

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

<u>Board Members Present</u>	<u>Staff Present</u>	<u>Community Members Present</u>
Kelly Dalton	John Chan	Jes Dobbs
Emma Viera	Cynthia Aguilar	Timothy Sierakowski
Aubrey Barnwell (Virtual-Webex)	Brandie I. Barrett	Jerry Van Gasse
Ed Zuercher	Marty Whitfield	Maggie Kelehan
Sarah Porter	Todd Shackelford	Deirdre Pfeiffer
Dorina Bustamante	Jarod Rogers	John Bawden
	Dustin Cammack	Robert Pittaway
	Tannia Ruiz	Marcel Van Der Stroom
	Chief Tim Kreis	Alicia Judy
	Chief Tim Jones	Hilary Van Der Stroom
	Tom Ford	Geri Koeppel
	Tim Frieders	Tim Gammage II
	Dr. Nick Staab	Bob Cogill
	Dr. Todd Davis	Ed Nusbaum
	Tannia Ruiz	Josh Fowler
	Jana Benson	Julia Taggart
	Laura Borson	Meeka Vigue
		Michael Duffy
		Christopher Bagby
		John Coleman
		Marion Cholieu (Virtual-Webex)
		Kelli Cholieu (Virtual-Webex)
<u>Board Members Absent</u>		
Tony Moya		

1. CALL TO ORDER

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

2. INFORMATION ONLY

a. Parks and Recreation Department 5-Year Preliminary Capital Improvement Program Budget

Jes Dobbs expressed concerns about the accuracy of the CIP list, stating that North Mountain and South Mountain Park/Preserve remain incomplete. She emphasized the need to focus on maintaining existing trails and keeping them open year-round, especially as the nation is approaching challenging times.

Tim Sierakowski expressed concerns that the budget is not updated.

Jerry Van Gasse expressed concern with PPPI funds and requested monthly expenditure reporting.

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

3. CONSENT ITEMS

3a. Parks and Recreation Board Summary Minutes – January 23, 2025

3b. Operating Agreement with Saint Mary’s Catholic High School for Monterey Park

**3c. Sponsorship Agreement with Integrity Foundation for Telephone Pioneer Park
Playground Equipment Project**

3d. Request to Vend in City Parks

**3e. Approval of Telecommunication License at South Mountain Communication Towers to
SBA Towers XI, LLC**

Board Member Bustamante made the motion to approve consent items 3a through 3e. Board Member Porter seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously, 6-0.

4. WORK STUDY: PHOENIX TRAILS AND HEAT SAFETY

Director Aguilar provided a recap of last month’s Work Study session and explained that today’s presentation would focus on information requested by the Board at that meeting. She noted that this item was for information and discussion, and that no action is scheduled to occur today. She provided an outline of the presentation topics, including trail access points and mountain rescues at South Mountain Park/Preserve Park (SMP), trail difficulty ratings, updates on the *Take a Hike. Do it Right.* campaign, signage improvements, the role of Park Rangers and volunteers, survey results and the feasibility of extending trail hours. Director Aguilar introduced the presenters, which included Deputy Parks and Recreation Director Jarod Rogers, Executive Assistant Fire Chief Tim Kreis, and Deputy Fire Chief Tim Jones, with additional contributions from National Weather Service Meteorologist Tom Frieders and Dr. R. Nicholas Staab, MD, MSPH Assistant Medical Director, Maricopa County Department of Public Health.

Deputy Director Rogers provided an overview of the more than 25 designated trail access locations at South Mountain Park/Preserve, which has a 44-mile perimeter and consists of more than 16,400 acres. He presented maps illustrating the seven trailhead parking lots and nine designated walk-in access points around the perimeter of the park, including information on which locations are gated. He also showed a map denoting access points internal to the park, including trailheads and walk-in access, and emphasized the importance of accessing the preserve trails at these locations for the long-term health of the ecosystem.

Deputy Director Rogers shared information on the Maricopa County Trail Difficulty Rating System, which was developed as part of a regional effort for trails in Maricopa County in 2012 and is used by the City of Phoenix trail system. The system uses international symbols and colors to indicate varying levels of trail difficulty, categorized into six tiers ranging from easiest to extremely difficult. The City of Phoenix system includes 276 miles of trails, with more than 80 percent of trails classified as easy, moderate or moderate/difficult.

