

CALIFORNIA COASTAL COMMISSION

South Coast District Office
301 E Ocean Blvd., Suite 300
Long Beach, CA 90802-4830
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W16c

5-90-311-A3 (Santa Monica Pier Observation Room)

NOVEMBER 4, 2020

CORRESPONDENCE



October 28, 2020

California Coastal
Commission South
Coast District Office 301
E Ocean Blvd., Suite 300
Long Beach, CA 90802-
4830

RE: Permit No. 5-90-311-A3 (Santa Monica Pier Observation Room, Santa Monica) November 4, 2020 Agenda Item 16. c.

Dear Members of the California Coastal Commission,

I hope this letter finds you all safe and healthy. On behalf of the Camacho family and our family-owned restaurant Mariasol, located at the western end of the Santa Monica Pier ("The Pier"), I write this letter in support of the City of Santa Monica's request for approval of a Coastal Development Permit (CDP) amendment, which is described in detail in the Coastal Commission Staff ("Staff") Report dated October 15, 2020. We agree with the Coastal Commission Staff's recommendation to approve this amendment but respectfully request that you modify their "Special Condition" and not prohibit use of the observation room ("the Room") for private events for a number of reasons.

The Camacho family has a history of being skilled operators and thoughtful custodians of landmark locations in the Southern California region. Mariasol is a full-service Mexican restaurant established and operated by my family at the Santa Monica Pier in 1991. We also own and operate El Paseo Inn, a full-service Mexican restaurant founded in 1930 and located at Olvera Street, a part of El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historical Monument in downtown Los Angeles. We have also operated in places such as Universal City Walk, LAX, Dodgers Stadium and Staples Center.

In March 2019, the City of Santa Monica issued a much-needed Nuisance Order that allowed the Room's outer doors to be locked during certain hours for public safety. Your Staff investigated the public safety reasons for the Nuisance Order and agreed to its terms, however, on the condition that no private events be held in the Room. Prior to the Nuisance Order, Mariasol used the Room on a limited basis exclusively for private events, generally during the holiday period of late November and December and the summer season, from May to September. Over the years, Mariasol has used the Room for private events approximately 30 times per year at most, but often used it fewer times per year. On the date of each private event, Mariasol staff is in the Room sporadically from about 3:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. to accommodate cleaning, maintenance, the actual private event and its breakdown. The private events themselves generally take place from about 5:00 p.m. or 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. or 10:00 p.m. at the latest. It is important to note that no member of the public has ever asked Mariasol staff to access the Room during these times nor has the staff witnessed anyone seeking to do so. At all other times, the Room remains open with very little to no activity by members of the public throughout the year. Please see the survey in **Exhibit 1** accompanying this letter. This survey, conducted by the Santa Monica Police Department over the week of August 26th through September 1st, 2019, including Labor Day weekend, shows the infrequency of the Room's use by Pier visitors. Please note the extremely low number of visitors to the Room during the peak summer season compared to the tens of thousands of visitors to the Pier during the same period. Suffice it to say the difference is more than significant.

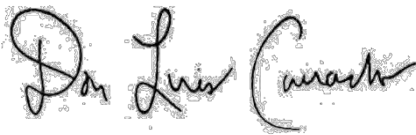
While the Nuisance Order has been critical for public safety, The Pier continues to suffer from frequent criminal activity. Earlier this month alone, The Pier experienced a shooting, a knife fight and numerous brawls. Despite its best efforts, the Santa Monica Police have limited resources to keep people safe. Recently, I was told by Santa Monica Police Chief Cynthia Renaud that measures like lighting and general activity at Mariasol would significantly help make the western end of The Pier safer for the public. Similarly, The Santa Monica Pier Corporation, the non-profit City designated marketing and production arm of The Pier, agrees that private events like those hosted by Mariasol in the Room make the public safer and is supportive of our efforts. Please see **Exhibit 2** for the Santa Monica Pier Corporation letter. Mariasol and the area surrounding it at the western end of The Pier become more remote, less traveled and very dark after the sun sets each day. Even right before sunset, the western end of The Pier receives far fewer visitors for many months of the year. As a result, the vast majority of Mariasol sales come during the daytime hours when it is warmer. When Mariasol is able to secure a private event, it draws visitors in the evening and activates an area of the Pier that would generally not be visited, thereby enhancing the public space and increasing safety.

