

**NOTICE OF PUBLIC MEETING
PARKS AND RECREATION BOARD
REGULAR MEETING AND WORK STUDY SESSION**

Pursuant to A.R.S. Section 38-431.02, notice is hereby given to the members of the **PARKS AND RECREATION BOARD**, and to the general public, that the **PARKS AND RECREATION BOARD** will hold a meeting open to the public on **Thursday, January 23, 2025 at 5:00 p.m.**

The Board may vote to convene an executive session on any item that is listed on this agenda for discussion or consultation with legal counsel to obtain legal advice in accordance with A.R.S. §38-431.03(A)(3).

OPTIONS TO ACCESS THIS MEETING

Watch meeting in-person at City Council Chambers, 200 W. Jefferson St., Phoenix, Arizona, 85003

Call-in to listen to the live meeting. Dial 602-666-0783. Enter the meeting access code **2634 770 7580** then enter in the Webinar password PksMtg! when prompted (7576841 from phones).

Observe

[January 23, 2025 - Webex Link](#)

REQUEST TO SPEAK

In-Person Requests to speak at a meeting:

Register in person at the front desk located at the City Council Chambers, 200 W. Jefferson St., Phoenix, Arizona, 85003.

Individuals may arrive up to 1 hour prior to the start of the meeting to submit an in-person request to speak before the item is called. Requests to speak on individual items or for Call to the Public will not be accepted after the meeting has been called to order.

Virtual Requests to speak at a meeting:

This process is exclusively for virtual speakers and does not apply to in-person attendees requesting to speak.

To speak virtually via Webex, please use this link:

[January 23, 2025 - Virtual Request to Speak Link for Parks and Recreation Board](#)

- Virtual speakers must register by: **January 22, 2025**

If you have any issues with the form or if you wish to submit a comment to the board, contact:
Laura Borson At: laura.borson@phoenix.gov or 602-495-5215

A complete packet of meeting materials will be posted 48 hours prior to the meeting at <https://www.phoenix.gov/parks>.

The agenda for the meeting is as follows:

1.	CALL TO ORDER	Kelly Dalton, Chair
2.	CONSENT ITEM(S): Consent items will be provided to the Board in writing and are not intended for formal presentation . Consent items may be voted on collectively, unless a Board member requests that any item be voted on separately. The chairperson may direct staff to formally present any consent item. These items are for possible action.	
	a. Corrected Parks and Recreation Board Summary Minutes – October 24, 2024	Robin Kelley
	b. Parks and Recreation Board Summary Minutes – November 21, 2024	Tannia Ruiz
3.	WORK STUDY: PHOENIX TRAILS AND HEAT SAFETY Items will be presented for information and discussion only . The Parks Board will receive a verbal presentation, followed by public and board member comments. No action will be taken on this item during the meeting.	
4.	ADJOURNMENT	Kelly Dalton, Chair

For further information or to request a reasonable accommodation, please contact:
Laura Borson At: laura.borson@phoenix.gov or 602-495-5215 or TTY: 7-1-1.
January 17, 2025

**CITY OF PHOENIX
PARKS AND RECREATION BOARD
CORRECTED SUMMARY MINUTES
October 24, 2024**

Virtual meeting hosted on Webex.

<p><u>Board Members Present</u> Kelly Dalton Emma Viera Aubrey Barnwell Ed Zuercher Dorina Bustamante Sarah Porter (Virtual)</p> <p><u>Board Members Absent</u> Tony Moya</p>	<p><u>Staff Present</u> Jon Chan Cynthia Aguilar Martin Whitfield Jarod Rogers Tim Kreis Tannia Ruiz</p>	<p><u>Community Members</u> Jerry Van Gasse Michael Duffy Jes Dobbs</p>
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1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Dalton called the meeting to order at 5:01 p.m. with Board Members Viera, Zuercher, Barnwell, Porter, and Bustamante in attendance.

2. INFORMATION ITEMS

No formal presentation on these items. Information only.

2a. Code of Conduct Update

3. CONSENT ITEMS

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

3a. Parks and Recreation Board Summary Minutes - September 26, 2024

3b. Mural Donation at South Mountain Park/Preserve

Jerry Van Gasse commented that it was late in the planning of the South Mountain 100-year celebration to include a mural and noted it is not necessary at the preserve.

Board Member Zuercher asked for confirmation that the reason this is happening now is because the vendor recently reached out to the Parks Department to donate these services.

Director Aguilar confirmed Board member Zuercher was correct.

3c. Sponsorships for Boo Fest at Paseo Highlands Park

Board Member Zuercher made a motion to approve consent items 3a through 3c. Board Member Barnwell, seconded the motion which passed unanimously, 6-0.

4. ~~INFORMATION AND DISCUSSION ITEM(S):~~ DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION

4a. Annual Update on Phoenix Trails and Heat Safety

Deputy Director Jarod Rogers and Fire Department Executive Assistant Chief Tim Kreis provided a collaborative update on the Phoenix Trails and Heat Safety Program.

They explained that the program, initially launched as a pilot in 2021, was developed to enhance safety for both trail users and first responders by closing high-use trails during extreme heat. The program currently includes trails at Camelback Mountain and Piestewa Peak, with closures triggered by Excessive Heat Warnings from the National Weather Service from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. The program is supported by public notifications through press releases, online updates, and onsite signage, and further promotes heat safety awareness through the “Take a Hike. Do it Right.” campaign, targeting both locals and visitors.

The update highlighted the program's positive impact, showing a decrease in rescues at closed locations, although rescues at other locations have increased, with call times shifting to earlier in the day as hikers attempt to avoid peak heat. The Parks and Fire Departments are evaluating if Excessive Heat Warnings remain the most effective closure trigger.

Based on mountain rescue data provided by the Fire Department, staff recommended expanding the program to include South Mountain Park/Preserve, given its high visitor volume and challenging trails. They also suggested adjusting closure hours to 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. to account for the early morning heat rise, aiming to prevent heat-related incidents. The Parks and Recreation Board was asked to approve these program expansions and modifications.