Deputy Director Rogers reviewed a series of maps showing 128 total miles of trails by difficulty rating at South Mountain Park/Preserve. He noted the presence of numerous connector trails within SMP and compared its trail ratings and size of preserve land to Camelback Mountain by showing a scale map of Camelback Mountain with an overlay of the perimeter of South Mountain Park/Preserve. He shared that the Phoenix Mountains Preserve has 44.3 miles of trails, including a 1.2-mile summit trail rated as extremely difficult.

Asst. Chief Kreis presented a map of trail difficulty levels noting emergency response locations and historical rescue data from 2021 to present based on all available cell phone pings. Of the 132 rescue calls at South Mountain Park/Preserve, 87 (66 percent) had mappable location data. Patient locations were mapped to the nearest trail to identify patterns between trail difficulty and rescue incidents. Rescues were evenly distributed between moderate and moderate/difficult trails, with 34 incidents (39 percent) on each. Thirteen rescues (15 percent) occurred on difficult trails, while only two were on easy trails, and none were recorded on the easiest or extremely difficult trails. In four cases, the patient was found in a parking lot or visitor center rather than on a trail. Rescue incidents were more concentrated on the east side of South Mountain Park/Preserve, though the mountain's extensive and interconnected trail system provides numerous access points.

Asst. Chief Kreis reviewed four common deployment locations at SMP for the Fire Department Tactical Rescue Teams (TRT). The presentation included an evaluation of those trails, demonstrating the physical challenges associated with each route. Various maps identified locations with a history of high rescue activity, particularly along the National Trail and other heavily utilized routes. Aerial images and fly-over videos showcased trail conditions, noting areas with steep inclines, rugged terrain and potential hazard zones.

Asst. Chief Kreis continued with an overview of rescue demographics and injury data for South Mountain Park/Preserve. More than 80 percent of rescues involved Arizona residents, particularly those from the Valley. The most common injuries include ankle and leg issues as well as head and neck trauma. A review of mountain rescues shows that 56 percent of patients experience a medical emergency, with the most common issues being weakness (71 cases), dizziness (51), heat illness (40), chest pain (26), and altered mental status (25). Asst. Chief Kreis reported that injuries most often involve the ankle/foot, arm/shoulder/hand, or head/neck. During summer months, medical emergencies increase, accounting for 76 percent of rescues, with heat illness (49 cases), weakness (38), and dizziness (32) as the most frequent complaints. He reported that South Mountain Park/Preserve accounts for 23 percent of mountain rescues annually and 18 percent during the summer.

Deputy Director Jarod Rogers presented on the feasibility of keeping select trailheads at South Mountain Park/Preserve open on heat warning days. Closing select trails at SMP presents logistical challenges due to the park's extensive 128-mile interconnected trail system spread across nearly 17,000 acres of rugged terrain. The park has seven perimeter parking lot trailheads

and nine walk-in access points, all providing entry to multiple trails. Since all trails are connected, hikers can access any part of the system from any entry point. Data included visitor usage, parking availability and trail connectivity, highlighting key trailheads such as the Pima Canyon, 19th Avenue and Baseline entrances, which experience high foot traffic. Data from 2024 showed significant visitation at these locations, with the Central Avenue Main Entrance being the most frequently accessed.

Deputy Director Rogers explained that while closing exterior trailheads could help limit access, it would not fully restrict entry.

Deputy Director Rogers shared information on efforts to enhance trail safety and outreach, including updated public information campaigns, extended trail access considerations and the role of park staff and volunteers. He shared that updates to the "Take a Hike. Do It Right." initiative could include new signage, updated maps and real-time communication tools, at an estimated cost of \$350,000.

Deputy Director Rogers shared that South Mountain Park/Preserve, Phoenix Mountains Preserve, Phoenix Sonoran Preserve, and Deem Hills are open year-round from 5 a.m. to 11 p.m., though trailhead parking lot gates close at 7 p.m. In 2020, the Parks and Recreation Board approved extending evening parking lot hours until 9 p.m. at North Mountain Park, Pima Canyon Trailhead, and Piestewa Peak Trailhead from June through September, allowing later trail access. Finally, Camelback Mountain is open from sunrise to sunset. He reviewed a visual showing trail availability for those trails subject to restrictions on National Weather Service Extreme Heat Warning days demonstrating a 94 percent availability of trail hours in 2024.

