CITY OF PHOENIX
PARKS AND RECREATION BOARD SUMMARY
MINUTES
October 22, 2026

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

Board Members Present	**Staff Present**	**Community Members**
Tony Moya, Chair	Dustin Cammack	Dana R. Chappell (Virtual)
Emma Viera (Virtual)	Martin Whitfield	Orla Bobo (Virtual)
Aubrey Barnwell (Virtual)	Brandie I. Barrett	Jerry Van Gasse
Jessica Fotinos	Todd Shackelford	John Bawden
Sarah Porter	Jarod Rogers	Anne Ender
	Mark Gonzales	Chelsey McHale
Absent Board Members	Tannia Ruiz	Gregory Butts
Leon Thomas	Cindy Peiz	Diane Butts
Martha Abbott	Jana Krcek	
	Isaac Pina	
	Dalia Adams	
	Sierra Hernandez	

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Moya called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m. with Board members Viera, Barnwell, Porter and Fotinos in attendance.

2. CONSENT ONLY

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

2a. Parks Board Minutes- September 24, 2026

2b. Request to Vend at City Parks

Board Member Barnwell moved to approve Items 2a and 2b, with Board Member Emma Viera seconding the motion. The motion passed unanimously, 5-0.

3. Information and Discussion Items

Information and discussion items are for discussion only. There is no action on these items.

3a. 2026 Trail Heat Safety Program Update

Deputy Director Rogers and Assistant Fire Chief Mark Gonzales presented the annual 2026 Trail Heat Safety Program Update. Rogers reviewed the City's trail restriction policy, which closes designated trails at Camelback Mountain, Piestewa Peak, and South Mountain from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on days when the National Weather Service issues an Extreme Heat Warning. He outlined the Department's communication efforts, including website notifications, social media outreach, media coverage, hotel partner notifications, email alerts, and trailhead

signage.

Deputy Director Rogers reported that 2026 recorded 47 Extreme Heat Warning days, making it one of the highest years on record. He noted that the last seven years have experienced five of the highest annual totals of Extreme Heat Warning days over the past two decades. Trail use data indicates hikers generally self-regulate during periods of extreme temperatures, resulting in lower visitation on the hottest days.

Assistant Fire Chief Gonzales provided an overview of mountain rescue operations and statistics. He explained that the Phoenix Fire Department's Technical Rescue Teams work closely with Parks and Recreation staff to reduce heat-related incidents and ensure visitor safety. During the 2026 heat season, the Fire Department responded to 64 mountain rescues compared to 88 during the same period in 2025. There were four rescues on restricted trails during restricted hours and six rescues on non-restricted trails during Extreme Heat Warning days. Gonzalez stated that rescue activity remains concentrated during the restricted period between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. and that the data suggests the current restrictions continue to have a positive impact on reducing incidents.

Deputy Director Rogers highlighted the Parks Department's hiker safety outreach efforts conducted from May through September. Park Stewards and Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) volunteers completed 131 outreach shifts, contributing nearly 900 volunteer hours and engaging more than 19,000 hikers. Volunteers distributed over 17,000 water bottles, cooling towels, electrolyte packets, and safety information. He also provided updates on new safety initiatives, including electronic safety message signs being installed at trailheads throughout the park system, promotion of hiking safety messaging through the Arizona Office of Tourism, a partnership with State 48 that will generate funding for hiker safety programming through special merchandise sales, and development of updated trail maps designed to improve visitor awareness and decision-making.

Chairman Moya opened the floor for public comment.

Dana Chappell expressed support for the Department's Trail Heat Safety Program and encouraged staff to further explore a previously proposed concept involving off-grid hydration, first-aid, and heat-relief structures along trails. He requested consideration of a task force to study the proposal.

Orla Bobo stated that mountain rescues remain a significant public safety concern and advocated for expanded trail restrictions, lower temperature thresholds, enforceable operating hours, and stronger penalties for violations. She emphasized the need to prioritize first responder safety and emergency resource availability.

Jerry Van Gasse expressed concerns regarding changes to opening times at Camelback Mountain's Echo Canyon Trailhead and questioned the implementation of automated gate systems and related expenditures.

John Bawden, a volunteer Park Steward, voiced support for the existing trail restriction program and noted that rescue statistics demonstrate positive results. He shared personal observations from the trails and described the importance of ongoing safety education and rescue efforts.

Anne Ender, representative from Operation Blue Ribbon, discussed research and analysis related to mountain rescue activity and first responder safety. He encouraged consideration of additional measures to reduce rescue incidents and preserve emergency response resources.

Board Member Fotinos asked whether patient counts included injured firefighters or first responders. Assistant Fire Chief Gonzalez explained that the reported patient counts would include firefighter patients if any occurred but noted that no firefighters required patient care during the 2026 heat season.

Board Member Fotinos also inquired whether mountain rescues affect response times for other emergency calls.

Assistant Fire Chief Gonzalez stated that while units committed to mountain rescues are unavailable for other incidents during the rescue, Phoenix Fire Department utilizes adaptive response strategies to maintain citywide coverage and response capabilities.

Board Member Fotinos asked whether any additional policy recommendations were being proposed.

Assistant Fire Chief Gonzalez responded that current trends show positive results, including fewer rescues and increased public awareness, and that the Fire Department remains supportive of the existing program.

