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

Thursday, January 22, 2026 **8:00 AM** **Maricopa Public Library and Cultural Center**
18160 N. Maya Angelou Dr

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 8:37 a.m.

2. Roll Call

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

3. Agenda Items

3.1 **SP 26-01**

The purpose of this meeting is for the City Council and City Staff to review and discuss the Future Planning of the City as well as City processes and practices.

City Manager Ben began the meeting by providing an overview of the transformational accomplishments of 2025, emphasizing the gravity and capabilities of the team and community when working together. Key accomplishments highlighted included: Getting State Route 347 fully funded for widening, with construction starting within months, Moving forward with ambulance service, with vehicles ordered and federal funding potentially secured, Field House at Copper Sky under construction, Iconic Park planning with a contractor on board for feasibility and site planning, Completed union negotiations with both police and fire unions, Completed classification compensation study, Enhanced advisory committees to improve community participation, Drafted the general plan (currently under 60-day review), Approved a partnership strategy to leverage community assets, Updated city code to include public art requirements for large facilities, Launched "Things to Do in Maricopa" magazine to address community concerns, Brought back Stagecoach Days to celebrate city heritage, Acquired the Smith home through a partnership with the Historical Society, Developed the Mike Ingram Heritage Park, which is nearing completion, Completed the Veterans Memorial, Reestablished the Maricopa Youth Council, Signed an agreement with Cabot for a new educational facility, Pedestrian overpass project underway, Approved trails plan, Updated rental rates and policies, Initiated a traffic strike force to address transportation concerns, Completed Smith-Enke/347 intersection improvements, Completed the business park master plan, Implemented a new phone system to increase efficiency and decrease costs, Published the capital improvement plan online through ClearGov for transparency, Started a Business Watch program, Implemented economic and tourism tracking software, Created a facility rental brochure and website

and Moving forward with design for the city hall annex.

Next, Management Intern, Natalia Loram, presented a proposal for implementing a resident survey to gain broader community insights beyond social media feedback.

The Council provided feedback on the survey proposal. Mayor Smith encouraged staff to proceed with implementing a citizen survey. Councilmember Goetll asked if the City Council could be more involved in the survey. He also inquired as to why we are using a third party to conduct the survey and added that he preferred that it be done internally by staff. City Manager Bitter stated that having a third party send it out keeps it unbiased. He also stated that they have additional tools that staff do not have. Councilmember Knorr stated that she was excited but agreed that it should be done in house. Councilmember Marsh suggested a survey of the month with 12 topics per year.

Next, Deputy City Manager Matt Kozlowski presented an update on the half-cent sales tax fund which was implemented to address transportation infrastructure needs. He explained that the Communications team had developed a simple, accessible online dashboard that would allow residents to track revenues and expenditures in real-time. Mayor Smith emphasized the importance of showing not just dollar amounts but also specific projects being funded. City Manager Ben Bitter emphasized that the dashboard represents the city's commitment to transparency, directly responding to public input received during open houses about ensuring dedicated tax dollars are used as intended.

Mr. Kozlowski detailed the upcoming timeline for financing the $30 million payment due to ADOT on June 1st. He stated that the city plans to bring all necessary documentation to Council on March 3rd for approval to obtain a $30 million revenue bond. He added that bond proceeds are anticipated to be available by approximately April 15th, with Pinal County contributing an additional $20 million by May 1st. He stated that a combined $50 million will fund the State Route 347 widening project. Mayor Smith asked about the impact on the operating budget. Mr. Kozlowski confirmed there would be zero impact, as the tax revenues collected would offset the annual debt service payments of approximately $2.5 million.

Council discussed the strategic decision of whether to pay down principal more aggressively or build up the fund balance for future projects, with Mr. Kozlowski noting this would be addressed through annual budget conversations. Mayor Smith noted that the city has been conservative throughout its 22-year history, allowing it to remain financially sustainable despite having significantly less revenue than comparable cities.

