

## Attachment A

### Phoenix City Council Public Safety and Justice (PSJ) Subcommittee Summary Minutes 04 February 2026

City Council Chambers  
200 W. Jefferson St.  
Phoenix, Arizona

#### Subcommittee Members Present

Councilman Kevin Robinson, Chair  
Councilman Jim Waring  
Councilwoman Betty Guardado – arrived at 11:02 a.m.  
Councilwoman Ann O'Brien

#### Subcommittee Members Absent

#### **CALL TO ORDER**

Chairman Robinson called the Public Safety and Justice Subcommittee (PSJ) to order at 10:03 a.m. with 3 members present.

#### **CALL TO THE PUBLIC**

None.

#### **MINUTES OF MEETINGS**

##### **1. Minutes of the Public Safety and Justice Subcommittee Meeting**

Councilwoman O'Brien made a motion to approve the minutes of the January 7, 2026, Public Safety and Justice Subcommittee meeting. Councilman Waring seconded the motion which passed unanimously, 3-0.

#### **INFORMATION AND DISCUSSION (ITEMS 2-5)**

##### **2. Fireworks Safety Task Force Update**

Assistant City Manager Lori Bays thanked the task force for its efforts in addressing illegal fireworks complaints raised by Council. Ms. Bays shared the interdepartmental team has worked within state law constraints to improve enforcement, ensure thorough inspections of vendors, and enhance communication with the community. She recognized Chief Alexander and the team for their leadership and collaboration, and an update on progress will be provided.

Assistant Fire Chief Justin Alexander thanked the team for the work they have done and outlined the presentation, which covered the task force's background, mission, objectives, and strategy. Mr. Alexander shared the task force was formed in response to

increased fireworks complaints and a rise in Police and Fire calls during major holidays. He emphasized its mission to protect public safety, reduce nuisances, and improve health by eliminating illegal aerial fireworks within city limits. Chief Alexander explained the taskforce applied the community risk reduction model, collecting and analyzing data to guide enforcement and planning. He shared the taskforce is committed to enforcing code provisions regulating the sale, possession, and use of fireworks while prioritizing public safety and highlighted great progress within the parameters of the State law to complete enforcements and ensure communication with the community to address concerns.

Assistant Fire Marshal Eric Williams noted the Phoenix Fire Code prohibits consumer fireworks and State law preempts and limits local jurisdictions from enforcing and permitting permit use during dates listed in the Arizona Fire Code. Assistant Marshal Williams emphasized as a result, Fire prevention only conducted inspections of sale sites whose quantities of fireworks required permitting in accordance with State law, which was a small percentage. He shared, starting for the fourth of July and New Years 2025, Fire staff inspected all permitted, identified, and potential firework sites to help validate that only legal permissible consumer fireworks are being sold and done so safely in the community. He highlighted this initiative resulted in more than 600 inspections last year which led to encounters of a few locations where non-permissible fireworks were identified. Mr. Williams shared postseason inspections conducted after the holiday will help verify if fireworks are removed from businesses and tents in the community once the State law dates expire.

Deputy Communications Director Ashley Patton shared the Communications Office created a coordinated, multimedia, multiplatform, education campaign titled Celebrate Safely to ensure the community is aware of all of the work. Ms. Patton emphasized the goal is to raise awareness and reduce fire related incidents. She highlighted collaboration efforts through engagement with several stakeholders including the Mayor, Council, Neighborhood Services Department, Public Works Department, Communications Office, and external partners such as ValleyWise Health. She also shared the Communications Office also worked with Maricopa Association of Government (MAG) on the impact to air quality and public health. She highlighted the team's community engagement Ask Me Anything approach through Reddit which garnered 37,000 views and demonstrates Phoenix's leadership in digital engagement.

Ms. Patton shared a sampling of the campaign and highlighted the Light Up the Sky in District 5 event, supported by Councilwoman Guardado. Ms. Patton also highlighted the After Dark in the Park in District 1 which won the Blue Sky Award from Valley Metro and congratulated Councilwoman O'Brien. She then shared Celebrate Safely Campaign examples.

