

**CITY OF PHOENIX
PARKS AND RECREATION BOARD
SUMMARY MINUTES
September 25, 2025**

Virtual meeting hosted on Webex.

<u>Board Members Present</u> Kelly Dalton, Chair (virtual) Aubrey Barnwell (virtual) Tony Moya (virtual) Sarah Porter (virtual) Emma Viera Ed Zuercher (virtual) <u>Board Members Absent</u> Dorina Bustamante	<u>Staff Present</u> John Chan Dustin Cammack Cynthia Aguilar Martin Whitfield Brandie Barrett Alonso Avitia Tony Salinas Becky Kirk Lisa Huggins-Hubbard Bob Adams	<u>Community Members</u> Ben Schrepf Shannon Mitchell Megan Avalos
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1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Dalton called the meeting to order at 5:02 p.m. with Board members Barnwell, Zuercher, Moya, Porter and Viera in attendance.

2. INFORMATION ONLY

No formal presentation on these items. Information only.

2a. Quarterly Code of Conduct Update

2b. Partnership Between the City of Phoenix Parks Department and State Forty Eight

2c. PPPI Webpage

2d. Preserve Gabion Wall (City of Peoria Utility Easement) Project Update

3. CONSENT ITEMS

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

3a. Parks and Recreation Board Summary Minutes – June 26, 2025

3b. Event and Vending Requests at City Parks

3c. Phoenix Sonoran Preserve Committee Reappointments

3d. Sponsorship for Basketball Court Renovation from Phoenix Sunds and Ability 260 at Telephone Pioneers of America Park

Board member Zuercher made the motion to approve consent items 3a through 3d. Board member Moya seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously, 6-0.

4. 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.

4a. Japanese Friendship Garden of Phoenix (Rohoen) Update

Deputy Director Avitia introduced the Japanese Friendship Garden (JFG) Executive Director, Ben Schrepf. Director Schrepf explained his extensive history working in Japanese Friendship Gardens throughout the United States. He described recent growth and improvements at the Phoenix garden. He detailed the partnerships that the JFG created to meet the garden's growing needs, given steady increases in attendance and revenue since 2018. He reviewed programming and educational opportunities for children and adults available at the JFG and highlighted the benefits participants have received from participating.

Director Schrepf described a recent trip to Japan to expand knowledge about traditional Japanese gardens and how the JFG in Phoenix compares. He also discussed the garden's master plan which includes planting trees, new water features, adding drought-tolerant plant material, and a new irrigation system. Unique landscape features at the Phoenix JFG include a Bonsai collection and a state-of-the-art lighting system. Director Schrepf explained the garden's transition from private bookings to more inclusive events and outreach that is accessible to a broader audience. He described the cultural benefits of being located within Margaret T. Hance Park downtown, and concluded with a review of the garden's hours and upcoming events.

Chairperson Dalton requested more information about the collaborations with partners at Margaret T. Hance Park.

Director Schrepf described a recent tea ceremony that was a collaboration between the JFG, the Irish Cultural Center, and The Great Arizona Puppet Theater.

Chairperson Dalton commented on the attendance growth and asked if marketing could have contributed to this increase.

Director Schrepf confirmed that social media presence is always helpful.

Board member Vierra thanked staff for the presentation and maintaining the gardens.

4b. 2025 Parks Summer Programs – Post Season Update

Director Aguilar introduced staff to provide an update on the summer programs.

Recreation Supervisor Salinas explained the 2025 PHXPlays Summer Camp Program, which was offered in 26 locations through out the City. Teens are an integral support for this program, and over 200 teens volunteered to make the program a reality. This summer, there were over 14,000 participants in the program each week. Recreation Supervisor Salinas demonstrated Phoenix's competitive pricing for the program by comparing costs of similar offerings by other organizations. He reviewed new offerings for the 2025 summer season and shared summer camp activity highlights. After the season, a feedback survey was sent to participants and parents, which revealed that families were very happy with the PHXPlays program and chose it primarily for the location and cost.

Aquatics Recreation Supervisor Kirk recapped the 2025 summer aquatics season. She shared which pools were open, participated in the free admission "Cool Kids" program, and the number of open swim and program participants. She explained that swimming lessons are a priority for the Department and reported that over 13,000 individuals registered for lessons this year, which cost only \$15 for two weeks of lessons. She described recruitment efforts to hire aquatics staff on social media, in high schools and colleges, and at community events. To increase retainment between summer seasons, this year a new accelerated assistant manager training was created and over 45 swim instructors participated. Aquatics Recreation Supervisor Kirk concluded with a review of improvements occurring at Eastlake Pool and plans for redesign at Maryvale Pool.

Board member Vierra thanked staff for the presentation and their hard work. She asked about donations this year compared to previous years and how that impacted membership.