Mariasol's occasional use of the Room does not affect bona fide nighttime public access activities at The Pier and in fact assists in minimizing the continuing nighttime public safety problems that exist at The Pier. Throughout the year, the Room falls into disrepair, partially due to wear and tear but also due to trash, vandalism, and the like. Before COVID-19, incidents of sexual activity, public urination, verbal assault, graffiti, litter, drug use, illegal smoking (smoking is prohibited on the Pier by Santa Monica Public Ordinance due to fire danger) continued to take place in the Room between 6:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m. but thankfully not at

the same frequency as before the doors were installed by the City of Santa Monica. Please see **Exhibit 3** for pictures of some of these incidents. This mistreatment of the space is due to its remote location, difficulty to access and very infrequent and limited use by the public, despite signage, elevator and stair access. The Pier, with numerous attractions and sites that call for attention, simply has a large variety of equally scenic and easy-to-access locations for visitors to enjoy. Nevertheless, the Mariasol staff works with the City of Santa Monica to report on and maintain the Room to do its best to keep it safe and clean for all visitors to the Pier on a year-round basis. Please see **Exhibit 4** for pictures of the Room well maintained by Mariasol staff. If we are not prohibited from holding private events in the room Mariasol would institute additional measures to help keep the space safe and clean going forward.

As you know, the effects of the COVID-19 crisis have devastated the restaurant industry. For one, our restaurants Mariasol and El Paseo Inn have been closed since March. The financial and emotional toll on our family, staff and the surrounding community has been immeasurable. Tourism at The Pier has been eliminated and may not return for years. The City of Santa Monica, like the rest of California and the country, is in a deep recession and recovery from it will be a slow process. When the crisis has passed and it is safe to reopen Mariasol, we will be in great need of generating revenue. Please do not handicap our efforts to rebuild and attempt to restore our family business by preventing private events in the Room. In any case, we appreciate your consideration of our request and thank you for your service to the State. Your efforts and dedication are very much appreciated. I wish you all the best.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Don Luis Camacho". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Don Luis Camacho
President
Mariasol Restaurant
Santa Monica Pier, Santa Monica, CA

Exhibit 1 – Survey

West End Viewing Deck - Visitor Survey

Date	Number of Visitors - checks every two hours
8/26/2019 - Monday	
6:00 AM	0
8:00 AM	2
10:00 AM	1
12:00 PM	0
2:00 PM	1
4:00 PM	0-1B
6:00 PM	0-1B
8:00 PM	1
10:00 PM	0
total	5
8/27/2019 - Tuesday	
6:00 AM	0
8:00 AM	2
10:00 AM	1
12:00 PM	1
2:00 PM	0
4:00 PM	0-1B
6:00 PM	2
8:00 PM	1
10:00 PM	0
total	12
8/28/2019 - Wednesday	
6:00 AM	0
8:00 AM	2
10:00 AM	0-1B
12:00 PM	0-1B
2:00 PM	0-1B
4:00 PM	0-1B
6:00 PM	0 HR
8:00 PM	3 HR
10:00 PM	0 HR
total	8
8/29/2019 - Thursday	
6:00 AM	0
8:00 AM	0
10:00 AM	0-1B
12:00 PM	0-1B
2:00 PM	2
4:00 PM	1
6:00 PM	4
8:00 PM	5
10:00 PM	0 HR
total	12
8/30/2019 - Friday	
6:00 AM	0
8:00 AM	2
10:00 AM	1
12:00 PM	2
2:00 PM	1

Confidential

8/26/2019

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Exhibit 1 – Survey

West End Viewing Deck - Visitor Survey	
Date	Number of Visitors - checks every two hours
4:00 PM	2
6:00 PM	3
8:00 PM	1
10:00 PM	0 4

total

(12)