Next, City Manager Ben Bitter provided several updates on the SR 347 widening project, including that ADOT had hired a contractor with extensive roadway project experience. He shared that design improvements include a flyover at 347 and I-10 allowing northbound traffic to avoid traffic signals, and the addition of two left turn lanes on Casablanca onto southbound 347, which could potentially reduce red light time significantly. He noted that overpasses at Riggs Road and Cement Plant/Mammoth Way would mean that after Casablanca, northbound drivers wouldn't hit another traffic signal until reaching Phoenix.

Regarding Interstate 11, Mr. Bitter explained it was currently delayed by a lawsuit concerning the southern portion near Tucson. He stated that the city was working with federal and state partners to separate these issues so the rest of I-11 could proceed

with environmental studies. He emphasized I-11's importance for diverting heavy vehicles from city streets and creating economic development opportunities along the interstate corridor.

Mr. Bitter also discussed the Green Road project, currently at 30% design, with development impact fees being collected. He noted that even before connecting to Gila River Indian Community land, Green Road could serve as a valuable reliever by connecting to McDavid or Edwards Avenue, providing an alternative to John Wayne Parkway for north-south travel.

Additional projects mentioned by Mr. Bitter included I-10 widening (split into three segments from 2026-2029), which would include improvements at various interchanges affecting Maricopa, including Coley Road, Seed Farm Road, Sonoran Desert Parkway, State Route 238 widening, and reconfiguration of Casablanca Road and the 587 bridge.

Next, Parks and Recreation Director Rocky Brown presented on the need for a Parks and Recreation Master Plan, noting the last adopted plan was from 2008. He explained that the plan would establish baseline data about park acreages and amenities, conduct public outreach through various methods, and help prioritize future park development. Mr. Brown detailed the importance of gathering accurate inventory data as a foundation for planning, emphasizing the need for a GIS consultant to precisely measure park acreage and catalog all amenities like bathrooms, splash pads, and playground equipment. Mr. Brown also mentioned the value of a policy review by consultants who have experience with multiple cities and could identify unusual policies or gaps, such as e-bike policies. The final deliverable would be an executive summary highlighting highest priorities based on all research and outreach.

Council members provided feedback, with Councilmember Knorr expressing support for the project and suggesting that data from this plan should inform the Iconic Park planning. Councilmember Liermann indicated she would prioritize trails, rodeo grounds, and equestrian facilities, noting that she would like to see an equestrian center included in the survey. Mayor Smith appreciated the random survey approach and the policy review component and inquired how this survey would connect with previous city surveys.

City Manager Bitter then provided an overview of economic development projects throughout the city, including Aldi in the Southbridge area, development along Maricopa Casa Grande Highway at the Wells featuring Starbucks, Wendy's, Sunburrows, Panda Express, and others, Legacy on Porter with Goodwill and Chipotle, Copper Sky area with hospital and family entertainment center development, Vestar commercial development along Sonoran Desert Parkway, Seven Ranches area with County Credit Union, Clean Freak Car Wash, Zeke's Pizza, and others, San Travasa retail with Fry's grocery store and additional pad space, West Bridge with 7-11, 5 Oil Change, and potential car wash, various infill projects along John Wayne Parkway including Black Rock Coffee, Ono Hawaiian, and Mattress Firm, Quick Trip at Porter Road and Smith-Enke and Terrible's gas stations at multiple locations

Council members inquired about economic development strategies and what council could do to support these efforts. Bitter explained that they employ multiple approaches from relationships to cold calls, and that the upcoming economic development strategic plan would provide further direction.

After the lunch break, Assistant City Manager Jennifer Brown provided a

comprehensive update on the partnership policy development process. She explained that the city had spent over a year working toward getting a partnership policy in place, communicating with advisory committees and receiving feedback from council members before finalizing the policy.