Board Member Sarah Porter asked whether the patient counts reflected only heat-related incidents.

Assistant Fire Chief Gonzalez clarified that the statistics include all rescue patients regardless of the injury or medical condition involved.

Board Member Porter commented that reducing rescues remains an important objective but noted that rescue statistics should also be considered in the context of total trail visitation. She stated that additional data would be useful when evaluating future policy changes.

Board Member Emma Viera asked whether staff had information regarding incidents involving multiple patients during a single rescue event.

Assistant Fire Chief Gonzalez explained that multiple-patient incidents often occur when rescue crews encounter additional individuals requiring assistance while responding to another call but did not have further details available.

Chairman Moya commented that the program has evolved significantly since its implementation and acknowledged the collaboration between the Parks and Recreation Department, Phoenix Fire Department, and community stakeholders. He noted that the Board's goal has been continued improvement in safety outcomes rather than the elimination of all rescues and suggested future discussions regarding long-term program goals.

4. Discussion and Possible Action
4a. Stetson Hills Trailhead Master Plan

Deputy Director Rogers presented the proposed Stetson Hills Trailhead Master Plan. He provided an overview of the approximately ten-acre site located near Stetson Hills Loop and Hackamore Drive adjacent to Sandra Day O'Connor High School. Rogers explained that the project will provide improved public access to the Deem Hills Recreation Area and its trail system while also accommodating shared parking opportunities with the Deer Valley Unified School District.

Deputy Director Rogers reviewed the public planning process conducted between January and July 2026, which included a citizen steering committee, public meetings, and an online survey. Two conceptual plans were evaluated, with the spiral concept receiving the strongest public support.

The proposed master plan includes dedicated trailhead parking, shared-use parking, a nature-themed play area, shade structures, drinking fountains, bottle fillers, landscaping buffers, and trail connections into the Deem Hills Recreation Area. Rogers stated that design work is anticipated to begin following approval of the master plan, with construction potentially beginning in late 2027 and completion anticipated in 2028.

Board Member Porter asked whether the facility was expected to open during the summer months. Rogers replied that construction schedules can change, but current projections anticipate completion during summer 2028.

Board Member Barnwell asked about the origin of the Deem Hills Recreation Area name.

Deputy Director Rogers explained that the name dates back to historic land transfers and has long been associated with the area and adjacent mountain preserve.

Chairman Moya moved approval of the Stetson Hills Trailhead Master Plan. The motion passed unanimously.

5. CALL TO THE PUBLIC

Chelsey McHale shared the story of her brother who passed away following a fall on Camelback Mountain fifteen years ago. She explained that her advocacy efforts are focused on promoting hiking safety and reducing future tragedies. She offered her continued support in advancing public education and safety initiatives.

Jerry Van Gasse reiterated concerns regarding changes to Echo Canyon Trailhead opening hours, automated gate operations, and public notification efforts.

Gregory and Diane Butts, representatives of Universal Track and Field, introduced their youth track and field organization and discussed opportunities to expand youth participation in athletics. They requested assistance in connecting with Phoenix families and community members to increase awareness of their program.

6. BOARD PERSON’S REPORT

Chairman Moya highlighted upcoming fall and Halloween-themed Parks and Recreation events taking place throughout October. He also promoted the upcoming FitPHX Zumba event

at Maryvale Community Center and encouraged community participation.

7. BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS

Board Member Jessica Fotinos thanked Parks and Recreation Department staff, Fire Department personnel, and community partners for their ongoing efforts related to trail heat safety. She commended the Department's continued investment in education, signage, technology, and visitor outreach and acknowledged the collaborative nature of the program's success.

8. DIRECTOR'S UPDATE

Assistant Director Shackelford highlighted volunteer efforts by the Encanto Pickleballers, who completed numerous improvement projects at the Encanto Sports Complex including new benches, recycling stations, upgraded netting, court artwork, and facility beautification activities. He also recognized Volunteer Coordinator Jana Krcek for her ongoing support of volunteer initiatives. He reported on the annual Scaryvale at Maryvale event, which attracted more than 3,000 attendees and featured trunk-or-treat activities, costume contests, a haunted house, scavenger hunts, inflatables, and family entertainment.

Assistant Director Barrett reported on the Department's Festival of Frights event at South Mountain Park and Preserve, which welcomed approximately 3,000 participants. She also announced that Pioneer and Military Memorial Park had been recognized as Best Cemetery in the Phoenix New Times Best of Phoenix Awards and acknowledged the contributions of the Pioneer Cemetery Association.

Barrett further highlighted ribbon-cutting ceremonies at Ho-E Park and Kiwanis Park, where new amenities, lighting, courts, shade structures, landscaping, and infrastructure improvements were completed.

Director Martin Whitfield recognized Parks Board administrative staff and Public Information Office staff for their work supporting Board meetings and Department communications.

Whitfield reported on the grand opening of the new skate plaza at Santa Maria Park and the ribbon cutting for a new playground at Deem Hills Park. He also highlighted the 45th Annual Phoenix Pride Festival, which attracted more than 45,000 attendees and celebrated diversity, inclusion, and community engagement.

9. ADJOURNMENT

Chairman Moya adjourned the meeting at 6:04 p.m.