



City of Maricopa

Meeting Minutes - Draft City Council Special Meeting

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

Wednesday, October 22, 2025

6:30 PM

Maricopa Library and Cultural Center
18160 N. Maya Angelou Drive

Joint Meeting with the Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:34 p.m.

2. Roll Call

Present, 7 - Mayor Smith, Vice Mayor Wade, Councilmember Goettl, Councilmember Knorr, Councilmember Liermann, Councilmember Manfredi, and Councilmember Marsh

3. Agenda Items

3.1 [SP 25-04](#)

The Maricopa City Council and the Parks and Recreation Committee will hold a joint meeting, to hear a presentation from City staff regarding current and future park development opportunities.

City Manager Ben Bitter began by outlining the history of the property intended for the iconic park. The city acquired the land in 2008, and it currently hosts the library and city hall, with plans for the iconic park underway. He explained that the area has seen considerable development since 2008, with the creation of village centers and community gathering spots. He highlighted the three-year discussion on establishing an "iconic park" as part of a "destination economy," aimed at providing a community amenity that also supports small businesses and tourism.

Parks and Recreation Director Rocky Brown gave a comprehensive overview of Maricopa's park system. He detailed its progression from Pacana Park in 2006 to Copper Sky in 2014, and the recent first phase completion of Lakeview Park. Brown emphasized the parks' alignment with strategic priorities by offering outdoor recreation and encouraging tourism. He categorized the parks as neighborhood, community, district, and special use, illustrating how the existing parks serve diverse areas of the city. He also mentioned upcoming projects such as the opening of Heritage Park in December 2025, the Copper Sky Fieldhouse in July 2026, and the subsequent phase of Lakeview Park development. Brown stressed the need for updating the city's parks master plan since the last update was in 2008. The new Civic Center Park, envisioned as the iconic park would cover around 55 acres east of the current meeting venue.

Jeff Velasquez, Principal Landscape Architect with J2 Design, and John King, Principal Architect with Architekton, presented a comprehensive vision for the iconic park. Mr. Velasquez stated that the design begins with an iconic entrance featuring a canyon-style roadway, enhanced by climbing elements to evoke Arizona's scenic landscapes such as the Papago Buttes and Cathedral Rock. He added that at the heart of the project is a striking "cloud" structure, designed not only as an architectural centerpiece but also a functional play area that provides shade and tells the ecological narrative of water's importance in the desert. He continued by stating that the park's design includes a splash pad inspired by Arizona's red rock formations, offering a captivating play environment with interactive elements. He stated that an east-west axis serves as a versatile space for food trucks and community gatherings, complemented by a scale relief map of Arizona, complete with topography and QR codes linking to educational resources about the state's geographical landmarks. He added that this area also proposes sections for indigenous cultural tributes to appreciate and educate visitors about local history.

Next, Mr. King presented stating that sports courts are planned, including areas for pickleball and volleyball, supported by necessary facilities like shaded rest areas and restrooms. He added that an amphitheater is proposed to host concerts and events, emphasizing its multifunctionality for both small and large gatherings. He stated that a distinct feature is a 3.5-acre urban fishing lake, enhancing the recreational aspect of the park. He stated that the surrounding development accommodates retail spaces envisioned for coffee shops and restaurants fronting the lake, enhancing both visitor experience and economic activity. Lastly, Mr. King shared that the design includes adventurous components like zip lines, running through various sections of the park, and a ninja course mimicking the agility challenges of an American ninja course, meant to engage both locals and tourists in an immersive outdoor experience.

Mr. King expanded on the "cloud" concept, presenting it as a central iconic feature designed to provide shade, narrate the story of water, and function as infrastructure for playgrounds and events.

Councilmember Knorr expressed concerns regarding the potential costs and ongoing maintenance expenses associated with the proposed iconic park. She questioned the prudence of advancing the park plan, suggesting it might be premature to proceed without first completing a comprehensive parks needs assessment. Knorr emphasized the importance of understanding the city's current needs, future requirements, and community desires before making significant commitments. She raised apprehensions about how such a large-scale project might impact the city's budget and ongoing fiscal responsibilities, highlighting critical issues like potential homelessness around the park and public-private partnership dynamics. While acknowledging the park's exciting potential, Knorr reiterated her stance that a thorough needs assessment is essential to ensure any development aligns with the residents' priorities and the city's strategic goals.

Councilmember Liermann asked Mr. Bitter if this park was going to be built in different phases. Mr. Bitter stated that it's hard to know what may be feasible at this level. Councilmember Liermann added that she does not want the city to go into debt for this park and suggested doing it in budgeted phases. She proposed adding a rodeo to the future east side of the park. She expressed her enthusiasm for incorporating a rodeo to this park.

Mayor Smith stated that cost and priority is hugely important to her. She stated that she does not want to lose vision of what can be done in different phases. She added

that she wanted to make sure that everyone keeps in mind the economic benefit that this park will have as a tourist attraction. She concluded by stating that this project has to be about all of the elements and not just cost.

Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee Chair, Kevin McDill, expressed an understanding of the need for more sports fields in Maricopa, noting the city's substantial growth and the importance of accommodating various sports like soccer, football, and lacrosse. He also acknowledged the anticipated popularity of the features proposed in the iconic park vision, such as the splash pad, zip lines, and pump track, which align with community interests. Chair McDill shared that while the iconic park's concept looks promising and could potentially draw tourism, there's a crucial need to maintain balance. He emphasized that expanding sports fields should be a concurrent priority, noting that more fields would support both local resident usage and sporting events that could bring visitors to the city.