Deputy Director Rogers explained that a possible option for expanding summer trail hours is opening trails earlier. With the earliest sunrise around 5:17 a.m., noting that an earlier start would allow hikers to begin before sunrise and complete a two-hour hike with some daylight. Adjusting trail hours could have a potential impact on established Park Ranger shifts, and a change in these shifts would require communication and coordination with employees and the labor organization that represent Park Rangers.

Deputy Director Rogers described the key role that Park Rangers play in enforcing trail restrictions, placing signage and educating visitors. He also described the City's Heat Injury & Illness Prevention Program. Additionally, he provided information on the impact of Park Stewards in education and outreach, with 301 active stewards contributing 15,897 volunteer hours valued at over \$532,000. Collaboration with the Office of Heat Response resulted in 57 volunteers distributing 20,824 water bottles and engaging with nearly 30,000 hikers at trailheads. These combined efforts aim to enhance hiker safety while maintaining accessibility and responsible trail management.

Deputy Director Rogers noted that at the October 2024 meeting, the Board asked staff to seek public input on whether trail restrictions should be based on NWS Excessive Heat Warnings days or a specific temperature threshold, and whether trail restrictions should begin at 7 a.m. He reviewed the results of the survey. Fifty-one percent, or 553 of the 1,081 respondents, were from the City of Phoenix. Results revealed that 60 percent of Phoenix respondents support a trail heat safety program, and 65 percent of Phoenix respondents oppose using the National Weather Service's Excessive Heat Warning as the primary threshold. Instead, 47 percent prefer closures

based on forecasted temperatures, with 110°F being the most favored threshold. The most common preference for the start time for heat warning closures was 8 a.m. (144 Phoenix respondents), followed by no closure (127 Phoenix respondents) and 7 a.m. (114 Phoenix respondents).

Tom Frieders, Warning Coordination Meteorologist from the National Weather Service, presented on the HeatRisk system and its impact thresholds. He explained that HeatRisk considers factors such as the rarity of extreme heat, the duration of high temperatures including nighttime lows, and potential health impacts based on CDC data. The HeatRisk system categorizes heat events into different levels, with extreme heat watches and warnings issued when conditions pose an elevated risk to public health. A graph of Phoenix heat impact levels demonstrated how peak heat risk occurs during the summer months, aligning with increased concerns for heat-related illnesses.

Dr. Nicholas Staab, MD, MSPH, presented data from the county's heat-related dashboard, which tracks deaths and illnesses weekly to identify at-risk populations and guide interventions across the county. He reported that heat-related deaths in Maricopa County have increased over the past decade, with 2024 data set for release soon. Contrary to assumptions, the data does not indicate that long-term Arizona residents become more acclimated to the heat, as they account for the majority of heat-related deaths compared to other in-state and out-of-state residents. He shared that in 2023, 72 percent of heat related deaths occurred on days with an excessive heat warning.

Director Aguilar concluded the presentation and stated that staff would be happy to answer any questions from the Board.

Chairperson Dalton inquired about the City of Scottsdale volunteer program and asked if volunteers work during the summer.

Director Aguilar responded that the group is managed by a non-profit organization and the City of Scottsdale encourages volunteers not to volunteer in the mountains Memorial Day to Labor Day due to the heat.

Chairperson Dalton asked how the Fire Department evaluates trail difficulty for rescues.

Phoenix Fire Department Special Operations Deputy Chief Tim Jones explained that rough trail terrain makes mountain rescues difficult. When a trail is more accessible, crews can plan out equipment that will be needed for the rescue. Other variables include whether a helicopter and hoist will be required, the distance of the patient from the trail access point, the temperature, difficulty of the trail, the time of day, and the condition of the patient. The exact maximum temperature that stops use of the helicopter is variable, but it is around 115 degrees.

Chairperson Dalton asked Dr. Staab to elaborate on the finding that individuals do not acclimate to heat overtime.

