

From: [Pat Marriott](#)
To: [Public Comment](#)
Subject: SPECIAL SESSION ITEM 1 MARCH 11, 2025
Date: Sunday, March 9, 2025 12:21:26 PM
Attachments: [3-11-25 public comment special session.pdf](#)

Please see attached.

PUBLIC COMMENT SPECIAL SESSION MARCH 11, 2025

Council Members:

There's been a great deal of discussion and criticism about the PARC Commission's lack of support for cultural events, particularly regarding the Iftar in 2024 and another scheduled for March 15, 2025.

I'm dismayed when my elected officials – who are supposed to represent me – behave in a disrespectful antagonistic manner toward other residents who sign up to serve the city.

Reviewing documents acquired through PRA requests, it's clear the PARC commissioners have done their due diligence and made appropriate decisions regarding Iftar in the absence of guidance from Council and Staff.

February 20, 2024 PARC Commission meeting

Staff report (attached) says: "The Muslims Around Los Altos group (MALA) is partnering with the Parks & Recreation Department to coordinate a few cultural events in Los Altos. ... Discuss the programs and request for funding presented by the MALA group and decide if funding from the Cultural aspect of the Public Art Fund is appropriate."

The MALA item was added to the agenda at the last minute without discussing with the commission chair. PARC reached out to Staff and the council liaison on February 18 asking for information, specifically for "... all applicable ordinances, permit requirements, fee waiver process rules/criteria, and the like pertaining to these areas: (a) separation of church and state."

Staff responded on the day of the meeting: "We do not have time. I also am not sure what is being asked."

No information was forthcoming.

At the meeting, MALA asked PARC for \$15,000 to support and promote an Iftar. After an in-depth discussion, the commission voted 4-1 vote against the request, based on concerns the event was religious.

Having already categorized the Iftar as cultural, Staff waived the room rental fee. They'd been having discussions with MALA regarding banners and room availability as early as February 5th.

After the commission meeting, the city manager and council liaison both thanked the chair for "making sure everyone's questions were answered and viewpoints were heard" and for having a "respectful and professional" discussion.

Some attendees of the March 31st Iftar told me they felt uncomfortable with the religious aspects, particularly the Call to Prayer. It appears commissioners were justified in denying support.

January 28, 2025 Council Meeting

The PARC commission was called on the carpet in a public meeting, given no opportunity to defend themselves against criticism, mainly from Mayor Dailey and Councilman Weinberg.

Newspaper reports surely proved embarrassing to the commissioners – and should be embarrassing to Council as well.

The February 23 Daily Post had a front-page article headlined, “Commission’s ‘culture of no’” with Mayor Dailey claiming the commission’s culture is “toxic” and it “has shown disrespect for Staff” – without corroboration.

The January 28 Town Crier headline was “Low-performing PARC commission under council review.” It ended with this paragraph quoting Councilman Weinberg: “If the response is, the Staff report is wrong, it’s biased, it’s full of half-truths, as someone who wasn’t there likes to call it, I am going to have a really difficult time finding a way to move forward with the commission as is.”

In other words, two elected officials passed a guilty verdict without hearing from the defendants, and any support for the defendants would only make their sentence worse!

If Council was unhappy with PARC’s work, a more appropriate approach would have been to have a meeting with the commission to hear their perspective and discuss ways to ensure their efforts aligned with Council’s wishes.

It must be noted that two commissions were merged to form PARC: Parks & Rec and Public Art. No guidance was ever provided about the new “cultural” aspect with respect to city policies, rules for evaluating financial and space requests, or how to distinguish between “cultural” and “religious” activities.

February 18, 2025 PARC Commission Meeting

Staff report agenda (attached) item 3: “Endorse the MALA Iftar Cultural Event.

RECOMMENDATION: Action to endorse the Iftar Dinner that is scheduled for March 15, 2025 as part of the PARC Commission’s efforts to increase cultural programming in Los Altos.”

Staff again decided the Iftar is a cultural event and waived the room rental fee. PARC was told they had “an opportunity to endorse the event. ... It’s just the public confirmation of accepting the event and that’s all.”

During the meeting, a commissioner said, “We as a commission need to make sure that we ... understand the city’s stance both legally and socially and legislatively to give us the scope where we know that we’re okay making that decision and saying this particular cultural event is okay even though it may have certain elements that we individually might perceive as being religious.”

Again, the commissioners **never** received any information, instruction or guidance on how to distinguish cultural from religious events.

Another commissioner pointed out that “Council has already said that they want this in this year. It’s already on the calendar, the room’s already reserved, so I don’t see that we have any choice other than to agree to it.”

The Commission Handbook says commissioners are appointed “to advise and make recommendations to the Council and Staff. ... there may be instances when Staff’s recommendations on an issue may differ from that of the Commission.”

