

# PHOENIX ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY and SUSTAINABILITY COMMISSION MINUTES

April 9, 2026

Phoenix City Hall & Webex

<b>Commission Members Present</b>	<b>City Staff Present</b>
Penny Allee Taylor, in-person	Nancy Allen, Office of Environmental Programs (OEP), in-person
Sotiria Anagnostou, in-person	Lahayla Curiel, OEP, in-person
Eric Gorsegner, in-person	Elizabeth Zima – OEP, in-person
Kathy Knoop, in-person	Madeline Mercer – OEP, in-person
Amy Scoville-Weaver, in-person	Ariel LeBarron, OEP, in-person
Kelly Barr, Chair, in-person	Gabriel Sheppard, OEP, in-person
Andrea Odegard-Begay, Webex	Carla De La Chapa, Office of Sustainability (OOS), in-person
Ginger Torres, Vice Chair, Webex	Emma Goethe, OOS, in-person
<b>Commission Members Not Present</b>	<b>Community Members Present</b>
Darren Chapman	
Kevin Groman	
Caroline Lobo	
Sarah Porter	
Bill Sandweg	
Colin Tetreault	

## 1. Call to Order/Roll Call and Announcements

The meeting of the Environmental Quality and Sustainability Commission (EQSC) was called to order with a roll call at 2:06 p.m. There were 8 members present at roll call.

New Commissioner Anagnostou, CEO of the Arizona Sustainability Alliance, was introduced. She shared her background in sustainability, climate initiatives, and her broad experience across various industries. Commissioners and City staff introduced themselves in turn.

Commissioner Knoop provided an update regarding research conducted on the City Manager’s proposed budget. She has prepared documents synthesizing the budget and highlighting relevant sustainability components including heat, shade, water, and

economic development. These documents will be distributed to commissioners after the meeting.

N. Allen (OEP) encouraged all commissioners to attend the budget hearings and provide public comments.

Chair Barr noted that sustainable economic development and heat mitigation will be key topic areas to focus on while reviewing the budget.

Chair Barr brought attention to the proposed Parks Medical Treatment and Food Distribution Ordinance. No representatives from Parks were available to answer questions during the meeting, but commissioners were encouraged to review the ordinance independently. N. Allen and Chair Barr also asked commissioners to complete the online survey to provide feedback.

Vice Chair Torres reviewed the ordinance during the meeting and noted that it appears to prohibit free food events and food handouts in parks, excluding private events.

Commissioner Taylor, who serves on the board of the Arizona Public Health Association, expressed concern that many organizations are worried about the potential impacts of the ordinance on their operations. Taylor also emphasized that the lack of public hearings on the issue is troubling.

## **2. Review and Approval of March 13, 2026, Minutes**

Commissioner Knoop made a motion to approve March 13, 2026, minutes.

Commissioner Gorsegrner seconded the motion, and it carried 8-0.

## **3. Public Comment**

No members of the public requested to speak.

## **4. Food Action Plan Presentation**

M. Mercer, OEP Program Manager, provided an update on the Food Action Plan and reviewed the mission and vision of the Food Systems team within the Office of Environmental Programs. Mercer noted that the original Food Action Plan was adopted by Council in March 2020, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Since 2025, significant progress has been made; however, Mercer emphasized that many changes in the industry, political landscape, and related areas have occurred since the initial plan was created. The updated plan reflects these shifts and incorporates emerging priorities and needs within the food systems sector.

M. Mercer provided an overview of the timeline for updating the Food Action Plan, highlighting the ten-month community engagement period conducted to ensure the revised plan reflects the needs and priorities of Phoenix residents. During this period staff engaged with more than 2,100 community members. The plan will be available for public comment from mid-April to May and is scheduled to be presented at the City Council Policy Session on June 9. Mercer presented the results of this engagement, which identified the guiding vision and values for the plan. Five key themes emerged: equity and justice; health and joy; community connection and sharing abundance; partnerships and collective action; and sustainability and resilience.

These themes informed the development of the plan's ten strategic priorities, which include food access, health, education and training, food production, the local food economy, food waste prevention, community and cultural connection, city planning and policies, partnerships and collaboration, and resilience. Each strategic priority is supported by specific actions, metrics, and implementation timelines to measure progress and success.

Food access – Actions focus on multiple dimensions of food access, including food availability and affordability. Community input also identified transportation as a significant challenge in accessing food.

Health – Actions align with the “food is medicine” concept. Community members specifically mentioned interest in produce prescription programs. This section also includes efforts to expand education.

Chair Barr asked a clarifying question regarding prioritization. M. Mercer responded that food access was identified as the highest priority; the remaining topics are not ranked in any particular order.

