

**CITY OF PHOENIX  
PARKS AND RECREATION BOARD  
SUMMARY MINUTES  
November 21, 2024**

Virtual meeting hosted on Webex.

| <b><u>Board Members Present</u></b>  | <b><u>Staff Present</u></b>   | <b><u>Community Members</u></b>   |
|--|---|---|
| Kelly Dalton<br>Emma Viera<br>Aubrey Barnwell (Virtual)<br>Ed Zuercher (Virtual)<br>Sarah Porter | John Chan<br>Cynthia Aguilar<br>Brandie Barrett<br>Amber Williamson<br>Carrie Brown<br>Joe Diaz<br>Theresa Faull<br>Jarod Rogers<br>Dustin Cammack<br>Tannia Ruiz | Jerry Van Gasse<br>Maria Hernandez<br>Janet Aviles<br>Aaron Johnson<br>Christopher Bagby<br>Thomas Cuddy<br>Chian Ma<br>Pat Linn<br>William Westfall<br>Noel Kingston<br>Daniel Luedders<br>Gerrit Mack<br>Jes Dobbs<br>Tim Sierakowski<br>Valerie Peters<br>Rene Dominguez<br>Karl Mueller<br>Kelli Cholieu<br>Marion Cholieu<br>Heidi McNeil Staudenmaier<br>Aaron Barber<br>Rhonda Bompensa-Zimmerman<br>Michael Hopkins<br>Chandler Papas |
| <b><u>Board Members Absent</u></b><br>Dorina Bustamante<br>Tony Moya                             |   |   |

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

Chairperson Dalton called the meeting to order at 5:01 p.m.

**2. CONSENT ITEMS**

No formal presentation on these items. Consent and request for approval only.

**2a. Parks and Recreation Board Summary Minutes – October 24, 2024**

Jerry Van Gasse made comments regarding a written complaint submitted to the Attorney General’s Office about illegal dumping at South Mountain Park.

Chairperson Dalton reminded Mr. Van Gasse to ensure his comments remained specific to the meeting minutes.

**2b. 2025 Annual Requests to Vend**

**2c. Phoenix Marathon- Tentative Event**

Board Member Porter made a motion to approve consent items 2a through 2c. Board Member Viera, seconded the motion which passed unanimously, 5-0.

**3. INFORMATION AND DISCUSSION ITEM(S):**

Information and discussion items will be presented verbally to the Parks Board and are for discussion only. No action will take place on these items at this meeting.

**3a. City Budget Overview**

Budget and Research Director Amber Williamson presented an overview of the City's budget. The presentation highlighted the city's financial outlook, focusing on the 2024-25 city budget of \$7.2 billion, allocated across Enterprise Funds (32%), the General Fund (29%), and Special Revenue Funds (39%). The 2023-24 General Fund performed well, with resources totaling \$2,138.4 million, exceeding estimates by \$6.3 million, and expenditures at \$1,844.9 million, coming in \$10.6 million below projections. These outcomes resulted in a General Fund balance of \$293.5 million, which was \$16.9 million higher than anticipated.

The presentation also emphasized significant budget challenges ahead. Key issues include legislative actions, such as the elimination of the residential rental sales tax in 2025 (SB 1131) and a flat 2.5% individual income tax rate (SB 1828), leading to projected revenue losses of \$35.4 million in 2024-25 and increasing in subsequent years. Other concerns include economic uncertainty, rising costs for labor, health insurance, and pensions, as well as the expiration of ARPA funds for homelessness support and the expiration of the Fire SAFER Grant for 32 sworn positions. Additional pressures include aging city infrastructure, new operating costs from the 2023 GO Bond Program, and increasing resident demands for expanded services. These challenges highlight the need for proactive fiscal planning to sustain city operations and services.

Chairperson Dalton thanked Ms. Williamson and asked what the City's efforts are to advocate at the state level.

Ms. Williamson explained that the City's Government Relations Office collaborates closely with the City Manager's Office to actively advocate for the city, working to prevent actions that could diminish revenues or undermine local control. She noted that the office regularly reports its efforts to the City Council.

Chairperson Dalton inquired about the process for notifying the City in the event of legislative actions during the budget process.

Ms. Williamson responded that the Phoenix City Council would be notified of any legislative actions taken by the state.

Board Member Porter asked if there was an opportunity to reconsider any of the 2023 GO Bond projects to address budget concerns.

Ms. Williamson clarified that bonds are issued to fund capital projects and are repaid through secondary property taxes. She assured that the projects will proceed as planned but explained that once new facilities are built, their maintenance and operating costs cannot be covered by the General Obligation (GO) Bond. These expenses must instead be managed within the General Fund.

