

Communication from Public

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Council File No: 21-1238

Comments for Public Posting: Councilmembers, We are gravely concerned by allegations that mayoral appointee Arturo Chavez, General Manager of El Pueblo, conveyed or caused to be conveyed confidential information about lease discussions for Casa La Golondrina with outside entities, and by the implication that this interference has contributed to the continued shuttering of the 99-year-old legacy business in the heart of Olvera Street. These allegations are contained in the legal complaint Casa Golondrina, Inc., a California Corporation, vs. The City of Los Angeles; Kevin De Leon ; UNITE HERE Local 11; and Does 1-50 (Case # 23STCV11385), which can be accessed at <https://archive.org/details/23-stcv-111385-complaint> If true, those involved must be held accountable. Casa La Golondrina cannot be held hostage by such unethical shenanigans. Save Casa La Golondrina! Save Olvera Street! Additional context can be found in the attached newsletter, and at <https://esotouric.substack.com/golondrina> Yours for Los Angeles, Kim Cooper & Richard Schave Esotouric www.esotouric.com

Scoop: As Los Angeles seeks to evict Casa la Golondrina, new owners of Olvera Street's oldest restaurant allege a shakedown



ESOTOURIC'S SECRET LOS ANGELES

SEP 11, 2023



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Gentle reader,

If you've visited Olvera Street lately, you likely noticed that the oldest, largest restaurant on the historic plaza is locked up tight. Casa la Golondrina Café is on the ropes. It needs our help.



The city has failed to be a good steward to this iconic legacy business, and if concerned citizens, journalists and civic leaders don't start paying attention to what's going on and demanding action, we fear that this core establishment at the heart of the commercial walking street will become a dead zone like [Pico House](#), a lifeless historic building only occasionally opened up to visitors, but with no invested tenants, a place that is forgotten. The city [failed](#) to be a good steward there, too.

For this to happen to Casa la Golondrina would be a tragedy. Let's save it instead.

What's happening? A lot, none of it good.

On [Thursday, 9/14/2023 at 2pm](#), the Board of El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historical Monument Authority Commissioners will meet in the basement of the Biscailuz Building to [discuss the eviction](#) of the café's tenants over outstanding rent of \$242,306 and unpaid common area maintenance fees of approximately \$46,000, not counting interest or late fees.

But this is not, as it appears at face value, a mere [rent dispute](#) with new operators who failed to re-open after the pandemic shutdown.

Those new operators have a lawsuit pending in Los Angeles Superior Court that raises disturbing questions about the relationship between [disgraced](#) Los Angeles City Councilman Kevin de Leon, the hospitality union UNITE HERE! Local 11, and [Arturo Chavez](#), the General Manager of El Pueblo Historic Monument who was [previously](#) a senior staffer for fellow [disgraced](#) councilmember Gil Cedillo.

It is important to note that the story told in this legal filing is merely an allegation that has not been tested in front of a jury, nor discussed in settlement. But as it concerns the survival of a beloved woman-owned Los Angeles legacy business that will hopefully celebrate its centennial in 2024, a large establishment that is essential to the successful activation of Olvera Street, we believe the complaint merits further investigation.

Here is a [link](#) where you can read **Casa Golondrina, Inc., a California Corporation, vs. The City of Los Angeles; Kevin De Leon ; UNITE HERE Local 11; and Does 1-50 (Case # 23STCV11385)**. This matter will next be heard at a Case Management Conference on ~~Friday, 9/15/2023 at 8:30am in Department 48 of the Stanley Mosk Courthouse at 111 North Hill Street, Los Angeles, CA 90012~~ [update: this has been continued to 11/30/23].

But first, some history and context before you dive into the 268 page complaint.



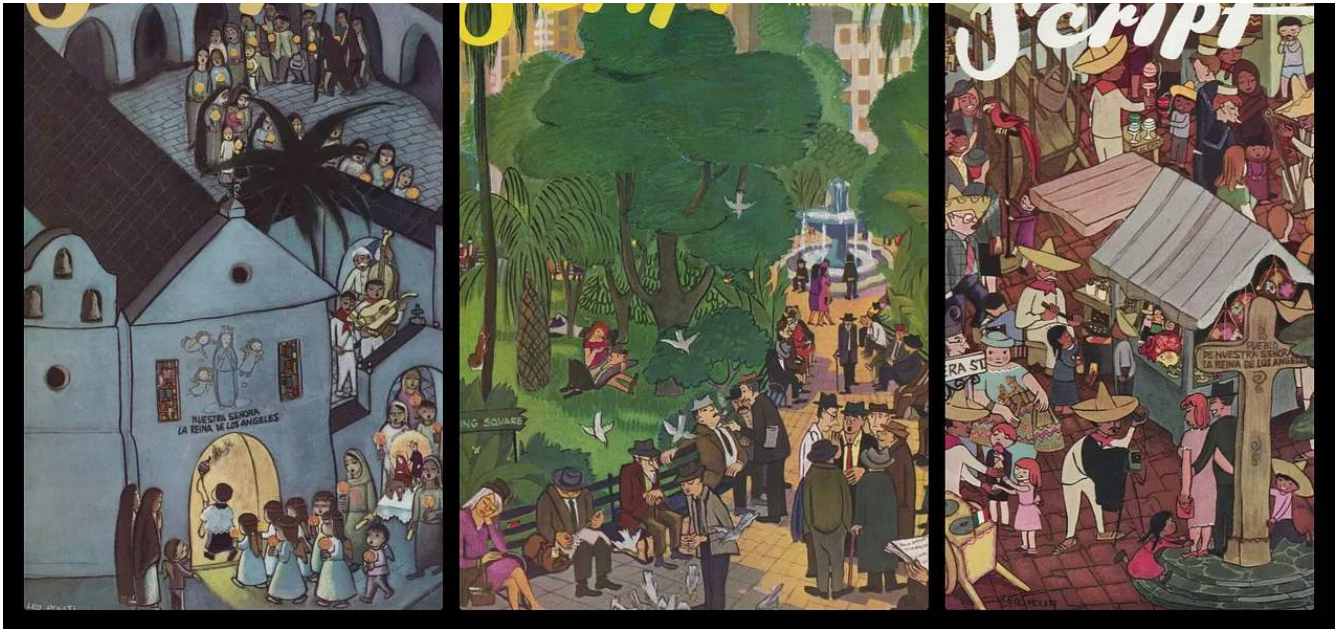
Casa La Golondrina Café is the oldest restaurant on [Olvera Street](#), located on the ground floor of [Pelanconi House](#), the oldest brick building in Los Angeles.