Lieutenant Brian Rimsza discussed the Police Department's support of the City's Firework Safety Task Force. Lieutenant Rimsza stated the fireworks educational campaign began in June 2025 and the Police Department focused on community

engagement, Community Connect and dedicated staffing. He explained the Community Connect software allows staff to communicate with the community and provided callers with a link to the fireworks educational platform. Lieutenant Rimsza explained two officers in each precinct were assigned to respond to fireworks calls and additional training provided to all officers explaining the educational campaign. Lieutenant Rimsza shared community engagement began weeks prior to the 4th of July and New Years holidays and involved the use of hotspot maps from previous years to contact residents and attend events across all seven precincts. He added leading up to the fourth of July, there were approximately 1,500 contacts, and nearly 3,000 contacts before New Years.

Lieutenant Rimsza emphasized fireworks calls for service increased significantly in 2025 due to a dedicated radio code and education efforts, correcting prior underreporting when calls were grouped under city ordinance offenses. He added for New Years, efforts focused on fireworks and celebratory gunfire, emphasizing Shannon's Law, a Class 6 felony named after Shannon Smith, who was killed by a stray bullet in 1999. He noted during the New Years holiday, two arrests were made for celebratory gunfire, with additional cases under investigation. Lieutenant Rimsza concluded fireworks calls have risen over the past four years due to education and tracking improvements, while celebratory gunfire calls remain higher during New Years, with New Years Eve being the most active date for gunfire in the city.

Chief Alexander stated that categories of calls were analyzed to measure the impact of efforts on the Phoenix Fire Department's emergency response during the 4th of July and New Year's holidays. Chief Alexander highlighted that on the 4th of July last year, the Phoenix Fire Investigation staff were dispatched to five fire incidents between 10 p.m. and midnight: three house fires and two debris fires. He explained two incidents identified fireworks as the ignition source, while others had multiple potential sources, including fireworks. Chief Alexander emphasized in 2024, nuisance fire activity on the 4th of July decreased by approximately 38 percent, and in 2025, by another 18 percent, totaling a 49 percent reduction over two years. He noted that calls for service during the past two New Year's holidays decreased by 44 percent. Chief Alexander shared moving forward, the task force will continue planning fireworks education and risk reduction initiatives, strengthen regional partnerships, and collaborate with MAG to address health and air quality impacts of fireworks. He emphasized joint messaging will continue through the Fireworks or Breathtaking campaign, and the legal team is reviewing potential City code amendments to align with State law and enhance enforcement.

Councilman Waring asked what does State law allow regarding fireworks and can you use them as long as they stay on the ground.

Chief Alexander replied consumer fireworks are legal by State law and permissible by the City.

Councilman Waring stated it sounds like we are accurately saying we could send officers out, but there's a good chance this is going to be a legal activity during New Years, Christmas, and fourth of July cause of State law.

Chief Alexander replied that is correct, that is legally permissible during those times and the Fire Department is looking for ways to leverage enforcement and our inspections. Mr. Alexander stated the health messaging is especially promising, and folks understand the repercussions of even ground-based fireworks, the team hopes the community will respond and lessen their use.

Councilman Waring expressed skepticism about focusing on air quality messaging for individuals using fireworks and suggested that tougher penalties and increased officer presence might be more effective. Councilman Waring then emphasized most people likely know celebratory gunfire is illegal and questioned whether awareness campaigns have significant impact. He then asked if there were a couple hundred incidents but only a handful of prosecutions.

Lieutenant Rimsza stated yes, that is true, there were two arrests.

Councilman Waring asked was the 49 percent reduction and the 44 percent reduction related to fireworks incidents only, or to all fires during those time periods.

Chief Alexander replied those are categorized as fires likely to be caused by fireworks.

Councilman Waring stated concerns about roof fires caused by fireworks are valid and echoed by residents who contact him each year, but enforcement is limited by State law and legal fireworks cannot be prosecuted. Councilman Waring asked if authorities are ever able to identify and hold individuals accountable in cases where a firework sets a roof on fire.

Lieutenant Rimsza replied every significant fire is investigated by the Phoenix Fire Investigation Task Force and in July 2025, two fires were definitively classified as intentionally caused by fireworks.

Councilman Waring asked if the Task Force caught the actual person who caused the fire and were they prosecuted for burning down someone's house.

Chief Alexander replied without discussing specific investigations, he could confirm that in one case, charges were pressed against an individual.

Councilman Waring stated increasing penalties for offenders might be more effective than relying on awareness campaigns, noting past success with tougher DUI penalties. Councilman Waring expressed skepticism about the impact of health messaging and videos, stating that stronger deterrence and focused messaging on legal consequences could be more effective.