Dr. Staab explained that most heat-related deaths occur among long-term residents rather than newcomers. He emphasized that heat risk varies based on individual health, and even healthy individuals can face danger if an injury prevents them from leaving the trail without assistance.

Chairperson Dalton inquired about the cooling-related technology the Phoenix Fire Department currently uses.

Deputy Chief Jones explained the use of cooling caps with wide brims, ice buckets/chests, and availability of water and fluids.

Chairperson Dalton inquired about the training the Tactical Rescue Team undergoes to maintain and update their skills.

Asst. Chief Kreis explained that the Tactical Rescue Team undergoes an initial five-week technical and physical rescue training program covering various types of mountain rescues. Additionally, team members participate in ongoing education and training throughout the year to maintain their skills.

Chairperson Dalton asked about the presence of Park Rangers at trailheads during the summer months and how they manage their own safety while working in extreme heat.

Director Aguilar explained that City of Phoenix employees follow heat safety and acclimatization standards, ensuring they have access to cooler environments. As a result, Park Rangers cannot remain on the trails or in extreme conditions for their entire shift.

Board Member Porter requested clarification on the difference between an excessive heat warning and an excessive heat watch.

Mr. Frieders explained that an excessive heat watch serves as an early alert, while a warning is issued when a heat wave is imminent, with a 50 to 80 percent likelihood of extreme heat conditions.

Board Member Porter asked whether the data used for the extreme heat warning system aligns with the hospitalization and heat-related death data presented by Dr. Staab.

Mr. Frieders explained that the data differs, as the National Weather Service uses a modeled dataset from the Centers for Disease Control, while mortality statistics are collected from various locations nationwide.

Board Member Porter asked about the time the Fire Department dedicates to mountain rescues compared to other emergency calls.

Asst. Chief Kreis stated that the Fire Department handles a range of emergencies, including mountain rescues, which can take an hour or more depending on the situation.

Board member Porter questioned how much time and personnel are committed on a typical rescue.

Deputy Chief Jones stated that up to five crews, totaling 25 personnel, respond to mountain rescues. Reaching the patient can take one to two hours alone, depending on the location, complexity of the rescue and availability of resources.

Board Member Porter questioned whether survey question seven or eight was clear to respondents.

Deputy Director Rogers stated he could go back and look at the data to see if it provided any additional insight.

Board Member Viera requested that Dr. Staab address the impact of heat on the body.

Dr. Staab explained that heat-related outcomes depend on both intrinsic factors, such as individual heat tolerance, and extrinsic factors like temperature and exposure duration. In some cases, heat-related illnesses can rapidly escalate to heat stroke.

Board Member Viera asked about the prevalence of chronic conditions like hypertension in the population, specifically requesting the percentage that have this risk factor for heat illness.

Dr. Staab stated that he did not have that specific data point at hand.

Board Member Viera questioned if the Parks Department has considered digital trail safety measures, like QR codes and Life360.

Deputy Director Rogers responded that the Department has begun to investigate digital trail safety technology and partnerships.

Director Aguilar added that another City department recently created their own app that has real time data. The Parks Department is beginning to explore this possibility, working with the Office of Innovation to find ways to communicate real-time information relating to trail restrictions and other safety priorities.

Board Member Viera referred to the map of SMP trailheads and asked if the recommendation was to close or open these six areas.

Director Aguilar stated that if the Board were to direct staff to return with a recommendation to modify the program and trail restrictions at South Mountain Park/Preserve, the Department would present the information in March. This timeline allows for a thorough review of data to determine which trails the Parks and Fire Departments would recommend remain open and which trails would maintain restrictions on Excessive Heat Warning days.

Board Member Viera stated for clarification that these are not closures, but rather restrictions in place during summer months due to extreme heat.

Director Aguilar confirmed that is correct.

Board Member Zuercher inquired about the content included in extreme heat warnings.

Mr. Frieders explained that extreme heat warnings include details on heat risk, temperatures, and recommended actions to prevent heat-related illnesses. They also provide information on cooling stations and the 2-1-1 Arizona hotline.

Board Member Zuercher asked what the calls to action advise regarding physical exertion in extreme heat.