Education and training – Actions focus on expanding training on gardening, cooking, health, and other food-related topics for residents and City employees

Food production – Actions revolve around supporting policies that increase food production and activate City spaces, and all efforts should reinforce support for local growers.

Local Food Economy – Actions focus on building a circular food economy with the goal of creating economic opportunity. Mercer noted that this priority may be of particular interest to the EQSC given its sustainable economic development focus.

Food Waste Prevention – Actions include composting efforts as well as a greater emphasis on preventing food waste before it occurs.

Community and cultural connection – Actions recognize food as a gathering point and are based in creating spaces where the community can grow, learn about, and share food. It also underscores the importance of sharing resources and program investments.

City Policies and Planning – Several actions are carried over from the 2025 plan. This includes updating the zoning code, as the City currently lacks a clear definition of urban agriculture. The team intends to provide clarity and ensure food-related considerations are incorporated into other strategic plans across the City.

Chair Barr asked for input on the proposed Parks Medical Treatment and Food Distribution Ordinance. M. Mercer noted that the team is in ongoing conversation with the Parks Department for clarity on the ordinance and that both residents and organizations have expressed concerns.

Commissioner Scoville-Weaver asked about composting at scale from a policy perspective. M. Mercer explained that composting surfaced primarily from a programmatic, rather than policy, approach during the planning process. This could be explored further based on readiness and infrastructure support.

Commissioner Gorsegrner highlighted zoning ordinances and noted opportunities to implement policy through zoning updates. M. Mercer shared that many cities across the U.S. have amended zoning definitions related to food production, and that the Food Systems Team has begun working with the Planning and Development Department. The team is also examining ways to embed food considerations into the Walkable Urban Code. Commissioner Gorsegrner asked about by-right thresholds that might require additional permits, and M. Mercer acknowledged that land use and permit thresholds need to be clarified.

Vice Chair Torres asked about farmland preservation. M. Mercer explained that this topic did not arise during the three focus groups conducted with local producers, however acknowledged that land access is an established barrier and noted that the team is beginning with City-owned land, as it provides clearer authority for action.

Partnerships and collaboration – Every stakeholder emphasized that this is an essential component of the plan. The intention is for this to be a community-wide plan, not solely a City plan. OEP plans to work with community partners, institutions, and other local agencies/municipalities from across Maricopa County.

Food System Resilience – Actions center emergency preparedness and the exploration of alternative funding strategies. There is also a need to explicitly connect food systems' work to climate efforts, including emissions reduction.

Commissioner Knoop asked about engagement with local farmers and whether there were concerns about competition with community gardens. M. Mercer shared that there were no concerns regarding competition with community gardens and that a needs assessment conducted by the University of Arizona showed that farmers participate to support community food needs rather than compete. Mercer noted that farmers would benefit from support in infrastructure, scaling to reach larger vendors, food storage, technical assistance, and water conservation efforts. There was also interest in increasing community awareness of local food systems.

Commissioner Scoville-Weaver asked about extreme heat. M. Mercer stated that heat was a frequently mentioned barrier to food access, especially in terms of transportation. The plan includes work on food access at the neighborhood level, such as the Farm Express bus, pop-up farmers markets, and grocery store shuttles. Heat concerns also arose in the context of built-environment policy, including interest in creating green spaces that are also edible landscapes. Commissioner Taylor asked about SNAP and how Arizona may be disproportionately impacted. M. Mercer explained that these concerns tie to emergency planning in partnership with Human Services and noted that the City has an existing resources webpage to address SNAP-related challenges and will continue to serve as a hub for resources.

Chair Barr shared an observation that five staff permanent members are expected to address ten actions and asked whether there is an opportunity to reduce or group the actions. She suggested structurally organizing the ten actions into multi-year categories—such as “must haves” versus “nice to haves”—noting concern about the relatively short four- to five-year timeline. She also asked whether some priorities could be incorporated into other pillars to streamline the list.

M. Mercer explained that the ten actions were identified directly by the community, and the plan aims to honor those priorities. She also emphasized that each action includes partnerships and that the plan itself identifies short, medium, and long-term priorities.

Vice Chair Torres stated she supports the actions but is now considering how they will be funded, mentioning grants and GO Bonds as potential sources. She asked whether the team feels confident about receiving GO Bond funding and suggested that highlighting high priority actions and actions that require high community coordination may help with funding prioritization. Torres also recommended categorizing the actions based on items that the city leads versus items that community organizations lead.

M. Mercer shared that the draft plan will be provided to commissioners next week and encouraged them to share it with their networks to identify potential collaborators. She

welcomed comments from commissioners individually or collectively. She also noted that feedback can be submitted through the online survey and the general inbox.