Chairperson Dalton opened with a comment expressing concern over the recent death of a young boy on South Mountain, noting that South Mountain is currently not included in the Phoenix Trails and Heat Safety Program.

Board Member Zuercher suggested updating trail closure hours based on data and emphasized the importance of gathering public input before making further modifications to the closure times.

Assistant Chief Kreis added that trail closures aim to balance safety by limiting mountain access during extreme heat.

Board Member Zuercher reiterated the need to balance public access with safety considerations, stating that, despite warnings, fire personnel continue to respond to rescues. He expressed a desire to gather public feedback before implementing the recommended changes to the Trails and Heat Safety Program.

Board Member Viera suggested inviting a medical or health expert to provide insight on the health impacts of extreme heat on the public.

Chairperson Dalton acknowledged the compelling and consistent data supporting the need for safety measures and expressed readiness to move forward, while recognizing the importance of gathering public input. She noted that the data clearly indicates these updates are necessary.

Board Member Barnwell stated that the hour restrictions should be evidence based and emphasized the importance of communicating the successes of the heat safety program to the public.

Board Member Porter stated that public engagement should be actively sought. She inquired about the future direction of the program, asking for clarification on the definition of excessive heat and whether the program can rely solely on excessive heat days as a measure.

Board Member Viera emphasized the importance of considering the data and requested additional information, noting that guidance from a medical expert could be highly beneficial. She also agreed that educating and engaging the community beforehand would be the best approach.

Mike Duffy from United Phoenix Firefighters Local 493 called in to provide comments. He shared his experience as a member of the technical rescue team, often involved in helicopter rescues on the trails. Mr. Duffy emphasized that these incidents have a profound impact on both the victims' families and the firefighting community. He expressed support for the recommendations and a heat safety policy based on a specific temperature threshold to better protect both the public and fire personnel.

Chairperson Dalton inquired if the motion could be delayed.

Director Aguilar confirmed that the Board did not have to take action and the motion could be delayed while staff conduct community engagement to inform the public of the recommendation, and then return to the board.

Board Member Zuercher agreed, stating that gathering public feedback would lead to a better-informed decision to protect both the public and firefighters.

Board Member Barnwell requested a determination on how the temperature would be measured.

Chairwoman Dalton inquired about the legal implications of delaying the decision. She also asked whether the rescue of the young boy on South Mountain occurred on a heat warning day.

Assistant Chief Kreis discussed the incident on South Mountain, confirming that it was not an Excessive Heat Warning day and that the temperature was approximately 113 degrees.

Board Member Porter suggested that a medical professional could offer guidance on whether to follow the National Weather Service heat warnings or set a specific temperature threshold. She emphasized the importance of selecting the appropriate medical expert for this input.

Board Member Bustamante provided an example of beach closures for riptides and shark sightings, suggesting that trail closures should similarly not be limited to heat warning days. She recommended considering temperature data and average rescue statistics when determining closures.

Board Member Porter added that she would like to see a thoughtful approach to trail closures, noting that heat tolerance tends to build gradually over the summer.

Board Member Bustamante noted that in the past, prior to having the Heat Safety Program in place, the board did not have the data we have today. She expressed a desire for a motion that allows for continued evolution of the process.

Chairperson Dalton expressed concerns with liability that could be associated with not taking action due to being made aware of the data.

Director Aguilar stated the recommendation presented to the board at this time was to approve adding South Mountain Park to the list of sites included in the Heat Safety Program and to extend the trail closure time to 8am-5pm. Director Aguilar added the intent was to return to the Board to have further discussion about what threshold should be used to determine trail

closures, the current method of Excessive Heat Warning Days or a set temperature. Director Aguilar stated that action on the recommendations could be taken by the Board today, with direction from the Board to return in January after doing further research and soliciting public feedback related to using a set temperature as the threshold to determine trail closures and moving the closure time to begin at 7 a.m.

Board Member Bustamante made a motion to include South Mountain Park/Preserve in the Trail and Heat Safety Program, initiate trail closures at 8:00 a.m. with the expectation to return in January to discuss the trail closure threshold and closure time after engaging the public.

Board Member Viera seconded the motion, [and the motion passed unanimously, 6-0.](#)

5. CALL TO THE PUBLIC

Jess Dobbs thanked the board for considering public input and expressed her preference for the trails to open earlier at 4:00 a.m. and to close later in the day.

6. BOARD CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

7. BOARD COMMENTS/REQUESTS

8. DIRECTOR'S BRIEFING

Assistant Director Whitfield shared information regarding the Sunnyslope Community Center Trunk or Treat and the PAC Program Lights on Afterschool Celebration.

Director Aguilar shared information on the Parks Department fall events and 2024 National Recreation Parks Association conference.

9. ADJOURNMENT:

Chairperson Dalton adjourned the meeting at 6:16 p.m.

**CITY OF PHOENIX
PARKS AND RECREATION BOARD
SUMMARY MINUTES
November 21, 2024**

Virtual meeting hosted on Webex.

<u>Board Members Present</u>	<u>Staff Present</u>	<u>Community Members</u>
Kelly Dalton Emma Viera Aubrey Barnwell (Virtual) Ed Zuercher (Virtual) Sarah Porter	John Chan Cynthia Aguilar Brandie Barrett Amber Williamson Carrie Brown Joe Diaz Theresa Faull Jarod Rogers Dustin Cammack Tannia Ruiz	Jerry Van Gasse Maria Hernandez Janet Aviles Aaron Johnson Christopher Bagby Thomas Cuddy Chian Ma Pat Linn William Westfall Noel Kingston Daniel Luedders Gerrit Mack Jes Dobbs Tim Sierakowski Valerie Peters Rene Dominguez Karl Mueller Kelli Cholieu Marion Cholieu Heidi McNeil Staudenmaier Aaron Barber Rhonda Bompensa-Zimmerman Michael Hopkins Chandler Papas
<u>Board Members Absent</u>		
Dorina Bustamante Tony Moya		

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Dalton called the meeting to order at 5:01 p.m.

