



City of Maricopa

Meeting Minutes - Final City Council Special Meeting

City Hall
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Mayor Nancy Smith
Vice-Mayor Vincent Manfredi
Councilmember Eric Goettl
Councilmember AnnaMarie Knorr
Councilmember Amber Liermann
Councilmember Bob Marsh
Councilmember Henry Wade

Tuesday, March 24, 2026

6:00 PM

Maricopa Library and Cultural Center
18160 N. Maya Angelou Drive

1. **Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order at 6:15 p.m.

2. **Roll Call**

Present, 6 - Mayor Smith, Councilmember Goettl, Councilmember Knorr,
Councilmember Marsh, Vice Mayor Manfredi, and Councilmember Wade
Excused, 1 - Councilmember Liermann

3. **Agenda Items**

3.1 **[SP 26-02](#)**

The Maricopa City Council and the Ak-Chin Tribal Council will have dinner at which they may discuss potential partnership opportunities, transportation matters, regional planning and economic development opportunities affecting both the City and the Community.

City Manager Ben Bitter provided comprehensive updates on several key topics of mutual interest between the City of Maricopa and the Ak-Chin Indian Community.

Ambulance Service

City Manager Bitter stated that the city has formally submitted its application for ambulance service, which is currently under review by the director. He explained that while the director had 180 days to review the application, they are now past that timeline with no penalty for the extended review. Bitter noted they expect a determination any day, followed by a series of hearings, with hopes to provide ambulance service by the end of calendar year 2026.

Mr. Bitter shared that six ambulances have been ordered and will arrive within the next few months. He added that the city has hired additional firefighters and plans to continue hiring more to staff the ambulances across the community, with training and personnel ramping up in preparation.

Hazardous Materials Response

Mr. Bitter explained that hazardous materials response would be the next venture after

ambulance service, requiring a multi-year process beginning with acquiring a specialized vehicle. He stated the city has requested federal funding, seeking a 70 percent federal match to their 30 percent contribution. If approved and included in the federal budget, the vehicle would have a 3-4 year delivery time due to its specialized nature and unique equipment.

Mayor Smith asked Mr. Bitter to discuss the regional benefits of this service. Mr. Bitter responded that the equipment is so expensive and specialized that it doesn't make sense for every jurisdiction to have their own hazmat capabilities. He referenced his experience in Casa Grande, where they signed agreements to share hazmat services with neighboring partners, and expected Maricopa would do the same.

Councilmember Eric Goettl added that the city participates in mutual aid covering 26 different agencies around the valley, allowing vehicles and trained personnel to respond across jurisdictional lines. He stated this would be a blessing not just for their city, but for joint communities throughout the county, providing specialized equipment and trained individuals on their side of the county.

Mr. Bitter further emphasized that hazardous materials incidents don't respect jurisdictional boundaries and are defined by incident size rather than geography. He noted their interest in development south of Ak-Chin, questioning who would respond to fires at those locations, likely being Maricopa, requiring them to be trained and prepared for such scenarios.

Emergency Planning

Mr. Bitter announced the recent hiring of Angela Eastman as the new emergency manager, who started the previous Monday. He described her extensive background in emergency management situations from Minnesota and her role in leading recent tabletop exercises, including a simulated train derailment.

He stated that emergency planning extends beyond major incidents like fires or train derailments to include day-to-day emergencies and community preparedness. He added that Eastman's role will include working with HOAs and the community on personal and neighborhood preparedness, helping residents become more self-sufficient and assist their neighbors during emergencies.

Mr. Bitter highlighted two strategic priorities: ensuring Maricopa's ongoing safety by advancing regional floodplain solutions, and reviewing and enhancing current hazard mitigation plans to identify risks and guide resilience measures. He explained that flooding impacts are typically regional, starting hundreds of miles away and flowing downstream into their community, requiring regional solutions.

