

**CITY OF PHOENIX
PARKS AND RECREATION BOARD
SUMMARY MINUTES
March 27, 2025**

Virtual meeting hosted on Webex.

<u>Board Members Present</u> Kelly Dalton Aubrey Barnwell (Virtual Webex) Ed Zuercher Sarah Porter Dorina Bustamante Tony Moya	<u>Staff Present</u> John Chan Cynthia Aguilar Brandie Barrett Marty Whitfield Mark Gonzales Jarod Rogers Dustin Cammack Dr. Todd Davis (Virtual Webex) Tannia Ruiz Jana Benson Cindy Peiz	<u>Community Members</u> Geri Koeppel Scott Davis John Bawden Katashia Morgan Maggie Kelehan Jerry Van Gasse Tim Sierakowski
<u>Board Members Absent</u> Emma Viera		

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Dalton called the meeting to order at 5:03 p.m. with Board Members Zuercher, Bustamante, Porter, and Moya in attendance.

2. Information Only

2a. Quarterly Code of Conduct Update

Chairperson Dalton noted that this was information only and no action will be taken.

3. CONSENT ITEMS

3a. Parks and Recreation Board Summary Minutes – February 27, 2025

3b. Request to Vend at City Parks

3c. Request to Extend Closure of Hilaria Park

3d. Recommendation to City Council to Amend Ordinance S-35137 Resolution Approving Fee Model for City Golf Course Fees and to Modify the Jr. Golf Card Program

Board Member Bustamante made a motion to approve consent items 3a through 3d. Board Member Porter seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously, 5-0.

**CITY OF PHOENIX
PARKS AND RECREATION BOARD
SUMMARY MINUTES**

March 27, 2025

4. WORK STUDY: PHOENIX TRAILS AND SAFETY

Director Cynthia Aguilar provided a summary of the Board's ongoing review of the Trails and Heat Safety Program, which began with the October 2024 update and continued through two work study sessions.

Board Member Barnwell joined the meeting virtually on Webex.

Deputy Director Rogers recapped prior work study discussions on South Mountain Park, highlighting its interconnected trails, multiple access points, and 16,000-acre size. He reviewed key data, including trail difficulty and rescue incidents, noting that the trail rating for the Holbert Trail had been corrected to reflect "difficult" on the map.

Following prior discussions, Parks and Recreation Department and Phoenix Fire Department staff evaluated the trail system at South Mountain Park including trail and mountain rescue difficulty, rescue data, and hiker volume, leading to the development of Option A. The proposal keeps most of the park's 128.3 miles of trails while proposing to restricts 6.71 miles of trails, which includes Holbert, Mormon, Hau'pal Loop, and access to the National Trail from Pima Canyon Trailhead, from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. during National Weather Service Extreme Heat Warnings. Access to the National Trail from other entry points across South Mountain Park/Preserve remain unrestricted. In addition, other trails accessed from the Pima Canyon Trailhead would also remain unaffected. No changes are proposed for Camelback Mountain or Piestewa Peak. A map was shared to show the impacted areas.

Under Option A, Holbert Trail, a 2.56-mile route with 1,000+ feet of elevation and 23,000 annual hikers, would be restricted at both the Holbert Trailhead and 7th Street walk-in access due to safety concerns.

Mormon Trail, a 1.35-mile trail with 700 feet of elevation gain and about 18,000 hikers per year, would also be restricted. This would include the closure of the Mormon Trailhead parking lot at 24th Street. This is the only trailhead in South Mountain Park proposed to be fully closed under Option A, using existing vehicular gates.

The Hau'pal Loop Trail, rated extremely difficult and averaging 65,000 hikers annually, would also be restricted. With steep grades exceeding 30 percent in some sections, the 2.8-mile loop poses increased rescue challenges. Trail closure signage would be posted

**CITY OF PHOENIX
PARKS AND RECREATION BOARD
SUMMARY MINUTES**

March 27, 2025

on days with Extreme Heat Warnings, while adjacent trails such as the Ma-Ha-Tuak Perimeter Trail would remain open.

Finally, access to the National Trail from the Pima Canyon Trailhead, which sees over 200,000 hikers annually, would be restricted. However, the National Trail would remain open from all other access points. The Pima Canyon parking lot would stay open, maintaining access to other nearby trails. Closure signage would be installed at the trailhead to clearly notify hikers of the restriction during Extreme Heat Warning days.