2. CONSENT ITEMS

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

2a. Parks and Recreation Board Summary Minutes – October 24, 2024

Jerry Van Gasse made comments regarding a written complaint submitted to the Attorney General’s Office about illegal dumping at South Mountain Park.

Chairperson Dalton reminded Mr. Van Gasse to ensure his comments remained specific to the meeting minutes.

2b. 2025 Annual Requests to Vend

2c. Phoenix Marathon- Tentative Event

Board Member Porter made a motion to approve consent items 2a through 2c. Board Member Viera, seconded the motion which passed unanimously, 5-0.

3. INFORMATION AND DISCUSSION ITEM(S):

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. City Budget Overview

Budget and Research Director Amber Williamson presented an overview of the City's budget. The presentation highlighted the city's financial outlook, focusing on the 2024-25 city budget of \$7.2 billion, allocated across Enterprise Funds (32%), the General Fund (29%), and Special Revenue Funds (39%). The 2023-24 General Fund performed well, with resources totaling \$2,138.4 million, exceeding estimates by \$6.3 million, and expenditures at \$1,844.9 million, coming in \$10.6 million below projections. These outcomes resulted in a General Fund balance of \$293.5 million, which was \$16.9 million higher than anticipated.

The presentation also emphasized significant budget challenges ahead. Key issues include legislative actions, such as the elimination of the residential rental sales tax in 2025 (SB 1131) and a flat 2.5% individual income tax rate (SB 1828), leading to projected revenue losses of \$35.4 million in 2024-25 and increasing in subsequent years. Other concerns include economic uncertainty, rising costs for labor, health insurance, and pensions, as well as the expiration of ARPA funds for homelessness support and the expiration of the Fire SAFER Grant for 32 sworn positions. Additional pressures include aging city infrastructure, new operating costs from the 2023 GO Bond Program, and increasing resident demands for expanded services. These challenges highlight the need for proactive fiscal planning to sustain city operations and services.

Chairperson Dalton thanked Ms. Williamson and asked what the City's efforts are to advocate at the state level.

Ms. Williamson explained that the City's Government Relations Office collaborates closely with the City Manager's Office to actively advocate for the city, working to prevent actions that could diminish revenues or undermine local control. She noted that the office regularly reports its efforts to the City Council.

Chairperson Dalton inquired about the process for notifying the City in the event of legislative actions during the budget process.

Ms. Williamson responded that the Phoenix City Council would be notified of any legislative actions taken by the state.

Board Member Porter asked if there was an opportunity to reconsider any of the 2023 GO Bond projects to address budget concerns.

Ms. Williamson clarified that bonds are issued to fund capital projects and are repaid through secondary property taxes. She assured that the projects will proceed as planned but explained that once new facilities are built, their maintenance and operating costs cannot be covered by the General Obligation (GO) Bond. These expenses must instead be managed within the General Fund.

Chairperson Dalton expressed gratitude to Ms. Williamson once again for her presentation.

3b. Sombra Art Project

Arts and Culture Deputy Director Carrie Brown presented on the ¡Sombra! Experiments in Shade project, which is Phoenix's innovative public art initiative addressing urban heat challenges. Awarded \$1 million through Bloomberg Philanthropies' Public Art Challenge, the project involves nine artists creating temporary shading and cooling installations for parks across all eight City Council districts. The installations will be featured in neighborhood parks during summer 2025, followed by a community festival at Steele Indian School Park in September 2025. The project team, led by the Office of Arts and Culture, is collaborating with selected artists and fostering community engagement through events between March and June 2025 to celebrate the installations. Designs are being finalized for permitting, emphasizing art's role in community resilience and the importance of shade in Phoenix's urban environment.

Chairperson Dalton thanked Ms. Brown for her presentation and asked if this project was funded by Bloomberg Philanthropies?

Ms. Brown stated that this was correct. Funding is being provided by a Bloomberg Philanthropies Public Art Challenge Grant and is specifically for temporary art installations.

Board Member Viera expressed her excitement and anticipation for the upcoming installation projects.

Chairperson Dalton inquired about the process for learning from the structures, so the City benefits beyond the initial installations. She also asked about the fate of the art installations after their removal.

Ms. Brown explained that the installations might return to the artists, or they could be reviewed to assess the impact of Phoenix's environmental conditions on their design. If a structure proves to be a successful shade solution, staff may consider implementing it as a permanent feature in the future.

Chairperson Dalton concluded by thanking Ms. Brown once again for her presentation.

4. DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION ITEM(S):

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

4a. Request the Temporary Closure of Hilaria Rodriguez Park

The Parks and Recreation Board received a presentation from Parks and Recreation Deputy Director Joe Diaz, Police Lieutenant Brian Milhone, Neighborhood Services Special Projects Administrator Lisa Huggins, and Office of Homeless Solutions Deputy Director Scott Hall. The presentation focused on the recommendation to temporarily close Hilaria Rodriguez Park at the request of the community, due to ongoing safety concerns.

The recommendation proposed closing the park, located at 2801 E. Adams, from December 1, 2024, to March 31, 2025. This 0.83-acre pocket park, featuring a playground, ramada, shade trees, and recreational space, has faced persistent issues, including vandalism, encampments, drug use, and other criminal behaviors. Despite significant efforts by city departments, these challenges have continued, leading to written requests from nearby residents for action to restore safety and security. The temporary closure is intended to provide relief to the neighborhood while city departments address these issues. During the closure, outreach services will be provided by the Office of Homeless Solutions, with continued efforts by the Police and Neighborhood Services Departments to improve conditions. The Parks Department will also collaborate with residents and community partners to create a park activation plan for programming and events when the park reopens on April 1, 2025. The Board was asked to approve the temporary closure to ensure the park becomes a clean, safe, and accessible space for the community.

Chairperson Dalton thanked the presenters for their collaborative effort and noted that two public speakers were present for this item.