Vice Chair Delia Carlyle shared historical context about flooding concerns, particularly regarding water backup issues near railroad tracks and their impact on preserved areas. She recounted the major flood in the 1980s when Ak-Chin, being at higher elevation than Maricopa, sheltered over 500 displaced Maricopa residents at their community center. She stated that several Ak-Chin members gave up their own homes to house Maricopa families during that crisis.

City Manager Bitter acknowledged the regional nature of flood planning, noting that while the Vekol Wash may not directly impact Maricopa's city limits, all regional efforts are truly collaborative. He described the extensive 2D and 3D modeling technology now used for wash channelization and FEMA submissions, calling the engineering work

"truly a marvel" though tremendously costly and time-consuming.

Councilmember Henry Wade mentioned the need for cooling centers given recent temperature indicators of climate change, currently utilizing the library and other facilities.

Pedestrian Overpass

Mr. Bitter presented plans for a pedestrian overpass project currently under construction. He explained that the old Maricopa Road was given to the city when the new State Route 347 overpass was built. They observed significant pedestrian traffic crossing railroad tracks at this location, particularly students from Maricopa High School walking to the Heritage District or local businesses.

He stated that using the existing overpass required an extra half-mile walk for pedestrians and added that in partnership with Union Pacific Railroad and with federal funding of a couple million dollars, they're constructing a pedestrian bridge with elevator shafts currently being worked on west of the Amtrak facility.

Mr. Bitter emphasized safety as the primary goal, with side benefits including economic development, enhanced safety, revitalization, and tribute to the historic water tower. He explained that while the original water tower will eventually be removed by Union Pacific, the new bridge design tips their cap to this historic symbol. He added that the project includes lighting, crime prevention environmental design, and area beautification, with completion expected in late 2026 or early 2027. Mr. Bitter noted that while the project uses mostly City of Maricopa funding, ADOT is running the project, placing them somewhat at their mercy regarding timeline.

Regional Transportation Planning

Mr. Bitter described their partnership with Pinal County on the Western Pinal County transportation plan, examining regional routes of significance with State Route 347 (John Wayne Parkway) as the central point. He discussed future considerations including the Sonoran Desert Parkway extending west into Ak-Chin, Green Road continuing south through Ak-Chin, the Val Vista Road corridor, and future I-11 connections. He emphasized the importance of tackling these regional issues together over the next 10-30 years, ensuring solutions work for everyone while respecting Ak-Chin's sovereignty and protecting what they prefer to keep protected.

Councilmember Lisa Garcia stated that transportation planning has always been a priority for their community regardless of which council is serving. She explained their unique situation with roads being tribal roads, BIA roads, and county roads, expressing interest in partnering on identifying the best routes to service both entities. Ms. Garcia emphasized the complexity of their approval processes, noting they must follow BIA processes and CFRs, with different layers of permissions required depending on whether easements and rights-of-way belong to counties, ADOT, or the community. She requested follow-up collaboration on transportation plans, highlighting State Route 347, the Maricopa Casa Grande Highway at 238, and Highway 84 as central corridors for both communities.

Mr. Bitter stated that they're working on the east-west corridor including Ak-Chin and the Maricopa Casa Grande Highway alignment, with the project team coordinating well among all partners from I-10 through Casa Grande, Pinal County, Maricopa, and Ak-Chin.

Mayor Smith inquired about the appropriate contacts for Ak-Chin regarding transportation opportunities. Mr. Bitter responded that they consistently work with Dr. Shade and her staff on transportation projects and planning, requesting additional contact information for broader collaboration.

Councilmember Wade asked about the operational status of the airport. Vice Chair Carlyle responded that it operates primarily as a fuel stop for aircraft, with air shows and events held there. She explained they're exploring options for additional hangars for aircraft storage, but face water pressure issues in that area. She described their challenges with bringing adequate water pressure to the airport, including considerations of running a pipeline under a canal, though erosion concerns complicate this solution. She noted their runway length currently accommodates only smaller planes, and expanding for larger aircraft would require purchasing additional land.

