



Date: September 7, 2021

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Councilwoman Suely Saro

Councilmember Roberto Uranga, Seventh District

Vice Mayor Rex Richardson, Ninth District

Subject: Long Beach Cambodian Cultural Center

RECOMMENDATION:

Recommendation to request the City Manager to work with community stakeholders to create a vision and feasibility plan that includes identifying potential sites in Long Beach for a Cambodian American Cultural Center that can serve as a hub to promote art, culture, and history.

BACKGROUND

Long Beach is a diverse and dynamic city, and it is widely recognized for celebrating the diversity of our population, and for embracing and advancing the arts. The City is home to the Museum of Latin American Art, the Pacific Island Ethnic Art Museum, the Homeland Cultural Center and the Long Beach Japanese Cultural Center, among many local cultural institutions.

Long Beach is home to the largest Cambodian population in the United States. The Cambodian or the Khmer people have a long and rich cultural heritage symbolized by the temple city Angkor Wat, considered one of the Wonders of the Ancient World, built

between the 9th and 12th centuries, stands as a living icon of the endurance and genius of all Cambodians throughout the world.

Early connections between the United States and Cambodia began in the 1950s, when Cambodia sent bright and talented college students to universities, including California State Universities in Long Beach and Los Angeles, to study technical trades, engineering, and agriculture with the assistance of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

On April 17, 1975, the lives of Cambodians were forever changed when the Khmer Rouge marched into Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia, and evacuated the entire city as they forced people into labor camps and executed former government officials, doctors, artists, scholars among others. It became known as Year Zero as it was marked by the Khmer Rouge regime. Under that regime, it has been estimated that over 2 million lives were lost due to execution and starvation. Tens of thousands were made widows and orphans, and those who lived through the regime were severely traumatized by their experiences. Several hundred thousand Cambodians fled their country and became refugees, resettling in countries across the world to rebuild their lives.

After the overthrow of the Khmer Rouge regime in 1979, over 140,000 Cambodians came to the United States as refugees, making the City of Long Beach home to the largest Cambodian population in the United States.

The Cambodian genocide was a human tragedy. Cambodian art and culture were nearly lost forever during the Khmer Rouge period. Therefore, it is imperative to have a Cambodian Cultural Center that not only promote but also preserve Cambodian art, culture, and history.

In the ongoing tradition in Long Beach of celebrating the diverse cultures and helping to tell their stories, we request the City Manager to work with community stakeholders to create a vision and feasibility plan and identify potential sites in Long Beach for a Cambodian American Cultural Center that can serve as a home to promote, preserve and celebrate Cambodian art, culture, and history.

This matter has been reviewed by Budget Manager Grace H. Yoon on September 1, 2021.

FISCAL IMPACT

The recommendation requests the City Manager to work with community stakeholders to create a vision and feasibility plan that includes identifying potential sites in Long Beach for a Cambodian American Cultural Center. Based on past experience with the African American Cultural Center and current efforts underway with the Latino American Cultural Center, preparing the feasibility plan will likely require funding for consultant costs to

assist with community engagement (potentially \$50,000 or more). Additionally, due to staff capacity challenges from diversion to other critical citywide priorities, the development of this plan is anticipated to have a moderate impact on staff hours beyond the budgeted scope of duties and is expected to have moderate impact on existing Council priorities. Funding for the development of this plan has not been identified and would require City Council to allocate resources in the future or draw down on reserves. Additional fiscal impacts of the potential implementation of any action items will be further outlined in the report.

SUGGESTED ACTION

Approve Recommendation.