

**CITY OF PHOENIX
PARKS AND RECREATION BOARD SUMMARY
MINUTES
June 25, 2026**

Virtual meeting hosted on Webex.
Parks Board meetings are recorded.

<u>Board Members Present</u> Tony Moya, Chair Aubrey Barnwell (virtual) Rick Naimark Leon Thomas Jessica Fotinos(virtual) <u>Board Members Absent</u> Sarah Porter Emma Viera	<u>Staff Present</u> Dustin Cammack Martin Whitfield Brandie Barrett Joe Diaz Maddie Mercer Tannia Ruiz Cindy Peiz Jana Krcek Dalia Adams	<u>Community Members</u> Jerry Van Gasse Jeremy Thacker Christina Tyler Jaime Garcia

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Moya called the meeting to order at 5:01 p.m. with Board members Naimark, Thomas, and Fotinos in attendance.

2. CONSENT ITEMS

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

2a. Parks and Recreation Board Summary Minutes – May 28, 2026

2b. Authorization to enter into an agreement for the operation of South Division Community Centers

Board member Naimark asked about the process used to select the recommended organization for operating the small centers.

Assistant Director Barrett answered that two proposals were evaluated using a 1,000-point scoring system. One proposal had seven areas rated unacceptable, while the other had two.

After a best and final offer process, the higher-rated proposer resolved all issues and received a final score of 775 compared to the other proposer's score of 131.

Board member Naimark requested for information about the scoring process to be included in future reports.

Chairman Moya opened up public comment for this item.

Jeremy Thacker said his comments are similar to Board member Naimark, and he would also like to see the scoring information in the report.

2c. TSMC Irrigation Controller Sponsorship

Board member Naimark moved to approve consent items 2a through 2c, with Board member Thomas seconding the motion. The motion passed unanimously, 4-0.

3. INFORMATION AND DISCUSSION ITEMS

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. Urban Farm Project (32nd Avenue and McDowell)

Board member Barnwell joined the meeting.

Director Whitfield presented an overview of the proposed urban farm project at 32nd Avenue and McDowell, noting that the site is city owned and has been the focus of interdepartmental planning since 2024.

Food Systems Project Manager Mercer from the Office of Environmental Programs continued the presentation and explained that extensive community engagement took place from March to June 2026, including bilingual workshops and surveys with a total of 268 participants. Residents expressed strong interest in spaces for growing food, educational programs related to gardening and nutrition, improved food access, and opportunities to connect with the community.

Director Whitfield concluded the presentation by outlining the next steps, which include releasing the RFP, upgrading the water infrastructure to bring service to the site, and finalizing the design in collaboration with the selected operator.

Chairman Moya asked if the Department has any other projects like this in our parks system.

Director Whitfield answered no, this would be the first of its kind to the department.

Chairman Moya noted that a rough timeline was mentioned in the presentation but wanted to know if there are any clear dates for this project.

Director Whitfield answered that staff will begin with releasing the RFP which is scheduled late next month.

Chairman Moya commented that it will be a great project.

4. DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION

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

4a. Request the acceptance of the abandoned alley acreage to Hilaria Rodriguez Park and to Deviate from Parks Board Policy 3.9 and Proceed with Sale of Approximately .13 Acres of the Abandoned Property

Assistant Director Barrett opened the presentation with an overview of Hilaria Rodriguez Park, located at 2801 East Adams and classified as a 0.83 acre pocket park. She noted that the park, the adjacent alley, and the surrounding neighborhood have experienced increased illegal activity in recent years. Parks and Recreation, along with the Office of Homeless Solutions, Phoenix Police, and Neighborhood Services, has been working to address these issues.

Deputy Director Diaz explained that residents near Hilaria Rodriguez Park have raised ongoing safety concerns tied to an adjacent alleyway that has attracted overnight camping, drug activity, vandalism and other negative behavior spilling into the park. To improve the area, the City is pursuing abandonment of the alley, which would add about .13 acres to City-owned property; however, staff does not recommend incorporating this land into the park. Instead, the neighboring southern property owner is interested in purchasing the parcel and installing a block fence and gated access to enhance security and reduce unwanted activity. Diaz requested Board approval to deviate from Parks Board Policy 3.9 and proceed with a direct land sale to Rolling Eagle Investments LLC, pending City Council action on the abandonment, appraisal, and disposition process.

Board member Naimark asked if staff knew what the property owner's intent is for the use of the property.

Deputy Director Diaz answered that the owners plan to use it for additional storage and install a block wall for additional security.

Board member Fotinos asked whether the property owner to the south, the only adjacent owner was interested in acquiring the abandoned alley parcel or if any other nearby property owners had expressed interest.

Deputy Director Diaz stated there has been no other interest in this property.

Board member Naimark moved to approve item 4a, with Board member Fotinos seconding the motion. The motion passed unanimously, 5-0.