Chairperson Dalton expressed gratitude to Ms. Williamson once again for her presentation.

### **3b. Sombra Art Project**

Arts and Culture Deputy Director Carrie Brown presented on the ¡Sombra! Experiments in Shade project, which is Phoenix's innovative public art initiative addressing urban heat challenges. Awarded \$1 million through Bloomberg Philanthropies' Public Art Challenge, the project involves nine artists creating temporary shading and cooling installations for parks across all eight City Council districts. The installations will be featured in neighborhood parks during summer 2025, followed by a community festival at Steele Indian School Park in September 2025. The project team, led by the Office of Arts and Culture, is collaborating with selected artists and fostering community engagement through events between March and June 2025 to celebrate the installations. Designs are being finalized for permitting, emphasizing art's role in community resilience and the importance of shade in Phoenix's urban environment.

Chairperson Dalton thanked Ms. Brown for her presentation and asked if this project was funded by Bloomberg Philanthropies?

Ms. Brown stated that this was correct. Funding is being provided by a Bloomberg Philanthropies Public Art Challenge Grant and is specifically for temporary art installations.

Board Member Viera expressed her excitement and anticipation for the upcoming installation projects.

Chairperson Dalton inquired about the process for learning from the structures, so the City benefits beyond the initial installations. She also asked about the fate of the art installations after their removal.

Ms. Brown explained that the installations might return to the artists, or they could be reviewed to assess the impact of Phoenix's environmental conditions on their design. If a structure proves to be a successful shade solution, staff may consider implementing it as a permanent feature in the future.

Chairperson Dalton concluded by thanking Ms. Brown once again for her presentation.

**4. DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION ITEM(S):**

Discussion and Possible Action items are for information, discussion, and possible action.

**4a. Request the Temporary Closure of Hilaria Rodriguez Park**

The Parks and Recreation Board received a presentation from Parks and Recreation Deputy Director Joe Diaz, Police Lieutenant Brian Milhone, Neighborhood Services Special Projects Administrator Lisa Huggins, and Office of Homeless Solutions Deputy Director Scott Hall. The presentation focused on the recommendation to temporarily close Hilaria Rodriguez Park at the request of the community, due to ongoing safety concerns.

The recommendation proposed closing the park, located at 2801 E. Adams, from December 1, 2024, to March 31, 2025. This 0.83-acre pocket park, featuring a playground, ramada, shade trees, and recreational space, has faced persistent issues, including vandalism, encampments, drug use, and other criminal behaviors. Despite significant efforts by city departments, these challenges have continued, leading to written requests from nearby residents for action to restore safety and security. The temporary closure is intended to provide relief to the neighborhood while city departments address these issues. During the closure, outreach services will be provided by the Office of Homeless Solutions, with continued efforts by the Police and Neighborhood Services Departments to improve conditions. The Parks Department will also collaborate with residents and community partners to create a park activation plan for programming and events when the park reopens on April 1, 2025. The Board was asked to approve the temporary closure to ensure the park becomes a clean, safe, and accessible space for the community.

Chairperson Dalton thanked the presenters for their collaborative effort and noted that two public speakers were present for this item.

Maria Hernandez, a community member, shared that Hilaria Rodriguez Park was once a beautiful space but has become unsafe for families and the community due to ongoing drug activity in the park and surrounding neighborhood.

Janet Aviles, the Sky Harbor Neighborhood Association President, agreed, emphasizing that crime such as drug use and prostitution has made the park dangerous. She expressed hope that the park could be restored and used as intended for the benefit of the community.

Board Member Viera inquired whether staff had engaged with the Village Planning Committee.

Mr. Diaz explained that the committee had not yet been consulted but would be notified if the closure is approved.

Board Member Viera also asked about the types of businesses in the area.

Ms. Huggins responded that while the neighborhood is primarily residential, it is surrounded by commercial businesses such as gas stations, fast-food restaurants, taxi companies, and plumbing businesses.

Board Member Porter expressed appreciation for the collaborative effort among city departments and community members. She acknowledged that while closing a park is an unusual step, it is necessary in this case to ensure safety and proper use. She asked whether four months would be sufficient for rehabilitation.

Mr. Diaz affirmed that four months would allow for an evaluation of progress and an update to the Board.

Board Member Porter also asked about measures to restrict access during the closure.

Mr. Diaz stated that a chain-link fence with "No Trespassing" signs would be installed.

Board Member Porter commended the community's involvement and urged ongoing collaboration among city departments.

