



LOS ANGELES CITY/COUNTY NATIVE AMERICAN INDIAN COMMISSION APPROVED MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF JULY 15, 2025

The July 15, 2025 Los Angeles City/County Native American Indian (LANAIC) meeting was at the County of Los Angeles Hall of Administration, Sybil Brand Room 372, 500 W. Temple Street, Los Angeles, California, 90012.

Call to Order & Land Acknowledgement

Chairperson Shawn Imitates Dog called the meeting to order at 6:30 P.M. and read the Los Angeles County Land Acknowledgment.

Invocation

Commissioner Ted Tenorio provided an invocation.

Roll Call

Present: Chairperson Shawn Imitates Dog
Vice Chairperson Mark Villasenor
Secretary Bryce Lewis-Smith
Treasurer Denise Escoto
Caroline Bhalla
Chrissie Castro
Dr. Andrea Garcia
Vivian Garcia
Dawn Jackson
Mona Morales Recalde
John Only A Chief
Rudy Ortega Jr.
Rich Toyon
Rene' William
Ted Tenorio

Absent: None

Staff: Alexandra Valdes, LANAIC Executive Director
Megan Moret, Department of Arts & Culture Board Liaison and Special Assistant
Julien Tan, LANAIC Administrative Manager

Quorum was met.

Commissioner Introductions

Commissioners provided brief introductions, including their names, appointing office, and tribal affiliation.



**LOS ANGELES CITY/COUNTY NATIVE AMERICAN INDIAN COMMISSION
APPROVED MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF JULY 15, 2025**

Public Comment

Mr. Jack Ochoa introduced himself as an appointed commissioner of the Indigenous People of Mexico. He advocated for free trade between Indigenous Peoples and countries, aiming to bridge the gap by collaborating with our commissioners.

Action Items

6.1 Adopt absentee excuses

There were no absentee excuses requested.

6.2 Approve the May 20, 2025, Los Angeles City/County Native American Indian Commission (LANAIC) Unapproved Meeting Minutes

A motion was made by Vice Chairperson Mark Villasenor and seconded by Commissioner Ted Tenorio to approve the unapproved May 20, 2025 LANAIC Meeting Minutes as presented.

The motion passed.

YES	Imitates Dog, Villasenor, Escoto, Bhalla, Castro, A. Garcia, Jackson, Morales Recalde, Only A Chief, Ortega Jr., Toyon, William, Tenorio
NO	
ABSTAIN	Lewis-Smith, V. Garcia
ABSENT	

Discussion Items

7.1 Discuss AIAN Homelessness in LA County

Dr. Andrea Garcia shared a video titled *Natives in L.A. Summit*. The video documented an event on Native housing where community members were able to reflect on the question: What is home in L.A.? Dr. Garcia emphasized the importance of visual media and the reports that have been produced, acknowledging that while progress has been made, there is still much work to be done. The following steps involve pulling data from past listening sessions and bringing that information back to the commissioners' respective appointing bodies. Dr. Garcia stressed that it is the commissioners' responsibility to engage in difficult conversations, which require time, effort, and relationship building.

She shared that feedback from the event affirmed that homelessness remains a significant issue for the Native American community. There is a need for a more inclusive definition of homelessness, especially considering recent data: 2,474 Native individuals were counted, with



LOS ANGELES CITY/COUNTY NATIVE AMERICAN INDIAN COMMISSION APPROVED MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF JULY 15, 2025

homelessness in the Native community growing by 4% this year compared to 3% last year. Measure A, which has been passed recently, offers a new stream of funding for homeless services.

As the responsibility for homelessness shifts entirely to the County, Dr. Garcia sees this as a critical opportunity for the Native community to make its presence and priorities known. With the creation of a new County department focused on homelessness, she expressed hope that the Commission can formally communicate to the Board of Supervisors that this is an issue they want to prioritize and engage with meaningfully. Specifics of the requests to the Board of Supervisors should be discussed during the next meeting.

7.2 Discuss Impacts of Federal Administration on LA County's AIAN Community

Commissioner Chrissie Castro asked that, since a lot of funding originates from the federal government and flows to the state and ultimately down to the County, how potential cuts might affect LA County. Megan Moret reported that the County just completed its fiscal cycle in June, and the final budget for the current fiscal year will be confirmed in September. However, preliminary information should be available before then. She noted that the most likely area for state-level cuts is healthcare.

Alexandra added that the state has already received its federal funding allocation for the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) program for 2025, so funding for the current year is secure. However, funding for the following year will depend on Congressional decisions expected in September. She also mentioned that under Project 2025, CSBG is proposed for complete elimination.

Commissioner Chrissie Castro asked what would happen to the LANAIC Self Governance Board if CSBG funding were eliminated in 2026. Alexandra responded that she will follow up with the State of California Department of Community Services & Development (CSD) for clarification.

7.3 Discuss LA City Parks Needs Assessment Steering Committee Updates

Commissioner Rich Toyon reported no updates.

Presentations

8.1 Care First Community Investment Updates - Joey Williams (LANAIC Designee to the CFCI Advisory Body)

Mr. Joey Williams, the LANAIC's Designees to the County of Los Angeles Care First Community Investment Advisory Body provided a presentation and summary report of CFCI Funding since 2021, and general funding information. He advised on specificity when Community Based Organizations apply for funding, and how to present their project concept. Commissioner



**LOS ANGELES CITY/COUNTY NATIVE AMERICAN INDIAN COMMISSION
APPROVED MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF JULY 15, 2025**

Chrissie Castro requested a list of Native Organizations affiliated with CFCI and suggested holding workshops for CBOs to support their application process.

