

**MARICOPA COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT  
PARKS AND RECREATION ADVISORY COMMISSION MEETING**  
Regular Meeting of January 20, 2026

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<b>LOCATION:</b>	Queen Creek Library Recreation Annex
<b>COMMISSION MEMBERS PRESENT:</b>	Megha Budruk, Jack Stapley, John Crane, Eric Mears, Shelby Scharbach, Isabel Chavez
<b>COMMISSION MEMBERS ABSENT:</b>	Samantha Stelp
<b>STAFF PRESENT:</b>	Jennifer Waller, Director; David Jordan, Deputy Director; Kara Currie-Gonzales, Finance Manager; Dawna Taylor, PIO; Candi Jones, Executive Assistant; Amber Gribler, Recorder; Betsy Pregulman, Deputy County Attorney

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The official correspondence and staff recommendations contained in this Commission folder are hereby entered as supportive material to the official minutes of the January 20, 2026, Parks and Recreation Commission regular meeting.

**PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION MEETING**

**ITEM #1 – CALL TO ORDER – Megha Budruk, Chair, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission**

- The regular meeting was called to order at 10:05 a.m.

**ITEM #2 – ROLL CALL –** Roll Call taken - a quorum was present.

**ITEM #3 – PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

**ITEM #4 – NOMINATING SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT AND NOMINATION OF 2026 OFFICERS – Megha Budruk and John Crane, Subcommittee Members, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee**

- Megha Budruk, Chair, shared that the subcommittee suggested Jack Stapley as Chair and Isabel Chavez as Vice Chair.

**ITEM #5 – ELECTION OF 2026 PARKS AND RECREATION ADVISORY COMMISSION OFFICERS – Megha Budruk, Chair, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee**

- Megha Budruk, Chair, called for a motion to confirm Jack Stapley as Chair and Isabel Chavez as Vice Chair. Moved by Commissioner Mears and seconded by Commissioner Crane. With all in favor and none opposed, the motion passed.

**ITEM #6 – APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE PARKS AND RECREATION ADVISORY COMMISSION MEETING NOVEMBER 18, 2025 – Jack Stapley, Chair, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission**

- Commissioner Mears moved to approve the minutes of the November 18, 2025, meeting. Seconded by Commissioner Crane. With all in favor and none opposed, the motion passed.

**ITEM #7 - DIRECTOR'S SUMMARY OF CURRENT EVENTS – Jenn Waller, Director, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department**

- Director Waller provided an overview of the Director's Summary.

- Director Waller thanked those in attendance at the December Board of Supervisors' Meeting for supporting the approval of the fee increase.
- Commissioner Scharbach's term as District One representative was extended through 2027.
- A grant from the Arizona Department of Forestry and Fire Management for wildfire mitigation was approved.
- A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was approved between Parks and the Maricopa County Juvenile Probation Department to support youth community service hours in regional parks.
- Candi Jones was introduced as the new Executive Assistant.
- The greenhouse at Cave Creek Regional Park has been completed.
- The Natural Resource Specialist has another Maricopa County Leadership and Advancing Public Service (MCLEAPS) intern.
- Maricopa Trail and Park Foundation initiated a training program, funded by a grant, to build and enhance our trail ambassador program. Approximately 70 people attended the four training sessions throughout the valley. So far, 25 of those have joined our volunteer trail ambassador program or are in the process.
- The Gold Mine Trailhead at San Tan is nearing completion. Host sites' canopies are complete, and final utility connections and inspections are expected to be completed by the end of January. The anticipated grand opening date is mid-February.
- A badger was observed near the railroad concessionaire site at Adobe Dam Regional Park.
- Work at Estrella Mountain Regional Park campground continues; electrical boxes are complete, paving began in late November, and host sites and large ramadas were completed in December. Electrical boxes are complete, and paving began at the end of November.
- At Hassayampa, trails were damaged due to heavy rains. Trails were closed for repairs at the end of November but have since reopened. They also led a fuel-reduction meeting effort. With a large number of trees and branches falling, the Arizona Department of Fire and the Nature Conservancy are evaluating potential solutions.
- The 100 Miles in 100 Days Challenge is well underway.
- The Agua Fria is open on select Fridays through Sunday, now that we have an entry station.
- Spur Cross received about 1.69 inches of rain at the end of November.
- Commissioner Mears inquired about terminating the use management agreement with Southwest Wildlife Conservation Center for a proposed nature and wildlife conservation center at McDowell.
- Director Waller stated that Southwest Wildlife Conservation was unable to secure funding, resulting in the termination of the agreement. They are still included in the Master Plan while they evaluate options. Parks will have to pursue a nature center on our own.

