



**EMMA S. BARRIENTOS MEXICAN AMERICAN CULTURAL CENTER
ADVISORY BOARD RECOMMENDATION 20260325-004**

Date: March 25, 2026

Subject: FY2027 Budget Recommendation - Support for Funding Value-Engineered Items and Staffing – ESB-MACC Phase 2

Motioned By: Vice Chair Zamarripa-Saenz

Seconded By: Board Member Herrera

Recommendation

The Emma S. Barrientos Mexican American Advisory Board (MACC) recommends the City Council direct the City Manager to allocate funds to complete the MACC Phase 2 construction and renovation project for FY 2027.

1. Approval of the Proposed Fiscal Year 2027 Operating Budget (as Recommended by Staff)

First and foremost, we recommend that City Council approve the proposed Fiscal Year 2027 budget for the ESB-MACC as it will be presented by staff. This includes support for an increased operating budget proportionate to the expanded size, scope, and utilization of the facility, as allowable. Ensuring that operational funding scales appropriately with the facility’s growth is essential to fully activate the space and deliver high-quality programming, maintenance, and community services.

2. Funding for Value-Engineered (VE) Items – Phase 2 Expansion

We urge the inclusion and funding of the value-engineered (VE) items associated with the Phase 2 expansion in the City of Austin’s upcoming annual budget.

As outlined in the January 5, 2024, memorandum provided by the Parks and Recreation Department (attached for reference to the detailed VE items and estimated costs), approximately \$6 million in construction scope was removed from the Phase 2 project through value engineering processes. While these reductions were necessary to align with prior budget constraints, they represent critical components that directly impact the functionality, accessibility, cultural relevance, and long-term sustainability of the facility.

Importantly, the Phase 2 design reflects extensive public comment and community input gathered over multiple years. The elements that were value-engineered out are not incidental—they are directly tied to the community-informed vision for what this cultural center should be. As such, restoring these components through future funding is not only a matter of project completion, but of honoring the voices, priorities, and expectations of the Austin community.

One specific example of a high-impact value-engineered item is the stage in the Zócalo, which was removed despite being a relatively modest investment (approximately \$52,000). This stage is essential for activating the outdoor space with live performances, cultural programming, and community events—core functions of the ESB-MACC’s mission. We respectfully request that this stage be funded in accordance with the cost outlined in the attached supporting documentation.

The deferred items include, but are not limited to:

- Auditorium and lobby renovations essential for community programming and performances
- Black Box theater upgrades, including projection, lighting, and sound improvements
- Expansion of parking capacity to better accommodate visitors and large-scale events
- Modern wayfinding systems, including digital kiosks and directories
- Rehabilitation of restrooms and upgrades to public-facing infrastructure
- Acoustical treatments and gallery enhancements to preserve the integrity of exhibitions
- Solar panel installation to advance the City's sustainability goals
- Landscape improvements and irrigation systems that support environmental stewardship
- Playground and cultural engagement features, including musical components

Collectively, these enhancements are foundational to delivering a fully realized cultural center that meets the needs of Austin's diverse and growing population. Without them, the facility risks operating below its intended capacity and community impact.

We also note that project costs are expected to escalate by more than 5% annually, with additional soft costs potentially exceeding \$2 million if these items are deferred further. From both a fiscal and strategic perspective, advancing these investments in the next budget cycle is the most prudent course of action.

3. Funding for Critical Staffing Positions (FTEs)

In addition to capital investments, the Board emphasizes the critical need to fund staffing positions required to support the expanded facility. Current requests outline essential roles that remain unfunded but are necessary for effective operations and programming, including:

- Technical Support (IT Support Specialist) – to support rehearsals, performances, and participant needs without overextending current staff (approximately \$95,052 annually)
- Marketing Support (Culture and Arts Education Specialist) – to ensure effective promotion, audience development, and program visibility across exhibits, events, and artist programs (approximately \$106,331 annually)
- Operations Support (Culture and Arts Education Supervisor) – to manage building operations and oversee facility logistics for a significantly expanded campus (approximately \$95,052 annually)
- Development Support (Business Process Consultant) – to strengthen fundraising capacity, partnerships, and resource development, including external funding opportunities (approximately \$106,331 annually)

These positions represent core operational capacity—not optional enhancements. Without them, the City risks underutilizing its capital investment and placing unsustainable strain on existing staff. Funding these roles ensures that the ESB-MACC can operate at scale, deliver high-quality programming, and remain accessible and responsive to the community it serves.

