

PHOENIX ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY and SUSTAINABILITY COMMISSION MINUTES

September 10, 2026

Commission Members Present	City Staff Present
Sotiria Anagnostou	Nancy Allen, Office of Environmental Programs (OEP)
Darren Chapman	Lahayla Curiel, OEP
Chris Erickson	Beth Zima, OEP
Eric Gorseger	Katrina Gerster, OEP
Kathy Knoop	Ariel LeBarron, ORP
Caroline Lobo	Carla De La Chapa, Office of Sustainability (OOS)
Andrea Odegard-Begay	Emma Goethe, OOS
Steve Olea	Maxwell Wilson, City Manager's Office (CMO)
Sarah Porter	Dayana Rosas, CMO
Amy Scoville-Weaver	
Colin Tetreault	
Ginger Torres	
Commission Members Not Present	Community Members Present
Kevin Groman	Kathryn Miller, North Central News
Kelly Barr	ASU University City Exchange
	Member of the Public

1. Call to Order and Attendance

The meeting of the Environmental Quality and Sustainability Commission (EQSC) was called to order with a roll call at 2:01 p.m. There were 10 members present at roll call.

2. Review and Approval of August 13, 2026 Minutes

Commissioner Tetreault made a motion to approve the August 13, 2026 minutes.

Commissioner Lobo seconded the motion, and it carried 10-0.

3. Announcements

Vice Chair Torres shared that a recent New York Times article on climate resiliency that highlighted Phoenix as low in resiliency but high in adaptability. She noted that national narratives portray the city in varying ways, with heat and water continuing to attract national attention. She shared that today's EQSC meeting will center on water and that the Commission hopes to identify meaningful ways to engage on the topic.

Commissioner Tetreault mentioned New York Climate Week, September 21st to 25th. He explained that even without attending in person, there will be online opportunities to participate and sustainability-focused presentations.

Vice Chair Torres asked whether cities outside New York host their own climate weeks, and Commissioner Tetreault confirmed that many do. She further asked whether any Arizona cities have done this. Commissioner Porter responded that a decision had previously been made that it was not the right time for an Arizona city to hold a climate week. Following an inquiry about City staff attendance at New York Climate Week, N. Allen stated that City staff will not attend Climate Week due to high costs.

4. Public Comment

No members of the public requested to speak.

5. Rio Phoenix Comment Letter

The land use amendment, previously not approved, has now been cleared by South Mountain Village Planning Committee (SMVPC). Planning and Development (PDD) provided a new schedule with key dates that the plans will go to the Planning Commission on October 1 and to City Council on October 21. PDD requested the letter by September 25 to present during the Planning Commission meeting, to which staff noted a special session could be arranged if needed to approve the letter ahead of the October EQSC meeting. Commissioners decided to vote on their Rio PHX Comment Letter in early October so that PDD may have the letter for the City Council meeting.

Commissioner Weaver clarified the difference between the broader policy plan and the land use and design guidelines, and the Commission agreed to focus their comment letter solely on the policy plan. She shared updates based on SMVPC feedback, including the now approved land use map revision that discourages displacement and encourages affordable housing. Commissioners discussed how PDD might incorporate SMVPC input, typical review processes, and feasibility of proposed actions.

Commissioner Weaver outlined the policy plan's four core themes: mixed uses, connection to the Rio Salado, improving quality of life, and an eco-tourism/green infrastructure hub. Commissioners recommended focusing language on walkable, neighborhood-scaled development rather than discouraging specific industries such as data centers.

Commissioner Weaver reviewed the draft letter, highlighting heat, environmental strategies, and shade planning in the policy. The draft letter also makes recommendations to add biodiversity, strengthened connection to the Climate Action Plan, expanded green stormwater infrastructure recommendations, and clearer business incentives to mitigate

heat outputs, and leverage the EQSC. Commissioner Weaver noted that she will incorporate Commissioner comments to discourage singling out industries and she invited further feedback. The draft will be sent for Commissioners to review before the next meeting.

6. Water Resources Discussion

Commissioner Porter presented outlining the growing unreliability of the Colorado River, shared by seven states, Mexico, and 30 tribal communities. She emphasized declining flows, shrinking reservoirs, and climate-driven changes in snowpack and evaporation. Commissioner Porter reviewed current reservoir conditions, noting Lake Powell and Lake Mead are at risk, which is critical for Arizona, where the Colorado River supplies 36 percent of statewide water. Arizona's remaining water portfolio consists of 41 percent groundwater, 18 percent in-state rivers, 5 percent reclaimed. Phoenix's reliance on 29 percent Colorado River water was highlighted, with municipal use making up more than half of the region's demand.