M. Mercer concluded the presentation with a final request for a formal letter of support to be presented at the June 9 Council Policy session. Chair Barr clarified that the letter will be drafted and reviewed in the meantime and then brought forward for a vote in May. Vice Chair Torres agreed to draft the letter.

#### **5. Solid Waste Rate Increase Letter**

Chair Kelly opened the discussion to comments on the drafted letter regarding the Public Works solid waste rate increase.

Commissioner Gorsegrner suggested listing all commissioner names on the letter which all commissioners were in favor of.

Commissioner Gorsegrner motioned to approve the Solid Waste Rate Increase letter with the addition of commissioner's names to the letter.

Commissioner Scoville-Weaver seconded the motion, and it carried 8-0.

#### **6. EQSC Strategic planning**

Chair Barr noted that the team is focusing on economic development and heat, and staff are working to bring the Community and Economic Development Department to a future meeting to discuss the sustainability elements in their work. There is also interest in having Dave Hondula attend an upcoming meeting to provide an update on the City's Heat Plan.

Commissioner Scoville-Weaver emphasized the growing focus on livability and walkability, including shade from both trees and the built environment. She highlighted the connection between heat mitigation infrastructure and sustainable economic development. Chair Barr reiterated interest in hearing from either the Office of Heat Response and Mitigation or the Community and Economic Development Department leadership to better understand this foundational work.

Commissioner Knoop reviewed the budget to identify where commission priorities are reflected. Commissioner Scoville-Weaver suggested that the Greater Phoenix Economic Council or Maricopa Association of Governments could offer additional context after the City of Phoenix presents. Vice Chair Torres mentioned the Arizona Community Foundation's 122<sup>o</sup> Conference on heat resilience in December and suggested inviting presenters from the event.

Chair Barr inquired about the upcoming GO bond cycle. N. Allen explained that the 2023 bond is mid-cycle and not all first-round funds have been spent. Departments are beginning early discussions on 2028 requests. Allen noted that the Mayor's Office is asking departments how sustainability is included in their 2023 updates and encouraged commissioners to submit comments if they do not see sustainability projects they want included, emphasizing this as an advocacy opportunity, and that updates are issued quarterly.

Vice Chair Torres remarked that although projects offer public benefits, the bond structure can be difficult for outsiders to understand and that it is a best practice for project proposals to show fiscal responsibility. N. Allen emphasized integrating sustainability early in project planning. The 2028 GO Bond is expected to span five years and total \$500 million. Chair Barr noted that this cycle could provide a key opportunity to advance sustainability.

## **7. Announcements and Review of Future Agenda Items**

Commissioner Gorsegrner asked whether someone could speak to the commission about the GO Bond process and whether it is possible to review projects that were not approved in the previous funding cycle. C. De La Chapa confirmed that departments are already considering proposals for 2028, and N. Allen added that OEP is doing the same. Chair Barr asked who from the City could present and what Sustainability and OEP expect to propose. N. Allen explained that City Engineers Office manages much of this work and advised waiting a month or two while departments finalize 2023 updates for the City Manager's Office.

Chair Barr asked if unspent funds can be moved. N. Allen clarified that GO Bond funds are voter-approved and must remain within similar project categories. Commissioner Gorsegrner also asked about scheduling a GO Bond discussion in June and how the commission should express its interest. C. De La Chapa noted that the executive managing the program will retire in June, making July more realistic. A Deputy City Manager will also be retiring, but the commission could still receive an initial overview, possibly in phases. N. Allen added that Budget and Research could present as well.

Chair Barr stated the commission wants a general understanding of the process before inviting an executive-level presenter. Barr confirmed that the May meeting will be in person, with June through August held online, and in-person meetings resuming in September with December as a recess month. Commissioners confirmed the next meeting is scheduled for May 13 at 2 p.m., instead of May 14.

Commissioner Scoville-Weaver asked whether the commission is developing a strategic plan or simply engaging in early planning. Chair Barr said a formal document will come later, but the goal is to establish a guiding framework. Commissioner Gorsegrner expressed interest in the built environment and zoning standards, asking about the city's approach and models used. C. De La Chapa said the commission can request a Planning and Development presentation on code updates and the General Plan, which also relates to economic development. A third presentation could involve leadership from the Planning and Development Department.

Vice Chair Torres asked about EPA ozone standards and how the City plans to maintain compliance while addressing local needs. Chair Barr suggested inviting ASU researchers to share relevant work. N. Allen added that the City's 2023 greenhouse gas inventory will be available soon and that the county's updates are already published on their website.

## **8. Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 3:40 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Emma Goethe, Management Assistant II