Additionally, under Option A, 6.71 miles of trails at South Mountain Park would be restricted during Extreme Heat Warnings, while the remaining 121.59 miles would stay open and accessible during the nine-hour restriction window. No changes are proposed for existing restrictions at Camelback Mountain or Piestewa Peak.

Assistant Fire Chief Gonzales shared information on significant challenges associated with mountain rescues at South Mountain Park for the Fire Department. He emphasized the physical demands placed on Firefighters, who often carry 40 pounds of gear while navigating steep, rocky terrain, and added that rescues are more complicated when air support is unavailable.

Asst. Fire Chief Gonzales described the Holbert and Mormon Trails as difficult-rated routes with steep elevation gains, where rescues typically require labor intensive and time consuming big-wheel operations. The Hau'pal Loop Trail, rated extremely difficult, presents even greater challenges due to its steep grades and remote location, which further increase response and extraction times.

Assistant Fire Chief Gonzales noted that while a 1.25-mile service road can assist rescues on the National Trail from Pima Canyon, it's not always available. Most rescues occur deep in the preserve, requiring long, difficult travel that delays patient care and extraction.

Deputy Director Rogers introduced Option B, which would leave the Phoenix Trails and Heat Safety Program unchanged. Under this option, the existing restrictions at Camelback Mountain, Piestewa Peak, and South Mountain Park and Preserve would remain in place without any modifications.

Regardless of the Board's decision, the Department plans to proceed with with an update to the 10-year-old "Take a Hike, Do It Right" campaign with updated graphics,

**CITY OF PHOENIX
PARKS AND RECREATION BOARD
SUMMARY MINUTES**

March 27, 2025

signage, trail maps, and expanded outreach through tourism and hospitality partnerships.

The Department will continue to engage the 300-member strong Park Steward volunteer group, and partner with the Office of Heat Mitigation for weekend trailhead outreach and water distribution during the hottest months of the year. The Department stressed balancing volunteer safety with effectiveness and plans to explore technology solutions like real-time closure updates to enhance the hiker experience.

Director Aguilar thanked the Chair and Board members and noted that the team was available to answer any questions.

Chairperson Dalton opened the floor for questions and asked Deputy Director Rogers whether any trails are completely inaccessible year-round under the current program.

Deputy Director Rogers responded by explaining that all Phoenix trails remain accessible 365 days a year, though some have restricted hours on extreme heat warning days. Typically, access is allowed during the early morning hours (5:00 a.m. – 8:00 a.m.) and again in the evening (after 5:00 p.m. until park closing).

Chairperson Dalton followed up by confirming that Piestewa Peak, Camelback Mountain, and South Mountain Park are currently accessible to the public even on days with Excessive Heat Warnings.

Deputy Director Rogers affirmed this is correct.

She then asked whether Option A would continue to allow public access on those days.

Deputy Director Rogers confirmed that it would.

Chairperson Dalton asked for clarification on how many miles of trails would remain open under Option A, noting it would restrict 6.7 miles at South Mountain.

Deputy Director Jarod Rogers responded that over 120 miles of trails would remain open all day under Option A. He also clarified that the 6.7 miles of restricted trails would still be accessible outside of the hours of 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Extreme Heat Warning days

**CITY OF PHOENIX
PARKS AND RECREATION BOARD
SUMMARY MINUTES**

March 27, 2025

Chairperson Dalton asked whether the restriction would apply only during the hottest parts of the day.

Deputy Director Rogers affirmed that this was correct.

Board Member Sarah Porter asked Assistant Fire Chief Gonzales for clarification on the principles used to determine which trails at South Mountain Park were selected for restrictions.

Asst. Fire Chief Gonzales responded by explaining that the selection process aligns with the criteria already used for restrictions at Camelback Mountain and Piestewa Peak. The primary consideration is the difficulty of performing mountain rescues, specifically, how challenging it is for first responders to access and transport injured hikers.

Board Member Porter questioned the impact of Extreme Heat Warnings in shoulder months like April and October, expressing concern that lower temperatures might trigger warnings without posing significant risks. She suggested setting a minimum temperature threshold for restrictions.

Director Aguilar responded, confirming that a temperature graph was not included in the materials for the meeting. She noted that the topic had been discussed previously, including during the public survey process. However, since the Board had not provided direction to shift from using National Weather Service advisories to a temperature-based system, the current recommendation remains to follow National Weather Service guidelines.