Ms. Brown detailed that the committee had taken a very targeted approach, focusing on three specific areas: teens, seniors, and arts. She stated that they created surveys for these respective areas to get community feedback on what residents wanted in these areas. The Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee (PRAC) was furthest along in the process and would be meeting the following Wednesday to review their first results. The Cultural Affairs and Arts Committee (CAAC) and the Senior Advisory Committee would receive their first look at results at their February meetings.

Ms. Brown noted they had received over 100 responses from the senior info expo the previous week. She mentioned that some early teen survey results showed requests for more sports programming, which was interesting since the city already offered many sports programs. This led to discussion about using the youth council as a focus group to better understand what teens meant by certain responses.

Councilmember Amber Liermann asked about creating multiple pathways to partnership beyond just the RFP process, suggesting an application process that could go to appropriate committees for review. She expressed concern that RFPs were limiting and that creative ideas might exist outside the RFP process.

Ms. Brown clarified that the partnership strategy was designed to target specific identified needs, but noted that people could always come forward with ideas to committees or staff.

Councilmember Henry Wade emphasized the importance of having dialogue with the right people within organizations to ensure information could be properly disseminated, specifically mentioning working with Brenda Campbell from the Community Enrichment department for youth council coordination.

Mayor Smith appreciated the update and supported the concept of having an application form that could be reviewed by committees. She suggested making it simple and one-page to provide residents with an easy way to submit ideas.

Mayor Smith transitioned to discussing teen center needs, separating the conversation into programming versus facilities. She acknowledged the financial reality discussed earlier in the meeting and asked whether council was comfortable waiting for the partnership process to finish in 2-3 months to understand teen priorities through RFPs, or if they wanted to pursue something immediately.

Councilmember Henry Wade expressed his long-standing support for a teen center, emphasizing his desire for teens to have a physical space that "belongs to them" rather than just borrowing space from other organizations. He described his vision including physical activities like basketball, volleyball, and pickleball in a gymnasium setting, though he agreed to separate facilities discussion from programming discussion.

Councilmember Liermann strongly supported the need for designated space for teens, particularly those who might not be athletes and don't easily make friends at school. She noted the strategic location of the Fieldhouse near the high school's 2,000 students and middle school's 1,000 students that could be within walking distance for

3,000 kids. She emphasized this was about providing space rather than city-funded programming.

Councilmember AnnMarie Knorr agreed there was an overwhelming need for a teen center and supported starting with dedicated space a few days per week, even if it meant beginning at existing facilities like the Fieldhouse or Copper Sky. Councilmember Knorr emphasized the need to have a plan ready whether or not teen programming emerged from the PRAC process.

Councilmember Eric Goettl mentioned the importance of providing information to residents about existing teen services and suggested creating a clearinghouse on the city website listing all organizations that serve teens in Maricopa.

Mayor Smith expressed caution about moving forward given the financial changes within the city, suggesting a slower approach starting with perhaps one or two days per week to test usage. She advocated waiting for the RFP process results to understand what needs would be met through partnerships before determining additional city-led programming needs.

Ms. Brown confirmed that council could issue an RFP for teen programming even if it wasn't the top priority from PRAC, and noted the city could provide space while having another organization oversee programming.

The consensus appeared to support waiting for the 2-3 month partnership process while simultaneously identifying potential space for future teen programming needs.

Next, Mayor Smith introduced discussion about city designations such as dementia-friendly, Alzheimer's-friendly, Purple Heart City, and autism-friendly city designations, noting that Maricopa was already designated as a Purple Heart City. She explained that these designations typically come with requirements from organizations and suggested developing a policy framework before pursuing specific designations.

Councilmember Goettl supported developing a policy to remove roadblocks for local organizations and groups working in these areas, making them more visible in the community.

City Manager Ben Bitter agreed to work on a draft framework and noted the importance of setting community standards to ensure groups that come forward align with organizational and community values.