Maria Hernandez, a community member, shared that Hilaria Rodriguez Park was once a beautiful space but has become unsafe for families and the community due to ongoing drug activity in the park and surrounding neighborhood.

Janet Aviles, the Sky Harbor Neighborhood Association President, agreed, emphasizing that crime such as drug use and prostitution has made the park dangerous. She expressed hope that the park could be restored and used as intended for the benefit of the community.

Board Member Viera inquired whether staff had engaged with the Village Planning Committee.

Mr. Diaz explained that the committee had not yet been consulted but would be notified if the closure is approved.

Board Member Viera also asked about the types of businesses in the area.

Ms. Huggins responded that while the neighborhood is primarily residential, it is surrounded by commercial businesses such as gas stations, fast-food restaurants, taxi companies, and plumbing businesses.

Board Member Porter expressed appreciation for the collaborative effort among city departments and community members. She acknowledged that while closing a park is an unusual step, it is necessary in this case to ensure safety and proper use. She asked whether four months would be sufficient for rehabilitation.

Mr. Diaz affirmed that four months would allow for an evaluation of progress and an update to the Board.

Board Member Porter also asked about measures to restrict access during the closure.

Mr. Diaz stated that a chain-link fence with "No Trespassing" signs would be installed.

Board Member Porter commended the community's involvement and urged ongoing collaboration among city departments.

Board Member Viera recommended staff collaborate with nonprofits to secure additional resources and support.

Chairperson Dalton concluded by acknowledging the sadness of closing a park but noted that the input from staff and the community clearly demonstrated the necessity of this action. She emphasized that the community's care for the park and neighborhood was evident throughout the discussion.

Board Member Porter made a motion to approve item 4a. Board Member Viera, seconded the motion which passed unanimously, 5-0.

4b. Acquisition and Designation of Property as “Mountain Preserve” into the Sonoran Preserve

Deputy Directors Theresa Faull and Jarod Rogers requested for the Board to recommend City Council approval to acquire and designate approximately 158 acres of land near 39th Avenue, Stetson Hills Loop, and Hackamore Drive as part of the Sonoran Desert Mountain Preserve. The property, currently leased to the Deer Valley Unified School District (DVUSD) for Sandra Day O'Connor High School, is undergoing a lease modification to facilitate its availability for purchase through an Arizona State Land Department auction.

Incorporating this land into the Mountain Preserve system would enhance recreational opportunities, protect native desert habitat, and provide connectivity to the Deem Hills trail system. Proposed plans include the development of a trailhead parking lot with amenities and a partnership with DVUSD for shared use of a portion of the parking lot during school hours. Funding for the acquisition will come from the Parks and Recreation Capital Improvement Program budget, utilizing Phoenix Parks and Preserve Initiative funds. The auction is anticipated to take place in early 2025.

Chairperson Dalton thanked staff for the presentation and clarified that it is the Parks Board's role to recommend this to the City Council.

Board Member Porter expressed enthusiasm for the addition of land to the parks system and commended the Parks Department for collaborating with the school district on this initiative.

Board Member Porter made a motion to approve item 4b. Board Member Viera, seconded the motion which passed unanimously, 5-0.

4c. Annual Election of Parks and Recreation Board Chair- November 21, 2024

Board Member Barnwell made a motion to nominate Board Member Dalton for a third and final year as the Parks Board Chair. Board Member Zuercher seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously, 4-0.

5. CALL TO THE PUBLIC

Aaron Johnson expressed his opposition to the decision made during the October Parks Board meeting regarding the Phoenix Trails and Heat Safety Program. He encouraged staff and the Board to consider a more forward thinking approach to addressing the issue.

Christopher Bagby addressed the Board to express his opposition to the decision made during the October Parks Board meeting regarding the Phoenix Trails and Heat Safety Program. He recommended that staff engage with all stakeholders to ensure a more inclusive approach.

Thomas Cuddy suggested gathering more data on trails and heat safety, noting that individual experiences can vary significantly. He shared that he has run approximately 200 miles between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. on very hot days without adverse effects. Having recently moved to Ahwatukee, he expressed his appreciation for the accessibility of the trails.

Chian Ma expressed their love for the hiking community and emphasized the importance of advocating for their rights. Chian suggested that staff focus on educating the public and working with resorts to better inform tourists about trail safety and etiquette.

Pat Linn shared that as a retiree, he hikes Camelback three to four times a week. Hiking has been instrumental in maintaining his health, particularly after recovering from a stroke, making it his preferred form of exercise. He recommended that staff prioritize education and consider adding signage to enhance trail safety and awareness.

William Westfall expressed his belief that closing preserves is a closed-minded solution and voiced his opposition to the decision made at the October Parks Board meeting regarding the Trails and Heat Safety Program.

Noel Kingston, a frequent trail user, primarily of South Mountain trails, expressed his appreciation for efforts to reduce heat-related injuries. He acknowledged the concerns surrounding the issue but noted that, based on the previous meeting minutes, Board members had discussed whether the closure decision needed to be made in October. He believed the decision could have been delayed allowing for more comprehensive conversations and outreach with the hiking community.

Daniel Luedders asked the Board to reconsider the decision made during the October meeting regarding the Phoenix Trails and Heat Safety Program. He highlighted that Phoenix boasts one of the largest park systems and emphasized the city's reputation, as stated on its website, as a place where people can live, work, and play. He expressed concern that restricting access to these beautiful spaces for a significant portion of the summer infringes on the rights of residents. He urged the Board to explore alternative solutions, noting that many hikers train year-round. He advocated for keeping the parks open to preserve access for the community.

Gerrit Mack opposed the October Parks Board decision on the Phoenix Trails and Heat Safety Program, calling it disproportionate and anti-Phoenician. He argued that better education, improved signage, and increased Ranger presence would be more effective than closing trails. Highlighting the mental health benefits of trail access, he shared his daily summer trail use and offered to collaborate on enhancing education and safety measures.