Ms. Bays added one of the next steps is to present potential code amendments to strengthen enforcement. She explained the recommendations will include increasing penalties to emphasize the seriousness of violations and consequences. She stated the proposals will be briefed to the Council, discussed in this subcommittee, and then brought forward for full Council approval.

Councilman Waring stated current efforts such as community meetings do not reach everyone and suggested leveraging HOA's and other groups to amplify messaging. He emphasized penalties for serious incidents such as house fires caused by fireworks should be highlighted in advertising.

Councilwoman O'Brien expressed her appreciation for the inspections of consumer fireworks vendors and tents. She asked how many fireworks were confiscated, how many vendors were non-compliant, and what criteria determined whether fireworks were confiscated versus returned to distributors.

Assistant Marshal Williams replied no fireworks were confiscated last year and approximately six to twelve retail locations were found with non-permissible fireworks, typically due to shipments from national distributors that included products legal in other states but not in Arizona. He added the items were removed from sales, isolated, and returned to the distributor and confiscation only occurs when fireworks are sold illegally by individuals or convenience stores without a legal distributor to return them to.

Councilwoman O'Brien shared her appreciation for retailers not being punished for distributor mistakes but emphasized retailers have an obligation to know what is permissible to sell in Arizona. She asked if retailers who repeatedly have non-permissible fireworks are being tracked and how will repeat violations be handled.

Assistant Marshal Williams replied it is being tracked and the Fire Department has advised the retailers, corporate offices and distributors if there are repeated violations the department will move into a confiscation phase.

Councilwoman O'Brien clarified her understanding that retailers get one chance before stricter action is taken and asked after the first violation, if the second time results in confiscation, what additional penalties apply beyond taking the product.

Assistant Marshal Williams answered under the Fire Code, selling illegal fireworks results in either a civil citation or a Class 1 misdemeanor and penalties include confiscation and fines ranging from 500 dollars to 2,500 dollars. Mr. Williams added if prosecuted criminally, penalties can include up to six months in jail. He explained citations are issued to the responsible party, which can be challenging for large corporations but straightforward for individuals or small stores.

Councilwoman O'Brien stated she anticipates a briefing on the recommended changes to the ordinances. She emphasized the need to review penalties for businesses while continuing to lead with education and outreach and noted illegal fireworks disrupt

neighborhoods, traumatize pets, and impact air quality despite progress shown by a 50 percent reduction in fireworks-related calls on the fourth of July and 44 percent at New Years. Councilwoman O'Brien expressed appreciation for the Fireworks Safety Task Force and its collaborative efforts with city departments and MAG. She added moving forward, enforcement should include penalties for those who refuse to follow the rules, alongside education and alternatives. Councilwoman O'Brien urged continued efforts to make holidays safer, improve air quality, and ensure peaceful neighborhoods.

Chairman Robinson thanked the presenters and Fireworks Safety Task Force.

#### **4. City of Phoenix 2025 Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team Report- Citywide**

Human Services Department (HSD) Director Jacqueline Edwards stated she will be reviewing the definition of domestic violence, national and city statistics, an overview of the Phoenix Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team (DVFRT), and updates on recommendations from the January 2025 report. She added that case information and recommendations from the 2025 DVFRT report would also be shared.

Ms. Edwards emphasized the importance of starting with a clear definition: domestic violence is a pattern of abuse used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner. She noted that this includes physical, sexual, emotional, economic, psychological, and technological abuse or threats. She highlighted that over ten million adults experience domestic violence annually, with 41 percent of women and 26 percent of men affected in their lifetime. She shared that in 2024, Phoenix Police Department recorded 33,048 domestic violence calls for service and 23,889 incident reports, with assaults being the most reported type. She added that 35 cases were classified as stalking, which is relevant to this year's case. Ms. Edwards noted that the most common abuser-victim relationship in Phoenix was among unmarried persons, and physical force was the most used weapon. She shared that the Phoenix Family Advocacy Center assisted 4,822 children, while the Human Services Department served nearly 4,000 adults and provided over 15,600 individualized services, including protection orders and shelter connections. Additionally, 785 medical referrals were made to Honor Health.

