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# Mariachi Plaza Cultural Preservation Needs Assessment Community Survey Report

SUBMITTED BY

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# BACKGROUND

Mariachi Plaza is as a historical and cultural landmark in the community of Boyle Heights. Located at the cross streets of First Avenue and Boyle Street, across from the old brick Boyle Hotel, the plaza is also a place where artists/performers/musicians gather for employment opportunities. Mariachi Plaza sits above one of Metro's light rail stations that is surrounded by affordable housing developments, White Memorial Medical Center, and a thriving corridor of small businesses such as restaurants, coffee shops and bars.

Mariachi Plaza is a pedestrian plaza that includes both City of Los Angeles and Metro properties. It connects the use of Metro's station plaza and the City of Los Angeles owned area (including a kiosk which is a replicate of Plaza Garibaldi in Mexico City). Metro's light rail subway station was opened in 2009 and includes escalators, elevators, and stairways that lead down to the mezzanine level and platform level of the station. Metro's plaza also includes a stage area where third-party, Metro permitted events take place, such as the farmers market, health/wellness events, and the annual Mariachi Festival and Celebration for Santa Cecilia, Patron Saint of the Musicians in November.

The community of Boyle Heights has a rich cultural history that has been home to Jewish, Japanese and now to a predominately Mexican American community. The increase in housing costs are prime concerns for the residents who live in the neighborhoods immediately adjacent to Mariachi Plaza.

East Los Angeles Community Corporation is considering a housing development on a Metro vacant owned lot adjacent to Mariachi Plaza. The proposed project would include a total of 60 units. This includes 59 units of affordable housing, 1 manager unit, retail, mariachi resource/community center, community garden and parking.

Metro is in the process of conducting an assessment and analysis of the community's needs at Mariachi Plaza. Through this process, Metro and Lee Andrews Group collaborated to conduct community surveys would meet the following objectives:

- Understanding the history and cultural significance of Mariachi Plaza in Boyle Heights
- Understanding the current and future needs of the mariachi musicians and other local artists as it related to their use of the plaza, as well as their housing needs
- Understanding the community needs and uses of the Plaza for special events

In recognition of the rich history surrounding this site and concerns regarding housing affordability, it was vital to thoughtfully engage stakeholders to understand the needs of the community.

# APPROACH

In collaboration with Metro, Lee Andrews Group developed a Project Management Plan (PMP) that outlined the project approach and schedule. This collaboration included the design of a bilingual (English and Spanish) survey to assess the needs of the community. Additionally, in coordination with Metro, Lee Andrews Group developed a stakeholder list of individuals and groups to conduct outreach and promote awareness of the survey, future projects and community engagement opportunities. These stakeholders included:

- Los Angeles County Supervisor Hilda Solis
- Los Angeles City Council Member Kevin De Leon
- California State Senator Maria Elena Durazo
- California Assembly Member Miguel Santiago
- Ben Johnson, City of Los Angeles, Performing Arts Program Director
- Los Angeles Department of Water and Power
- Los Angeles Sanitation
- Boyle Heights Resiliency Hub
- Mariachis- OMULA, OMICAL
- Various groups who established Mariachi Relief Funds
- Festival Foundation (Frank Villalobos/Barrio Planners) and Azure Development proposed affordable housing project at southeast corner of First Street and Boyle Ave.
- The Mariachi Conservatory
- Self-Help Graphics
- The Boyle Heights Arts Conservatory
- Proyecto Pastoral
- Fideicomiso Comunitario Tierra Libre
- Residents and business owners within 750 ft
- First Street Business Association
- East LA Community Corporation (ELACC)
- Boyle Heights Neighborhood Council
- Boyle Heights Planning and Land Use Committee
- Design Review Advisory Committee (DRAC)
- Boyle Heights Community at Large

Surveys were conducted between November 20, 2021 and December 22, 2021. The surveys were conducted in-person and collected digitally via tablets on Survey Monkey, through QR codes and providing participants with the option of handwritten response. Surveys were collected at Mariachi Plaza and at various community events. To encourage participation, Lee Andrews Group incentivized participation by offering gift cards.

Lee Andrews Group hired residents through the Promotora program to facilitate participation from the community. This approach provided for a cost-effective method to gather input from the community at Mariachi Plaza and community events.

Surveys were collected at the following events and/or dates:

- November 20th – YMCA Turkey Giveaway
- November 21st – Mariachi Festival
- November 23rd Mariachi Festival
- December 3rd – Mariachi Plaza Station
- December 5th – 5th Annual Christmas Parade
- December 10th Mariachi Plaza Station
- December 11th – 1st Annual Boyle Heights Tree Lighting Ceremony
- December 16th – YMCA Toy Giveaway
- December 22nd – Mariachi Station and Mercadito
- December 23rd – Mariachi Station and Mercadito



As a result of these efforts, 585 surveys were collected. Of the 585 surveys, 277 were in English and 308 were in Spanish. A total of 12 questions were asked to all participants and 18 questions were asked of participants that identified themselves as artist/performer/musician after question 11. Please note that one of the questions related to contact information of the surveyed participants. The list of questions and responses are included in Appendix A.

Of the 585 surveys collected, 68 participants (12% of all participants ) identified themselves as an artist/performer/musician. This group of participants were then asked six additional questions related to housing, homelessness and access to affordable housing.

Additionally, two focus groups were conducted to further engage the Mariachi community in a discussion and solicit additional feedback. The focus groups were hosted on two separate Fridays in January 2022. The first was hosted on January 14, 2022, and the second was hosted on January 28, 2022. Twenty individuals were invited to participate. There was a total of 11 participants.