Jerry Van Gasse criticized the decision to allow the Fire Department to influence park policy, stating that such decisions should be managed by the Parks Department. He argued against deferring to the Fire Department and suggested that charging for rescues, as he proposed in 2010, would serve as a deterrent for unprepared trail users. He opposed the closure of trails, calling it misguided and warning that voters would not support such measures.

Jes Dobbs shared that they organized a petition to oppose restrictive trail closures and advocate for maintaining access to Phoenix trails. She emphasized the collective goal of preserving the freedom to access trails for physical and mental well-being. Dobbs criticized trail closures as a weak-minded solution and stressed the importance of ensuring opportunities for exercise and connection with nature.

Timothy Sierakowski expressed frustration, stating the Board is failing to represent hikers, bikers, and the community. He criticized the Fire Department's involvement in park policy and questioned the lack of educational resources to prevent trail injuries.

Valerie Peters expressed her opposition to the trail closures at South Mountain. As a cyclist and a 35-year resident of Ahwatukee, she and her husband use the trails 2-3 times a week. She noted that with South Mountain now included in the trail closure program, the trails would be inaccessible far more frequently, affecting regular users like herself.

Renee Dominguez, a Homedale resident and community activist, criticized the Department for awarding a 2020 contract to a Mexican Fiesta dance group, stating it has failed to meet its afterschool programming goals. She stated the group operates as

a for-profit business rather than a nonprofit and requested a new performance evaluation, questioning how their 10-year contract extension was approved despite prior issues.

Karl Mueller thanked the Board for their work on behalf of the outdoor community and urged them to reconsider their October decision on the Trails and Heat Safety Program. He highlighted his wife's ASU research on the importance of green spaces for happiness, community interaction, exercise, and well-being, emphasizing the need to balance safety with these benefits.

Kelli Cholieu, a third-generation Phoenix native, opposed the Board's October decision on the Trails and Heat Safety Program. She criticized blanket trail closures implemented without significant public engagement, warning that such restrictions may lead to the creation of social trails, causing damage to the preserve, as people will continue to hike regardless.

Marion Cholieu, expressed opposition to trail closures starting at 7 a.m., stating they negatively impact the community. She emphasized the need for a balance between safety and accessibility, noting that eliminating all risks is impossible and that rescues are an inherent part of the job as a Firefighter. She urged the Board to consider the petition advocating for keeping the trails open.

Heidi McNeil Staudenmaier, a taxpayer and lawyer who hikes Camelback, opposed the trail closures, noting that they restrict access even for experienced hikers. She emphasized the need for decisions to be based on facts and evidence, which she believes were lacking in the decision to implement the closures.

Aaron Barber expressed concern that the closures unfairly punish hikers and may push people to create makeshift access points. He urged the Board to explore alternative solutions.

Rhonda Bompensa Zimmerman criticized the lack of health equity and community inclusion in the decision, urging the Board to pause and reflect on the feedback shared to ensure all voices are considered.

Michael Hopkins noted that Firefighters often require EMT support during rescues but emphasized that the active trail community reduces the need for such rescues. He highlighted that trail access is an integral part of the city's identity.

Chandler Papas expressed opposition to the October decision on the Trails and Heat Safety Program. He wants the Board and the Department to support the hikers that have a natural connection to the trails.

6. BOARD CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

None.

7. BOARD COMMENTS/REQUESTS

Chairperson Kelly Dalton thanked the speakers and assured them that their voices are being heard, even though the Board cannot comment during this time. She expressed eagerness for further discussions.

Board Member Porter agreed with Chairperson Dalton. She highlighted three key points: first, clarity on what was actually decided in October regarding trails and heat safety is essential. Second, she emphasized the importance of basing discussions on facts rather than solely personal experiences, which, while valuable, lack comprehensive data. Lastly, she acknowledged the usefulness of petitions but noted that signatures from Phoenix residents carry more weight in her considerations as a Board member compared to those from outside the city.

8. DIRECTOR'S BRIEFING

Director Aguilar introduced Brandie Barrett as the new Assistant Director for the Parks and Recreation Department, overseeing the Northeast, Special Operations, Management Services, and Natural Resources Divisions.

Additionally, Director Aguilar invited everyone to attend the 37th annual APS Electric Light Parade on December 7, 2024, starting at 7 p.m., with the theme *Let Every Holiday Shine*.

9. ADJOURNMENT:

Chairperson Dalton adjourned the meeting at 7:00 p.m.



To: Parks and Recreation Board

Date: January 23, 2025

From: Cynthia Aguilar, Director

Subject: WORK STUDY: PHOENIX TRAILS AND HEAT SAFETY PROGRAM

This joint report by the Parks and Recreation Department and the Phoenix Fire Department provides information about the Trails Heat Safety Program from inception in 2021 through the 2024 season.

THIS ITEM IS FOR INFORMATION AND DISCUSSION.

BACKGROUND

The Parks and Recreation Department builds healthy communities through parks, programs and partnerships; and makes the City a better place to live, visit and play. The Department is home to more than 41,000 acres of desert parks and mountain preserves, and more than 200 miles of trails, and is dedicated to preserving, protecting, restoring and sustaining cultural and natural resources while providing quality, safety and accessible educational and recreational opportunities. Natural Resources leads with education on safe and responsible use of Phoenix trails, including the “Take A Hike. Do it Right.” campaign.

Living in a desert climate, heat has continued to present challenges. For more than a decade, the city of Phoenix has experienced record-breaking heat, and the impact of heat on trail users and first responders can be severe. Strenuous physical activities in high temperatures during long and even short durations can cause heat stroke, heart attack and/or arrhythmia, and neurological, circulatory and respiratory issues. For first responders, the risk is further elevated as they are required to wear approximately 40 pounds of emergency medical equipment, personal protective equipment and communication equipment.