8/31/2019 - Saturday

6:00 AM	0
8:00 AM	0
10:00 AM	2
12:00 PM	1
2:00 PM	1
4:00 PM	1
6:00 PM	8
8:00 PM	2
10:00 PM	3

total

(18)

9/1/2019 - Sunday

6:00 AM	5
8:00 AM	1
10:00 AM	2
12:00 PM	1
2:00 PM	3
4:00 PM	2
6:00 PM	1
8:00 PM	3
10:00 PM	2

total

(13)



October 29, 2020

California Coastal Commission
South Coast District Office 301 E
Ocean Blvd. Suite 300 Long
Beach, CA 90802-4830

RE: Coastal Commission Staff Recommendation for Permit Amendment No. 5-90-311-A3 (Santa Monica Pier Observation Room, Santa Monica) - November 4, 2020 Agenda Item 16. c.

Dear Members of the California Coastal Commission,

The Santa Monica Pier Corporation applauds the staff recommendations within Permit Amendment No. 5-90- 311-A3 in regard to the recently installed doors and establishment of closure of those doors nightly from 10:00 PM to 6:00 PM at the Pier's Observation Room at 401 Santa Monica Pier, while also asking for further consideration into allowance of private events within that space.

The Pier Corporation is a 501(c)3 non-profit formed by the City of Santa Monica to handle marketing and events on the landmark 111-year old structure. Among the many intricate duties within the "marketing and events" realm are both the production of public events and the rental of space for private events. It has been our observation of the past many years that events, whether they be smaller, consumer-facing activations or the more grandiose large-scale productions, have become an effective deterrent to the less-desirable activities which pose risks to public safety. In fact, the more that our public and private programming has increased in recent years, the safer the Pier has become.

We agree with the Coastal Commission's stance that the Observation Room is best used as a publicly accessible viewing area, and we are very appreciative of the Commission's recognition of the potential value of the Observation Room's potential for events that are open to the public, for the space has drawn interest in the past and we expect that to continue in the future. We do, however, also see the potential benefits for allowing private events within that space.

Private events most often take place in the evening and nighttime hours. With the new application of "closed" hours at nighttime for the Observation Room, we view the use of it as event space as being positive in a number of ways beyond just a revenue source. The added usage will assure that more attention is given to the cleanliness and maintenance of the space that might otherwise be overlooked. Plus, as mentioned earlier in this letter, activation of the space will act as a deterrent for any nefarious or otherwise unwanted activities. Keeping the Pier's image as a clean, safe and family-friendly venue is something that our organization, alongside all other Pier stakeholders, has worked hard to achieve during the past several decades, and it is attention to the lesser-known details such as activating this space that have helped the Pier to achieve an overall positive reputation.

200 SANTA MONICA PIER, SUITE A. SANTA MONICA, CA 90401

Exhibit 2 – Letter from Jim Harris (SM Pier Corporation)

Our friends at Mariasol Cocina Mexicana, the restaurant immediately adjacent to the Observation Room, have activated that space often, and in doing so have taken on the extra duties of cleaning and maintenance in order to assure the room's general appeal. Our organization is, of course, very appreciative of their above- and-beyond efforts toward that, as I'm sure the City of Santa Monica is as well. We know that they, too, are very interested in continuing to use the room for private events. Having witnessed the benefits of their stewardship of the room first-hand, and also recognizing that their use has never generated complaints from the general public nor caused any other negative issues, we applaud Mariasol's use of the space in the past and hope that they may continue the same moving forward.

In summary, the Santa Monica Pier has a very special public space in the Observation Room, and part of what makes that space so special is its flexibility as a public viewing area which provides extraordinary views during the daytime as well as its potential as a safe and clean rentable private event space after-hours. We ask that you please consider adding the private event use to the current proposed amendment.