Board Member Porter expressed concern that a 105°F temperature in April could trigger an Extreme Heat Warning, which may not pose the same risk as higher summer temperatures. She emphasized the need to consider a minimum temperature threshold for trail restrictions.

Board Member Bustamante recalled that both Extreme Heat Warnings and a fixed temperature threshold were considered. She noted the Board's conservative approach, aiming to balance safety while minimizing trail access restrictions.

Chairperson Dalton cautioned against setting arbitrary temperature thresholds without further discussion, reaffirming the Board's reliance on the National Weather Service's

**CITY OF PHOENIX
PARKS AND RECREATION BOARD
SUMMARY MINUTES**

March 27, 2025

Excessive Heat Warning system. She noted that staff had not prepared data on a fixed temperature threshold but acknowledged the issue could be revisited later.

Board Member Porter stated she had raised the temperature threshold concern before, especially as temperatures rise in April. She noted that while the initial vote occurred during cooler months, the conversation needs to adapt as warmer weather approaches.

Board Member Porter asked for clarification, confirming that the Board could only vote on Option A or Option B as listed in the agenda.

City Attorney Dustin Cammack explained that the agenda must outline topics clearly, and while modifications are allowed, introducing new elements could be problematic. He recommended adding significant changes, like adjusting the temperature threshold, to a future meeting's agenda.

Board Member Porter expressed surprise, stating that the board has previously amended proposed action items without issue.

City Attorney Dustin Cammack clarified that major changes without prior public notice are not ideal. He recommended scheduling any significant actions for the next meeting if they differ from the agenda.

Board Member Porter asked what qualifies as a drastic change, noting her concern about temperature fluctuations in the shoulder months. She pointed out that a 105°F day in April may trigger an Excessive Heat Warning but may not pose the same risks as in peak summer.

City Attorney Cammack reiterated that the key legal standard is whether the public and board members were given proper notice of the actions to be taken.

Board Member Porter agreed to wait until the next meeting but expressed frustration.

Board Member Bustamante suggested that Board Member Porter and City Attorney Cammack might be discussing different aspects, one focused on procedural rules and the other on policy decisions.

**CITY OF PHOENIX
PARKS AND RECREATION BOARD
SUMMARY MINUTES**

March 27, 2025

Board Member Porter requested that the heat advisory graphic be included for review at the next meeting. She also suggested evaluating the feasibility of keeping trails open during the shoulder months by comparing historical Extreme Heat Advisories with actual temperatures.

Chairperson Dalton expressed openness to revisiting the discussion but was not ready to support a motion on a specific temperature threshold at this meeting. She recommended moving forward with the current vote and addressing the temperature threshold issue at a future meeting.

Board Member Porter clarified that selecting Option A would expand trail access, recalling that the Board had previously voted to restrict access to all trails at South Mountain, so approving Option A would increase trail availability.

Chairperson Dalton confirmed that was correct.

Board Member Zuercher agreed with Board Member Porter, stating the Board has the authority to discuss changes to heat restriction criteria. While he didn't support changes, he saw no reason why it could not be considered.

Board Member Zuercher asked Asst. Fire Chief Gonzales whether the level of risk to Firefighters varies with temperature. He noted that Extreme Heat Warnings are influenced by seasonal conditions and public acclimation and questioned whether sudden temperature changes affect Firefighters similarly to how they impact the general public.

Chief Gonzales responded that, while the National Weather Service's system appears straightforward, the way heat warnings are determined is complex. He agreed that acclimation is a major factor, and that both the public and firefighters can experience physical strain when performing intense activity in unexpected heat.

Director Aguilar added that the National Weather Service bases its warnings on risk rather than temperature alone. If the level of risk is high in April, they issue a warning just as they would in July. The primary concern is public safety, not just how hot it is outside.

Board Member Zuercher supported using National Weather Service Extreme Heat Warnings as a clear, objective guideline and stated he would not support Board Member

**CITY OF PHOENIX
PARKS AND RECREATION BOARD
SUMMARY MINUTES**

March 27, 2025

Porter's amendment. However, he disagreed with the idea that the Board couldn't discuss or propose changes at the current meeting.

Board Member Tony Moya asked for more details about the heat mitigation team's work, whether they had done it before, and if they focused on specific trails.

Deputy Director Rogers explained that from May to September, staff work with Park Stewards and the Office of Heat Mitigation at trailheads to provide water and educate hikers. They offer safety tips, recommend cooler hiking times, and suggest alternative routes, particularly for those not acclimated to the heat. He emphasized the program's focus on outreach and encouraged more volunteer involvement.