4b. Request for Approval of New Name for Park and Community Center at 35th Avenue and Baseline Road

Director Whitfield introduced the item and provided background on the renaming process for Cesar Chavez Park and Community Center, which began after City Council action on March 25, 2026, directing the removal of the Cesar Chavez name from City facilities. He explained that on March 26, 2026, in accordance with Park Naming Policy 3.3, staff received Parks and Recreation Board approval to begin the formal renaming process for both Cesar Chavez Park

and the Cesar Chavez Community Center. He then turned the presentation over to Assistant Director Barrett.

Assistant Director Barrett explained that the Parks and Recreation Department launched a community engagement process to gather input on potential new names for the park and community center at 35th Avenue and Baseline. Staff created an electronic survey that was open for 30 days and promoted it through signs with QR codes, flyers, message boards, email outreach to more than 14,500 community center participants, and social media. The survey received 1,843 responses.

She noted that six name options were presented, each reflecting cultural, historical, or geographic significance. Aguila Park and Aguila Community Center received the highest number of votes overall with 565 and the highest number within the service radius with 445 votes. Staff also reviewed write-in suggestions submitted by residents. Based on the strong level of community support, staff requested Board approval to rename the park and community center to Aguila Park and Aguila Community Center.

Chairman Moya opened the floor for public comment.

Jerry Van Gasse stated he previously proposed naming a park after Jesse Owens and had gathered extensive community support, including signatures from track coaches and Owens' Olympic medals for the effort. He criticized staff for disregarding that proposal and choosing a name not associated with a person.

Jeremy Thacker encouraged the Board to choose a meaningful name for the park, noting that many residents are unaware that Jesse Owens spent his final and happiest years in Phoenix. He explained that, aside from a medical center Owens helped establish, nothing in the city bears his name. Mr. Thacker described the renaming effort as a rare opportunity for Phoenix to honor a world-renowned athlete recently recognized as one of the greatest and most influential in history. He stated that naming the park after Owens would both honor his legacy and inspire future generations.

Board member Thomas questioned the process behind the survey, specifically why Jesse Owens' name wasn't included as an option. He then asked what the lift would look like and would it be possible to redo the survey with Owens' name added, and whether that was even possible.

Director Whitfield explained that he directed staff to generate a list of names that reflected the surrounding area, which is why the survey included only those six options plus a write-in field. Regarding the possibility of redoing the survey, he said the situation is complicated because there is already a citizens' petition scheduled to go before the Mayor and Council on July 1. Whatever direction the council gives at that time is what the Parks Department will follow.

Board member Thomas asked whether the July 1, 2026 formal city council meeting date was fixed or if it could be extended so the city could revisit the process and ensure proper due diligence, including reconsidering the naming options.

Director Whitfield explained depending on that what is decided at the city council meeting, the Parks board could possibly have another process.

Board Member Naimark stated that the Parks Board has the charter authority to make naming decisions and said he does not expect the Mayor and Council to override that authority. He asked whether the Board could take more time or consider a different approach separate from the petition and requested clarification on how long it would take if the Board chose to revisit or repeat the renaming process.

City Attorney Dustin Cammack explained that although naming authority normally rests with the Parks Board, the citizen petition requires City Council action by July 1, 2026, under the city charter. He noted that the Board can choose how to proceed, including taking action that becomes effective after the Council meets, tabling the item, or making any decision dependent on the Council's action. He emphasized that the Board has several options, and any legal issues will be addressed once the Council has made its decision.

Chairman Moya stated that the Board has always welcomed and relied on citizen input, and in this case the strongest feedback came from residents who live and work in the affected zip codes. He acknowledged that some community members were disappointed with the results, but emphasized that the process worked as intended. He also noted that the Board could revisit the issue multiple times, but the established procedure was followed.

Board member Thomas suggested that while citizens did vote on the issue, he was unsure whether the Jesse Owens name was given equal consideration compared to other options. He questioned how much weight was placed on evaluating the names fairly during the process.

Chairman Moya noted that if the Board continued expanding the list of possible names, many additional options could be considered, and the discussion could become much longer.

Board member Thomas noted that one name stood out above the others, which was the Jesse Owens proposal.

Chairman Moya noted that the Jesse Owens proposal received 23 votes, which reflected a smaller portion of the overall feedback. He shared this to clarify how the community's input aligned with the survey results.

Board member Thomas suggested that the Board create space to reconsider the naming decision, emphasizing that Jesse Owens carries significant historical importance and meaningful connections.

Chairman Moya commented that he grew up in South Phoenix and is familiar with several places named in honor of Jesse Owens, including Jesse Owens Parkway and Jesse Owens Hospital.

Board member Barnwell asked for clarification on the voting results, specifically whether the 23 votes for Jesse Owens came from write-in responses and whether the six additional votes were from the listed survey options. He wanted to confirm that Jesse Owens was not one of the official name choices.

