



**LOS ANGELES CITY/COUNTY NATIVE AMERICAN INDIAN COMMISSION
APPROVED MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF FEBRUARY 17, 2026**

The February 17, 2026, 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 Mark Villasenor called the meeting to order at 6:34 P.M. and read the Los Angeles County Land Acknowledgment.

Invocation

No invocation was provided

Roll Call

Present: Chairperson Mark Villaseñor
Vice Chairperson Bryce Lewis-Smith (Departed at 7:22 PM)
Secretary Caroline Bhalla
Treasurer Rene' Williams
Denise Escoto
Chrissie Castro (Remote – Just Cause)
Dr. Andrea Garcia
Dawn Jackson
Mona Morales Recalde (Remote – Just Cause)
John Only A Chief
Ted Tenorio

Absent: Shawn Imitates Dog
Vivian Garcia
Rudy Ortega Jr.
Rich Toyon

Staff: Alexandra Valdes, LANAIC Executive Director
Julien Tan, LANAIC Administrative Manager

Quorum was met.

Commissioner Introductions

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



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Public Comment

No public comment was submitted for the meeting.

Presentation

8.1 Introduction to LA County Retained Tribal Indian Law Experts - David Montoya and Jana Simmons

Heather Jue Northover and Ben Russak, Principal Analysts with the Los Angeles County Chief Executive Office, introduced consultants David Montoya and Jana Simmons to the Commission. David and Jana will serve as resources on policy, operational practices, and legislative matters. The consultants and commissioners were provided time to become acquainted and engage in an initial exchange of questions and information.

Alexandra noted that the Commission previously sent a budget request letter to the Board of Supervisors in October 2023 requesting that the County engage Tribal law experts. She emphasized that the introductions made during this meeting represent a continuation of that advocacy effort and congratulated the Commissioners on their successful advocacy.

Commissioner Dr. Andrea Garcia asked about the process for County employees to bring forward requests to the tribal Indian law expertise. Alexandra explained that County Counsel maintains numerous contracts for subject-matter expertise. For example, she has assigned counsel whom she can consult. When a specific need is identified—such as expertise in Tribal law—Counsel coordinates with consultants, such as David and Jana.

Commissioner Dr. Garcia then asked how to ensure that all departments are aware of these resources. Heather responded that the goal is to introduce all commissioners to all departments to strengthen communication and awareness across the County.

Alexandra also highlighted that the County has funded a Tribal Consultation Policy project. Meetings between Tribal representatives and County employees were well-received. Reports and summaries from this work will be shared with David and Jana to support their efforts.

Heather added that Ben is leading a countywide stakeholder engagement workgroup that is introducing the concept of Tribal consultation across departments. The workgroup includes representatives from every County department.

8.2 Introductory Presentation - LA County Fire Chief Anthony Marrone

County of Los Angeles Fire Department Chief Anthony Marrone introduced himself and the department to the Commission, highlighting its use of controlled, or prescribed, burns and its intention to collaborate with Tribal communities on Tribal cultural burns. Chief Marrone emphasized the operational need to identify locations and to invite Tribal representatives to participate in these efforts.



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Chief Marrone also introduced California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) Deputy Chief Brook Spelman as his counterpart for the Eastern region, including Riverside. Deputy Chief Spelman oversees the department's Tribal affairs and expressed his commitment to partnering with Chief Marrone to strengthen communication, cohesion, and trust with Tribal communities.

Chairperson Mark Villaseñor referenced the County of Los Angeles report *We Are Still Here: A Report on Past, Present, and Ongoing Harms Against Local Tribes* ("Harms Report") as a resource for identifying local Tribal contacts. He noted that the Commission can also serve as a point of reference for the community. Commissioner Mona Morales Recalde shared that, from a Tribal perspective, the opportunity to work with both fire departments on Tribal burns is very encouraging.

Alexandra reminded commissioners that Chief Marrone attended the November Board of Supervisors meeting and delivered forward-thinking, inclusive, and impactful remarks. Chief Marrone acknowledged that fire has long moved naturally through the region's hills, predating the establishment of fire departments, and expressed his desire to engage the Commission in managing fire in ways that benefit all parties.

