



Austin Raza Round Table
April 22, 2014

Boards and Commissions Transition Task Force
City of Austin
P.O. 1088
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Dear Chair Martinez and Members of the Task Force:

The Emma S. Barrientos Mexican American Cultural Center (ESBMACC) and Hispanic/Latino Quality of Life Resource Advisory Commission (HQLRAC) are two important yet distinct initiatives in the City of Austin. *“Somehow combining them under one single advisory board or as one voice”* would be harmful and detrimental to both.

The significance, history and interests of the Mexican American Cultural Center in the eyes of the Mexican American community of Austin over the last 40 years would be diluted if *“somehow merged”* with any other city of Austin board. The ESBMACC mission is “...the preservation, creation, presentation, and promotion of Mexican American cultural arts and heritage. The Center is a resource for the community and visitors to learn and participate in classes and programs that will foster a meaningful understanding and appreciation of not only Mexican American, but also Native American, Chicano, and other Latino cultures. The programs and educational curriculum include areas of visual art, theatre, dance, literature, music, language arts, and multi-media.”

The Mexican American community struggled and fought for decades and demanded that a cultural center be established. The dream finally came to fruition in 2007. The ESBMACC Board responsibility is to bring the mission of the ESBMACC to life through its support and approval of programming and activities that staff and community organizations bring forward for approval.

The Hispanic/Latino Quality of Life Initiative goal was: "...to answer the following questions for Austin:

- A. Is the quality of life experience of Hispanics/Latinos significantly different from the quality of life experienced by the rest of Austin and other demographic groups?
- B. Is the City of Austin providing programs, services, financial assistance and other opportunities to enhance the quality of life for Hispanics/Latinos?"

The HQLRAC major topics to be considered and recommendations for City action by this entity are:

- A. Education,
- B. Youth Services,
- C. Housing and Community Development,
- D. Cultural Arts,
- E. Economic Development,
- F. Health,
- G. Civic Engagement, and
- H. Transportation.

The HQLRAC has too broad a role and mission to give the citizens an opportunity to participate closely with their city government when it comes to the MACC. The HQLRA Commission should have a major role in supporting the mission and interests of the MACC and not supplanting it in an advisory role.

The suggestion of a board merger with the MACC comes down to a simple lack of respect that is rooted in a lack of understanding of the history of the Mexican American community and their work and struggle to bring the MACC to fruition. In addition, the MACC is the seat of the new City of Austin Rainey Street Historic District with an important role in the future of the district, especially since the City Council voted in 2004 to remove National Historic Neighborhood Registry designation for Rainey Street. Merging the two boards dilutes the strength of both organizations, losing the unique identity of each.

We the Raza Roundtable of over sixty Austin area members urge you in your recommendations to City Council to keep the MACC Advisory Board separate and independent with Council appointed members of the community, and not merge in any way with the HQLRAC as is currently being considered by your commission.

Sincerely,

Raza Round Table of Austin:

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XC: Mayor and Members of the City Council