#### Focus Group One (January 14, 2022)

- Mariachi Musician from Boyle Heights
- Artist from San Fernando
- Mariachi Musician from Boyle Heights

#### Focus Group Two (January 28, 2022)

- Mariachi Musician Organizer from Omical
- Mother of Mariachi students from Boyle Heights
- Mariachi Musician from Boyle Heights
- Mariachi Teacher from Garfield High School



# SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

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As a result of the surveys, the following key findings were identified

- The three top reasons that people visit Mariachi Plaza are to attend live events, because they live in the community and to purchase from street vendors
- Culture, history and mariachis were the most popular responses when survey participants were asked what Mariachi Plaza meant to them
- The three most popular choices for events and activities to take place at Mariachi Plaza were cultural events (such as Dia de Los Muertos), live music and food vendors
- Safety, cleanliness and programming were the top three responses participants gave when asked what participants would improve at Mariachi Plaza
- 71 out of 585 survey participants has applied for permits at Mariachi Plaza, of those 76% indicated that the process was user-friendly
- Residents from Boyle Heights, Artists/Performers/Musicians and Small Business Owners were the top three choices when survey takers were asked who should make decisions about special events and activities
- With respect to the community space available at the new housing development, the most supported options included support services for Mariachis and the community, other (reference sub bullet below) and cultural space focused on Mariachis
- Responses for other included incubator and support services, food, library, Aztec dancers, entertainment (extension of the Plaza), and wellness programs
- With respect to how Metro should inform the community of upcoming events at Mariachi Plaza, the top three responses were Telemundo, Univision and Facebook
- The top three survey participants were residents, transit riders and youth



The focus of the surveys then turned to the 68 respondents who were musicians, performers or artists.

- 72% of participants indicated that finding adequate and affordable housing as a challenge
- 37% indicated that their housing situation had remained the same, while 35% indicated that it had improved, and 28% indicated that it had changed negatively
- 28% of participants shared that they had been unhoused in the previous two years
- 72% responded that that they have permanent housing now
- 38% indicated that availability, financial assistance/government programs and information where and how to apply for affordable housing would make affordable housing more accessible
- Participants indicate Other as the most popular choices when it came to where they look for housing. These responses included:
  - All of the above (Craigslist, Laundromats, and Newspapers)
  - Zillow/Redfin
  - Neighborhood Postings
  - Word of mouth
  - Friends
  - El Clasificado

Of the 68 participants who were musicians, performers and artists, a total of 20 people were randomly selected to participate in the Focus Groups. 11 of these individuals participated in the two focus groups facilitated by Lee Andrews groups. Some of the key findings from these two focus groups were:

- Most of the focus group participants had not applied for affordable housing or subsidized housing and live in sub-par conditions
- Mariachis frequent Mariachi Plaza to congregate with other Mariachis and to look for employment
- Only one of the focus group participants did not live in Boyle Heights, but he commutes from San Fernando Valley to Mariachi Plaza to look for work

The focus groups served as a venue to have deeper conversation and provide greater context to the housing insecurities and challenges faced by mariachis and other performers. Some of the reasons that they shared as to why they did not apply for affordable housing included lack of sufficient credit scores, lack of legal status or documentation and not having access to information.



## Themes

Through engagement with nearly 600 respondents, some key themes emerged.

- Mariachi Plaza continues to be culturally significant to the community
- Safety and cleanliness are concerns to stakeholders surveyed
- There is interest in having community input when permitting third party events at Mariachi Plaza
- Support services for Mariachis at the new proposed development is strongly supported
- The use of Spanish media is key towards informing the community about events at Mariachi Plaza

When addressing the additional questions with the 68 participants who identified as artists, performers and musicians, the concerns regarding housing affordability and access to affordable housing programs were significantly identified. This is further supported by the feedback received in the two focus groups.



## Recommendations

As the proposed development moves forward, it is key that Metro meaningfully continues to engage stakeholders, residents and business owners who work and live near Mariachi Plaza. Lee Andrews Group recommends the following:

- The development of a community roundtable, consisting of residents, small business owners, artists, performers and musicians for input on events on Mariachi Plaza
  - This roundtable could also assist with improving communication with the community regarding cleanliness and upkeep of Mariachi Plaza, which were raised as concerns
- Improved coordination for use of the Mariachi Plaza kiosk and stage such as a single point of contact for permitting
  - The process could also include:
    - Online permitting process (website and QR code)
    - Information on how to apply for a permit at the kiosk
    - Information in English and Spanish

- Improved coordination of responsibility for public safety at Mariachi Plaza, such as meetings between all public safety agencies responsible to discuss community concerns and confusion over whose jurisdiction, this could also include
  - Community meeting with residents, small business owners, artists, performers and musicians to discuss safety at Mariachi Plaza

With respect to the issues raised in the surveys and focus groups, such as access and affordability, the following recommendations are provided:

- Partnering with elected officials who represent Mariachi Plaza to host events to discuss access and housing affordability programs with local stakeholders, this could include Housing non-profits in Los Angeles
  - Housing non-profits in Los Angeles
  - Immigrants' rights non-profits in Los Angeles
  - Public agencies with housing access and affordability programs in Los Angeles