Event Coordination and Cross-Promotion

City Manager Bitter presented the city's annual event calendar, suggesting opportunities for cross-promotion and coordination between the two communities. He described their upcoming Wild West Music Fest featuring Alien Ant Farm on Friday, Diamond Rio on Saturday, and Soulja Boy and Paul Wall on Sunday, along with carnival activities and local business vendors.

Vice Chair Carlyle clarified an important point about their community events, particularly their annual Masik Tas celebration. She mentioned that there is incorrect information out on social media suggesting they would charge admission to their event. Ms. Carlyle confirmed their events remain free of charge, though food vendors must cover their costs, with all rides and activities provided free to the community.

Councilmember Goettl discussed ideas for celebrating the country's 250th anniversary, suggesting potential collaborations such as public readings of the Declaration of Independence, library rooms dedicated to the Constitution, guest speaker series, and incorporating 250th anniversary themes into their Great American Fourth celebration at Copper Sky Park.

Next, Councilmember Garcia provided extensive details about Ak-Chin Farms' operations and their water settlement. She listed their crops including cotton, alfalfa, sorghum, pecans, jalapeños, corn and potatoes, explaining their distribution networks. She shared that their potatoes go to Frito Lay, Four Brothers Potato Chips, and In-N-Out Burger for fries. She added that their jalapeños are sold to Campbell's Soup for chili paste and Hormel for chili beans. Ms. Garcia stated that wheat, barley, sorghum, and other crops are purchased by local dairies including Shamrock and Milky Way for cattle feed and that their pecans currently go to New Mexico, having previously been shipped to China where they were highly valued, but tariffs and commodity pricing issues made domestic sales more profitable.

Next, Ms. Garcia shared that Ak-Chin was the first Native American tribe to achieve a water settlement, describing it as very unique with congressmen stating there will never be another like it. She expressed pride in their former council members who fought over 20-30 years for this settlement, with each current council recognizing their responsibility to uphold this commitment and ensure the US government upholds their end.

Vice Chair Carlyle detailed their housing program requirements stating that members must be 21 years old with either a GED or high school diploma, encouraging education completion before home assignment. She explained their approach of providing housing benefits instead of per capita payments, with assigned homes including paid utilities and no rent. She added that members cannot use homes as collateral since they remain under government ownership, but this provides substantial living benefits. She also shared that their high school graduates receive all-expense-paid trips to Hawaii for a week as additional educational incentives. Ms. Carlyle emphasized their goal of encouraging members to pursue education beyond high school, whether college or trade school, to meet employment needs in their various projects and potentially serve the broader Maricopa community.

The presentation made by Ms. Garcia included renderings of Southern Dunes Golf Course renovations, with dining area expansions while keeping the golf course operational, their new healthcare facility, in addition to other exciting growth opportunities happening in their community.

Next, Ms. Garcia announced their recent award of joint venture construction funding for a new healthcare facility, making them the only tribe in Arizona and second tribe nationally to receive this funding. She described the personal visit from officials, including Mr. Robert F. Kennedy Jr., to announce the award, emphasizing that providing healthcare has been a council goal since their establishment in the early 1960s. She added that the facility will serve not only their community but also Maricopa residents, eliminating the need to travel to State Route 347 or Casa Grande for certain medical services, particularly dialysis treatment, allowing patients to remain closer to home.

Next, Ms. Garcia mentioned their emergency management manager, who recently started, coming from Pinal County, and is currently reviewing their emergency operation plans while managing facility transitions. She expressed interest in collaboration between their new emergency manager and Maricopa's Angela Eastman, both being new to their positions. Ms. Garcia confirmed their enjoyment of previous tabletop exercises and requested inclusion in future emergency planning activities.

