

June 19, 2021

Bert Lumbreras, City Manager
City of San Marcos
San Marcos, Texas 78666

Dear Councilmembers and City Staff,

The Centro Cultural Hispano de San Marcos, under the sponsorship of Hays County Commissioner Ingalsbe (Precinct 1), plans to apply for Hays County Parks and Open Spaces Committee (POSAC) bond monies to 1) create a new urban park or plaza with community gardens, an outdoor theatre and festival space, and 2) remodel and renovate the historic Southside School, which currently houses the cultural center.

Centro respectfully requests the city's public support for the POSAC project, including the possibility of transferring ownership of the park area in exchange for managing and maintaining the outdoor portion once construction is complete. City services might include landscaping, trash pickup, making the space available to the public via the city's reservation system, and so forth.

The deadline to submit the POSAC proposal is July 30, 2021, and POSAC is encouraging applicants like Centro to submit proposals even if they are in the beginning stages of the planning process. POSAC will consider the \$268,000 CDBG grant from the city—received in conjunction with the SMCISD--as matching funds for the remodel and renovation of the Southside School.

Centro, located in the heart of a low-income, densely populated, historic Mexican American neighborhood threatened by gentrification, has become a beloved community center and beacon of civic engagement for San Marcos' Hispanic and general population. The dream of the original founders, to provide a community center with a focus on programming related to local Hispanic and other heritage and cultural practices, has been met with overwhelming demand and success. This historically marginalized community now has a place to call its own, but Centro needs to expand to meet the community's increased demand for services. Currently housed in the historic Mexican or Southside School, Centro has dreamed of expanding to include the entire city block, which has been vacant since the SMCISD demolished their administrative building.

Centro is currently in discussions with the San Marcos Consolidated Independent School District (SMCISD) School Board and staff regarding the purchase of their historic school and property where Centro located. If the property is available, Centro will request POSAC funds to proceed with the purchase and create a new urban park, outdoor performance and festival space, and renovated cultural center.

Although Centro is still in the preliminary phase of planning for its expansion, the Master Plan for the block designates about seventy-five percent of the property for outdoor greenspace. This park or plaza area would serve as a family-friendly outdoor festival and event space, including community gardens and an outdoor theatre. Plans for the interior of the historic Southside School would preserve some of the original classroom space while renovating and remodeling other areas to support expanded museum and art exhibits. Programming in art, music, dance and educational classes and workshops will be continued and enhanced.

Centro's long-term Master Plan includes construction of a two-story multipurpose theatre building with rooftop, vertical and other gardens. In addition to an indoor theatre and event center, this building will incorporate studios for art, music, dance, educational classes and workshops. Once Centro obtains additional funding and constructs the two-story building, the historic Southside School will be dedicated primarily for art and museum exhibits. Together, the footprint of Centro and the future two-story building encompass about twenty to twenty-five percent of the block.

Development of this urban park, outdoor performance and festival venue and expanded cultural center will add much-needed multi-purpose city park space to a rapidly gentrifying and densely populated urban area, preserve permeable surface area near the river, and allow Centro to apply for outside grant-funding to expand its mission to provide educational, cultural, dance, music and arts programming.

The Centro project clearly meets San Marcos' vision regarding land use, neighborhoods, and public spaces and facilities. The plan also meets community, environmental and financial goals for the Hays County Master Plan, as well as POSAC goals and criteria. Developing the project provides additional connectivity to the river, downtown area, and some of the most important historical sites in the proposed Mexican American and Indigenous Heritage and Cultural District, including Cuauhtemoc Hall.

Again, Centro respectfully requests the city's public support of the POSAC project proposal, including the possibility of transferring ownership of the park area in exchange for managing and maintaining the outdoor portion once construction is complete.

We look forward to discussing this matter further.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ana M. Juárez". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized initial "A".

Ana M. Juárez, PhD

Amigas de Centro Cultural Hispano de San Marcos