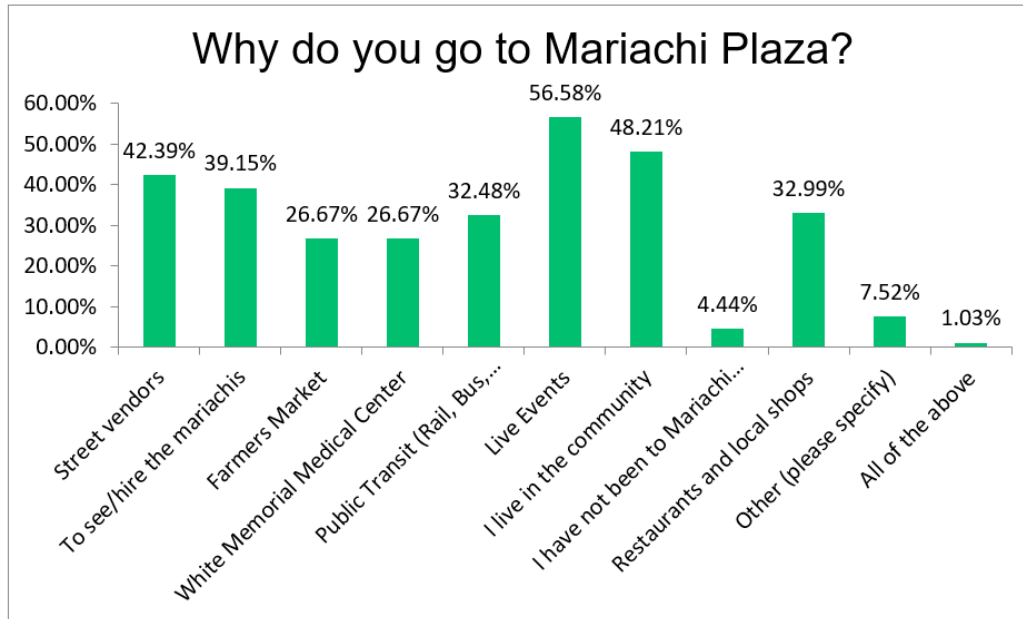
## Conclusion

Mariachi Plaza remains a landmark of historical importance and cultural significance. It maintains a place of meaning for those who frequent the Plaza and for those that reside within the Boyle Heights community. The opportunity to continue building goodwill and establish partnerships with local stakeholders exists. Through continued engagement, Metro can support efforts to ensure that the cultural and historical integrity of Mariachi Plaza are maintained.

## Appendix A: Survey Results

The questions and responses for the survey are included below.

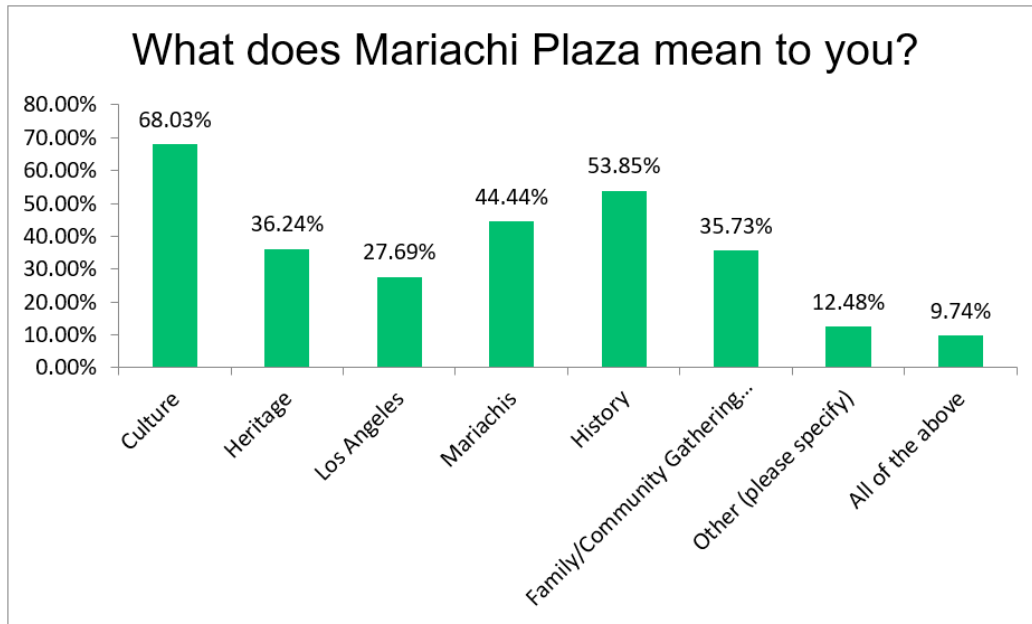
### Question 1.



There were 585 responses to this question. Other responses included:

- To go to work
- To hang out/sight seeing
- To look for work

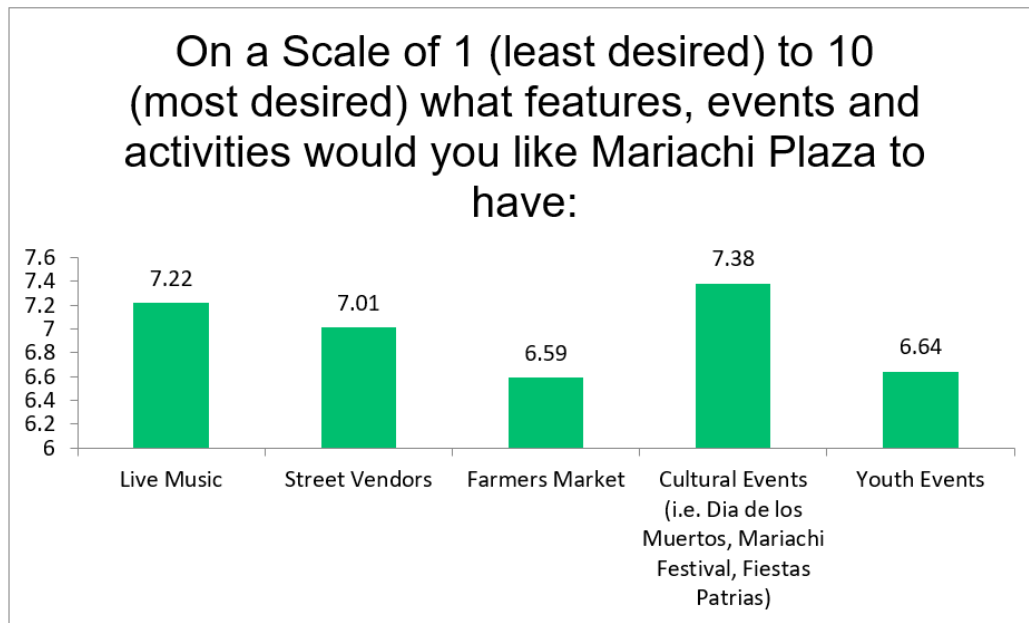
## Question 2.