Like every other public facing business in the city, La Golondrina closed in March 2020 due to the pandemic lockdown orders and has never reopened.

As we [reported in late 2021](#), third generation owner Vivien Bonzo is seeking to transfer her interest in Golondrina to another operator. She has been trying to effect this change since 2018. But it's not easy to do.

Olvera Street is not like any other place of business in Los Angeles. Here, due to the city's competitive bidding rules, concession agreements are essentially restricted to families that have been vending for many years—some, like Vivien Bonzo's, all the way back to founder Christine Sterling's original vision for the street as a mixed-use fantasia of casual and more formal dining options, imported goods vendors, skilled artisans, antique shops, art pottery and glass, cactus nurseries, strolling musicians, puppet and live theaters, book shops, fashion retailers and apartments upstairs.





It was a creative incubator and a community hub, a place where a talented young illustrator like [Leo Politi](#) could be discovered by [Script magazine](#) publisher Rob Wagner while sketching birds and children, and launch a beautiful only-in-Los Angeles career. But by 2020, there wasn't much variety among Olvera Street's business owners: plenty of tacos, but not a potted cactus, belt-maker, glass-blower or bookshop to be found.

When Vivien Bonzo decided it was time to retire, a year into the lockdown, she put the word out among the qualified Olvera Street Concessionaires. Only Bertha A. and David R. Gomez, a mother/son team operating Rudy's Mexican Candy stall, expressed interest.





Ofrenda for deceased vendors and Christine Sterling, Día de los Muertos, 2022

Because we read almost every agenda that comes out of Los Angeles City Hall, and because we love Olvera Street and revere Christine Sterling as a dogged and misunderstood preservation angel—who was not a “wealthy socialite,” as she’s typically described, but actually a struggling single mom who became obsessed with saving a place she loved—we’ve been watching this slow, now stalled, process with increasing alarm.



Naturally, we were concerned that there was a big difference between selling candy from a stand and operating a [large, popular restaurant](#). But the Gomezes had a [business plan](#), and could hire an experienced manager to run the show. Also, Vivien Bonzo offered to consult for a few months. So maybe it would be okay after all.

But some anonymous person or persons sure didn’t think so.

Soon after [Olvera Street Space W-17a and W-17b / La Golondrina Cafe, Incorporated, LTD / Transfer of Interest](#) hit the City Council file management system, three comments were submitted to the record.

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We read a lot of written public comments. It is exceedingly unusual for one to be uploaded with nothing in the "Name" field, yet all three of these comments are nameless. All are written in a voice that suggests intimate knowledge of the place, the players and the arcane lease requirements, [suggest improprieties](#) in the Commission report and proposed transfer, [accuse](#) the new operator of trespassing and of winning an "illegal" bid, and generally appear to be making the case for a future legal challenge.

But when a [suit was filed](#), it was by the Gomez family. Among other things, they allege that UNITE HERE Local 11, representing hospitality workers, obtained confidential information about their negotiations with El Pueblo and the City, and used it to hamper their ability to open La Golondrina.

18 54. Local 11 sent two representatives to the Commission meeting referred to in paragraph 53
19 above and during public comment urged the Commission to reject the rent abatement proposal. Prior
20 to the item being pulled, the Gomezes had multiple conversations with Manager where he said the
21 rent abatement would not be problem. Manager expressed surprise when Board VP David Louie say
22 that it was customary to give rent abatement in commercial leases. This type of rent relief and other
23 special considerations have always been granted by the Commission to new restaurant operators on
24 Olvera Street. For example, Andy Camacho and Chiguacle Restaurant are the most recent examples
25 of restaurants receiving.

From Page 9 of the complaint; soon after Board VP David Louie spoke in support of the Gomezes, the longtime Commissioner was not reappointed.

We can't know how much truth there is in the allegations set forth in this lawsuit. That is for a judge and jury to decide, or to be hashed out in a settlement. But these are disturbing allegations and Angelenos deserve answers. What happens on Olvera Street matters to every one of us, and it can no longer be decided in the dark, in poorly attended basement Commission hearings that are not livestreamed.

We are calling on the press and elected officials (other than the one who was named in the lawsuit) to get to the bottom of this, before it's too late for Casa La Golondrina to reopen in time for its own centennial. Attend the [Commission hearing](#) on Thursday—go the Case Management Conference on ~~Friday~~ 11/30—investigate these allegations at the city level now, and not months or years from now as the case winds through the courts.

Save Casa La Golondrina! Save Olvera Street!

yours for Los Angeles,

Kim & Richard

Esotouric

P.S. The campaign to save Marilyn Monroe's home in Brentwood is evolving fast. so [take another look](#) at Friday's updated newsletter to get caught up.

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SAVE MARILYN'S HAVEN!

DON'T DEMOLISH ME!

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