Director Aguilar clarified that there were no scholarships for the summer camp program, rather there were donations for scholarships for swimming lessons and swimming.

Board member Vierra suggested that staff work with local farmers to get produce to feed kids at summer camp. She inquired how participation rates this summer compared with previous years.

Director Aguilar responded that she did not have the data on hand, but it could be provided. She noted that this year's vacancies were significantly lower than in the past, which can be attributed to improved registration and drop in procedures.

Board members Vierra asked about plans to address the wait list for swimming lessons.

Director Aguilar explained the wait list is typically a capacity issue, which is determined by the size of the facility. If there are other swimming lesson sites that are not filled on a daily basis, we encourage families to consider other sites.

Chairperson Dalton asked if we have data on the percentage of children that return to summer camp. She expressed gratitude and thanks to the staff.

Director Aguilar noted that the Department has never tracked that data but moving forward will determine if the registration program can track retention.

Shannon Mitchell is a mother of two children who participated in the PHXPlays summer

camp program at three different sites in the City. She highlighted the key features of the program that make it attractive to families, which include the early 7 a.m. start time, pre- and post- week options, and teen volunteers.

5. DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION

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

5a. Request to Extend Closure of Hilaria Rodriguez Park

Director Aguilar reminded the Board of their vote to close Hilaria Rodriguez Park in March 2025. She introduced staff to speak about the current state of the park and surrounding areas. Special Program Administrator Huggins-Hubbard, from the Office of Homelessness Solutions, described improvement efforts at the park. She explained a partnership between City Council, Police, the Parks Department, the Office of Homeless Solutions and the Sky Harbor Neighborhood association. A key issue identified was a property adjacent to the park, which went into foreclosure and is continually littered with trash and trespassers. Evictions were completed in June 2025 and on September 22, 2025, there was a successful cleanup of the property.

Special Project Administrator Huggins-Hubbard detailed the next steps for returning Hilaria Rodriguez Park back to the community which includes new signage, additional enforcement patrols, meetings with neighbors and local businesses, and park activations to engage the local community. The culmination of the coordinated efforts will be an event on October 30 to celebrate the re-opening of the park.

Director Aguilar clarified that the Department is asking for approval to re-open the park in October, rather than the previously approved date of September 2025.

Board member Moya thanked the team for coming together to improve the park and surrounding area. He asked about the maintenance at the park during the closure and whether any special maintenance would be needed to re-open in October.

Director Aguilar responded that staff have maintained the park as usual throughout the closure, continuing regular maintenance and patrols from park rangers.

Board member Porter made the motion to extend the park closure until October 30. Board member Zuercher seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously 6-0.

5b. Approval of Park Name and Design of an Undeveloped Park Site Located at Inspiration Mountain Parkway and Molly Lane

Deputy Director Bob Adams provided information on the site where a new City of Phoenix park will be constructed. Two design concepts and a variety of park names were created by a steering committee then presented to the community for feedback. Public engagement included an online survey, mailings, QR codes at the future park site, emails, and post in the community newsletter. Concepts and names were also presented to local elementary school children. Almost 75% of the respondents selected concept two and the name of "Inspiration Mountain Park." He reviewed the timeline for the future of

the park and asked for Board approval of the new name and design.

Megan Avalos spoke as a resident of the neighborhood surrounding the new park. She thanked staff for the opportunity to provide community input on the park's name and design. She stated her support for the selected design concept and name and expressed her excitement to see the future park.

Board member Moya reiterated Ms. Avalos' sentiment about community engagement and interaction, and he praised the staff for including students in their outreach.

Board member Zuercher also expressed his support and made a motion to approve item 5b. Board member Vierra seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously 6-0.

6. CALL TO THE PUBLIC

No public speakers.

7. BOARD CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

Chairperson Dalton did not share a report.

8. BOARD COMMENTS/REQUEST

Board member Zuercher announced his resignation from the Parks and Recreation Board and that this will be his final meeting.

9. DIRECTOR'S BRIEFING

Assistant Director Whitfield described the grand re-opening of La Pradera Park, held on September 6, 2025, and highlighted various upgrades to the park. He also described the Rancho Ko-Mat-Ke centennial anniversary celebration to be held at Highline Park on September 26, 2025.

Assistant Director Barrett detailed recent upgrades to the basketball and tennis courts at Dynamite Park as well as the practice putting green at Encanto Park. Upgrades were made to ensure durability and safety of park property and to decrease water consumption.

Director Aguilar reviewed 2025 Arizona Parks and Recreation Association Annual Conference, hosted by the City of Phoenix Parks and Recreation Department in downtown Phoenix, where the Department won an award for their work on the South Mountain Visitor Center. She noted the recent opening of Laveen Heritage Park in South Phoenix, the third park to open in the area in just 16 months.

10. ADJOURNMENT

Chairperson Dalton adjourned the meeting at 6:04 p.m.