Simply endorsing the Staff decision is counter to the commission’s charter, but commissioners obviously felt pressured to endorse Staff’s decision.

Culture or Religion: Who decides?

On February 11, I submitted a PRA request for “all documents the city uses to inform Council, Staff, commissioners and residents about what constitutes a religious vs. a cultural event.”

I received this response on February 25: “The City does not own, possess or maintain any responsive public records.”

In other words, there are no documented city standards defining cultural or religious events.

That means every council member, every Staff member, every commissioner has nothing to go on but personal interpretations.

References to the display of Christmas trees and Menorahs in public places don’t provide adequate guidance to distinguish a cultural from a religious event.

Court decisions regarding separation of church and state reveal how difficult the decision can be. As one author wrote, “Court decisions have made the law a bit murky.” The ACLU noted that “the court has adopted an approach that would see the lines between church and state hopelessly blurred, if not eliminated altogether.”

Lacking a common framework, it’s grossly unfair to criticize commissioners for using their best judgement while assuming Staff always makes the right call. Threats and bullying won’t improve anyone’s performance, but will promote a toxic culture and demean the city.

I urge Council to promote a team spirit at City Hall instead of pitting Staff against commissioners and residents.

Respectfully,

Pat Marriott Los Altos



ITEM #2

PARKS, ARTS, RECREATION AND CULTURAL COMMISSION AGENDA REPORT

Meeting Date: February 20, 2024

Subject: Ramadan Event – Cultural Event Funding Request

Prepared by: Manny A. Hernandez, Parks & Recreation Director
Initiated by: Staff

Attachment(s): Presentation

Staff Recommendation

Receive program request and decide on potential funding for the program from the Cultural Art funding.

Environmental Review:

Not applicable

Summary/Project Description

The Parks, Arts, Recreation and Culture Commission, and the Parks & Recreation Department is committed to help expand cultural programs and events in Los Altos. This can be done through City programming and partnerships with cultural experts and organizations. The Muslims Around Los Altos group (MALA) is partnering with the Parks & Recreation Department to coordinate a few cultural events in Los Altos.

Muslims Around Los Altos, founded in 2023. They are a group of 20 civic-minded Muslim families from ethnically diverse backgrounds. They have partnered with Muslims living in Mountain View, Sunnyvale, Palo Alto, and Menlo Park making up over 150 individuals.

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar and is observed by Muslims worldwide as a month of fasting, prayer, reflection, and community. During Ramadan, Muslims fast from dawn until sunset, abstaining from food, drink, smoking, and other physical needs. The fast is broken each evening with a meal called iftar. Ramadan is also a time for increased prayer, reading the Quran, and acts of charity. It is considered a time for spiritual growth, self-discipline, and empathy for those less fortunate. The end of Ramadan is marked by the celebration of Eid al-Fitr, a festive holiday that includes communal prayers, feasting, giving of gifts and charity.

MALA is requesting the PARC Commission sponsor a series of events open to all Los Altos residents, with the intent to create stronger community ties and cultural understanding.

The list of events and amount of requested sponsorship is as follows.

Iftar	\$8,000
Education	\$2,000
Giving Back	\$1,000
Banners (Supporting the Events)	\$4,000

Fiscal Impact:

Not to exceed \$15,000

Discussion/Analysis

Discuss the programs and request for funding presented by the MALA group and decide if funding from the Cultural aspect of the Public Art Fund is appropriate. MALA will provide a presentation.



TO: Parks, Arts, Recreation and Culture Commission

FROM: Manny A. Hernandez, Staff Liaison

SUBJECT: Endorse the MALA Iftar Cultural Event

RECOMMENDATION:

Action to endorse the Iftar Dinner that is scheduled for March 15, 2025 as part of the PARC Commission's efforts to increase cultural programming in Los Altos.

BACKGROUND

The Parks, Arts, Recreation and Cultural Commission, and the Parks & Recreation Department is committed to help expand cultural programs and events in Los Altos. This can be done through City programming and partnerships with cultural experts and organizations. The Muslims Around Los Altos group (MALA) is holding their 2025 Iftar event at the Community Center on March 15.

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar and is observed by Muslims worldwide. During Ramadan, Muslims fast from dawn until sunset, abstaining from food, drink, smoking, and other physical needs. The fast is broken each evening with a meal called iftar. It is considered a time for spiritual growth, self-discipline, and empathy for those less fortunate. The end of Ramadan is marked by the celebration of Eid al-Fitr, a festive holiday.

As part of the PARC Commission's effort to promote increased cultural events in the Los Altos Community, the Commission has the opportunity to endorse this cultural event that was very successful in 2024. The Commission will entertain a motion to endorse the 2025 Iftar cultural event and discuss at a later meeting possible ways to support the 2026 event.

Attachments:

A. None