

Date: May 24, 2010

To: Mayor and City Council

Subject: City Council Meeting Item 4.1 – Mexican Heritage Plaza Conceptual Model and Work Plan and Agreement with the Alum Rock Union Elementary School District

Honorable Mayor and City Council Members,

Under the direction of the Mayor and Council, the Mexican Heritage Plaza Steering Committee has been meeting over the past year to develop a new business model for the Mexican Heritage Plaza (MHP). We believe the recommendation for the MHP to become a School of Arts and Culture is a compelling model, both in terms of sustainability and meeting the needs of the community. The Committee is aware and supportive of Recommendation (c) regarding the lease agreement between the City and the Alum Rock Union Elementary School District for conversion of the second floor office space to classrooms and for use of the classrooms and other spaces within the MHP by the San Antonio School for academic year 2010-11.

The Steering Committee is excited about this opportunity and views it to be in step with the vision arrived upon by the Committee over the past year in collaboration with the greater community. That being said, the Committee remains committed to ensuring that the future vision of the MHP as a School of Arts and Culture be preserved and propelled forward by the short term utilization by San Antonio School. To that end, there are items of the proposed agreement that are of specific interest to the Committee, because they are critical to the viability of the future School of Arts and Culture. The Steering Committee has prepared a list of recommendations for consideration by the Council and City staff. These recommendations are intended to ensure that the long term vision for the MHP as a School of Arts and Culture is realized.

The Steering Committee congratulates the City and ARUESD for their efforts to develop a mutually beneficial partnership that demonstrates the potential for MHP to serve the community in a wide-ranging and deeper way. We believe this partnership is an excellent opportunity for short term school use to coexist with the development of MHP as a future School of Arts and Culture.

To support mutual goals of serving the community with diverse educational opportunities, the Committee strongly recommends that there be access to the classroom space when school is not in session. Phase 2 of the Steering Committee's work focuses on implementation of the School of Arts and Culture model through a method of prototyping arts education or arts learning programs over the next 2 – 3 years. This prototyping will be essential to developing the curriculum, clientele and faculty for the School of Arts and Culture and should occur while other elements, like the business model, fundraising and leadership development, are underway. Without access to classroom space in which to test afterschool and weekend programming, the progress toward a School of Arts and Culture will be seriously hindered.

The Committee recommends that the lease agreement allow for a joint-use of the classrooms and Gallery that balances the needs of San Antonio School and the efforts of the Steering Committee and City to make critical early strides in reaching the long-term vision for a School of Arts and Culture at MHP.

Secondly, this set of recommendations pertains to the construction of the second-floor conversion of office space to classroom space. The Committee recommends that the future use of the classrooms for multidisciplinary arts education be carefully planned and constructed. This opportunity to convert the second-floor office space to classrooms should result in a lasting improvement with the future School of Arts and Culture at MHP in mind. Of particular interest to the Committee are the following design elements:

- 1) Consideration be made for plumbing and storage in the new classrooms
- 2) Construction of walls allow for sound buffering between classrooms
- 3) No permanent furniture affixed to floors
- 4) Adequate protection of the sprung flooring and walls in the Gallery space

Lastly, the Steering Committee is concerned about the implications related to the relocation of the Resident Arts Partners and outlines suggestions for consideration to mitigate the potential negative impacts, and thus help to sustain programs of benefit to MHP and community at large. The Steering Committee is aware that the current tenants of the MHP were given 30 day notices on May 6th to relocate, in order for construction on the second floor to take place in time for the first day of class in school year 2010-2011 for San Antonio students. Given this aggressive relocation timeline, the Committee wants to stress that we do not want to see the organizations detrimentally impacted as a result of their imminent move. Teatro Visión, Mexican Heritage Corporation and the San Jose Multicultural Artists Guild have invested 10 years at the MHP, and many more years in the community at large, offering quality educational and performance programming and bringing artistic prestige to San Jose. Moreover, the Committee views these arts organizations as important partners in the future educational programming of the School of Arts and Culture and we believe it would be counterproductive to the future vision should these organizations be incapacitated.

In regard to the relocation of the Resident Arts Partners, the Committee strongly recommends for:

- 1) Financial support to be provided to ensure that the relocation of the Resident Arts Partners/Cultural Partners can happen in as timely a manner as possible, to reduce as much as possible negative effects to the operations and stability of the impacted organizations.
- 2) New office locations to be identified that meet the specific needs of each of the organizations, both short term and long term.
- 3) Commitment to continue the Cultural Partner relationship between the organizations and MHP, to ensure on-going community programming in the short term, as well as to pave the way for long term educational arts programming for the School of Arts and Culture.

It is an understatement to express that after a year of work, the Steering Committee feels that the model of the School of Arts and Culture at MHP offers the community and the City of San Jose the best option for a sustainable future. With that in mind, should our recommendations not be considered, with a genuine interest placed on the long term vision of the School of Arts and Culture, it would be discouraging to the work of Phase 2 and the Steering Committee members committed to it. The Steering Committee understands that the successful execution of a lease agreement with the ARUESD may require compromise on some of the recommendations made above, however we would like to emphasize that our commitment to Phase 2 of the process requires that even short term opportunities support the future of the School of Arts and Culture.

The Steering Committee appreciates the opportunity to serve as advisors to the City's efforts to develop a sustainable and vibrant future for the Mexican Heritage Plaza and its community. We envision that with a strategic long-term view and action by the City Council and through strong community partnerships and strategic planning, that balance both short term and long term opportunities, that the MHP can reach its full potential.

Sincerely,

Mexican Heritage Plaza Steering Committee

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