There were 585 responses to this question. Other responses included:

- Work
- I have not been there
- All the above

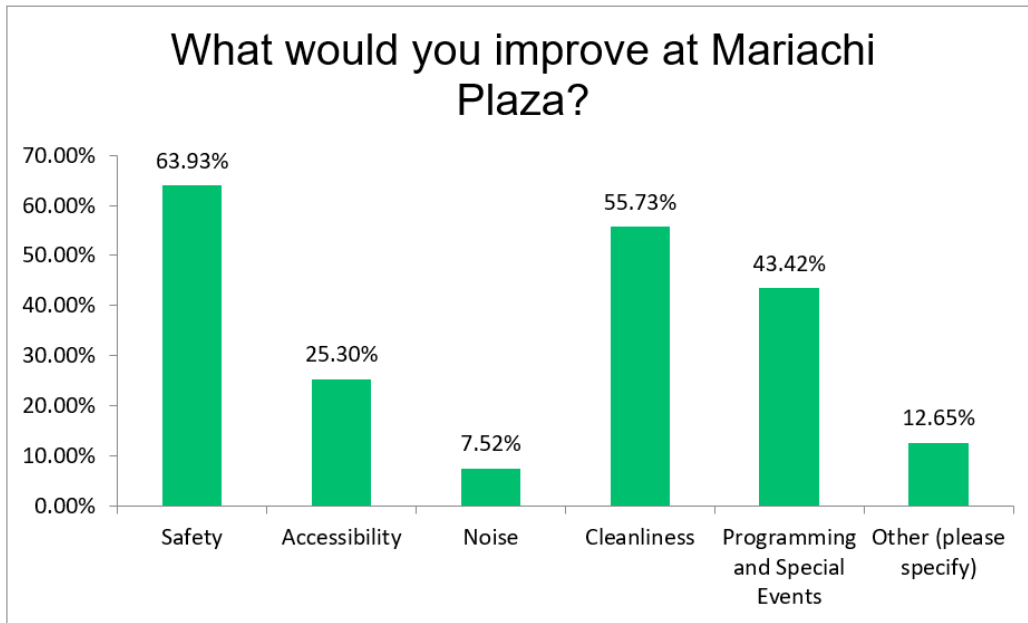
### Question 3



There were 579 responses to this question. Other responses included:

- Food distribution
- Events that include parking
- Family activities
- Vaccine sites
- Ways for local mariachis to connect with people who stop by

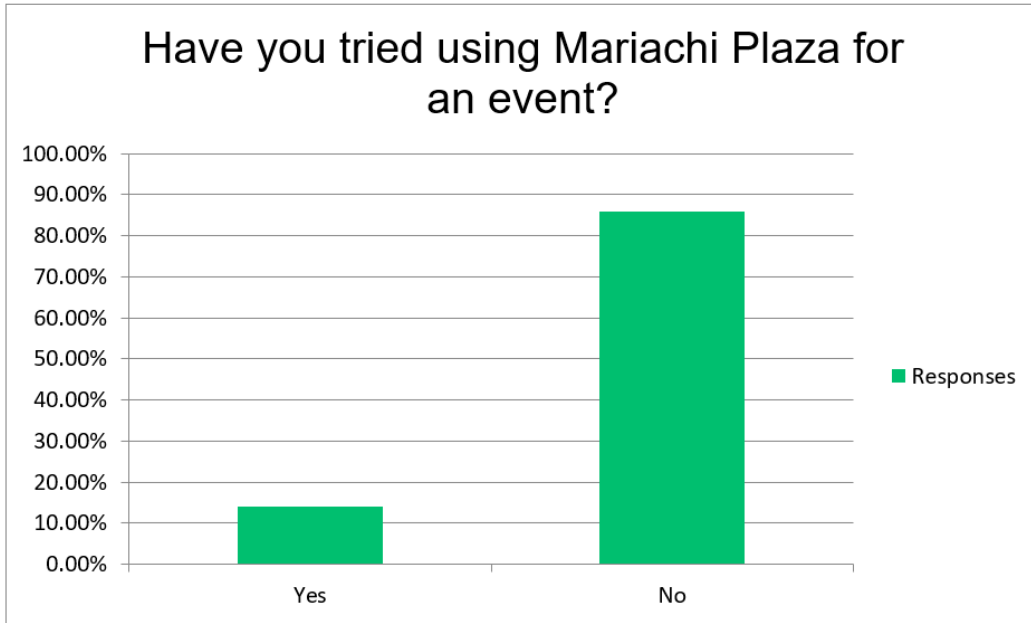
## Question 4



There were 585 responses to this question. Other responses included:

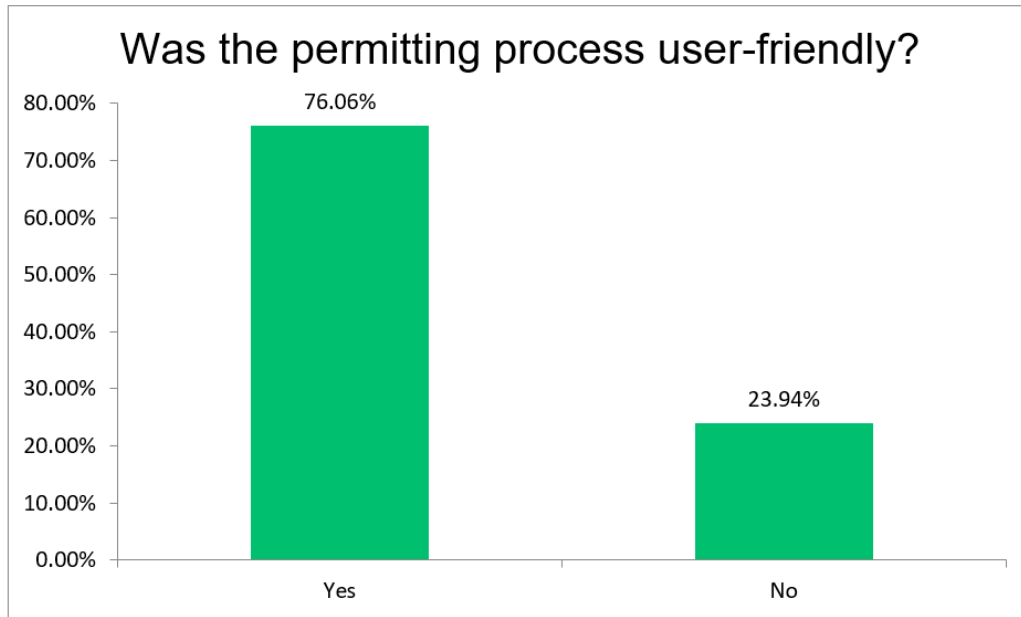
- Restrooms
- I would not improve much
- Street Vendors
- Parking
- Bus frequency
- Seating
- Homeless Mariachis
- All the above (safety, accessibility, noise, cleanliness, programming)

### Question 5



There were 83 responses to this question.