Director Aguilar acknowledged the legal guidance given to the board but clarified that members could still choose to discuss or propose amendments. If necessary, any amendments could be ratified in a future meeting.

Chairperson Dalton stated that while Board Member Porter was welcome to propose an amendment when a motion was made, she was not prepared to support it at this time.

Board Member Porter requested that the discussion remain open. She noted that extreme heat days were determined by hospital admissions for heat-related illness but questioned whether the observed trends were due to people adapting to heat or if early-season heat waves disproportionately affected vulnerable populations, such as unhoused individuals. She suggested that Dr. Davis might provide further insight.

Chairperson Dalton said this did not align with her understanding but welcomed further discussion when the appropriate experts were present. She asked if Dr. Todd Davis was available to comment.

Dr. Davis explained that most heat-related illnesses in hikers are due to exertion, as even well-hydrated and acclimated individuals can experience dangerous body temperature rises within 25 to 50 minutes. In severe cases, hikers can suffer heat stroke, leading to symptoms like nausea, seizures, or even death.

Dr. Davis also noted that while firefighters are more acclimated to heat, their physical exertion during rescues increases their risk of muscle breakdown and dehydration, which can cause kidney failure. Unlike hikers, firefighters must exert extra effort to not

**CITY OF PHOENIX
PARKS AND RECREATION BOARD
SUMMARY MINUTES**

March 27, 2025

only reach the rescue site but also transport both themselves and the patient, further increasing their heat exposure.

Chairperson Dalton asked whether the heat risk remained significant if a Firefighter performed only one rescue in a day instead of multiple.

Dr. Davis confirmed that even a single high-heat rescue is dangerous. He explained that once a Firefighter reaches a critical level of heat exposure, each subsequent rescue becomes exponentially riskier.

Chairperson Dalton then brought up the issue of helicopter rescues in extreme heat, noting that many members of the public may not be aware that helicopters are sometimes unable to operate in high temperatures. She asked Dr. Davis to explain the risks associated with transporting a patient by ground instead of by air.

Dr. Davis emphasized that time is crucial in mountain rescues. Helicopter transport significantly shortens the time to medical care, while ground rescues using baskets or big-wheel stretchers are much slower and increase patient risk. On average, ground extractions take three to four times longer, delaying access to life saving treatment.

Chairperson Dalton asked if any Board members had additional questions or comments before opening the floor to public comments.

Board Member Dorina Bustamante expressed her appreciation for Director Aguilar and the park staff, acknowledging the challenges of managing one of the largest public park system in the United States. She emphasized that overseeing parks, swimming pools, golf courses, community centers, and mountain preserves is no small task and thanked the staff for their stewardship and advocacy.

Board Member Bustamante acknowledged the Board's role as community volunteers and praised park staff for their dedication. She emphasized that the proposed restrictions focus only on the most sensitive trail areas, covering a few miles rather than imposing widespread closures. She compared the approach to public safety advisories in activities like skiing or surfing, where guidance helps protect both people and the environment. She voiced support for the staff's recommendation, noting that the decision reflects a thoughtful, ongoing response to rising temperatures and public safety and not a final step.

**CITY OF PHOENIX
PARKS AND RECREATION BOARD
SUMMARY MINUTES**

March 27, 2025

Chairperson Dalton thanked Bustamante for her comments and seeing no further remarks from the board, moved to public comment.

Geri Koeppel thanked city staff and the Board, supporting Option A as a reasonable solution. As a frequent hiker who's seen multiple rescues near Pima Canyon, she agreed with focusing on the most at-risk areas and individuals.

Scott Davis voiced concern that both options would restrict more trails than in past summers. He felt locals can manage the heat and found NWS warnings less intuitive. Citing confusion over past enforcement, he recommended better public education, such as QR codes for real-time updates, and noted that locking trailheads would likely deter most hikers.

John Bawden urged the Board to adopt Option A, describing it as a well-developed plan that would reduce rescues on high-risk trails and ease pressure on the Fire department. He warned that a full closure would cut off access for 85,000 Ahwatukee residents, while Option A offers a balanced solution. He stressed the importance of education over additional closures and shared his commitment as a new trail steward.

Tim Sierakowski urged the Board to keep parks unchanged, warning that new restrictions could jeopardize critical 3PI funding. He argued hiking should be a personal choice, not a government decision, and questioned why hikers face limits while outdoor workers operate in similar heat. He encouraged the Board to avoid unnecessary regulations and respect individual freedoms.

