

PHOENIX ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY and SUSTAINABILITY COMMISSION MINUTES

July 9, 2026

Commission Members Present	City Staff Present
Penny Allee Taylor	Eric Johnson, Community and Economic Development (CED)
Darren Chapman	Katrina Gester, Office of Environmental Programs (OEP)
Chris Erickson	Beth Zima, OEP
Kelly Barr	Erin Beasley, OEP
Andrea Odegard-Begay	Lahayla Curiel, OEP
Sarah Porter	Carla De La Chapa, Office of Sustainability (OOS)
Bill Sandweg	Emma Goethe, OOS
Amy Scoville-Weaver	
Colin Tetreault	
Commission Members Not Present	Community Members Present
Sotiria Anagnostou	Maggie Soffel, Arizona State University (ASU)
Eric Gorsegrner	Mikaela, Member of the Public
Kevin Groman	David Sailor, ASU
Kathy Knoop	Kathryn Miller, North Central News
Caroline Lobo	Mikayla Qian, Member of the Public
Ginger Sykes Torres	Member of the Public

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 2:07 p.m. There were 8 members present at roll call.

The following Commission members arrived to the meeting at:

Sarah Porter arrived at 2:24 p.m.

2. Review and Approval of June 11, 2026 Minutes

Commissioner Tetreault made a motion to approve June 11, 2026 minutes. Commissioner Erickson seconded the motion, and it carried 8-0.

3. Public Comment

No members of the public requested to speak.

4. Community and Economic Development (CED) Office Introduction – Sustainable Development

Eric Johnson, Assistant Economic Development Director, updated the Commission on how sustainability fits into economic development. While not always top of mind, sustainability remains an important factor, especially for workforce development. Johnson outlined CED's core focus areas: business development and attraction, business support, community development, workforce development, and international relations through sister cities. Current priority industries include healthcare, bioscience, advanced manufacturing, the circular economy, education, corporate headquarters, aerospace and defense, and emerging technology.

Johnson described Phoenix's competitive approach to community and economic development, emphasizing advanced industry hubs, business-ready sites, future workforce, accessible markets, economic diplomacy, and Phoenix's advantageous location. Johnson noted the 2.6 million-person metro workforce and increasing population over the last two decades supports growing business sectors. FY25/26 economic activity included the creation of 8,500 jobs and securing 20 business relocations. He also reviewed development milestones such as the Halo Vista groundbreaking, TSMC Fab 3's topping-out ceremony, and citywide projects like the Tres Rios Freeway anticipated to break ground in summer 2027.

Downtown progress includes the Central Station grand opening and a new ASU Health partnership. Workforce updates featured the Innovation 27 workforce center and a mobile career unit. Johnson also spotlighted Rio Reimagined, a sustainability-oriented project expanding riverbank connectivity, recreation, open space, and community integration. He noted the 20-acre Resource Innovation Campus, aimed at waste reclamation, energy transfer, and shared innovation space.

Looking ahead, Johnson emphasized the growing importance of the knowledge economy, education, workforce development, and international investment. Phoenix Sky Harbor continues to be a major economic driver. Physical infrastructure remains both a challenge and opportunity, with older areas requiring upgrades. While Phoenix's infrastructure is relatively new compared to other major cities, water and power availability are the most common concerns among companies.

Commissioners raised several questions. Commissioner Chapman asked about union growth opportunities, which Johnson noted that from the economic perspective, everything has the potential for growth. Commissioner Weaver asked about sustainability's role and company expectations. Johnson explained that sustainability is embedded in Phoenix's

strategic plans and varies in importance based on company priorities. Heat is a frequent concern, particularly regarding employee well-being and site walkability.

Chair Barr reiterated that sustainable economic development and heat are the Commission's top priorities. Commissioner Erickson asked whether physical infrastructure is viewed positively or negatively; Johnson responded that Phoenix's infrastructure is relatively new with a good freeway and grid system, and advancing light rail system, but a challenge remains with updating older infrastructure amid quick growth demands. Companies largely do not ask about sustainable infrastructure, rather water and power infrastructure are primary company concerns.

Commissioner Tetreault encouraged CED to use the Commission as a resource and referenced an article by the Mayor and the Greater Phoenix Economic Council (GPEC) on competitive infrastructure and economic development and sustainability. He asked how Phoenix can invest in an economy that works for everyone. Johnson suggested strengthening support for small businesses, improving incubator spaces, and investing in infrastructure solutions.

Commissioner Porter asked how CED evaluates returns on investment. Johnson explained that beyond profit, projects are guided by city policy and public benefit. From an economic perspective, well-structured requests for proposals (RFPs) and the right partners can generate positive net returns. Porter inquired about assessment guidelines for the Rio Salado investment; Johnson noted that some returns on investment are long-term and serve primarily as a public good benefit.