The Parks and Recreation Board (Board), per the City Charter Chapter XXII and City Code Chapter 2, is the proper authority to take action to close or restrict trail access. Due to concerns for the safety of the public and first responders related to trail use and mountain rescues during extreme temperatures, in 2021 the Parks and Recreation Board initiated a pilot program and subsequently established the Trails Heat Safety Program. Each year, the Parks and Recreation Department and the Phoenix Fire Department have provided a program update to the Board. Based on data presented, the Board has made modifications to the program over the years. The following is a summary of discussion and action taken by the Board between 2021 and 2024.

2021

The Board called a special meeting on July 13, 2021, to discuss heat safety on Phoenix trails. Following a joint presentation from the Parks and Recreation Department and the Phoenix Fire Department that included information on the 2016 Phoenix Trails Safety Task Force, the “Take a Hike. Do it Right.” campaign, other efforts to educate the public on trail safety, and data on mountain rescues and the associated challenges, the Board approved, the following with a 4-2 vote:

- Implement a pilot program which closed trails from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. at Camelback Mountain Preserve-Echo Canyon (Cholla Trail was closed at the time for a renovation), and all associated trails and trailheads at Phoenix Mountains Preserve - Piestewa Peak on Excessive Heat Warning days.
- Use the National Weather Service (NWS) as the official agency for providing temperature forecasts when identifying Excessive Heat Warning days on which trail closures are implemented.
- Communicate information on the pilot program and closures to the public through published press releases and posting information on-site, online, and on social media. Also, communicate this information as part of the city's "Take a Hike. Do it Right" campaign message to local hotels and resorts.
- Close parking lot gates, where gates exist, and post signage noting trail closures between 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. to close affected trails. Park Rangers will also be visible at busier trailheads.

The Board reviewed the pilot data on October 28, 2021, and unanimously approved the pilot as a formal program. The Board requested an ongoing annual update on the Trails Heat Safety Program.

2022

On October 27, 2022, the Parks and Recreation Board received the annual update on the 2022 Trails Heat Safety Program, including data on mountain rescues, heat warning days, and trail usage. The Board did not take formal action on the program in 2022, however directed staff to engage the public to provide input on proposed modifications. Information about the potential changes were posted on the City's website and social media. In addition, Parks and Recreation staff distributed a survey to allow community members and trail users to share their input and feedback about the recommended changes. Survey information was posted on signage at the trailheads of affected trails with a QR code linking to the survey, and the survey link was also distributed to the 'Hiking & Heat Updates' electronic mailing list. The survey opened for responses on Dec. 21, 2022, and closed Jan. 31, 2023. A total of 535 people responded to the survey. The following breakdown is provided as a summary of the responses.

Question 1: Do you support the idea of closing the affected trails (Piestewa Peak Summit, Camelback Cholla and Echo Canyon) two hours earlier so closures would now be in effect from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. instead of from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.? Why or why not?

All respondents

- Yes – 54.5% (292 respondents)
- No – 40.9% (219 respondents)
- Unclear / undecided – 4.5% (24 respondents)

Phoenix residents

- Yes – 59.0% (151 respondents)
- No – 35.9% (92 respondents)
- Unclear / undecided – 5.1% (13 respondents)

Question 2: Are you in favor of initiating a closure on any day the National Weather Service issues an Excessive Heat Warning at Echo Canyon and Cholla Trail at Camelback Mountain Preserve, and at the Piestewa Peak Summit Trail and associated trails at the Phoenix Mountains Preserve? This change would make this a year-round program. Why or why not?

All respondents

- Yes – 56.3% (301 respondents)
- No – 40.2% (215 respondents)
- Unclear / undecided – 3.4% (19 respondents)

Phoenix residents

- Yes – 63.3% (162 respondents)
- No – 33.6% (86 respondents)
- Unclear / undecided – 3.1% (8 respondents)

On November 17, 2022, at the Board's direction, staff gave a presentation, and the Board held a discussion on the National Weather Service and Heat Warning system. A presentation on how the system works was provided by National Weather Service Operation Officers.

2023

On August 31, 2023, the Board received the annual update on the program and reviewed data showing that many mountain rescues occurred between 10 to 11 a.m. The Board unanimously approved modifying the program to include initiating trail closures on any day during the year when the NWS issues an Excessive Heat Warning at Echo Canyon and Cholla Trail at Camelback Mountain Preserve and at the Piestewa Peak Summit Trail and associated trails at the Phoenix Mountains Preserve, and to implement the closures from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

DISCUSSION

On October 24, 2024, the Parks and Recreation Board received the 2024 annual update. Based on data presented, the Board unanimously approved modifying the Trails Heat Safety Program to add South Mountain Park/Preserve and to implement the closures from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. In addition, the Board directed staff to conduct a public survey for feedback on: 1) if National Weather Service Excessive Heat Warning days are the appropriate indicator to implement trail closures, or if a specific temperature threshold should be used, and 2) the potential expansion of closure hours to begin at 7 a.m.

The public survey opened on November 17, 2024 and remains open at the time of this report. Survey information was posted on signage at the trailheads of affected trails, including South Mountain Park/Preserve with a QR code linking to the survey, and the survey link was also distributed to the 'Hiking & Heat Updates' electronic mailing list. Responses are still being accepted at: www.phoenix.gov/parks/trails/heatsafety.

Trails Heat Safety Program trail closures are implemented by providing information about the program and closures to the public by publishing a press release and posting signage on site, online and on social media, and are also communicated as part of the "Take a Hike. Do it Right." campaign communication to local hotels and resorts. To close trails, parking lot gates are closed where gates exist, and signage is posted noting the trail closure hours. Park Rangers are also visible at busier trailheads.

Evaluation of Trail Closures and Mountain Rescue Data (2021–2024)

The primary objective of implementing trail closures is to minimize the risk of heat-related illnesses, reduce mountain rescues, and ensure the safety of both first responders and the public. To evaluate the effectiveness of these closures, mountain rescue data from 2021 to 2024 was reviewed, with a specific focus on the months of May through September. The analysis included the four major

mountain ranges in the City of Phoenix: Camelback Mountain, Piestewa Peak, North Mountain/Shaw Butte, and South Mountain Park.