Commissioner Porter explained Central Arizona Project (CAP)'s junior-priority status and the vulnerability it creates, along with differences in how cities like Tucson store and replenish their allocations. She noted upcoming cuts: lower basin users must reduce 2.5 million acre-feet over two years, including 760,000 acre-feet for CAP. Commissioner Porter notes that not all cities are as prepared as Phoenix for deep Colorado river cuts and that cities will increasingly rely on stored groundwater while new infrastructure is developed. She stressed growing legal uncertainty, including Nevada's lawsuit, and the likelihood of long-term litigation.

Commissioner Porter pointed to community adaptability through emphasizing water conservation, especially outdoors, while cautioning that conservation alone cannot resolve the crisis. She encouraged the Commission to consider supporting more prescriptive water-use measures. Long-term sustainability, she noted, requires major investment in renewable water supplies and infrastructure. Cities may need to raise rates to fund these efforts, and delaying action will deepen reliance on groundwater. Commissioner Porter urged timely investment to avoid short-sighted decisions and ensure long-term water security.

7. Colorado River Water Allocation Update

M. Wilson explained how Phoenix plans to respond to the Colorado River reductions beginning in January 2027. Under the new guidelines, Arizona will face a 760,000-acre-foot reduction, which may shift some cities from water-budget surpluses to deficits. Phoenix is distinct because its water resource advisor works in the City Manager's Office rather than the Water Services Department, coordinating closely with leadership on strategy. Phoenix's supply is currently 58 percent Salt and Verde River water, 40 percent Colorado

River water, and 2 percent groundwater. Declining in-state reservoirs and changing hydrology mean Phoenix must monitor all water sources closely. Next year, groundwater and Salt/Verde supplies will make up a larger share of the portfolio.

Wilson noted Phoenix's water demand continues to fall even as the population grows, driven by federal efficiency standards and widespread adoption of desert landscaping. Total system production has remained steady, creating financial challenges because infrastructure costs rise while sold water volumes remain stagnant. Outdoor use accounts for 41 percent of citywide demand, mostly from single-family homes, where over-watering remains common and represents a major conservation opportunity.

Phoenix will work to maintain reliable service while accelerating the development of new water supplies as quickly as possible to limit groundwater drawdown. While conservation is a critical long-term strategy, Wilson outlined five steps to address immediate needs. First, deploy Arizona's water bank. Second, activate City backup supplies, supported by drought-pipeline infrastructure that allows water movement across Phoenix. Third, pump groundwater as a temporary bridge supply. Fourth, develop next-generation supplies, which will require rate increases and federal investment. These include the Bartlett Dam Expansion, Pure Water PHX advanced water recycling to achieve direct potable reuse, and the Secure Water Arizona Program (SWAP), which involves emergency reserves, offsets, and shared resources between cities. Fifth, Phoenix may need to escalate stages of its Drought Management Plan to ensure water is delivered reliably to homes. The City has been in Stage 1 since 2022 and expects to enter Stage 2 next year. Stages 3 and 4 represent curtailed use and water emergencies. Despite Colorado River challenges, Phoenix has a structured plan to maintain reliable service.

Vice Chair Torres asked where the Commission could offer support. Wilson responded that the most important area is backing long-term supply investments, which will require higher water rates to protect groundwater. Commissioner Knoop asked about cloud seeding; Wilson said Phoenix has funded SRP projects, though early results are inconclusive. Commissioner Gorsegrner stressed the importance of Bartlett Dam and asked about recharge locations and upcoming bond needs. Wilson said his team is developing upcoming GO Bond recommendations. Commissioner Erickson asked about the technology used for advanced water purification efforts; Wilson explained Phoenix is pursuing direct potable reuse, similar in process to desalination, allowing the city to retain recycled water. Commissioner Porter recommended the ASU virtual tour of an advanced water purification site.

Vice Chair Torres asked whether the Commission can help support City water priorities and encouraged members to reflect before the next meeting.

8. Review of Future Agenda Items

None

9. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 4:00 at p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Emma Goethe, Management Assistant II