Chair Barr closed by emphasizing Phoenix's vision to be the most sustainable desert city in the world. She requested that Johnson return with synthesized actions or recommendations, noting the need to strike a balance between business-friendly incentives and sustainability requirements.

5. Presentation from Dr. David Sailor – Heat and Large Load Users

Chair Barr introduced Dr. David Sailor, noting his research on the relationship between heat and data centers. Dr. Sailor studies how large energy users create extra heat in cities. This added warmth, called anthropogenic heat, comes from everyday energy use in urban areas.

This heat enters the environment in several ways, such as through air-based or evaporative cooling from buildings. The magnitude of anthropogenic heat varies by location and is expected to increase in dense urban areas, including around data centers. Dr. Sailor emphasized that data centers are often located close to neighborhoods, with equipment sometimes only 50–100 yards from residential structures.

Downwind thermal impacts depend on several factors, including emission temperature, vertical velocity, the use of latent versus sensible cooling, equipment placement and design geometry, wind speed and direction, atmospheric stratification, and turbulence.

To measure these impacts, the team used traverse measurement techniques. Electric vehicles (EVs) were used to carry instruments to avoid measurement interference from engine heat. Dr. Sailor's goal is to identify how operations or facility designs could be modified to reduce downwind warming effects. Dr. Sailor reaffirmed that urban heat modeling is not novel; the new component is data centers in the modeling.

He provided examples using models developed within the CityDigitalTwin (CDT) platform. These models track vehicle movement, temperature, wind patterns, and shifts in wind direction to illustrate thermal impacts coming from data centers. Areas of interest for this research include near parks, bodies of water, and neighborhoods close to data centers. The modeling shows a consistent downwind warming effect from data centers of about 1-2° Fahrenheit, but up to 5° Fahrenheit.

Dr. Sailor explained that this research is still in its early stages. The team is working to refine the anthropogenic heat model for data centers, validate simulations across different weather and wind conditions, and explore mitigation strategies for downwind warming.

Commissioner Porter noted that many data centers are transitioning to closed-loop energy systems, which still produce heat. She asked whether cooling methods influence anthropogenic heat contributions and whether heat from power-generating facilities should be a concern. Dr. Sailor responded that regardless of the cooling method, all heat must ultimately dissipate into the environment, including the heat generated by the cooling technology to function.

Commissioner Erickson added that liquid-based cooling is more efficient than air cooling, which is used in most data centers, and the technology continues to improve. Dr. Sailor reaffirmed that new technologies are more energy efficient but still generate heat which leaves through data center rooftops as sensible heat.

Commissioner Weaver asked how much additional research is needed before the team can produce formal recommendations for data centers. Commissioner Weaver also questioned whether trees play a role in reducing heat. Dr. Sailor said nature-based solutions can indeed help with heat mitigation, sharing an example of a data center located near a park and neighborhood where air temperatures were cooler after passing through the park. Chair Barr highlighted a broader question on the cumulative impact of anthropogenic heat in the Valley. She noted that the research team is seeking funding for further study and solution development.

6. Phoenix Climate Action Plan Update

Erin Beasley, Climate Manager within the Office of Environmental Programs, provided an update on the Climate Action Plan (CAP), last updated in 2021. The Office of Environmental Programs leads the plan, which will be refreshed with progress updates organized by goals and actions. Beasley noted major updates, including ambitious targets such as achieving net-zero emissions by 2050, a thorough review of energy and building sector strategies, and new content addressing biodiversity, innovation, and community feedback gathered during 2025 stakeholder workshops.

She explained that the CAP is guided by C40 and the greenhouse gas reduction protocols, which shape the plan's structure and reporting standards. In response to Barr's question about scope, Beasley clarified that the CAP covers both municipal operations and the broader community.

Carla De La Chapa added that the office continues to coordinate with CED and other departments, while Barr emphasized that the Commission stands ready to support and provide leverage where needed.

Beasley outlined the timeline for the updated plan including a public comment period and Council feedback in early Fall, and anticipated adoption in December. Sector-specific workshops are planned for 2027, followed by more detailed GHG inventory updates in 2028.

Barr closed by confirming the Commission's role and requested clarity on how they can best support the process, noting the need for sufficient time to review and provide feedback.

7. Announcements and Review of Future Agenda Items

The Commission will have a continued focus on GO Bond process. Bill Sandweg announced he will be resigning from the EQSC and will be on the ballot for the Maricopa County Community College District's Governing Board. He shared thanks and appreciation for the board.

8. Adjournment

The meeting lost quorum and was adjourned at 4:00 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Emma Goethe, Management Assistant II