She explained that the DVFRT, created in 2006, examines domestic violence fatalities and near fatalities to improve system responses with a team of city staff and external representatives from criminal justice, advocacy, health care, and academia. She stated the team is chaired by HSD Assistant Director Tracee Hall and Police Commander Steve Martos. Ms. Edwards highlighted five recommendations from the 2024 case review and provided updates including: updated protocols requiring Police and Fire to coordinate on domestic violence calls, medical follow up with documentation from Honor Health, and added strangulation category to the Police Department's records system, a new case management system, new policies for client engagement and full strangulation training by June 2026.

Human Services Department Assistant Director Tracee Hall stated the case requirements for Phoenix DVFRT review include that the case must involve a fatality or near fatality occurring in Phoenix and be fully adjudicated by the court system. She shared that this year's case involved a heterosexual married couple with three children who lived together but had contemplated divorce. She explained the wife was seeing another man, and the husband used a geo-tracking system to stalk her location. Ms. Hall noted in May 2022, the husband messaged his wife accusing her of being with her boyfriend and threatened to post a suggestive photo on social media to shame her. She added the wife threatened to call the police and stayed away from home for several days in response. Ms. Hall stated when the wife returned, the husband had left with his belongings and a gun and later that month he picked up the children, took them to his mother's house, and then drove to the boyfriend's home. She explained after an unanswered call to his wife, the husband entered the home, fatally shot the boyfriend, and threatened the wife before leaving to then later contact family to see the children and turn himself in. Ms. Hall emphasized that while less common, assaults and fatalities targeting new romantic partners of domestic violence victims occur and represent another tragic outcome. She noted that due to the complexity of this case, the committee found it challenging to identify multiple systemic enhancement recommendations. She added that the recommendations in the 2025 report are broad approaches to education, prevention, and response.

Police Commander Steve Martos stated DVFRT developed three key recommendations from the 2025 case assessment. Commander Martos emphasized the need to research domestic violence education and prevention programs, noting the growing influence of technology and social media on relationships, particularly among youth. He explained that the team recommends creating a subcommittee to explore community-based initiatives focused on healthy relationships, boundaries, and technology use, as well as developing a resource library to share widely with community members and partners.

Commander Martos highlighted the importance of expanding domestic violence education and awareness campaigns and noted in this case, there were multiple missed opportunities for intervention and support. He shared the team suggests reviewing and enhancing existing city training materials, developing a domestic violence training module for all city employees, potentially on an annual basis, and exploring external partnerships to increase awareness and improve prevention efforts. Commander Martos provided the third recommendation which is researching options to amend sentencing statutes to include a domestic violence enhancement. He emphasized this would involve exploring legislative changes to add an additional two to five years to sentences for homicide convictions where domestic violence elements are proven.

Councilman Waring expressed concern about the recommendation to increase sentencing by two to five years for homicide convictions involving domestic violence. He emphasized it does not prevent fatalities and questioned why the focus isn't on earlier intervention. Councilman Waring noted tougher penalties for precursor crimes might

have greater impact and stressed the importance of preemptive measures to stop escalation before homicide occurs.

Ms. Edwards acknowledged Councilman Waring's concern and stated the team can include research on potential legislative changes earlier on in the process to have penalties that prevent homicides from occurring.

Councilman Waring questioned whether tougher penalties for serious prior offenses such as strangulation or threatening with a weapon, could prevent tragedies. He also highlighted the impact on children who witness abuse, noting that exposure to violence at home can lead to abusive behavior later in life.

Commander Martos agreed with Councilman Waring's and noted that aggravated domestic violence charges already include enhanced penalties similar to DUI laws after repeat offenses. He added that his bureau is discussing what types of crimes, based on case data or anecdotal evidence, tend to escalate into more violent acts.

Councilman Waring asked if the aggravated domestic violence charge imposes harsher penalties starting with the second offense and noted he may have misunderstood the earlier statement and wanted confirmation.

Commander Martos replied he was trying to imply it works similar to a DUI conviction.

Councilman Waring stated while DUI laws impose mandatory penalties even for first offenses, domestic violence should be treated with even greater severity. He questioned whether a zero-tolerance approach, with immediate consequences such as mandatory jail time for the first offense, would be more effective than waiting for repeat offenses. Councilman Waring emphasized domestic violence is different than DUI and suggested stronger initial penalties to send a clear message and prevent escalation. He asked if an individual has to serve 24 hours after being convicted with a DUI.

Commander Martos replied that is correct.

Councilman Waring asked if the team can revisit first-time convictions to prevent escalation.