Thank You,



James Harris
Deputy Director

Santa Monica Pier Corporation
(310) 458-4939

Exhibit 3 – Santa Monica Pier Observation Deck Space



Exhibit 3 – Santa Monica Pier Observation Deck Space

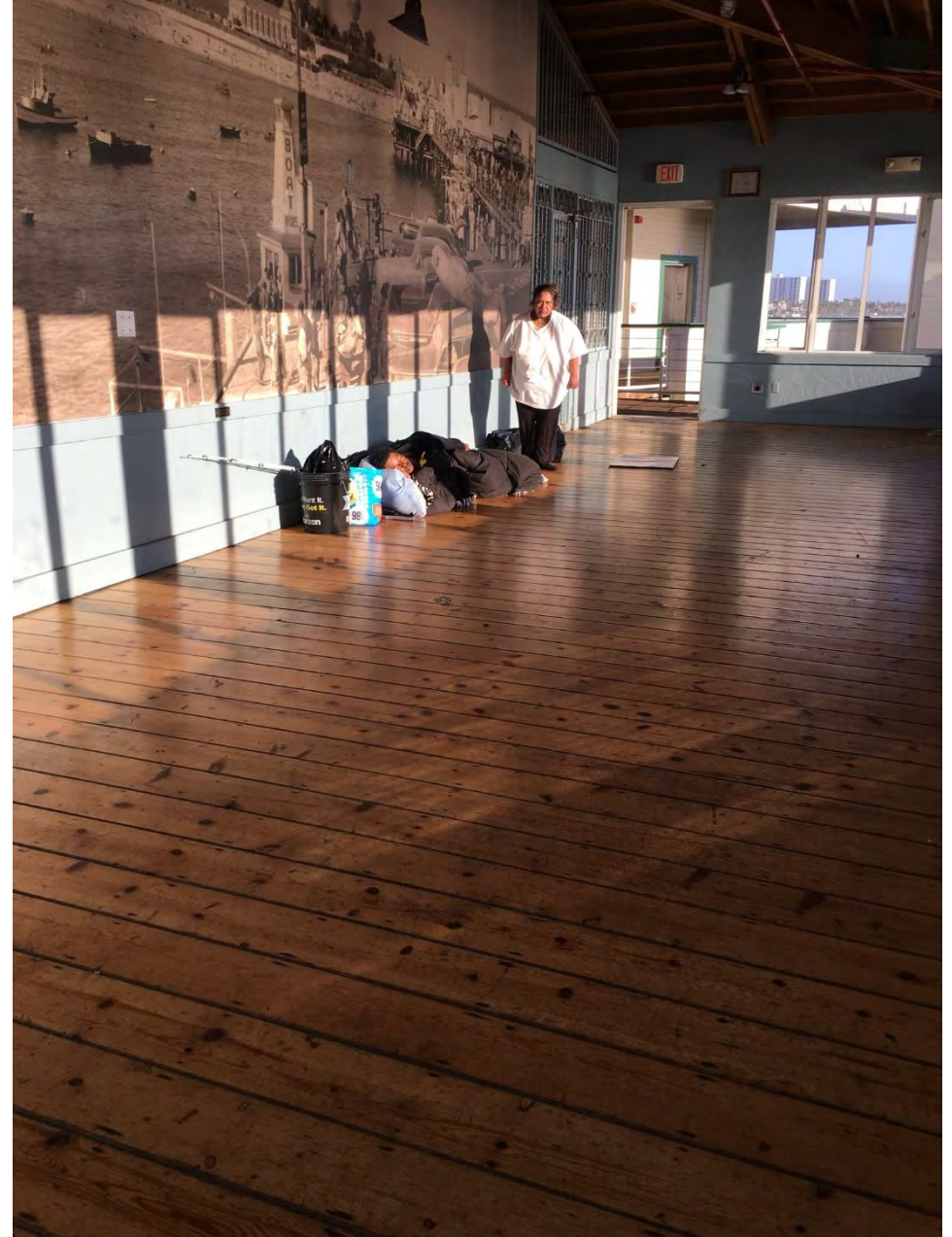


Exhibit 3 – Santa Monica Pier Observation Deck Space



Exhibit 4 – Santa Monica Pier Observation Deck Space