The ESB-MACC is a vital cultural hub that preserves and celebrates Mexican American and Latino arts, history, and community life in Austin. Fully funding these priorities ensures that the City upholds its commitment to cultural equity, community investment, and the original vision shaped by community input.

The Advisory Board respectfully urges the Austin City Council to prioritize these investments in the upcoming budget. Doing so will safeguard the integrity of the project, honor community vision, maximize

prior investments, and ensure that the ESB-MACC operates as a world-class cultural institution for generations to come.

Rationale:

Phase 2 Operating Budget

In 2018 a comprehensive community engagement was completed as part of the Facility Expansion Plan which included community members and Austin City Council members. The Austin City Council unanimously voted to adopt the 2018 Facility Expansion Plan on May 24, 2018, with the intent to complete all remaining phases without preconditions on funding sources. The 2018 Bond Committee recommended, and Austin City Council approved \$27 million to be included under Proposition B for the ESB-MACC Phase 2 project. 74 percent of voters in the 2018 election voted in favor of Proposition B. The Joint Venture team of Miro Rivera Architects (Austin) and Estudio Tatiana Bilbao (Mexico City) was selected to lead the Phase 2 design in part because of their experience designing world-class facilities. Due to the rising costs in construction and inflation, items had to be value engineered out of the project to stay within budget. The project team has been diligently working on completing the project slated for completion in late Spring of 2026.

The Mexican American Cultural Center Advisory Board recommends to the Austin City Council to allocate the necessary amount needed to complete the items as were presented during community engagement to fulfill the commitment by the City of Austin to complete a Phase 2 expansion and renovation that is commensurate with a world-class cultural center that continues to reflect the strength and resiliency of Austin’s Mexican American community.

Vote: Vice Chair Zamarripa-Saenz motioned to submit a letter of recommendation to City Council for the FY27 budget as presented with the addition of the stage and the priorities list. Board Member Herrera seconded on a 9-0 vote. Board Member Duarte absent.

For: Chair Angelica Navarro, Vice Chair Lily Zamarripa-Saenz, Board Member Hilario “Larry” Amaro, Board Member Noemi Castro, Board Member John Estrada, Board Member Cynthia “Cy” Herrera, Board Member Lynda Quintana, Board Member Raul “Roy Reyna, Board Member Selma Sanchez

Against:

Abstain:

Absent: Board Member Alexander “Al” Duarte

Attest:



Michelle Rojas, Staff Liaison

TO: Mayor and Austin City Council

FROM: Emma S. Barrientos Mexican American Cultural Center Advisory Board

DATE: March 31, 2026

SUBJECT: Support for Funding Priorities – ESB-MACC Phase 2, Staffing, and Community Partnership

Dear Mayor and Members of the Austin City Council,

On behalf of the Emma S. Barrientos Mexican American Cultural Center (ESB-MACC) Advisory Board, we write to express our strong support for key investments needed to ensure the successful completion and long-term operation of the Phase 2 expansion, as well as to sustain critical community partnerships.

We respectfully offer the following funding priorities for Council's consideration, in order of importance:

1. Approval of the Proposed Fiscal Year 2027 Operating Budget (as Recommended by Staff)

First and foremost, we recommend that City Council approve the proposed Fiscal Year 2027 budget for the ESB-MACC as it will be presented by staff. This includes support for an increased operating budget proportionate to the expanded size, scope, and utilization of the facility, as allowable. Ensuring that operational funding scales appropriately with the facility's growth is essential to fully activate the space and deliver high-quality programming, maintenance, and community services.

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Importantly, the Phase 2 design reflects extensive public comment and community input gathered over multiple years. The elements that were value-engineered out are not incidental—they are directly tied to the community-informed vision for what this cultural center should be. As such, restoring these components through future funding is not only a matter of

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The Advisory Board respectfully urges the Austin City Council to prioritize these investments in the upcoming budget. Doing so will safeguard the integrity of the project, honor community vision, maximize prior investments, and ensure that the ESB-MACC operates as a world-class cultural institution for generations to come.

Thank you for your leadership and continued support.

Sincerely,

Emma S. Barrientos Mexican American Cultural Center Advisory Board