

## MEXICAN HERITAGE PLAZA

### Steering Committee Meeting #1

13 July 2009

12:00 to 1:30 p.m.

#### INTRODUCTIONS

Laurie MacDougall,  
Facilitator

The facilitator informed those present that all meetings would start on time and end on time. She then introduced the guests in the audience and noted that they would be playing an advisory role to the process:

- From the office of the Mexican Consulate:  
Deputy Consul General José Eduardo Loreto
- Executive Directors of Resident Arts Partners:  
Jess Moreles, Executive Director Teatro Vision  
Leigh Henderson, Operations Director Mexican Heritage Corporation  
Arlene Segun, Director SJ Multicultural Arts Guild

Committee members introduced themselves and talked briefly about their hopes and expectations of the business planning process. Committee members echoed one another in their desires to see the Plaza functioning at maximum activation and financial solvency. Several committee members expressed wishes to see the Plaza utilized for educational purposes for children in the community.

The facilitator noted that she'd read the entire 15 years worth of studies, assessments, claims and counter-claims so that the committee doesn't have to, and met with every member of the committee. She observed there are a number of points of view represented on the steering committee.

#### BROWN ACT TRAINING

Lisa Herrick from the City of San Jose Attorney's Office presented the requirements of the Brown Act that would guide the actions of the steering committee process.

#### MEETING SCHEDULE

The facilitator presented a schedule of monthly meetings through June 2010. Meetings will take place on the second Tuesday of each month, alternating each month between lunch and after work to accommodate the needs of everyone.

All members will receive a summary of the meeting, which will help committee members in the event they must miss a meeting. Also, he or she should call either Elisa or Laurie for additional information if all isn't clear. Due to the requirements of the Brown Act, committee members are discouraged from calling one another about the meeting or "replying all" on email correspondence regarding steering committee business.

## **OVERVIEW OF THE PROCESS**

### **A. Ground Rules:**

Steering committee and the public in attendance were all requested to follow a set of ground rules to keep the process moving forward, without focusing on the past. The ground rules are:

1. Assume positive intent.
2. Focus on the future, don't revisit the past.
3. Respect each other and our limited time.
4. Seek the common ground.
5. Bring your best to the task and expect the best from one another.

### **B. Define the task.**

The group was reminded that the task of the steering committee is to develop a business plan as a recommendation to the City Council for the future of MHP. This process was not designed as a visioning process. Business plan means not only a realistic vision for using the space to serve the community (which has never been clearly defined), but a realistic budget for how to finance the operation.

Historically, in 1995 the Wolf Report laid forth the Operating Plan, the master design for MHP, based on some key flawed assumptions. The vision was very broad and because elements of the vision were not prioritized, this encouraged the perception MHP could/would be all things to all people. Heroic staff efforts to be all things to all people ensued. The original funding assumptions from the Wolf report indicated that regional and national foundations would fund MHP as a "national model." This didn't happen. Also the Wolf report assumed that a significant number of major donors would step forward because of the unique aspirations of MHP to make annual gifts of \$1000 to \$5000 PER YEAR. This also failed to materialize. The Wolf Report predicted that annual audiences of 40,000 would be attracted to MHP to support its programs. That translates into an average of 110 people, every day of the year, Thanksgiving and Christmas included. This also didn't happen. The City poured money into the coffers, but

given the overly ambitious income projections from other sources, not surprisingly, bankruptcy loomed.

A second attempt to stabilize operations lasted from 2003 to 2008. This period was characterized by efforts to outgrow the problems from the original vision, revamping the organization as a “regional art center.” Its “entrepreneurial” model focused on generating earned income to overcome the lack of non-City contributed income, which had the unintended consequence of alienating the community and the RAPs.

### **REALITY CHECK ABOUT THE LIMITATION OF THE SPACE**

The facilitator pointed out that there are two purely practical reasons MHP could not possibly succeed as a “regional art center”

- 1) It’s not located on a site that supports that ambition,
- 2) The venue itself can’t support that ambition. It’s too small.

Committee members Carlos Perez and Erin Goodwin-Guerrero questioned the definition of a “regional art center,” given that the Plaza could and does attract patrons from the region. The facilitator clarified that, while the Plaza certainly has regional appeal, the founding vision was for the Plaza to serve the local community, in addition to the fact that arguably a more locally focused model suits the size and scale of the facility.

The facilitator distributed a worksheet showing Total Indoor Space is about 17% of the total square footage of the Plaza. Add the Quad, and the usable space for programming is still less than 24% of the total space.

Before beginning the walk-through, steering committee members were reminded to read the most recent assessment on the MHP available, the Maribel Alvarez report. It was completed nearly a year and a half ago, so some of the information in it is outdated, but a good deal of the observations derive from extensive public processes that involved a re-visioning for MHP, so the steering committee can see what ideas in the report might prove useful going forward. The facilitator reminded the committee that the Alvarez report is the most recent study on the Plaza and is therefore worth examining for research purposes. The committee will be making its own conclusions based on a combination of learnings from past studies, committee member expertise and new findings within the last 2 years.

Committee member Erin Goodwin-Guerrero requested that the committee consider models of comparable cultural venues, to inform the discussion of potential organizational structures and financial models for the Plaza.

Committee member Olivia Mendiola suggested an analysis of each physical space within the Plaza would help determine the feasibility of programming, revenue generation vs. costs associated with operations and maintenance.

## **COMMUNITY INPUT TO THE PROCESS**

About 30 members of public attended the first meeting. Committee member Chris Esparza suggested that an opportunity for public comment should be added to the day's agenda. Steering Committee members agreed, and this was supported by the City Attorney present, that the meeting agenda should always include an opportunity for public comment. This element will be incorporated into future meetings.

Several members of the public gave input during the allotted timeframe for public comment. Notably, a community member commented that Blanca Alvarado should be honored for her original vision for the Plaza. It was recommended that, past grievances aside, an understanding of the founding vision would serve the process and give credit to those who made the Plaza a reality.

Another member of the public described the success and financial viability of the Mariachi youth program and his hopes to see musical education programs reinstated at the Plaza.

Several members of the public expressed their gratitude for the dedication of the Steering Committee members in taking on this important task on a voluntary basis.