Board Member Viera recommended staff collaborate with nonprofits to secure additional resources and support.

Chairperson Dalton concluded by acknowledging the sadness of closing a park but noted that the input from staff and the community clearly demonstrated the necessity of this action. She emphasized that the community's care for the park and neighborhood was evident throughout the discussion.

Board Member Porter made a motion to approve item 4a. Board Member Viera, seconded the motion which passed unanimously, 5-0.

**4b. Acquisition and Designation of Property as “Mountain Preserve” into the Sonoran Preserve**

Deputy Directors Theresa Faull and Jarod Rogers requested for the Board to recommend City Council approval to acquire and designate approximately 158 acres of land near 39th Avenue, Stetson Hills Loop, and Hackamore Drive as part of the Sonoran Desert Mountain Preserve. The property, currently leased to the Deer Valley Unified School District (DVUSD) for Sandra Day O'Connor High School, is undergoing a lease modification to facilitate its availability for purchase through an Arizona State Land Department auction.

Incorporating this land into the Mountain Preserve system would enhance recreational opportunities, protect native desert habitat, and provide connectivity to the Deem Hills trail system. Proposed plans include the development of a trailhead parking lot with amenities and a partnership with DVUSD for shared use of a portion of the parking lot during school hours. Funding for the acquisition will come from the Parks and Recreation Capital Improvement Program budget, utilizing Phoenix Parks and Preserve Initiative funds. The auction is anticipated to take place in early 2025.

Chairperson Dalton thanked staff for the presentation and clarified that it is the Parks Board's role to recommend this to the City Council.

Board Member Porter expressed enthusiasm for the addition of land to the parks system and commended the Parks Department for collaborating with the school district on this initiative.

Board Member Porter made a motion to approve item 4b. Board Member Viera, seconded the motion which passed unanimously, 5-0.

**4c. Annual Election of Parks and Recreation Board Chair- November 21, 2024**

Board Member Barnwell made a motion to nominate Board Member Dalton for a third and final year as the Parks Board Chair. Board Member Zuercher seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously, 4-0.

**5. CALL TO THE PUBLIC**

Aaron Johnson expressed his opposition to the decision made during the October Parks Board meeting regarding the Phoenix Trails and Heat Safety Program. He encouraged staff and the Board to consider a more forward thinking approach to addressing the issue.

Christopher Bagby addressed the Board to express his opposition to the decision made during the October Parks Board meeting regarding the Phoenix Trails and Heat Safety Program. He recommended that staff engage with all stakeholders to ensure a more inclusive approach.

Thomas Cuddy suggested gathering more data on trails and heat safety, noting that individual experiences can vary significantly. He shared that he has run approximately 200 miles between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. on very hot days without adverse effects. Having recently moved to Ahwatukee, he expressed his appreciation for the accessibility of the trails.

Chian Ma expressed their love for the hiking community and emphasized the importance of advocating for their rights. Chian suggested that staff focus on educating the public and working with resorts to better inform tourists about trail safety and etiquette.

Pat Linn shared that as a retiree, he hikes Camelback three to four times a week. Hiking has been instrumental in maintaining his health, particularly after recovering from a stroke, making it his preferred form of exercise. He recommended that staff prioritize education and consider adding signage to enhance trail safety and awareness.

William Westfall expressed his belief that closing preserves is a closed-minded solution and voiced his opposition to the decision made at the October Parks Board meeting regarding the Trails and Heat Safety Program.

Noel Kingston, a frequent trail user, primarily of South Mountain trails, expressed his appreciation for efforts to reduce heat-related injuries. He acknowledged the concerns surrounding the issue but noted that, based on the previous meeting minutes, Board members had discussed whether the closure decision needed to be made in October. He believed the decision could have been delayed allowing for more comprehensive conversations and outreach with the hiking community.

Daniel Luedders asked the Board to reconsider the decision made during the October meeting regarding the Phoenix Trails and Heat Safety Program. He highlighted that Phoenix boasts one of the largest park systems and emphasized the city's reputation, as stated on its website, as a place where people can live, work, and play. He expressed concern that restricting access to these beautiful spaces for a significant portion of the summer infringes on the rights of residents. He urged the Board to explore alternative solutions, noting that many hikers train year-round. He advocated for keeping the parks open to preserve access for the community.

Gerrit Mack opposed the October Parks Board decision on the Phoenix Trails and Heat Safety Program, calling it disproportionate and anti-Phoenician. He argued that better education, improved signage, and increased Ranger presence would be more effective than closing trails. Highlighting the mental health benefits of trail access, he shared his daily summer trail use and offered to collaborate on enhancing education and safety measures.