**ITEM #8 – AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT COMPLIANCE PARKS PROJECT – Chris Martin, Director, Geospatial & Digital Solutions, Matrix Design Group**

- Mr. Martin presented the Department's Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance self-evaluation and transition plan process.
- Assessments have been completed at five parks, with the sixth underway. Assessments include evaluation of facilities, restrooms, park amenities, trails, websites, programs, policies, and procedures.
- Commissioner Chavez expressed appreciation for the inclusive approach to accessibility.
- Commissioner Mears asked if this plan provides a roadmap for litigation.
- Mr. Martin stated that identifying gaps and having a plan to address them reduces an organization's risk of litigation.
- Commissioner Mears asked about alignment with the budget.
- Mr. Martin explained that improvements range from low-cost to phased capital projects based on available funding.
- Commissioner Crane asked if the Department had previously had an ADA plan.
- Director Waller confirmed that the Department has not had a formal plan, although ADA standards have been followed on projects.

Commissioner Scharbach left the meeting at 10:55 am.

**ITEM #9 – VOLUNTEER PROGRAM UPDATES – Bill Klewer, Volunteer Coordinator, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department**

- Mr. Klewer provided an overview of the volunteer program, highlighting FY25 data.
- Volunteers contributed a total of 93,644 hours in FY25, consistently exceeding 90,000 annually over the past seven years. The estimated financial impact of volunteer hours exceeded \$3.1 million using the federal hourly rate for volunteer service.
- Factors contributing to a slight decrease in volunteer hours in FY25 included reduced campground capacity due to the Estrella campground project, medical issues, personal emergencies, retiree availability, competition from other agencies, and unusually low rainfall limiting invasive weed removal events.
- Core volunteers, including park hosts and community volunteers (Desert Defenders, stewards, trail ambassadors, and local entry station volunteers), contributed over 86,000 hours, forming the bulk of volunteer work.
- Service volunteers, who assist with one-time or occasional park projects, contributed over 7,000 hours in FY25, including 120 scheduled volunteer events (89 held due to weather) and over 1,300 participants. Volunteers received free park admission during events.
- Private corporations and community groups, including REI and American Express, actively support volunteer events, contributing significant labor and community engagement.
- The community restitution program engages low-level, non-violent probationers in supervised volunteer work, providing two-for-one credit for their hours. In FY25, 264 volunteer shifts were completed through this program.
- The Memorandum of Understanding with Juvenile Probation has been finalized with plans to provide educational volunteer opportunities for youth under supervision.
- Commissioner Chavez inquired about program growth and collaboration with other parks.
- Mr. Klewer stated that while recruitment is competitive, the program seeks to meaningfully match volunteers to available positions, without overwhelming park staff.
- Commissioner Chavez asked if hosts were required to have a fingerprint clearance card.
- Mr. Klewer stated that background checks are required for park hosts, replacing the previous fingerprint clearance card requirement.

**ITEM #10 – CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT AND PROJECT UPDATES – Jeff Gruver, Project Manager, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department**

- Mr. Gruver provided updates on major capital improvement projects.
- Thirteen new chilled water drinking fountains have been purchased, with ten installed at Cave Creek, McDowell, and Lake Pleasant. These new fountains are ADA-compliant and include bottle fillers and dog bowls.
- Chair Stapley asked whether these installations were performed by staff or subcontracted.
- Mr. Gruver stated that they were installed by Caliente Construction.
- Cave Creek campground sites now have individual electrical breakers and new water risers.
- Estrella campground is adding forty-nine campsites, restrooms with showers, equestrian parking, and a dump station.
- Infrastructure improvements include redesigning the Lake Pleasant Pipeline South ET bed and replacing water lines at McDowell.
- Chair Stapley asked if this work would be done by staff or contracted out.
- Mr. Gruver confirmed that this would also be contracted out.
- San Tan Goldmine Trailhead with a 130-space asphalt parking lot, restrooms, and a utility building; new restrooms and a canopy at Usery; and a 63-space parking area and restroom at White Tank Wildlife Trailhead.
- White Tank Wildlife Trailhead project is scheduled to start in April. This involves installing a new restroom, equestrian parking, and a 63-space parking lot.