Between 2021 and 2024, overall, the number of rescues at closed locations decreased (Attachment A):

- 2021: 58 rescues
- 2022: 45 rescues
- 2023: 30 rescues
- 2024: 35 rescues

The data identified a clear reduction in calls for service on mountains affected by trail closures (Camelback Mountain and Piestewa Peak), while mountains unaffected by closures experienced either slight increases or remained relatively unchanged (± 2 calls per year). The data was assessed comprehensively by month, hour, and mountain, with particular attention to trends during the summer months (May–September). Policy recommendations for trail closures were based on these findings.

Key findings from the data shows that closing trails during extreme heat advisories issued by the National Weather Service significantly reduced the number of mountain rescues: 2021 to 2024 (May–September), calls for service decreased by approximately 37% on Camelback Mountain and 43% on Piestewa Peak.

While rescues at closed locations decreased, data from the four mountain parks with the highest number of rescues showed an increase in rescues at other locations. Rescue call times also shifted earlier in the day, likely due to hikers attempting to avoid peak heat; however, injuries or the inability to complete the activity prior to the start of the trail closure seems to lead to a spike in rescues. (Attachment B).

Temperature data further demonstrates the correlation between rising temperatures and decreasing trail use, with several instances of multiple rescues on the same mountain shift occurring on days above 100°F. (Attachment C). Not surprisingly, the data also shows as temperatures rise, the number of hikers using the trails decreases (Attachment D). While trail activity decreases as temperatures rise, thousands of individuals continue to visit the parks even on days exceeding 110°F. This leads to cases of heat-related illnesses or injuries requiring prolonged rescue efforts, which can escalate into heat-related emergencies.

During May–September, rescue calls spiked at 6:00 AM and 8:00 AM, peaking at 11:00 AM before declining around 1:00 PM. The peak heat of the day is between 1:00 PM–6:00 PM, as per the National Weather Service.

There were 16 instances where the Phoenix Fire Department conducted multiple rescues during a single shift (May – September), 11 of which occurred on days with projected highs above 100°F. This mirrors the conditions that led to the implementation of the trail closure policy in 2021.

OTHER INFORMATION

The Parks and Recreation Department continues to prioritize safety on Phoenix trails, which follow a recognized countywide rating system ranging from easiest (green circle) to extremely strenuous and difficult (double back diamond). The “Take a Hike. Do it Right.” campaign incorporates improved and consistent safety messaging posted onsite at the summit trailheads, on the Department’s website and shared via news media coverage and social media. In addition to safety messaging, colorful signage at more than 44 trailhead locations alerts trail users that more than 200 hikers annually are rescued

from City of Phoenix desert and mountain parks and preserves, and that each year hikers suffer serious illness or death from heat exhaustion. Additionally, the Department communicates with surrounding resorts about Heat Warning Days to support safety messaging to visiting guests who are not as familiar with the hiking environment in Phoenix. Park Rangers are deployed to busier trailhead access points to increase visibility and perform education and outreach, reminding potential trail users of the heat risk and provide safety tips and water if needed. The Department also continues to enforce the 'no dogs on trails' when the temperature reaches 100° policy.

The Department partners with Park Stewards through Volunteer Phoenix and the City of Phoenix Office of Heat Response and Mitigation through the "We're Cool" program to distribute water bottles and discuss hiking safety at popular trailheads on weekends in the summer months. Between May 1 and October 13, 2024, a total of 57 volunteers spent 793 hours passing out 20,824 bottles of water while making contact with 29,491 hikers.

The Parks and Recreation Department also offers Park Ranger-led programming and events such as Hike Right PHX, Hike with a Firefighter, National Trail Trek, Phoenix Summit Challenge, and other events to help foster a culture of safe hiking for people of all experience levels. Currently, a Phoenix Trail Heat Safety Program webpage provides information about the program, access to the October 2024 Parks Board presentation along with a link to the Program survey to share feedback/concerns about the most recent Program changes.

At the Boards request, the intent of this report and the Work Study is to provide an update on the Trails Heat Safety Program and to have further discussion with staff and the public regarding the Boards previous direction in October 2024, to return to the Board to discuss potential modifications to the program related to identifying the appropriate indicator to close trails and trail closure hours.

RECOMMENDATION

This report is for information only.