Katashia Morgan, described hiking as essential to her wellbeing and said she is acclimated to year-round heat. She urged the Board to prioritize education over restrictions, noting most rescues involve unprepared hikers.

Maggie Kelehan supported Option A but stressed that education, not restrictions, is key to safety. She cited fire department funding and response times as core issues and warned that reduced trail use could affect future funding. She urged the Board to pursue systemic, long-term solutions, particularly for vulnerable populations.

Chairperson Dalton noted that with no additional public comments, the discussion would return to the Board for questions, comments, or a motion.

**CITY OF PHOENIX
PARKS AND RECREATION BOARD
SUMMARY MINUTES**

March 27, 2025

Board Member Zuercher asked about penalties for violating trail restrictions and how enforcement is handled. He also sought clarification on law enforcement's role.

Deputy Director Rogers explained that individuals on closed trails may be cited for being in a closed park. Rangers can issue fines or trespass individuals if needed, but he noted compliance has been high and the Department prioritizes education over enforcement.

Board Member Zuercher asked for confirmation that enforcement would be handled by Park Rangers rather than Police Officers.

Deputy Director Rogers confirmed this, stating that violations fall under park rules and are enforced through citations rather than police intervention.

Board Member Porter asked if the Board's established practices enforcing the Code of Conduct prioritizing education before citations apply.

Deputy Director Rogers confirmed the Department would prioritize education through social media, signage, and direct outreach before enforcing rules.

Board Member Moya clarified that the Code of Conduct was created to avoid police involvement, a strategy strongly supported by the Board.

Board Member Bustamante asked about the funding source for marketing and public education efforts.

Director Aguilar explained that there is no dedicated funding for the initiative, so the Department will use existing resources and a phased approach for signage and outreach. Some signage needs updating, and further planning will determine if external support is necessary for marketing and education efforts.

Board Member Bustamante asked if the Department had reviewed signage needs and integrated messaging on the Code of Conduct, restricted hours, and safety measures.

Director Aguilar confirmed the Department is aware of signage needs and will begin rolling out trail restriction signs and educational materials immediately as part of the current strategy.

**CITY OF PHOENIX
PARKS AND RECREATION BOARD
SUMMARY MINUTES**

March 27, 2025

Board Member Zuercher began by commending the Parks and Fire departments for their thoughtful and collaborative approach in balancing public access with public safety. He emphasized that the proposal of Option A effectively integrates education with appropriate restrictions and acknowledged the complexity of remote trail rescues.

Board Member Zuercher moved to approve Option A.

Board Member Aubrey Barnwell seconded the motion.

Chairperson Dalton confirmed the motion and asked if there was any further discussion before proceeding to a vote.

Board Member Porter explained her vote, emphasizing that the decision was an expansion of access but not a blanket restriction. She praised the collaboration between Fire and Parks staff to focus on high-risk trails rather than broad closures. She clarified the goal was not to limit personal choice, but to reduce unnecessary strain on first responders.

Chairperson Dalton thanked Board Member Porter for her remarks and, with no further discussion, called for a vote.

The motion passed unanimously, with all board members voting in favor, 6-0.

Chairperson Dalton thanked everyone for their input and participation.

5. Call to the Public:

Jerry Van Gasse criticized the process for lacking public input and raised concerns about uninvestigated debris dumping and unaccounted park renovation funds. He called for increased transparency and accountability in park decisions.

Tim Sierakowski questioned the review process of the "mystery house" purchase and potential misuse of 3PI funds, citing past complaints about financial mismanagement and criticized the lack of action on safety and education issues he raised ten years ago.

6. Board Comments/Request:

**CITY OF PHOENIX
PARKS AND RECREATION BOARD
SUMMARY MINUTES**

March 27, 2025

Board Member Moya requested an update on summer programming and pool preparations.

Director Aguilar confirmed a full update, including pools and summer camp information, is scheduled for April.

Board Member Zuercher followed up on Trail 100 signage, praising the new adjustable signs for improving clarity, especially in the Dreamy Draw area.

Board Member Bustamante praised the city's golf program, noting the challenging greens at Encanto and highlighting the affordability, popularity, and accessibility of the courses through the city pass program.

Chairperson Dalton closed the meeting, thanking everyone for their participation.

7. Adjournment:

Chairperson Dalton adjourned the meeting at 6:20 p.m.