- Vulture Mountain phase one is complete. Phase one included roadways and underground infrastructure for water, electricity, and sewer. Phases two and three include a nature center, a day-use area, a playground, restrooms, a campground, a well, and a 500,000-gallon water storage tank.
- The White Tank competitive track project is at Maricopa County Planning and Development and is awaiting permits. This project will include the addition of a restroom, shade structures, and a 476-space asphalt parking lot.
- Commissioner Chavez inquired about projected revenue for the new campsites at Estrella.
- Director Waller indicated that initial occupancy is expected to be below full capacity in the first year, but bookings are expected to increase significantly in the second and third years. Based on past performance at Cave Creek (55 sites), Vulture Mountain (77-78 sites), and Estrella (40-59 sites), these sites are projected to generate approximately \$150,000 to \$200,000 annually. She noted high interest, driven by the nearby racetrack, particularly in March and April.
- Commissioner Mears noted that it had been several years since the Board last reviewed project costs in detail, and observed significant price escalation compared to original estimates, and asked if that was still the case.
- Mr. Gruver confirmed that construction material costs have risen approximately 30% over the last one to two years and continue to increase.
- Commissioner Mears raised the question of using asphalt for parking areas versus crushed aggregate or decomposed granite.
- Mr. Gruver explained that asphalt requires less ongoing maintenance than crushed surfaces and helps discourage off-road vehicle activity that could damage the parking lots.

**Item #11 – POINT OF SALE UPDATE – David Jordan, Deputy Director, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department**

- Deputy Director Jordan presented an update on the new Point-of-Sale (POS) system.
- Phase one launched on November 17<sup>th</sup> with core functionalities operational. Phase Two is scheduled to launch in March, including enhancements such as campground map views, online annual pass purchases, and system refinements.
- This new system is customizable and allows for ongoing modifications to meet operational needs, a significant improvement over previous “cookie-cutter” systems.
- Features of the system include Apple Pay and Google Pay, QR-coded annual passes, and streamlined reservations.
- The initial rollout received positive feedback, with fewer concerns than in previous system transitions.
- Staff successfully managed the implementation during a high-traffic holiday period.
- The Phase Two rollout in March will continue enhancements based on visitor and staff feedback to optimize system performance.
- Commissioner Crance noted that, as someone who has used the previous system, he has seen here today in just a couple of minutes what appears to be an improvement.
- Deputy Director Jordan emphasized that we could make this product whatever we need it to be and continually improve and streamline the system.
- Commissioner Chavez asked about the ease of adding processing fees and implementing reward or point-tracking systems.
- Deputy Director Jordan confirmed that the system’s flexibility allows for such additions.
- Director Waller noted improvements not only in usability, but also in staff modernization of back-end office processes, including the Special Use Permit process and interpretive program registrations.

**Item #12 – JOINT PROGRAM WITH MARICOPA COUNTY ANIMAL CONTROL – Dawna Taylor, Communications Department Officer, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department**

- Ms. Taylor presented an update regarding the Parks’ social media consolidation and a new partnership-driven campaign featuring a canine ranger program.
- The Parks Department previously managed 12 individual Facebook pages. After years of consideration, all pages were consolidated into a single page on January 1, 2026.

- The page consolidation was preceded by a multi-week communication campaign starting December 1, 2025, including cover photos and graphics to inform visitors of the transition.
- The decision was driven by operational efficiencies, reducing redundancies in posts and easing staff workload, as previously a single post could generate up to 28 posts across platforms.
- Individual park pages were established in 2008 to reflect each park's unique theme, but after 18 years of visitation growth, the approach became less effective. Consolidation improves the visitor experience, enables centralized engagement, and introduces followers to additional parks.
- Rangers, Park Supervisors, and communications staff now monitor and respond to visitors on the consolidated page, ensuring consistent engagement.
- Ms. Taylor shared information about a new campaign focusing on a partnership with Animal Care and Control and the Office of Communications.
- Tentatively titled, the year-long campaign will feature a canine ranger to highlight park programs, engage younger audiences (ages 35 and under), and attract families.
- The program will feature the canine ranger starting as a new hire and following their journey to becoming a park employee.
- The canine ranger will then visit the parks, interact with rangers, and highlight the offerings available there.
- Campaign objectives are to increase visitation, engagement, and revenue for Parks and to facilitate adoptions of dogs that have been in Animal Care and Control for long periods.
- The campaign is being partially funded by Arizona Recreation and Parks Association (ARPA) funds, allocated toward digital assets and the canine ranger program.
- Commissioner Crane inquired about the management of Facebook messages and replies since the consolidation to a single page.
- Ms. Taylor noted that she can respond, Park Supervisors can as well, and Rangers can still respond to posts.

**Item #13 – PARKS MASTER PLAN EXPLANATION – Jenn Waller, Director, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department**

