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Council updated on Alamo plan progress following controversies, property dispute

Alamo says event highlighting Mexican soldiers is reset for May, with 'both sides' represented after complaints.

By **Scott Huddleston**, Staff writer
Updated Oct 19, 2023 5:11 p.m.



The Alamo Visitor Center and Museum is scheduled to open in 2027. Courtesy / Alamo Trust

The Alamo has rescheduled an event for May to highlight Mexican soldiers in the 1836 battle for Texas independence, which also will feature portrayals of Anglo and Tejano defenders, City Council members were told Wednesday.

The Texas General Land Office, which oversees the site, received complaints about the event originally scheduled for Saturday, titled "Día del Soldado," because of its planned focus on Mexican troops, said Kate Rogers, executive director of the nonprofit Alamo Trust.

"The request that we received at the trust was to make sure that there was equal representation of soldiers from both sides," Rogers said in response to a question by Councilwoman Teri Castillo during a council work session. "And so the living history team at the Alamo decided to postpone."

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The next new building to be constructed as part of the Alamo project will be an education center that will welcome school groups, provide on-site learning and teacher training and offer online learning opportunities to classrooms worldwide. Courtesy / WestEast Design Group, Alamo Trust

An interpretive event with reenactors representing combatants in the conflict is tentatively set for May 4, Alamo officials said.

The issue came up during a briefing on the \$550 million Alamo makeover, which has enjoyed progress this year after initial stumbles over its details and funding.

Several council members said they appreciate the goals of inclusion and diversity planned for the site of San Antonio's first permanent Spanish-Indigenous mission made famous by the 1836 battle.

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"This is really our chance to get it right," said Councilwoman Melissa Cabello Havrda.

A few council members urged the Alamo Trust to continue communicating with businesses about street closures and construction, and Councilman John Courage asked that the project be kept affordable for visitors. Although the Alamo charges admission to its new collections center, and will for its visitor center and museum, the grounds, mission-era structures and Alamo Plaza will remain free and open to the public.

The first floor of the museum will be free, including a 4,000-square-foot civil rights exhibit that is "well underway" in its planning, Rogers said. A 2027 opening is targeted for the museum complex.

"The goal here is to tell the story of both the African American Civil Rights movement in San Antonio, as well as the Mexican American Civil Rights movement that really started here," she said. "We've got a very diverse committee that's also helping to inform the content that will also go into that gallery."



Valero Energy Corp. has donated \$5 million for an Alamo museum and visitor center set to open in 2027. Courtesy/Alamo Trust Inc.

Planning for the visitor center project is being guided by Gallagher & Associates, the Alamo project's program manager, along with a museum planning committee, Indigenous people's subcommittee and civil rights subcommittee.

Castillo asked if meetings of those panels are open to the public, and she and other council members suggested adding other Chicano and Native American history experts to the planning process. Rogers said the makeup of the committees is fluid, and the trust is open to adding other scholars to provide perspectives that have been underrepresented.

The trust thought it best to allow committee members to air their views and opinions without an audience present when discussing topics of culture and history that often can turn emotional, she said.

"There is debate within those meetings. And we wanted to provide a safe space, where people can be honest and candid with one another, even when they disagree," Rogers said.

The massive yet intricate project dates to 2014, when a citizens' committee crafted a nine-page vision and guiding principles document. The city entered a cooperative agreement the following year with the Land Office and Alamo Trust to expand and improve the site. The city owns much of the plaza where the mission compound was located and the battle was fought.

The plan for the overall Alamo makeover is in its third iteration, following tweaks, changes and controversies, some related to parade routes and preservation of buildings.

A proposal to relocate the 1930s Alamo Cenotaph in the plaza, to create room for commemorative events and return the area to its 19th-century appearance, was ardently opposed by many Texans, including Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick, who felt it should remain inside the historic footprint of the mission-fort to honor the roughly 200 Texians and Tejanos who died in the battle.

The Texas Historical Commission denied the city's permit request to move the monument in 2020, and a few key fundraisers withdrew from the project.



Dignitaries view an Alamo diorama undergoing restoration during a sneak preview of the Alamo Collections Center at the Alamo on Nov. 18, 2022. Jerry Lara/San Antonio Express-News

Planning came to a standstill during the pandemic. But the city, in coordination with then-Land Commissioner George P. Bush, declared a "reset" for the project in 2021 and agreed the Cenotaph would be repaired in place. Fiesta parades would continue their traditional route through the plaza, observing new rules to acknowledge reverence for the site, and the visitor center and museum design would preserve the 1921 Woolworth Building and 1882 Crockett Building.

The opening of the new Ralston Family Collections Center, the first new building on the Alamo grounds in more than 70 years, represented a major step forward. More recently, the city and its project partners purchased Moses Rose's Hideout, a bar at 516 E. Houston St., for the visitor center, using an undisclosed amount of state funds under a settlement that ended the city's pursuit of the property through eminent domain.

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The Legislature this year approved a \$400 million allocation for the project, which also includes construction of an Alamo Education Center, set to open in 2025, along with outdoor exhibits and renovations to the Plaza and the Paseo del Alamo, a linear walkway connecting the Alamo with the River Walk that was dedicated in 1981.

Plans for renovation of the paseo are scheduled for presentation to the city's Historic and Design Review Commission on Nov. 1.

Oct 18, 2023 | Updated Oct 19, 2023 5:11 p.m.



By **Scott Huddleston**



Scott Huddleston is a veteran staff writer, covering Bexar County government, local history, preservation and the Alamo. He has been a reporter at the Express-News since 1985, covering a variety of issues, including public safety, criminal justice, flooding, transportation, military, water and the environment. He is a native Texan and longtime San Antonian. Email Scott at shuddleston@express-news.net.

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