Director Whitfield confirmed this information and explained that the survey included six official name options along with an option for write-in suggestions. Jesse Owens was not one of the listed options and still received 23 votes through the write-in responses.

Board member Barnwell asked why the name Jesse Owens was not included among the six options presented in the survey.

Director Whitfield explained that this was the decision he made and he directed the team to identify names that were representative of the area.

Board member Barnwell stated that he would like Jesse Owens to be included as one of the six names and for the process to be redone. He said this would give him comfort and ensure the name received adequate visibility.

Chairman Moya suggested making a motion to table the item until after the July 2026 City Council meeting, explaining that the Council's discussion may offer clearer direction. He also noted that although the Board does not meet in July or August, some work could still continue during that period.

Board member Naimark commented that while the City Council may not have authority over the matter, it would be helpful to see how the Council responds to the citizen's petition before the Board moves forward.

Chairman Moya agreed and stated we could revisit it again after summer break.

Board member Naimark noted that several additional names had been suggested in earlier discussions and should be reconsidered if the Board decides to reopen the process. He emphasized the importance of understanding the background of any individual being considered, especially since the current renaming effort began in response to serious concerns about the existing namesake. He added that although he does not anticipate any issues with Jesse Owens or other suggested names, the Board should still conduct appropriate due diligence before moving forward.

Chairman Moya added that some of the work could still be done during the break, even without formal meetings. He noted that discussions can continue during that time to help move the process forward.

Board member Aubrey Barnwell asked for clarity on what the City Council would be doing on July 1 and what exactly the Board was asking the Council to consider.

City Attorney Dustin Cammack clarified that the City Council will review both the citizen petition and the staff recommendation, which may be adjusted following the Board's discussion. All naming suggestions submitted will be forwarded to the Council, which holds full authority to approve, deny, or choose an alternative within the scope of the topic. He emphasized that the final decision rests entirely with the City Council.

Board member Aubrey Barnwell asked whether he was correct in understanding that the Parks Board is the body responsible for this issue.

City Attorney Dustin Cammack responded that this is an issue that should be addressed in more detail. He said he can prepare documents outlining the relevant questions and provide them to the Board before the next meeting, with some materials shared separately as attorney work product. He added that, in short, there are unresolved questions about who ultimately has the authority to name a park.

Board member Fotinos agreed with earlier comments and noted that the Board is not making a decision on any of the proposed names at this time. She stated that if the process is reopened or new individuals are considered, all suggested names should be carefully reviewed. She emphasized that while not every issue can be avoided, the Board should make every effort to prevent future situations where a park name must be removed due to negative information that emerges later.

Board member Thomas, noting that he is still learning the process, asked a hypothetical question to better understand next steps. He wanted clarification on what would have happened if the Board had voted on a name that evening and the motion had not passed, specifically what the process would have been for determining a new name.

Director Whitfield explained that staff would conduct another survey if the Board decided to revisit the naming process. He added that it is difficult to predict the exact next steps because they depend on the outcome of the upcoming City Council meeting.

Chairman Moya stated that the Board would table the item and revisit it after the July 1, 2026, City Council Formal Meeting.

5. CALL TO THE PUBLIC

Jeremy Thacker encouraged the Board to restart the naming process with a more complete survey that includes all suggested names and shared that his group would consider withdrawing its petition if a new survey were conducted.

Jerry Van Gasse added that his support for the effort is rooted in a long-standing personal connection to former Deputy City Manager Jerome Miller, who had been mentored by Jesse Owens, and emphasized his desire to ensure the process is handled in a way that honors everyone involved.

Christina Tyler raised concerns about accessibility and encouraged the Board to improve accommodation for individuals with disabilities. She also offered general suggestions to enhance parks and identify new funding opportunities and thanked the Board for allowing her to speak.

Jaime Garcia raised concerns about a significant number of dead ducks and geese at the park and expressed concern about the response to the issue. She urged the City to improve lake maintenance and ensure that staff are trained to handle wildlife health concerns.

6. BOARD CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

No board member report.

7. BOARD COMMENTS/REQUEST

No board member comments.

8. DIRECTOR'S BRIEFING

Assistant Director Barrett provided a heat and trail safety update, noting that certain trails close from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Extreme Heat Warning Days. She also reported that the department has implemented upgrades such as electronic gates, digital message boards, and cameras to improve safety and trailhead operations.

Director Whitfield shared that the Mayor visited the Washington Activity Center during the PHXPlays Summer Camp, highlighting the strong programming and positive experiences for campers. He invited everyone to attend the Parks Department's Fourth of July events at Deer Valley Park, American Family Fields of Phoenix, and Steele Indian School Park. Finally, he congratulated Theresa Faull on her upcoming retirement in July.

9. ADJOURNMENT

Chairman Moya adjourned the meeting at 6:05 p.m.