Mayor Smith outlined several policy considerations based on financial constraints: requiring nonprofit leadership rather than city management, having fundraising be the responsibility of the requesting organization for any required funding, establishing community standards, and determining signage policies to avoid excessive entrance signage.

Next, Councilmember Goettl requested an update on the Commerce Park development, expressing concern about apparent delays and asking about low-hanging fruit that could accelerate progress. He specifically mentioned utilities, rezoning, and flood zone issues as areas needing attention.

City Manager Bitter provided a comprehensive update, explaining that they were working with a master developer and the main challenge was moving the floodplain solution from 30 percent to 100 percent engineered plans. He noted they expected to

have 100 percent plans by the end of the year, which would enable them to move toward construction of the regional flood solution. Mr. Bitter explained that portions of the property not currently in the floodplain could develop immediately, but infrastructure improvements would make the land more valuable. The sale process was still ongoing, and once closed, the new property owner would begin investing in site development.

Regarding utilities, Mr. Bitter noted that ED3 was already available on-site, but water and sewer from Global Water would require 12-18 months for permitting, particularly for boring under Union Pacific's right-of-way.

Next, Councilmember Knorr expressed concerns about the 347 expansion potentially creating backups at Cobblestone if the Green Road loop wasn't completed. She emphasized the importance of focusing on completing the Green Road loop to help alleviate traffic coming off 347.

Mr. Bitter confirmed their commitment to the Green Road overpass, which was within their control, and explained their ongoing work with Gila River on the broader loop, noting monthly or bimonthly meetings to advance the project. He emphasized the need to respect Gila River's sovereignty while continuing to pursue the designation of right-of-way.

Mayor Smith noted that even the three-lane expansion alone would provide value by increasing capacity and offering alternatives during accidents, providing better traffic movement overall.

Next, Councilmember Knorr requested discussion about developing a strategic framework dedicated to public safety, noting that other cities had independent documents outlining their vision and strategy for police and fire departments over 5, 10, and 15-year periods.

Fire Chief Brad Pitassi responded, noting the significant growth in commercial development since 2020 and explaining that the last fire station was built in 2013. He emphasized the importance of understanding call volume demographics and target hazards, and supported creating a document that clearly outlined their 1, 5, 10, and 20-year plans.

Police Chief Mark Goodman agreed on the value of strategic planning but suggested a 3, 5, 10-year timeline rather than extending to 20 years for practical purposes. He emphasized the importance of considering concurrency of calls, noting that over the past two years, there had been a 19 percent increase in handling two calls simultaneously, around 30 percent increase in handling three calls at once, and 38 percent increase in handling four calls simultaneously.

Next, Chief Goodman provided an update on the new business watch program, which featured common branding across window stickers, signs, and programming for all businesses. The program included a comprehensive workbook (20-25 pages) available on the city website that walked businesses through safety measures and provided guidance for reporting crimes and emergency contact information.He added that the program would launch with outreach in February or March, offering businesses signs and materials in exchange for updated emergency information and permission for police to check their businesses when closed.

Councilmember Liermann thanked Chief Goodman for his work on the program and encouraged him to present to business organizations like the Greater Maricopa

Alliance and Black Chamber.

Next, Councilmembers Liermann and Knorr presented a request to strengthen the city's arts grant program. Councilmember Liermann explained that 2-3 years ago, the city began awarding two grants to artists in the community, which had been successful in encouraging and supporting the arts community.

She stated that currently, the program awarded $1,500 and $3,000 grants, and they requested increasing these to $3,000 and $5,000 respectively. She added that staff confirmed that approximately $20,000 was available annually (10 percent of bed tax), with additional funds potentially available from previous years.