- Director Waller presented a handout on the park's master plan process, as Commissioner Mears had requested an overview at the last meeting.
- Director Waller explained that system master plans guide the department, and park master plans define what is allowed at each park. Any project not in a park's master plan must be reviewed before proceeding.
- System master plans typically have a 20-year lifecycle, while park master plans are usually updated every five to ten years. The ideal cycle is ten years.
- Some park master plans (e.g., Buckeye Hills, 1965) have not been updated in decades.
- Updates have historically been made individually but are now planned in groups of three parks per year to improve efficiency.
- Master plan updates consider trends, population shifts, policy changes, and capital funding.
- Steps in the master process plan include inventory, stakeholder meetings, public engagement, draft recommendations, staff review, stakeholder review, 30-day public comment, Commission review, Board review, and Federal oversight, if applicable.
- Stakeholders include local jurisdictions, federal agencies, and park partners.
- Public input is via meetings, surveys, workshops, and online tools ("social pinpointing")
- The emphasis is on implementing plans, addressing aging infrastructure, and balancing load across the system.
- Commissioner Mears asked whether there is a legislative mandate, as in cities, requiring general plans to be updated every 10 years.
- Director Waller noted that although there is no legislative mandate, it is a parks and recreation professional practice and the norm within the recreation field.
- Commissioner Mears asked what prevents the Department from doing something outside the master plan.

- Director Waller explained that master plans reflect community input and commitments; transparency requires adherence to the plan.
- Cave Creek, Spur Cross, and McDowell's plans are drafted. San Tan, Estrella, and Buckeye Hills are scheduled for 2026, with White Tank, Usery, and Lake Pleasant to follow.
- Commissioner Chavez asked if grouping parks improves bidding efficiency.
- Director Waller confirmed that grouping allows economies of scale for contracts (e.g., plumbing for multiple parks).
- Master plans can be amended for minor or administrative changes, such as adjusting locations, with a 30-day public review. Major amendments, such as adding new facilities not in the plan, require a full public process, commission review, and Board approval.
- Director Waller emphasized trend-based decision-making and avoiding short-term fads. Changes should reflect multi-year trends.
- Commissioner Mears asked how unexpected events, such as wildfires, affect master plans.
- Director Waller stated that master plans address resource management; wildfires will be addressed in upcoming updates.

**ITEM #14 – FY27 BUDGET REQUESTS – Kara Currie-Gonzalez, Finance/Administration Manager, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department**

- Ms. Currie-Gonzales stated that she is preparing the budget forecast and will then begin work on the FY27 operations budget.
- Ms. Currie-Gonzalez was asked to submit a one-time above-base request for assistance from the general fund to cover the opening of Vulture Mountain, including personnel, operating services, and supplies for the first six months and the first full year of operation.
- For FY27, we requested seven months of personnel funding (\$224,000) to hire and train staff. It's anticipated that the park will be open for approximately 6 months in FY27, but staff will need to be hired and trained before the park opens.
- Supplies and equipment needs include trucks for staff and volunteer hosts; office setup (computers, entry stations); maintenance tools and supplies; signage; souvenir displays; critter enclosures; and fuel for the first year.
- Services funding request includes utilities, new radios and service, technology services (point-of-sale system), and credit card processing fees.
- Total FY27 request: \$952,534.
- For FY28, the plan is to cover supplies and services from park-generated revenue via the enhancement fund.
- Full-Year personnel funding is requested for FY28, with the intent to transition staff to the enhancement fund if revenue supports it.
- Ms. Currie-Gonzalez highlighted the potential for rapid financial recovery based on expected visitor demand, anticipating the success of Estrella's campground opening with day-use users and repeat campers.
- The floor was open to questions, but none were raised.

**ITEM #15 – SET MARCH 2026 PARKS COMMISSION MEETING LOCATION – Jack Stapley, Chair, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission**

- Chair Stapley recommended holding the March meeting at Estrella Mountain Regional Park.
- Commissioner Chavez moved to hold the next meeting at Estrella Mountain Regional Park. Seconded by Commissioner Budruk. With all in favor and none opposed, the motion passed.

**ITEM #16 – CALL TO THE PUBLIC**

- Mr. Kurt Kempton addressed the Commission.
- Mr. Kempton welcomed the Commission to Queen Creek and described the area's rapid growth, noting that Queen Creek has doubled or tripled in population over the last 15 years, and the nearby San Tan Valley continues to place increased use and demand on San Tan Regional Park.

- Mr. Kempton expressed appreciation for San Tan Regional Park's inclusion in upcoming master planning efforts and encouraged Commissioners to observe the surrounding construction and development during their site visit.
- Mr. Kempton noted accelerating growth driven by housing and economic conditions and stated that he has data available regarding these trends.
- Mr. Kempton raised concerns about staffing and personnel retention at San Tan Regional Park, citing turnover in leadership positions, and encouraged considering personnel needs as part of future planning.

**ITEM #17 – CALL TO COMMISSION**

- Chair Stapley announced that the Commission would conduct an informal site visit to San Tan Regional Park following adjournment.
- It was clarified that the site visit was not a formal meeting, but an informational tour to observe recent changes and improvements.
- The Commission was provided with directions and logistical details for the site visit location.

**ITEM #18 – ADJOURNMENT**

- With no further business, Chair Stapley adjourned the meeting at 12:22 p.m.