8.2 City of LA Park Needs Assessment Updates – Sarah Swanssen (The Olin Studio)

Ms. Sarah Swanssen provided a presentation on the City of Los Angeles Park Needs Assessment updates. She shared that the survey received over 5,000 responses, with nearly two-thirds of respondents rating parks as being in excellent condition. Over 90% of participants reported having visited a park, and about half had visited an L.A. City recreation center. The top reason cited for not visiting parks was concerns about homelessness, primarily related to safety. There was a clear consensus that parks support health, mental wellness, and stress relief. While many expressed a desire for programmed green spaces, interest in natural, unstructured areas was mixed. Commissioner Rich Toyon is expected to join the August Steering Committee meeting to continue these discussions.

Commissioner Chrissie Castro asked about tribal engagement and whether Native communities are being adequately represented, expressing concern that their voices might be overlooked. She referenced the past removal of the Columbus statue from Grand Park as an example of using park spaces for public education and cultural acknowledgment. Ms. Swanssen acknowledged the importance of broader awareness and the need for future report-backs. Alexandra offered to share previous reports including a report on equitable land access inf with Ms. Swanssen to support this effort.

Commissioner John Only A Chief asked if there were plans to eliminate parks, raising concern that there is no dedicated community space for Native people. Ms. Swanssen clarified that the City is working to expand park space, not reduce it, and mentioned the use of multi-benefit infrastructure and underutilized city-owned properties as potential opportunities, while also noting that real estate costs are a significant factor in meeting these needs. Mr. Darryl Ford from L.A. City confirmed that parks cannot be sold and reaffirmed the City's recognition of the ongoing need for more park space. Secretary Bryce Lewis-Smith emphasized the importance of creating areas that support climate resiliency, such as cooling centers and spaces for cultural events like powwows. Ms. Swanssen encouraged further conversations about heat risk and the design of shaded and cooling spaces. She noted that a public survey is open to gather feedback on unprogrammed green spaces. She also committed to setting up a separate meeting with Alexandra to continue this dialogue outside the formal commission setting.

Chair's Report

9.1 General Updates

No general updates.



**LOS ANGELES CITY/COUNTY NATIVE AMERICAN INDIAN COMMISSION
APPROVED MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF JULY 15, 2025**

9.2 Discuss Appointing a Commissioner or Community Member to Serve as the LANAIC’s Alternate Designee to the Care First Community Investment (CFCI) Advisory Body

Commissioner Rene’ Williams volunteered to serve as the CFCI Advisory Body Alternate Designee.

Committee & Ad Hoc Committee Reports

10.1 Executive Committee

No Executive Committee updates.

10.2 Self Governance Board

Alexandra reported that the Self Governance Board has adopted the 2026-2027 Community Services Block Grant Community Action Plan & Community Needs Assessment during the Self Governance Board meeting earlier that evening. She expressed gratitude to the Self Governance Board for their effort, and that this is a huge achievement. Alexandra will provide more information on the fate of CSAIBG funding as it becomes available.

10.3 2025 Native American Heritage Month Ad Hoc Committee

Secretary Bryce Lewis-Smith reported that funding for the project is secured through the office of LA City Councilmember Imelda Padilla and that the Ad Hoc will have a meeting with the Councilmember’s Office on July 22.

Chairperson Shawn Imitates Dog underscored the need for commissioners to submit Native American Heritage Month honoree nominations. He shared that it is an opportunity to highlight the many community leaders doing great work who deserve recognition. He encouraged each commissioner to submit at least one or two nominees, sharing that past honorees found the recognition deeply meaningful and that more effort should go into this process. Commissioners Rene’ Williams and Caroline Bhalla initially believed the recognition was limited to firefighters, but Secretary Lewis-Smith clarified that the intention is to honor both Native firefighters and community members.

Alexandra noted that a memo outlining this recognition process was established in 2018 and was shared via email when the initial access for nominations was sent. Nominations are due by Tuesday, August 12, at 5:00 PM, and should include a brief biography (no more than 250 words) and a statement on why the nominee should be considered (no more than 250 words).

10.4 LANAIC Bylaws Ad Hoc Committee

No report was provided.



LOS ANGELES CITY/COUNTY NATIVE AMERICAN INDIAN COMMISSION APPROVED MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF JULY 15, 2025

Commissioner General Comments on Non-Agenda Items

Commissioner John Only A Chief expressed that the full attendance of the commissioners during this meeting is very encouraging and expressed gratitude to everyone who showed up to help the Native American community.

Commissioner Dr. Andrea Garcia shared that she received a call from a community member on a Wednesday regarding an upcoming event scheduled for that Saturday. The event host encouraged as many commissioners as possible to attend and speak about the commission's work and identity, emphasizing the importance of the community knowing who the commissioners are and understanding their role. Commissioner Dr. Garcia highlighted this as a reminder of the value in being more visibly present at community events and sharing information about the commission's efforts. She encouraged the group to consider additional ways to be in community and strengthen connections with the public.

Alexandra reported a recurring issue where individuals seeking assistance are unable to receive support because they are not residents of Los Angeles County. She emphasized that this reflects a broader reality within the Native community—people often come to L.A. seeking safety and support but are ultimately unable to access services due to residency restrictions. She will explore flexible funds to help address these gaps. She also reported a significant increase in individuals seeking help with tribal enrollment.

Commissioner Caroline Bhalla shared that she is involved in a research study focused on identifying service providers for individuals experiencing homelessness. She invited any commissioners who have relevant connections or contacts to share them with her to support the study.

Announcements/Future Agenda Items

No announcements/future agenda were provided.

Commission Adjournment

Chairperson Shawn Imitates Dog shared that the next LANAIC meeting will be held on Tuesday, August 19, 2025, at 6:30 p.m. in the Hall of Administration, Room 372, 500 W. Temple Street, Los Angeles, CA 90012.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:11 P.M.