## Question 6



We received 71 responses to this question out of 585 respondents.

The follow up question was, "What would make the permitting process better?"

Responses received included:

- Extended deadlines (online accessibility)
- Parking
- Clarity of permits/permitting process
- Wi-Fi on site
- Online application
- Cheaper fees
- Follow the Olvera street model. Too many bosses to answer too (bureaucracy).
- Additional support/technical assistance
- Faster process

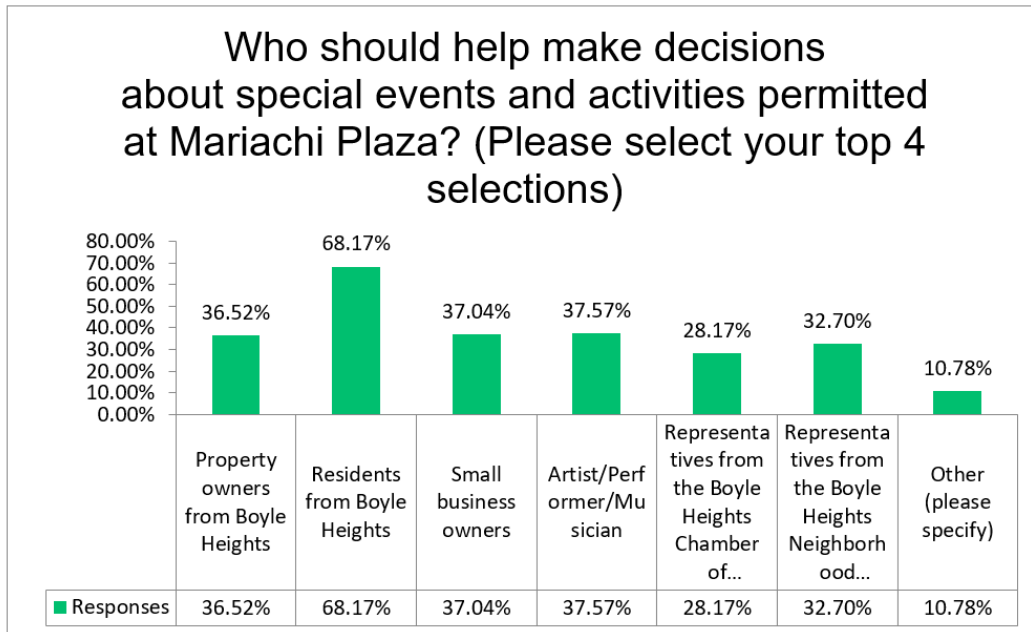


## Question 7

What would make the permitting process better? (There were 19 responses to this question) The reoccurring responses are provided below.

- Online Accessibility/Application
- Extended deadlines
- Parking
- Clarity of permits
- Wi-fi
- Cheaper fees
- Cleansing
- Nothing, it is good the way that it is
- Follow the Olvera street model
- More support
- Quicker response
- More information

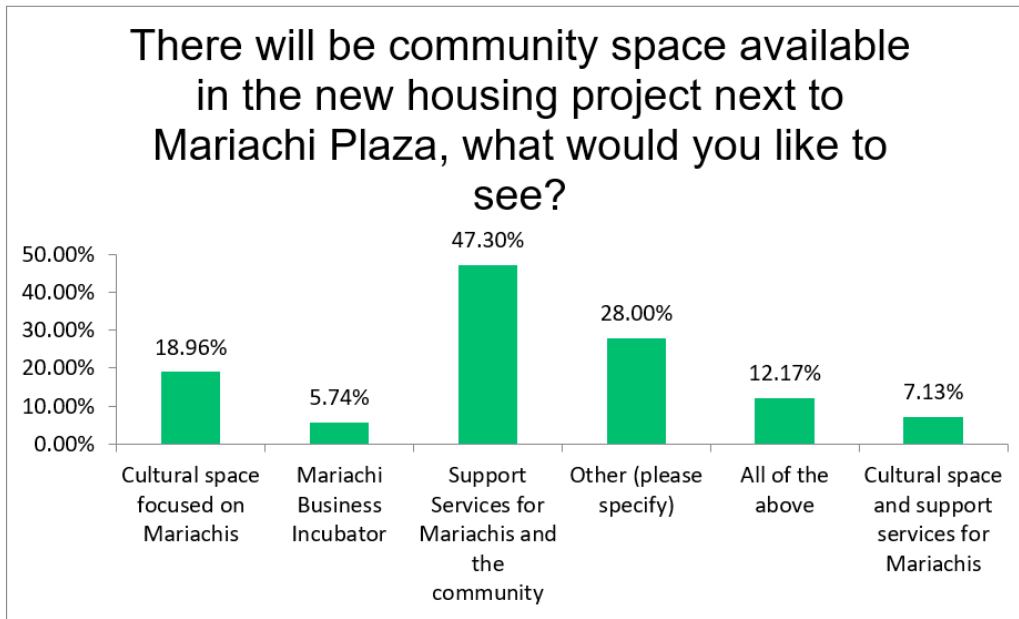
### Question 8



**There were 575 responses to this question. Other responses included:**

- All the above
- A committee with a representative from all the above
- Create a resident community advisory council
- Mariachi Plaza Festival Foundation
- LAUSD Performing Arts