Jerry Van Gasse criticized the decision to allow the Fire Department to influence park policy, stating that such decisions should be managed by the Parks Department. He argued against deferring to the Fire Department and suggested that charging for rescues, as he proposed in 2010, would serve as a deterrent for unprepared trail users. He opposed the closure of trails, calling it misguided and warning that voters would not support such measures.

Jes Dobbs shared that they organized a petition to oppose restrictive trail closures and advocate for maintaining access to Phoenix trails. She emphasized the collective goal of preserving the freedom to access trails for physical and mental well-being. Dobbs criticized trail closures as a weak-minded solution and stressed the importance of ensuring opportunities for exercise and connection with nature.

Timothy Sierakowski expressed frustration, stating the Board is failing to represent hikers, bikers, and the community. He criticized the Fire Department's involvement in park policy and questioned the lack of educational resources to prevent trail injuries.

Valerie Peters expressed her opposition to the trail closures at South Mountain. As a cyclist and a 35-year resident of Ahwatukee, she and her husband use the trails 2-3 times a week. She noted that with South Mountain now included in the trail closure program, the trails would be inaccessible far more frequently, affecting regular users like herself.

Renee Dominguez, a Homedale resident and community activist, criticized the Department for awarding a 2020 contract to a Mexican Fiesta dance group, stating it has failed to meet its afterschool programming goals. She stated the group operates as

a for-profit business rather than a nonprofit and requested a new performance evaluation, questioning how their 10-year contract extension was approved despite prior issues.

Karl Mueller thanked the Board for their work on behalf of the outdoor community and urged them to reconsider their October decision on the Trails and Heat Safety Program. He highlighted his wife's ASU research on the importance of green spaces for happiness, community interaction, exercise, and well-being, emphasizing the need to balance safety with these benefits.

Kelli Cholieu, a third-generation Phoenix native, opposed the Board's October decision on the Trails and Heat Safety Program. She criticized blanket trail closures implemented without significant public engagement, warning that such restrictions may lead to the creation of social trails, causing damage to the preserve, as people will continue to hike regardless.

Marion Cholieu, expressed opposition to trail closures starting at 7 a.m., stating they negatively impact the community. She emphasized the need for a balance between safety and accessibility, noting that eliminating all risks is impossible and that rescues are an inherent part of the job as a Firefighter. She urged the Board to consider the petition advocating for keeping the trails open.

Heidi McNeil Staudenmaier, a taxpayer and lawyer who hikes Camelback, opposed the trail closures, noting that they restrict access even for experienced hikers. She emphasized the need for decisions to be based on facts and evidence, which she believes were lacking in the decision to implement the closures.

Aaron Barber expressed concern that the closures unfairly punish hikers and may push people to create makeshift access points. He urged the Board to explore alternative solutions.

Rhonda Bompensa Zimmerman criticized the lack of health equity and community inclusion in the decision, urging the Board to pause and reflect on the feedback shared to ensure all voices are considered.

Michael Hopkins noted that Firefighters often require EMT support during rescues but emphasized that the active trail community reduces the need for such rescues. He highlighted that trail access is an integral part of the city's identity.

Chandler Papas expressed opposition to the October decision on the Trails and Heat Safety Program. He wants the Board and the Department to support the hikers that have a natural connection to the trails.

## **6. BOARD CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT**

None.

## **7. BOARD COMMENTS/REQUESTS**

Chairperson Kelly Dalton thanked the speakers and assured them that their voices are being heard, even though the Board cannot comment during this time. She expressed eagerness for further discussions.

Board Member Porter agreed with Chairperson Dalton. She highlighted three key points: first, clarity on what was actually decided in October regarding trails and heat safety is essential. Second, she emphasized the importance of basing discussions on facts rather than solely personal experiences, which, while valuable, lack comprehensive data. Lastly, she acknowledged the usefulness of petitions but noted that signatures from Phoenix residents carry more weight in her considerations as a Board member compared to those from outside the city.

## **8. DIRECTOR'S BRIEFING**

Director Aguilar introduced Brandie Barrett as the new Assistant Director for the Parks and Recreation Department, overseeing the Northeast, Special Operations, Management Services, and Natural Resources Divisions.

Additionally, Director Aguilar invited everyone to attend the 37th annual APS Electric Light Parade on December 7, 2024, starting at 7 p.m., with the theme *Let Every Holiday Shine*.

## **9. ADJOURNMENT:**

Chairperson Dalton adjourned the meeting at 7:00 p.m.