that are municipally-funded and supported and that are in close proximity to the Chavez Theatre along with the results of interviews with industry professionals who provide expertise and experience in space planning and programming. Back of house/support spaces are spaces that are necessary to run the operations of the center and to keep program spaces out front running on time. She noted that storage is hardly ever programmed for, but very necessary. Wheelchair storage, loading dock, mechanical rooms can be modified if they already exist to serve both the Hispanic Cultural Center and the Chavez Theatre.

Mimi closed her presentation with program recommendations, noting that collaborative relationships with nearby established institutions as a sustainability strategy will strengthen the identity of the center and develop a loyal audience. She recommended that the center not be a collecting institution because a collecting institution has a permanent collection of art and artifacts and stewardship of those resources. Collections impact physical facilities and operational budgets in a major way. Permanent collections must be stored in climate-controlled facilities, along with being monitored, secured and conserved. The resources to care for collections require, among other things, a part-time individual dedicated to the care and conservation of those collections, which can be very expensive. Given the space limitations of the Hispanic Cultural Center site, the use of borrowed collections is recommended. Staffing recommendation is to start with a manager/administrator with fundraising responsibility and experience, and a part-time public program/educator while the center is under development. Exhibit designers and preparators already on staff with other municipally-funded institutions can perhaps have a portion of their time negotiated as part of the resource-sharing cost relationship with the other municipally-funded institutions in close proximity. There is also an opportunity to manage creative capital and deliver programs through an artist-in-residence

program, which is being pioneered across the country. Mimi continued with her recommendations, noting that multi-use spaces such as meeting rooms and classroom spaces with moveable walls, theater and performance studio spaces and labs designed to accommodate several types of programs and single block of space for administrations, volunteers and storage should be included. Exhibits should change two or three times per year and an annual exhibit should be initiated. A core, permanent exhibit tied to the mission and core values of the Hispanic Cultural Center that will orient and educate visitors on the role of Mexican American heritage, culture and art in the region should be developed. The recommendation is for the Hispanic Cultural Center to work with a committee that includes educators, community members and City officials to conceive, develop, fabricate and install that permanent exhibition. Additional recommendations for public programs and events, offering fee-based and free programs, events and activities that can be produced collaboratively or offered solely by the Hispanic Cultural Center to build community awareness and a brand. A menu of rental opportunities that are mission-appropriate events should be developed to open the Center to broad exposure in the community and provide a source of earned income to offset operational costs. Mimi noted that recommendations for mission, vision and core values was outside her scope of work, but in researching, assessing and analyzing all of the information, she feels the group is on the cusp of needing to articulate a mission as soon as possible. She recommended the group develop a mission, vision and articulate a set of core values as a means of getting people excited, for fundraising efforts and to get more broad-based support from the community. She further explained that a mission statement tells people what you do, why you do it and what you are aspiring to; a vision statement projects out what we are doing for the community and our place in it; and core values are the guiding statements critical to planning and fundraising, telling people how we are going to treat them and what our philosophy is. Mimi mentioned that the next steps are to use the survey information, space usage estimates and program ideas to develop a program outline and sample budget, taking into consideration looking at programs identified in previous reports and measure against what is already being offered by nearby institutions; look at collaborative program opportunities for sharing resources such as the collections, staff, programming and exhibit spaces; look at sustainable, signature programs for the Center that will fill the niche she spoke of and fit the bill for the community's expectations; and finally, what activities and programs can be programmed in the Chavez Theatre site with modifications by developing several different scenarios and providing an idea of different levels of programming and expenses so operational costs based on vision and articulation can be developed. With that, Mimi concluded her presentation and turned the floor over to Hugo Saldaña and Carl Daniel, her associates on this project.

Carl Daniel began by saying that adding on to the Chavez Theatre was very challenging, and the addition came to be known as a 'bustle'. Carl began by showing members an existing site plan via a PowerPoint slideshow, that included the proposed location for the bustle, explaining it will be added to the back end of the building, on the southeast corner. The Hispanic Cultural Center will have its own identity and its own entrance, yet be internally connected to the Chavez Theatre. He moved on to a street level/stage level proposed floor plan, noting the proposed entry lobby will have exhibit space, a store, a reception center and library/archives. There will be a public stair going up to the terrace level, three feet above the lobby level, which will be enclosed to become an exhibit space for the Hispanic Cultural Center. A support area for the theatre will be enhanced by a long list of improvements. Carl continued by showing a lobby/terrace level proposed floor plan, noting that upon entering, one would go up to the terrace level, which would be the main exhibit space. The Theatre and the Center are directly connected to collaborate with each other – as you move around the terrace level, there will be studios, a blackbox theater, offices and other spaces needed to house the Center. Restroom facilities will possibly be moved outboard to serve both the Theatre and the Center; the number of fixtures is quadrupled; code issues, fire protection and sprinkler systems could be incorporated into this project. Using a building section to show the addition to the Theatre, Carl noted the elevation shows the scale of the building and the materials such as stucco, metal panels and green-blue glass will be incorporated into the addition to look like part of the original building. Before concluding his presentation, he showed three renderings of the finished product and reiterated the addition is a two-story bustle around the end of the building to accomplish the needed square footage, yet connected interior-wise with the existing Chavez Theatre.