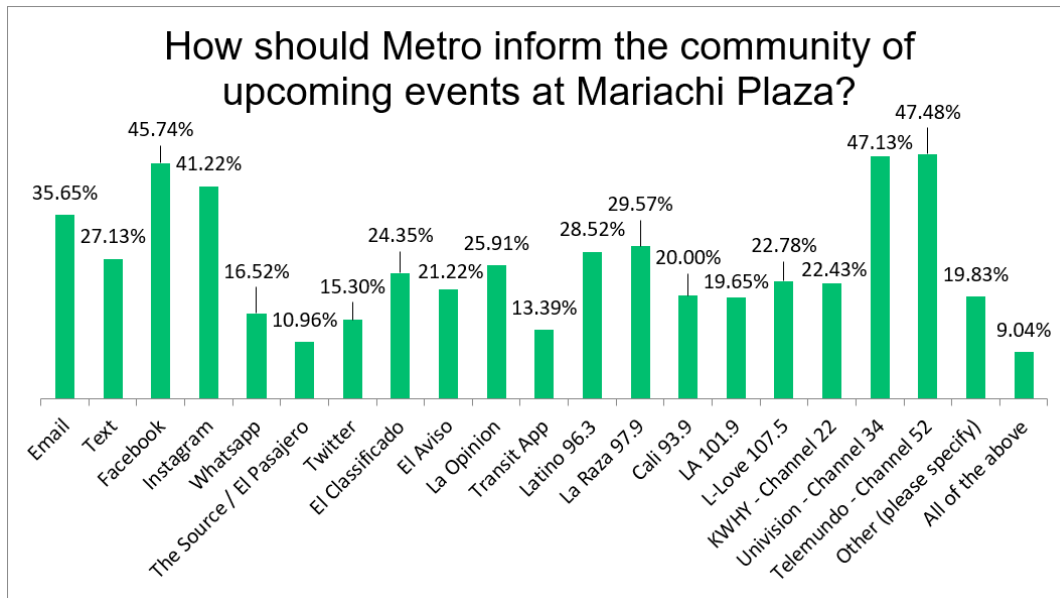
## Question 9



There were 575 responses to this question. Other responses included:

- Incubator and support services
- Food
- Library
- Do not support ELACC or this project
- Aztec dancers
- Entertainment, extend the plaza
- Wellness programs

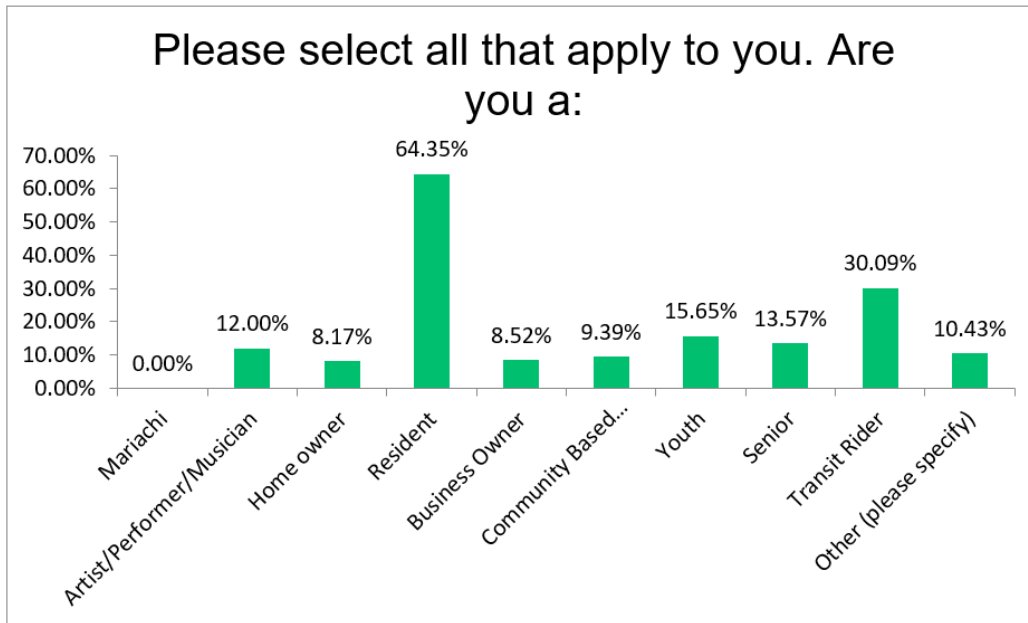
## Question 10



There were 575 responses to this question. Other responses included:

- Flyers/Posters in the community
- 93.1 Jack FM
- USPS
- Neighborhood Council
- BH Beat
- LA Times
- Billboards
- 103.9 FM

## Question 11

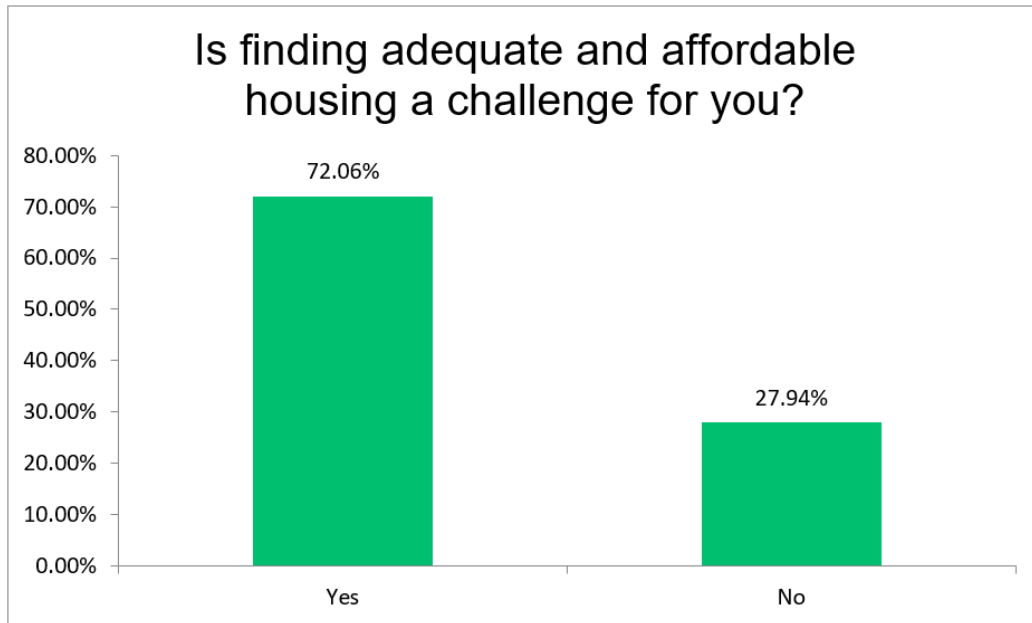


There were 575 responses to this question. Other responses included:

- Educational/teacher
- Work for special events
- Activist
- Boyle Heights Coalition
- Work at White Memorial
- Billboard

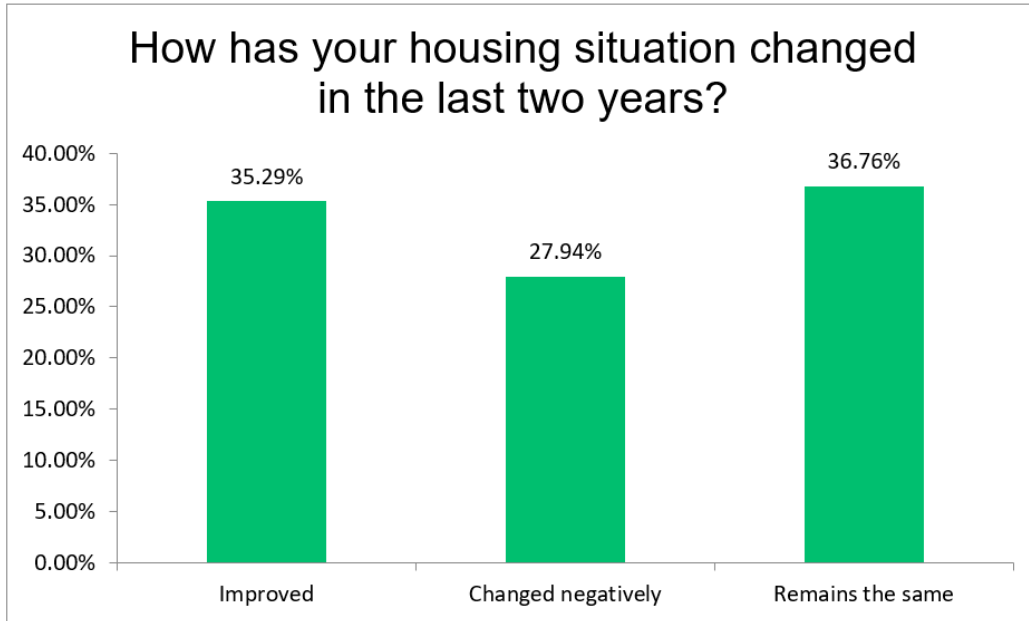
Participants who responded that they were an Artist/Performer/Musician to Question 11 were then asked six additional questions related to housing. 68 out of the 585 participants indicated that they were Artists/Performers/Musicians.

## Question 12



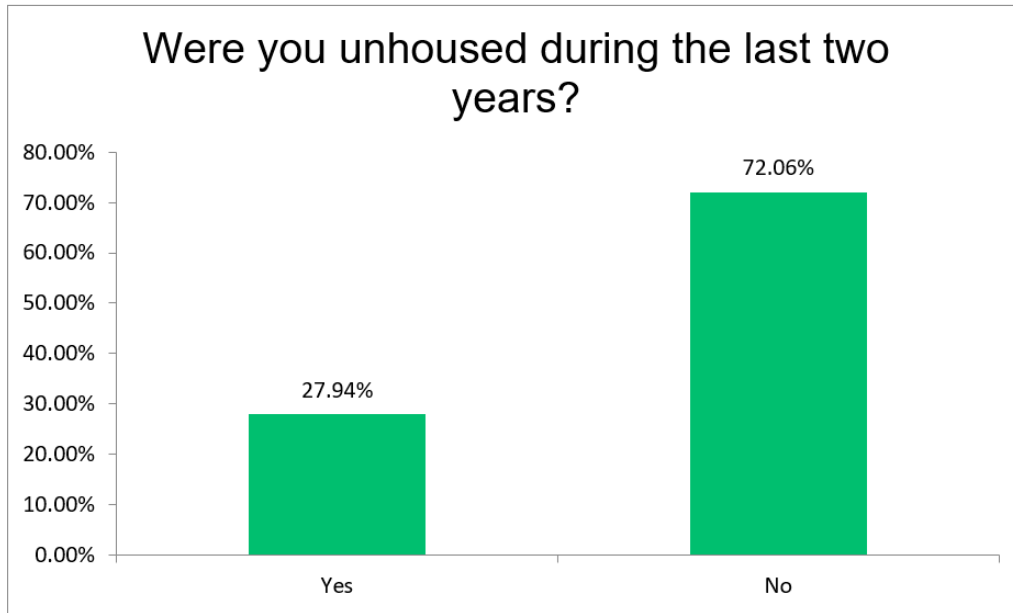
For this question, we received 68 responses out of 585. This question was targeted to musicians/performers/artists.

### Question 13



There were 68 responses to this question.

