

CITY OF LOS ANGELES

CALIFORNIA

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

JOHN WIRFS
PRESIDENT
JESSE MAREZ
VICE PRESIDENT
PATRICIA ALARCON
ZELENNE CARDENAS
FABIAN GARCIA
IRMA BESERRA NUÑEZ
LORI QUON
AARON THOMAS



KAREN BASS

EL PUEBLO DE LOS ANGELES HISTORICAL MONUMENT

ARTURO CHAVEZ
General Manager
125 PASEO DE LA PLAZA, SUITE 300
LOS ANGELES, CA 90012
TEL: (213) 485-6855

April 21, 2023

Honorable Members of the Budget, Finance & Innovation Committee
c/o Holly L. Wolcott
Office of the City Clerk
200 N. Spring Street, Rm. 360
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Re: FY 2023-2024 Proposed Budget- El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historical Monument

On behalf of El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historical Monument (El Pueblo), thank you for this opportunity to comment on the proposed Fiscal Year 2023-2024 (FY 23/24) budget.

As the birthplace of our great city and a premiere destination for both residents and visitors, our world-renowned 22-acre historic district reflects the diverse communities that together forged Los Angeles. As home to world-famous Olvera Street, our district uniquely integrates museums, historical sites, retail, restaurants, events, and filming. As expressed by our mission statement, El Pueblo “promotes, safeguards, and preserves the City’s Birthplace, and culturally diverse heritage through the effective management of its commercial and historical resources and events.”

El Pueblo has emerged stronger and more resilient from the COVID-19 pandemic as we embark on a new post-pandemic chapter in the nearly 250-year history of El Pueblo with a renewed commitment to reconstitute our staff and operational capacity.

The department is thankful and overall satisfied with the proposed FY 23/24 budget as it preserves our current budget and personnel levels while providing for: reclassification of one (1) real estate position; retention of one (1) resolution authority position; and \$150,000 in support of updating our outdated 1981 master plan. We respectfully seek only one change to the proposed budget: reconsideration of restoring an El Pueblo Curator II (2392-2) position. The cultural and historical significance of El Pueblo along with its complex history with communities of color in particular Native American communities necessitates the hiring of a cultural practitioner with the necessary skills to interpret and help tell their stories. This leadership position will help address equity and accessibility in how we present and interpret El Pueblo’s story to Angelenos and visitors.

Five (5) Potential Achievements for El Pueblo

1) **100% Staff Occupancy**

Organized around a core full-time staff of eleven (11) employees, El Pueblo worked diligently to address the severe staff vacancy in recent years created by the Separation Incentive Program (SIP) and staff promotions to other departments. El Pueblo reached a 60% staff vacancy in early 2022 coupled with the departure of long-time part-time staff. We continued to address staff vacancy with a recent round of hires and offers. The proposed budget will help reach our current goal of reaching full staff capacity by the end of calendar year 2023. This support will also enable us to continue and expand our revenue generating activities and functions.

Proposed change: The addition of an El Pueblo Curator will add one additional full-time staff member, expanding our staff roster to twelve (12) employees. This position will be fully integrated into all El Pueblo divisions ensuring coordination of cultural activities with all other operations.

Equity impact: As a cherished multicultural space with ties to communities of color, El Pueblo provides unique employment and training opportunities to work and prosper in a living museum space. Employment opportunities at El Pueblo have been largely sought by underrepresented groups and we are proud of our diverse workforce.

2) **100% Commercial Occupancy of Olvera Street**

In support of Olvera Street merchants, the Los Angeles City Council provided nearly two years of rent waivers and assistance to merchants with nine (9) months of full rent forgiveness and six (6) months of rent reduction. This assistance in combination with emergency order protections saved many of the merchant businesses on Olvera Street. Most recently, just two days ago on April 19, 2023, the City Council voted on a motion to support a structured repayment plan for current outstanding debt owed by merchants. While we enjoy a current 90-93% occupancy rate on Olvera Street, the proposed budget support will allow us to pursue full occupancy on Olvera Street through vigorous request for proposals and commercial outreach.

Proposed change: In coordinating cultural activities such as events, programming, and activities, the addition of an El Pueblo Curator II will increase visitorship to Olvera Street, thereby keeping our commercial spaces marketable with repeat visitor foot traffic. Reinvigorated museum spaces, particularly our museums located on Olvera Street, will also expand the customer base for existing and future businesses.