Mayor Smith supported the increases but requested adding matching fund requirements and transferring decision-making to the Cultural Affairs and Arts Committee (CAAC). Councilmember Liermann agreed to matching funds for the larger grant but suggested the smaller grant remain without matching requirements since it targeted startup artists and college students. They agreed that matching funds could be considered favorably in the application process rather than being strictly required. Next, Mayor Smith presented six potential facilities for council consideration: conference center, kiosks, swimming pool, teen center (facility), senior center, and arts center. She explained that given budget constraints heard earlier in the meeting, council needed to provide direction on priorities for CIP and budget planning.

Councilmember Liermann clarified that the kiosk concept (approximately $10,000) was significantly different in scope from the million-dollar facilities, designed to support small business entrepreneurs at locations like the Fieldhouse or Copper Sky during events.

Council members completed priority ranking forms and all six items received at least four votes, requiring staff to develop estimates for all items during the CIP and budget review process.

Next, Matt Klyszeiko from Michael Baker International provided a comprehensive update on the General Plan process. He explained they were currently in the 60-day public review period, a state-mandated timeframe ending February 6th where the plan was shared with adjacent municipalities, state agencies, and the public for comment. Mr. Klyszeiko emphasized that unlike other planning documents, the General Plan must be ratified by voters, not just approved by council, making public engagement critical. He added that the plan addressed required elements based on community size, and Maricopa had been visionary in including all elements in their 2016 plan even when not required, providing a strong framework to build upon. He stated that the plan was organized around chapters covering different elements, with consistent organization including general discussions, frameworks (maps), and goals and policies for decision-making guidance. He went on to state that public outreach included three community workshops, a robust project website, a general plan advisory committee with diverse community representation, and pop-up booths at city events, resulting in over 600 survey responses.

Mayor Smith raised questions about land use designations along the future I-11 corridor, expressing concern about creating more bedroom community development versus employment and commercial opportunities. Mr. Klyszeiko explained the balance between being progressive versus aggressive in planning, noting the need to consider existing county entitlements and community input.

Councilmember Liermann submitted feedback emphasizing the importance of designated spaces for youth and arts communities, and Mr. Klyszeiko confirmed that residents had expressed strong interest in arts and cultural facilities.

Next, Assistant City Manager Jennifer Brown reviewed updated strategic priorities, focusing on areas with changes based on accomplishments and new initiatives.

Transportation priorities were updated to reflect the approved half-cent sales tax for leveraging local funds and included the new traffic strike force team initiative for identifying and solving high-priority traffic problems.

Job Creation and Business Development priorities remained unchanged, continuing focus on the business park development and educational partnerships.

Smart Growth replaced the previous housing-focused priority, emphasizing thoughtful, responsible planning for sustainable community development. Council discussed clarifying the term "smart growth" to better communicate the concept to residents.

Quality of Life priorities included updates to Copper Sky recreational opportunities and continued focus on the iconic park, trail system, cultural vitality, and partnerships for underserved groups.

Becoming a Destination City priorities remained unchanged, focusing on regional appeal events, economic impact analysis, and sports tourism through the Parks Master Plan.

Public Safety priorities remained largely unchanged but would include additions for emergency management based on Councilmember Goettl's feedback, continuing emphasis on data-driven deployment, community policing, fire station construction, hazmat team development, and ambulance service implementation.

Ms. Brown concluded by noting these priorities would return to council for formal approval after incorporating feedback from the discussion.

City Manager Bitter concluded the meeting by thanking all participants, including council members, staff, public, and press, for their time and engagement in the futures planning process. He referenced the opening quote about lighting a single candle versus cursing the darkness, emphasizing that the day's collaborative effort represented a single act that would elevate and energize the community's vision moving forward.

Mayor Smith endorsed this message, encouraging all participants to focus on being positive forces in community discussions rather than dwelling on past challenges, suggesting this approach could improve public dialogue and even social media discourse about city matters.

4. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 4:46 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 22nd day of January, 2026. I further certify that the meeting was duly called and held and that a quorum was present.

Dated this 3rd day of March, 2026.

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Vanessa Bueras
City Clerk