Mr. Bitter stated that the direction from City Council has been for this park to be iconic and serve a different purpose.

Councilmember Manfredi highlighted the significance of different funding streams for distinct priorities within the city. He articulated that the iconic park project should not be viewed in isolation or in competition with other essential city needs. Councilmember Manfredi emphasized that the city has separate allocations and methods, like development impact fees, to address a wide array of municipal requirements concurrently. Councilmember Manfredi stated that the focus should not only be on potential costs but also on how these projects align with the broader goals of urban growth and community benefit. He reassured that funds used for the iconic park, sports fields, public safety, and other infrastructure are not interchangeable but tailored for specific projects. Furthermore, he brought attention to the expanding population and infrastructure demands, underlying the importance of strategic planning to address future growth. Councilmember Manfredi urged an ongoing dialogue to clarify to residents that multiple civic improvements could be pursued simultaneously without compromising fiscal responsibility or prioritizing 1 area at the expense of others, highlighting a balanced approach to community development.

Councilmember Goettl supported the vision for the park but insisted that the planning for additional sports fields should occur concurrently. He highlighted the importance of integrating both initiatives, emphasizing the need for balance between recreational facilities and sports amenities. Councilmember Goettl expressed concern that while the iconic park offers exciting features that promise to attract tourism and enhance the quality of life for residents, addressing the community's needs for additional sports infrastructures such as soccer and football fields is equally critical. He suggested that the planning process should ensure sports fields are prioritized alongside the iconic park development, thereby accommodating the city's growing population and supporting various athletic activities.

Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee member, Devin Pitcher, shared his enthusiasm for the plan, stating his excitement about the potential for enjoying such a development without having to leave Maricopa. He noted that as someone who works from home and spends a significant amount of time within the city, the availability of a broader range of recreational offerings would be highly advantageous. Mr. Pitcher highlighted the interest in having more amenities that provide diverse experiences beyond sports fields, emphasizing a desire for elements like trails and walkable areas that cater to the general public. He acknowledged that while sports fields are essential, the iconic park concept presents an opportunity to cater to a variety of interests,

appealing to residents seeking non-sport activities.

Councilmember Knorr emphasized the importance of gaining financial clarity before making any final decisions on the park's development. She voiced strong reservations about moving forward without a thorough understanding of the project's potential fiscal impact. Councilmember Knorr expressed particular concern that proceeding with the park initiative could be premature without first conducting a detailed needs assessment. She argued that such an assessment is vital to align the project with the city's strategic priorities and ensure it meets both current and future demands. Councilmember Knorr shared the necessity of understanding community desires to make informed decisions regarding the development.

Vice-Mayor Wade stated that he too was concerned about the financial impact.

Councilmember Manfredi suggested evaluating different routes, such as public-private partnerships and leveraging development impact fees, to ease the fiscal load on the city's budget. He stressed understanding and integrating these approaches to prevent potential overspending and ensure sustainable development without compromising Maricopa's ongoing financial commitments.

Chair McDill expressed understanding of the excitement surrounding the iconic park's features, but reiterated the necessity for prudent financial strategies that would prevent operational costs from straining the city's long-term budget.

Councilmember Marsh stated that he would like to see things for the seniors like trees, benches and shaded areas. In addition, he stated that he would like to see charging stations for electric cars, performing stages, a scaled down version of the Sphere in Las Vegas.

Councilmember Goettl asked for a timeline and next steps. City Manager Bitter stated that staff is looking for some direction of a site plan and some of the amenities that they want to see in this park. Councilmember Goettl stated that he surveyed about 100 teens in the community and a lot of them indicated that they would like to see a zip line. He also suggested an olympic size pool. Mr. Bitter stated that staff will take the feedback and figure out if they can make it happen.

Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee member, Priscilla Behnke, asked about the purpose of the cloud feature was. There was general discussion of the purpose of the cloud to be used as large event venues. She asked what efforts are going to be made to include the community in the planning process. City Manager Bitter stated that this is a long time in the making and added that staff will gather community feedback from this meeting.

Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee member, Adam Leach, asked if the cloud could be LED.

Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee member, Kenneth Longman, stated that he surveyed some of his neighbors and one of them mentioned including an archery range.

Mayor Smith reminded the group that economic benefits should be weighed alongside costs when considering the project. She emphasized that while the cost of the iconic park is a crucial factor, it should not overshadow the potential economic development benefits the park could bring to the community, including increased tourism and

enhanced visibility for local businesses. The conversation also delved into public-private partnerships, with a focus on innovative funding opportunities that do not solely rely on public funds.

Parks and Recreation Director Rocky Brown highlighted his experience in orchestrating such partnerships in previous roles, suggesting that privately funded amenities could ease the city's financial burden. City Manager Ben Bitter introduced the idea of forming an entertainment district as a strategy to generate additional revenue streams, which could contribute to funding ongoing maintenance without leaning heavily on taxpayers. He added that in these types of districts, businesses within a specific radius contribute to the maintenance of these amenities. Methods for obtaining community feedback were discussed extensively, with council members and committee members alike stressing the importance of community engagement in finalizing the park's vision. Mayor Smith noted that the ongoing dialogue with residents, as well as their participation in surveys and meetings, would be crucial for aligning the park's features with public interest, allowing the community's voice to shape the project meaningfully.

By meeting's end, there was a general agreement to proceed with both the parks master plan and a site plan for the iconic park, ensuring both would be developed in tandem with considerable community input. The council stressed that progressing with these plans does not equate to a final project approval or budget commitment.

4. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 8:18 p.m.