Equity impact: Increasing access to Olvera Street's vacant commercial spaces will allow for underrepresented communities of color to have better economic opportunities for starting a retail business. In fact, Olvera Street was founded in 1930 to provide business opportunities to Mexican American families suffering from the Great Depression. We envision our handful of vacant puestos as chances for vendors and online services that wish to graduate to actual brick and mortar businesses.

3) 2 Million Annual Visitors to El Pueblo

The last formal visitor count study for El Pueblo was conducted over twenty (20) years ago and estimated that our cultural destination receives just over two (2) million guests each calendar year. We know for certain that since the catastrophic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic that El Pueblo is nowhere close to this traditional figure as reflected by our visitor count metrics at our museums. Through the proposed budget, El Pueblo seeks to return and potentially bypass the goal of two million annual guests to El Pueblo. We will also seek innovative tools to ensure we are properly counting the number of guests through partnerships with other city departments, firms, and organizations.

Proposed change: The El Pueblo Curator II will oversee all seven (7) free museums onsite as well as the overall cultural content and programming at El Pueblo's 22-acre district. A culturally relevant El Pueblo will make our site a go-to destination for tourists and locals and thereby increase our visitor numbers with the goal of reaching the goal of two million visitors.

Equity impact: Returning and surpassing the figure of two million annual visitors to El Pueblo will ensure that all communities from all backgrounds visit El Pueblo and feel safe and integrated.

4) Initiation of an Updated El Pueblo Master Plan

Lacking a comprehensive long-range planning master plan, El Pueblo welcomed the City Council's allocation of \$350,000 in support of a master plan in FY 2022-23. This year's proposed budget continues some of this funding as El Pueblo works in partnership with the Bureau of Engineering to initiate the multi-year process to pursue a master plan to replace the outdated 1981 General Plan. An updated master plan will provide clarity and guidance for all future development in and around El Pueblo which could include housing and transitional housing.

Proposed change: The El Pueblo Curator II position will play a crucial role in the planning and preparation of a master plan as a major portion of the plan will address historic and cultural resources along with archeological resources. For CEQA purposes these are important components of the future that will require professional expertise and guidance from the curator position.

Equity impact: The El Pueblo Master Plan presents an opportunity to pursue long-range planning through the lens of equity and accessibility. This is incredibly important as the El Pueblo district has major cultural links to our Native American communities, Mexican American-Latina/o/x communities, Asian-American and African American communities, as well as a whole host of diverse stakeholders.

5) Expansion of Cultural and Educational Offerings

El Pueblo currently offers seven (7) free public museums including the America Tropical Interpretive Center (ATIC), Avila Adobe (1818), Plaza Firehouse (1887), Sepulveda House, Italian American Museum (IAMLA), and the Chinese American Museum (CAM). In proximity to El Pueblo is La Plaza de Cultura y Arte as well as the Social Justice Museum.

With the support of the proposed budget, the departments seeks to expand our free cultural and education offerings through additional museum spaces and updated exhibitions at our existing museums. This includes an expansion of the Chinese American Museum at the historic Garnier Building; a future History of Water museum in partnership with the Department of Water & Power (DWP); and future public art opportunities throughout the district.

Proposed change: El Pueblo Curator II will oversee all expanded cultural functions and spaces at El Pueblo. Lack of this position severely limits the capacity of El Pueblo to expand its cultural and educational offerings and to keep our exhibitions relevant in 2023 and the future. The major cultural shifts addressing cultural equity require thoughtful management that can only be achieved through a professional such as a trained curator.

Equity impact: Expanding our free museum and educational spaces provides meaningful opportunities for all visitors to become educated on the history of our diverse communities and their cultural legacies. This is particularly important for our K-12 students many of whom visit El Pueblo as part of educational field trips and other activities.

Thank you again for this opportunity to respond to the proposed FY 23/24 budget in support of the city's historic and cultural birthplace. As we prepare for both the 2028 Olympic and Paralympic Games and the 100th anniversary of Olvera Street in 2030, we are confident we are ready to lead El Pueblo for these momentous milestones.

We wholeheartedly thank the leadership of Mayor Karen Bass in a spirit of equity and accessibility.

Thank you,



Arturo Chavez
General Manager