Commissioner Dr. Andrea Garcia noted that the meeting agenda includes a request to the Board to incorporate training into the department's budget proposal. She asked whether Chief Marrone sees a need for training to help departmental staff understand where Tribes reside, who to contact during incidents, and other relevant information. Chief Marrone agreed that such training would benefit both his department and Deputy Chief Spelman's team.

Alexandra commended the County of Los Angeles Fire Department for submitting the highest volume of employee input during the Tribal Consultation Policy Project's employee survey. Deputy Chief Spelman shared that he is developing a fact sheet to support Tribal inclusion, including guidance on whom to contact during and after emergencies and information on post-burn rehabilitation work.

Commissioner Morales added that the Gabrieleno Tongva community has provided valuable information to the Los Angeles Unified School District and expressed willingness to share similar information with both fire departments.

Action Items

6.1 Adopt absentee excuses

A motion was made by Treasurer Rene' Williams and seconded by Commissioner Dr. Andrea Garcia for Commissioners Vivian Garcia, Shawn Imitates Dog, Rudy Ortega Jr., and Rich Toyon's absentee excuses for the February 17, 2026, meeting.

The motion passed.



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

6.2. Adopt the November 18, 2025, Los Angeles City/County Native American Indian Commission (LANAIC) Unapproved Meeting Minutes

A motion was made by Commissioner Dr. Andrea Garcia and seconded by Vice Chairperson Bryce Lewis-Smith to approve the unapproved November 18, 2025, LANAIC Meeting Minutes as presented.

The motion passed.

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

6.3. Establish the LANAIC 50th Anniversary Planning Ad Hoc Committee

Chairperson Mark Villaseñor noted that July marks the Commission’s 50th anniversary and suggested holding a celebratory event later in the year. Commissioner Shawn Imitates Dog recently shared that he has been in preliminary discussions with the Huntington Museum regarding a potential partnership for the celebration. Chairperson Villaseñor invited commissioners to volunteer for the planning effort.

Vice Chairperson Bryce Lewis-Smith, Commissioner Dawn Jackson, and Commissioner Denise Escoto volunteered to serve on the committee. Commissioner Imitates Dog was also nominated, and Chairperson Villaseñor confirmed that he will participate as well.

Alexandra shared that she recently reviewed historical documents indicating that the Board adopted the motion establishing the Commission in May 1976, the ordinance was enacted in August 1976, and the Commission held its first meeting in February 1977. She suggested that the Commission consider holding one meeting on the 8th floor as part of the anniversary observance.

Treasurer Rene’ Williams asked whether any funds have been secured for the anniversary activities. Alexandra reported that the Huntington Museum has expressed interest in hosting an



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event at its venue. While they appear to have space, it is not yet clear whether they can support food service. She also noted that the museum houses urban Native archives that may be relevant to the celebration.

The LANAIC 50th Anniversary Planning Ad Hoc Committee was formally established, with Chairperson Villaseñor serving as Chair.

Discussion Items

7.1 Discuss AIAN Homelessness in LA County

Commissioner Dr. Andrea Garcia reported that she met with representatives from Supervisorial Districts 1 and 2, as well as staff from the City Mayor's Office, to discuss communication efforts and the Commission's previously sent letter. Supervisorial District 1 suggested that the Puente Hills Regional Park may offer opportunities for cultural spaces rather than uses related to homelessness. Supervisorial District 2 indicated that there may be potential sites within the district, but they will need to follow up with additional information. Commissioner Dr. Garcia noted that these conversations have been challenging to manage and welcomed assistance from any commissioner who can support this work. She added that staff from the City Mayor's Office expressed enthusiasm and interest in becoming more active on the issue. She emphasized that significant work remains and that broader involvement from the commissioner would be helpful.

Secretary Caroline Bhalla suggested that Alexandra, as the Executive Director of LANAIC, could attend future meetings to answer questions about the Commission while noting she did not want to impose additional responsibilities. Alexandra indicated she will try to attend Commissioner Bhalla's next meeting with SD2.