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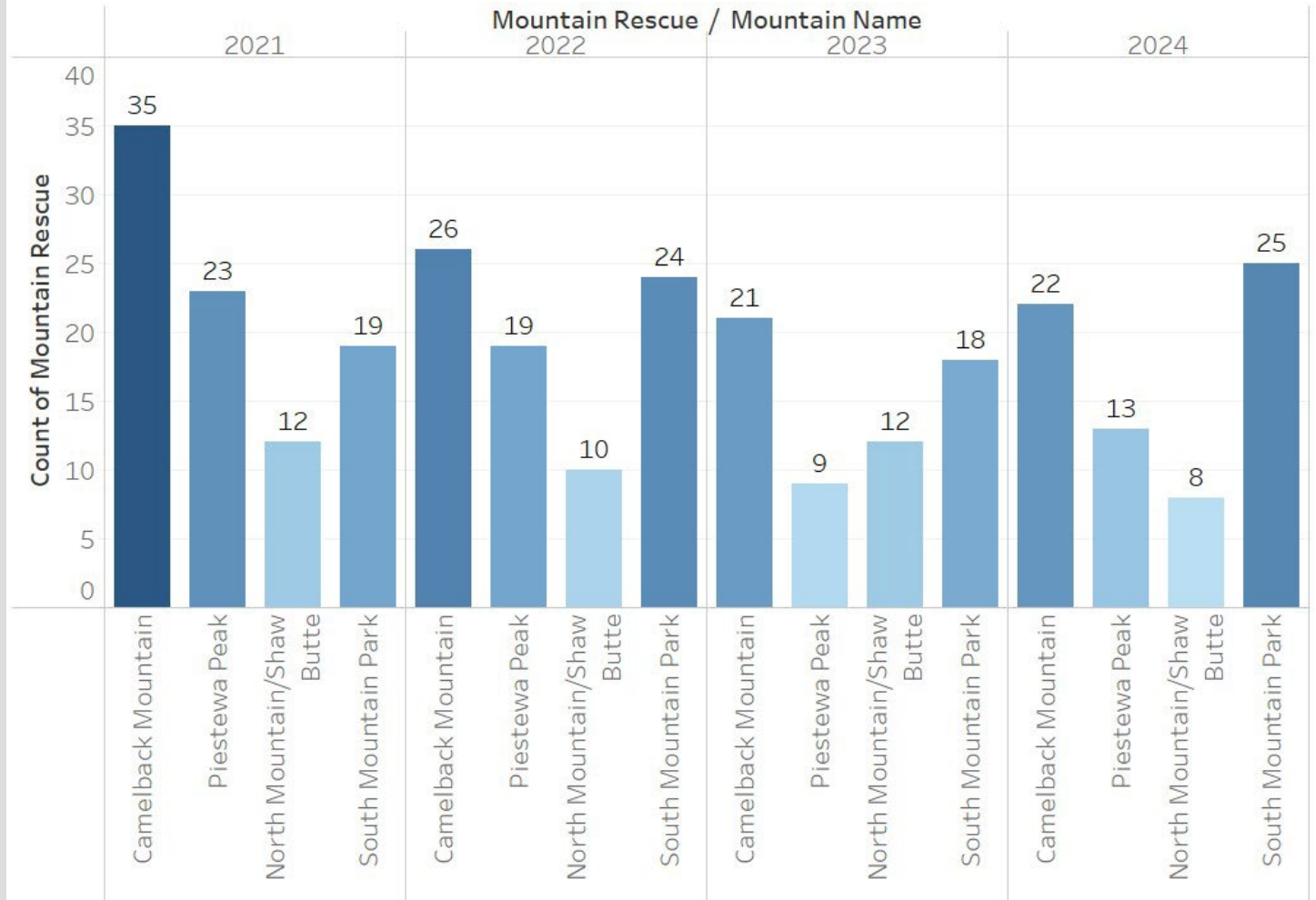
ATTACHMENT A

Mountain Calls by Year

May 1 - September 30



Phoenix Mountain Calls



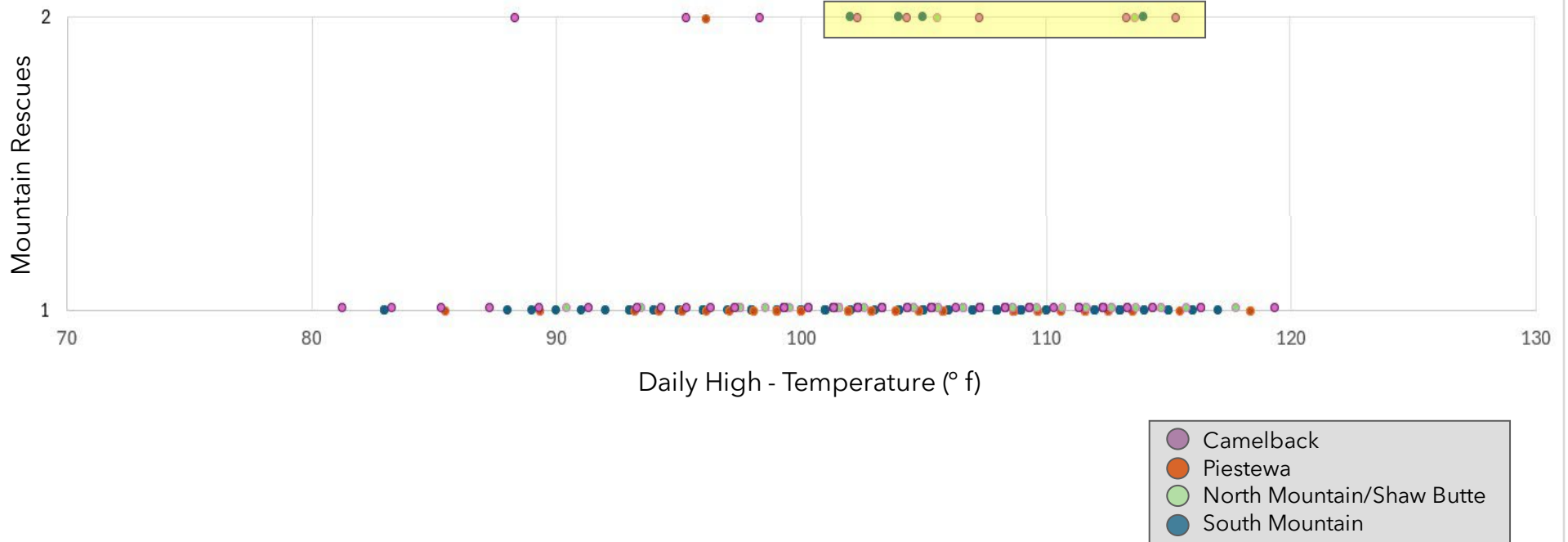
ATTACHMENT B

Mountain Calls by Hour 2021-2024/May-Sept

Mountain Name	Mountain Rescue																									
Camelback Mountain																								104		
				1	3	6	3	7	18	17	7	17	6	7	5	1	1	1	2	2						
Piestewa Peak																								64		
		1	1	2	6	5	8	7	4	8	6	1	4	2	1	2	3	2		1						
North Mountain/Shaw Butte																								42		
			1		4	4	4	6	3	3	1	1	2	1	2	1	3	4	1		1					
South Mountain Park																								86		
		1	1		2	6	5	13	4	8	6	10	8	2	5	2	1	3	5	3	1					
	0	1	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	23	Grand Total				
Hours included in trail closure days																										



Mountain Rescues vs Temperature



ATTACHMENT D

Park Visitors

COP Parks and Rec visitor counts for:

- Camelback
- Piestewa Peak
- N. Mountain/Shaw Butte
- S. Mountain



Phoenix Mountain Park Visitors