Mr. Frieders stated that the advisories recommend staying hydrated, seeking shade and cooling, and exercising general caution in extreme heat.

Board Member Zuercher inquired about the source of information used for the calls to action.

Mr. Frieders replied that it comes from collaborations with healthcare partners and social scientists.

Board Member Zuercher asked Dr. Staab for his recommendations on physical exertion in extreme heat.

Dr. Staab stated that his advice to the general public would align with the National Weather Service guidelines, though recommendations may vary for specific individuals or groups.

Board Member Bustamante emphasized that a strong marketing campaign will be essential in promoting safe hiking practices in extreme heat.

Board Member Barnwell thanked the presenters for their informative presentation and thorough responses to questions from the previous meeting. He suggested creating an infomercial on the City's website to educate the public on the Board's final decision once it is reached.

Chairperson Dalton opened the floor for public comment.

Maggie Kelehan disagreed with trail restrictions and suggested a summer permitting system that requires an annual course on heat safety for summer hikers.

Dr. Deidre Pfeiffer spoke to trail users over the last month to solicit their solutions to the current issue. She reported that users requested more Park Ranger and volunteer engagement and education, enhanced trail markers, water at the midpoint of the trail, laws requiring individuals to pay for their own rescue, improved signage, and gear checks at the trailheads.

John Bawden stated that the information in the packet is misleading. He stated that during closures, the only open trails will be in North Phoenix. He inquired if any rescue workers have been hospitalized for rescues at SMP and suggested the City use the Grand Canyon and Scottsdale parks as examples for avoiding closures. He also called for a bigger budget for the Fire Department.

Robert Pittaway requested that the Board exhaust all other options before turning to trail closures.

Marcel Van Der Stroom asked that the Board move efficiently and regain the trust of the people.

Alicia Judy suggested that the Board follow models at Picacho Peak, Flat Iron, the City of Scottsdale, and the Grand Canyon, which do not close for the heat.

Hilary Van Der Stroom described night runs that she leads at SMP and stated that she hopes to find better alternatives to trail closures.

Board member Zuercher asked staff for clarification on whether the current trail restrictions would impact the evening night runs. Director Aguilar clarified that the current restrictions are from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. and therefore the night runs being mentioned would not be affected.

Geri Koeppel requested more facts and good science. She is not opposed to closing the parks at a reasonable time but does not think 8 a.m. is practical.

Tim Gammage II stated he is a Phoenix Firefighter who hikes South Mountain Park regularly and has to respond to individuals who find themselves in trouble on the mountains. He asked the Board to consider individuals that are negatively affected by heat and the positive impact that has already been made by the trail restrictions.

Bob Cogill expressed his support for the program and requested the Board consider the impact of the extended time on the mountain for fire rescue personnel coupled with inability to use the helicopter during extreme heat. He also noted the tremendous impact in the reduction of mountain rescues at Camelback Mountain due to the trail restrictions there.

Ed Nusbaum expressed doubt about the soundness of questions on the heat restriction survey and asked the Board to look for alternatives to closures, similar to the Grand Canyon.

Josh Fowler requested that the trails at SMP not be closed during extreme heat.

Julia Taggart promoted educational programs at visitor centers and suggested that Park Rangers host heat awareness programs and educational classes on heat and trail safety.

Meeka Vigue stated that the data used was misrepresented because the Fire Department must show up to calls to assess the situation, but the entire team does not always get involved in rescue situations.

Michael Duffy expressed support for the program and explained that the rescue helicopter cannot leave at temperatures above 116.6 degrees, but if required to fly over 2,000 feet, this threshold drops to 114 degrees. This is important because rescues at Camelback and Piestewa Peak exceed this elevation.

Christopher Bagby asked the Board to be caring and considerate of Park Rangers, park users, and first responders.

John Coleman commented that closures are part of a slippery slope of restrictions.

Kelli Cholieu asked the Board Members to commit to proper trail education and hike the trails they are protecting. She requested more pay for Park Rangers noting Firefighters are paid very well.

Marion Cholieu called for transparency and honesty in politics and asked the Board to make decisions based on real data.

5. ADJOURNMENT:

Chairperson Dalton adjourned the meeting at 7:38 p.m.