Treasurer Rene' Williams stated she will reach out to identify the appointed representative for her district so that communication regarding the Commission's letter can begin.

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

No discussion was had.

7.3 Discuss Draft FY26-27 Budget Request Letters

Alexandra reported that the County's budget process is underway. The Chief Executive Office is providing weekly updates on the current fiscal climate, and the County is not in a strong financial position. She emphasized the importance of placing all Commission requests on record, which is why the items discussed in previous meetings are included in the draft letter.

Chairperson Mark Villaseñor noted that it is still worthwhile to make the requests. Commissioner Dr. Andrea Garcia stated that the request for a Senior Executive position must clearly articulate that the role is intended to elevate policies and funding mechanisms and should not be confused with the Tribal Liaison position at the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority. Alexandra will work with Commissioner Andrea Garcia to refine that section of the letter.



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Commissioner Garcia also reminded the Commission that Chief Anthony Marrone's request should be included. Alexandra stated that his request could be incorporated into the Tribal Consultation Policy to make the plan more dynamic, particularly by adding training sessions that complement the policy.

Chair's Report

9.1 General Updates

There were no general updates. Chair Villasenor expressed his appreciation to the commissioners for their flexibility regarding the previously cancelled meeting due to civil unrest and for braving the weather to attend the current meeting.

9.2 LANAIC 50th Anniversary Celebration

Chairperson Mark Villaseñor reiterated the importance of celebrating the Commission's 50th anniversary, as referenced in Item 6.3. He acknowledged that the celebration may be more modest than originally envisioned but emphasized that the Commission should still invite community members and partner organizations to participate.

Executive Director's Report

10.1 General Updates

There were no general updates.

Committee & Ad Hoc Committee Reports

11.1 Executive Committee

No report was provided.

11.2 Self Governance Board

Self Governance Board (SGB) Chairperson Dawn Jackson announced the newly elected officers for Calendar Year 2026. Commissioner Chrissie Castro congratulated the SGB and commended its members for taking on additional responsibilities to support the community. Alexandra reported that the Commission's contract with service provider Pukúu Cultural Community Services has entered its third year and noted that the newly revised SGB bylaws require the Board to meet at least four times per year.

It was also noted that Commissioner Bryce Lewis-Smith now serves on the SGB in addition to his role as the Commission's Vice Chairperson.



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Commissioner General Comments on Non-Agenda Items

Commissioner John Only A Chief expressed gratitude to Chairperson Mark Villaseñor for attending the County's Unclaimed Burial event, to Commissioner Dawn Jackson for participating in the CSUB meeting over the past two months, and to both Commissioner Jackson and Commissioner Dr. Andrea Garcia for attending the Wildhorse Pow Wow. He expressed his pleasure at seeing the commissioners actively engaged in these events. He also shared that he is writing the history of Changing Spirits as part of the entity's 25th anniversary. The writing will include supporting documentation, an outline with photos, a record of the original founders, and information highlighting support for Native men and women in recovery from drug and alcohol addiction. He emphasized the importance of correcting two decades of misinformation.

Commissioner Mona Morales Recalde shared that her tribe, the Gabrieleno Tongva San Gabriel Band of Mission Indians, is hosting a Native American music festival on March 15th to showcase musicians' work. It will be a family-friendly event. They are also hosting a spring Native market on April 11th. All events will be announced through social media, and she will share the posts with Alexandra.

Announcements/Future Agenda Items

Alexandra received an invitation to a community health fair for Urban Indians in Los Angeles from the CEO of the American Indian Health & Services, Scott Black. The organization is opening its first Los Angeles County location and is exploring strategic expansion and recruiting additional Native physicians. The invitation was forwarded to the commissioners, and Alexandra asked them to inform her if they plan to attend so she can notify AIHS staff.

She also reminded the commissioners that Form 700 is due soon. Anyone with questions or needing assistance completing the form may contact her directly.

Commission Adjournment

Chairperson Villasenor announced that the next LANAIC meeting will be held on Tuesday, March 17, 2026, at 6:30 p.m. in the Hall of Administration, Room 372, located at 500 W. Temple Street, Los Angeles, CA 90012.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:52 P.M.