Chair opened the floor for questions and discussion of the proposal. Luis Cortinas said the project was very impressive, he likes the bustle and everything that was mentioned, but never once was cost discussed. Ben Fyffe replied there was not an answer at the moment, as this presentation was to get feedback from the group and find out if this was a direction members were interested in going so that consultants can be tasked with estimates and cost for presentation to City Council. Luis then asked about the asbestos that will be exposed when the bustle is constructed; Ben replied that the consultants and architects with a lot of

experience with this facility are aware of the existing challenges and it will be presented to City Council as a complete cost package. He reminded members that those costs had previously been presented to them in terms of what a 2007 study showed for associated costs related to the Chavez Theatre. The idea of the programmatic study is to help guide fundraising and provide a clear goal for fundraising. The next step is an Open House for the community on January 25<sup>th</sup> to come in and see the plans, talk to the consultants, and provide their input. We will go to City Council the next day with the programmatic study and full projections. Hector Gutierrez asked for a copy of anything written that can be shared with the group along with the scope of work for both Quintanilla Schmidt Consulting and Carl Daniel Architects. He next asked Mimi how to go about creating mission and vision statements, along with core values as the group cannot move forward without them. He further stated he was against taking this to the public without having answers first because it may inadvertently create more issues for the subcommittee and the City. Mimi noted that kernels for the mission and vision statements are in the group's discussions, documented in the minutes. She expressed her opinion that it doesn't need to be complicated and further added that although the group may have an idea of what the mission is through meetings and conversations with each other, it may not be so clear to an outsider. The vision is the passion that drives members; articulate what the need is and turn it into the vision. Core values are the philosophy and the treatment of people that must be articulated. Hector then asked how much of the \$5.7M would be spent doing things in the existing structure, and what the estimated cost of the bustle would be. Carl Daniel replied that he could not supply an estimate, but there is an estimating firm working on this. The numbers should be available by the end of the month. Chair asked for confirmation that having the Center at the Chavez Theatre is doable; Mimi replied that from a programmatic standpoint and her experience, yes, it is doable. Chair then asked how you weigh the economy of numbers and the location as a benefit when you want to make an addition to the Center; Mimi replied that to have that kind of aggregated site with all of those resources, infrastructure and capacity is a lot cheaper than starting from scratch. Rafael Adame concurred with Hector and Luis, budget and cost constraint is relevant, but not now; the consultants need the creative freedom to come up with the best, state-of-the-art facility and upon reviewing the numbers, costs can be brought down if necessary. Nestor Valencia commended the consultants for their comprehensiveness and shaping the idea the group had from the beginning. Belen Robles commended the City in hiring the consultants and requested a hard copy of the presentation, noting it was excellent. Rosa Guerrero said she is very excited and reminded members that a 501(c)(3) needs to be started immediately because the group cannot move on to fundraise without it. Yolanda Clay asked Carl Daniel for clarification on how much square footage the bustle would add; he replied 21,000 feet. She asked what improvements would be made to the existing building and he replied there are numerous improvements needed such as restrooms, fire alarm systems, fire sprinkler systems, elevators, seating, lighting, theater rigging, and a/c system amongst others, to bring the Theatre up to code, as it was built in the 70's. Chair asked Mimi for direction towards creating a public/private partnership; she suggested working through MCAD and strategizing on who to speak with to talk about those partnerships and what the possibilities of those partnerships are. She suggested going to City leadership with a strategic plan and fundraising, and a commitment of ownership for fundraising would be very important. Ben Fyffe added that the next steps of formulating a mission, vision and values for the Center are not necessarily integral to getting the group to the end of the month with City Council. He suggested that would be a next step, as Council has extended the tenure of the subcommittee without a sunset date. He also suggested staff come back with presentations to show the group how the City enters into public/private partnerships. Ruben Chavez asked to see cost estimations broken down by what is attributed to the Center and what needs to happen anyway. Additionally, he asked that estimations be projected out 5 or 10 years for consideration. Hector Gutierrez concurred and Ben responded by reminding members that the subcommittee did elect to attach itself to that facility with those issues articulated. Chair voiced an exception, noting that in the public discussion, figures should be broken down by Theatre costs and Center costs. Rafael Adame asked that nothing go out to the public until numbers and final design have been vetted; Chair reminded members that meetings are live-streamed. Hector Gutierrez asked to go on record as being against going to the public until he sees what the numbers are going to be before the public sees them; Ben Fyffe replied he could explore how to get that information to members, but staff was tasked with making the information available to the public prior to the Council meeting. Cimi Alvarado asked for a copy of the plans with numbers and square footage of the gallery space along with room placement in the floor plan. He noted that it would be hard to have an artist residency next to a dance studio, and things of that nature. Cimi asked about the public art that is currently on the terrace level of the Chavez Theatre; Ben replied that the artist contract will be reviewed as the bustle will mean that the public art will need to be reprogrammed. He briefly reviewed a couple of options: creating a trail or using them as wayfinding system throughout the Downtown Arts District or elsewhere downtown. Chair closed the discussion by saying this is a great step forward and City Council should be commended for being really

thoughtful in having a programmatic study.

**6. Adjournment.** Chair requested a motion to adjourn. Rafael Adame moved to adjourn; Luis Cortinas seconded; all members voted in favor, none opposed, and motion passed unanimously. Meeting was adjourned at 2:48pm.

Approved for content by:  
Jaime Esparza, Chair

Respectfully submitted by:  
Misty Monteros, Administrative Assistant  
Museums & Cultural Affairs Department

CITY CLERK DEPT.  
2016 APR 14 PM 3:18