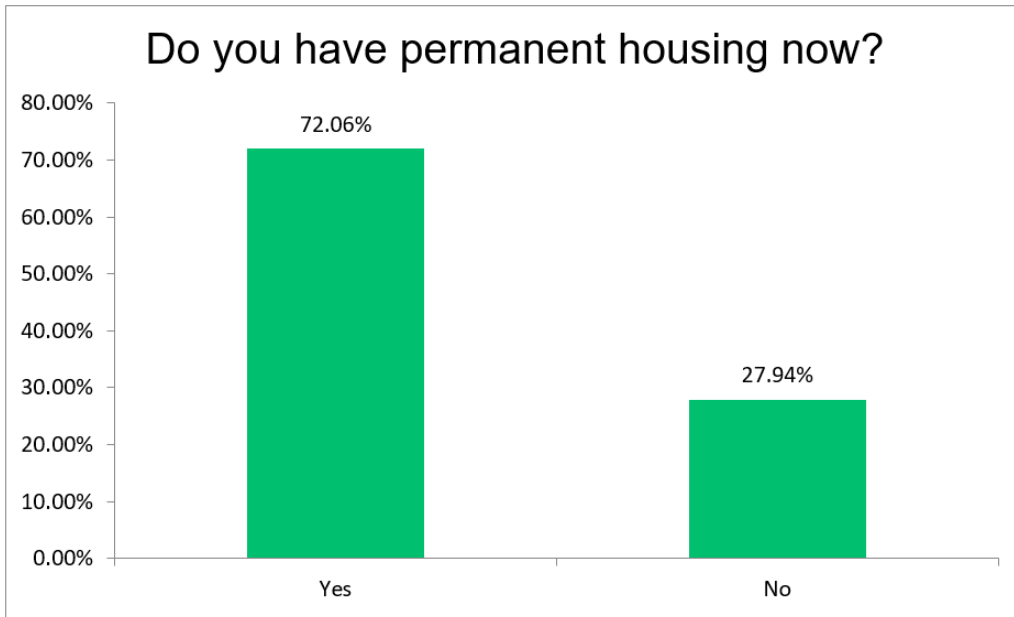
### Question 14



There were 68 responses to this question.

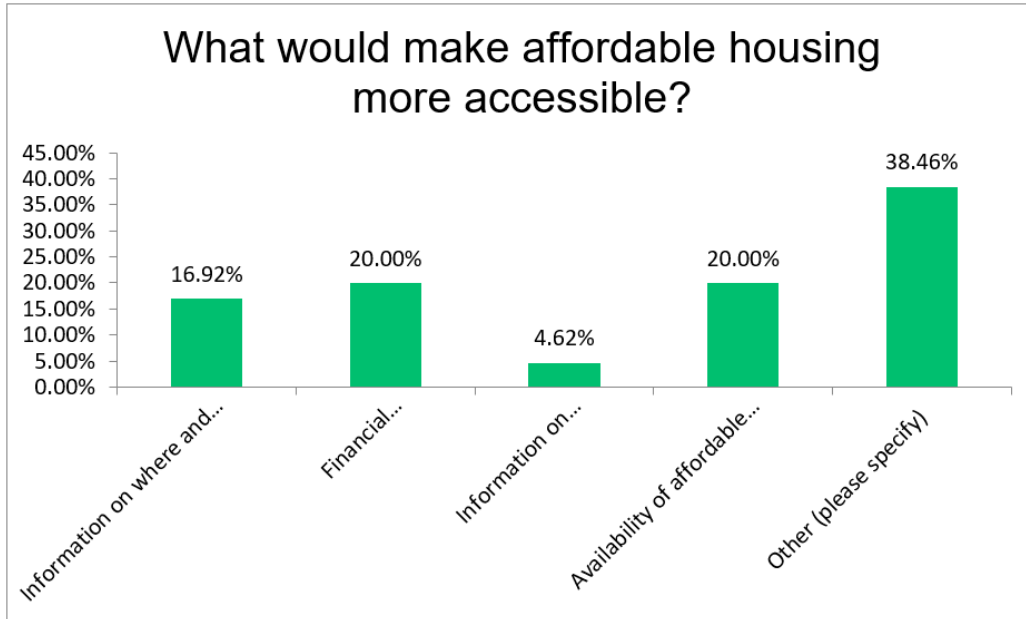


### Question 15



There were 68 responses to this question.

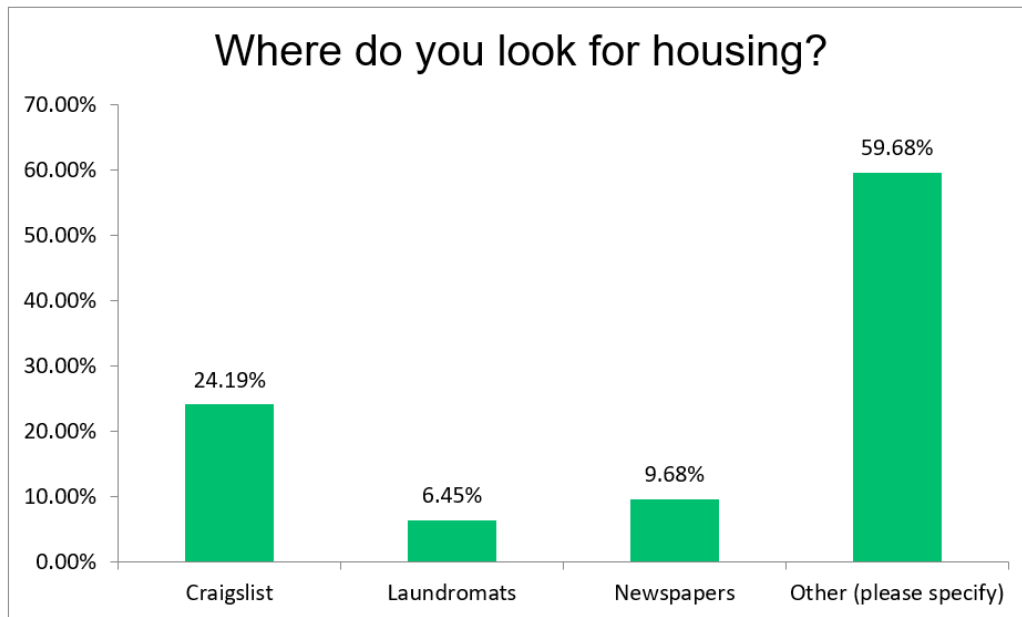
## Question 16



There were 68 responses to this question.

- Employment opportunitéis and availability
- All of the above

## Question 17



There were 62 responses to this question. Other responses included:

- All the above
- Zillow/Redfin
- Neighborhood Postings
- Word of mouth
- Friends
- El Clasificado

Participants who responded that they were an Artist/Performer/Musician to Question 11 were then asked six additional questions related to housing. 68 out of the 585 participants indicated that they were Artists/Performers/Musicians.