Next, Vice Chair Carlyle raised several important cultural and historical issues. Regarding proposed data centers, particularly one near their farming enterprise called Scorpio Power, she expressed concerns about the location due to discovered cultural artifacts, including what appeared to be a partial cremation site. She emphasized their desire to ensure cultural artifacts can be properly returned to Ak-Chin and remain undisturbed, noting that early development in the area likely resulted in loss of cultural materials when developers didn't notify the community. She appreciated developers who have since contacted them about discoveries, allowing proper cultural protocols.

Ms. Carlyle also requested assistance with maintaining a memorial for the late Sergeant Kelly, a police officer killed in what near the Baptist Church along highway 347. She wanted to understand the process for ensuring his memory remains honored at that location, noting the historical significance of Ak-Chin providing police and fire protection to early Maricopa when the city had only about 1,000 residents. She shared that two Ak-Chin police officers, including one of their first police chiefs, were killed in the line of duty while serving the area, as Pinal County response times were too long at that time. She expressed gratitude for Maricopa eventually establishing their own police and fire departments, recognizing their shared humble beginnings.

Next, Ms. Carlyle requested collaboration on a potential traffic signal near their planned

dialysis center and clinic on Sugar Road, across from city development on the other side. She stated that while they have an existing traffic light at the casino entrance, the medical facilities would require safe patient access for easy entry and exit.

City Manager Bitter explained the complexity of traffic signal placement given the mix of jurisdictions (ADOT, Pinal County, tribal land, and BIA involvement) but committed to connecting Ak-Chin with the Vestar property's planning team for their 3,400-acre master plan community development to ensure coordinated access planning.

Ms. Carlyle shared additional historical context about their communities' mutual support, describing how when the BIA predicted their farming enterprise would fail, local Maricopa farmers provided equipment to help them start their agricultural operations. She noted the irony that the BIA now uses their successful farming operation as a model after initially predicting failure. She emphasized water as the lifeblood for everyone, explaining their protective stance on water rights after the 20-30 year battle for their water settlement. She acknowledged current drought conditions, referencing her recent flight over Las Vegas and the shocking view of low water levels.

Ms. Carlyle mentioned their upcoming April trip to Washington DC for Hill visits, offering to carry messages supporting Maricopa's interests, as they had done previously with the TIGER grant, demonstrating their continued commitment to mutual support.

Next, Councilmember Goettl described the new field house under construction, scheduled to open in fall 2026. He shared that the facility will include four basketball courts, six volleyball courts, numerous pickleball courts, large tournament space, meeting rooms, and housing for parts and recreation department offices. He added that unlike Copper Sky's membership model, this will be free community space designed to bring people together.

City Manager Bitter added that they've already received interest from organizations like jiu-jitsu tournament organizers for regional or statewide events. The facility is located immediately north of Copper Sky off Bowling Road, incorporating the former dispatch facility as office space and check-in areas.

Mayor Smith suggested tournament collaboration between both communities' facilities. Ms. Garcia mentioned their Elder Olympic Games starting the following day, with invitations extended to other tribes, expressing openness to including Maricopa elders and expanding participation.

Ms. Carlyle noted basketball's popularity in their community, particularly during December celebrations, and Ms. Garcia committed to sharing information about Maricopa's new facility with their athletics department for potential collaboration.

The meeting concluded with both communities expressing appreciation for the collaborative discussion and commitment to continued partnership on regional issues, emergency preparedness, transportation planning, cultural preservation, and community events. Multiple follow-up actions were identified including emergency management collaboration, transportation planning coordination, memorial preservation assistance, traffic signal planning, and facility tour arrangements.

4. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 7:51 p.m.

Certification of Minutes

I hereby certify that the foregoing minutes are a true and correct copy of the minutes of the special meeting of the City Council of Maricopa, Arizona, held on the 24th day of March, 2026. I further certify that the meeting was duly called and held and that a quorum was present.

Dated this 7th day of April 2026.

Vanessa Bueras
City Clerk