Commander Martos replied the team can look into that.

Commander Martos stated that the third recommendation is to research options for amending statutes to include a domestic violence sentencing enhancement, as previously discussed. He then presented the fourth and final 2025 recommendation: to share the Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team's annual report with local government agencies, including the City of Phoenix and external partners, to promote collaboration and awareness.

Ms. Hall stated in addition to the DVFRT recommendations, the Human Services Department proposes three actions: provide the next review team with an overview of the City's domestic violence services and programs, present the DVFRT report to key city commissions and task forces, and explore creating a Family Advocacy Center resource guide. She added next steps include requesting the City Manager to appoint members for the 2026 DVFRT, beginning the case review process, conducting interviews, and making recommendations. Ms. Hall noted that the 2025 recommendations presented today will also be included in the 2026 report.

Ms. Edwards thanked the members of DVFRT for their work and expertise.

Chairman Robinson asked the members to stand and acknowledged them.

Councilwoman Guardado thanked the team for the presentation and Councilman Waring for his leadership on the matter. She questioned if the information will be provided in Spanish as the team conducts outreach.

Ms. Edwards replied awareness campaigns are done in English and Spanish.

Councilwoman Guardado asked how closely the team is working with the school districts to reach high school students.

Ms. Edwards answered the team works with school districts to provide information at resource fairs in both the Paint Phoenix Purple and Teen Dating Violence campaigns which occur in February.

Councilwoman Guardado thanked the team for their hard work and shared she is looking forward to hearing more about the Family Advocacy Center.

Councilman Waring noted this marks approximately 20 years of DVFRT reports, following legislation passed in 2005 and implemented in 2006. He stated the goal was to reduce fatalities by learning from experience and asked whether data exists to show progress toward that goal. He compared this to DUI tracking, where annual data is monitored, and requested similar information for domestic violence fatalities.

Councilman Waring then asked whether the annual DVFRT reports have been used effectively over the past 20 years to reduce domestic violence incidents and fatalities.

Ms. Edwards answered last year's recommendations on strangulation were not being tracked and there were points in the process that were not previously tracked but are now tracked. She noted protocols have been updated so strangulation incidents are now documented at multiple points; from police, fire, and CRT response through victim services. Ms. Edwards explained this ensures victims and families receive tailored support, including medical care from partners like Honor Health and assistance from Human Services staff. Ms. Edwards emphasized that this demonstrates how the review process can lead to meaningful system changes.

Commander Martos reported in 2024, there were 19 domestic violence-related homicides. He stated official numbers for 2025 are still pending, but preliminary data suggests a decrease in reported domestic violence cases compared to 2024. Commander Martos noted during the pandemic, domestic violence homicides were significantly higher and while it is difficult to measure direct impact, he expressed hope that the team's efforts have contributed to prevention and support for victims.

Councilman Waring asked Commander Martos to refresh his memory on how many total homicides in 2024.

Commander Martos replied in 2024 there was about 146.

Councilman Waring stressed the importance of early intervention before escalation, suggesting measurable goals such as cutting domestic violence fatalities in half over time. Councilman Waring acknowledged achieving zero fatalities may be unrealistic but stated that reducing the number significantly would be an achievable goal with sustained effort.

Chairman Robinson referred to slide six and asked if the individuals who were victimized by an ex-boyfriend or ex-girlfriend were high schoolers or teenagers.

Commander Martos stated he does not have that information readily available but he can go retrieve that information.

Chairman Robinson suggested maybe there needs to be a more concerted effort on the school's part to make better awareness of domestic violence.

Chairman Robinson referred to slide 17 which shares the case and asked if the Police Department had been to the address or spoke to the couple before the incident became fatal.

Ms. Hall replied to her recollection there had been no police interaction or priors, but the perpetrator had received counselling through the military and recovery for alcoholism. She added the couple had gone to therapy once, but the perpetrator felt the therapist was favoring the wife because she is a female. Ms. Hall acknowledged there were language barriers in finding alternative therapists.

Chairman Robinson referred to slide 16 and asked for clarification on what is considered near fatal and if it requires hospitalization.

Commander Martos explained charging decisions often influence case outcomes and noted while some offenders may intend for a situation to end in homicide, it is often easier to charge aggravated assault rather than attempted homicide because the legal threshold for aggravated assault is lower. He stated charging practices can impact how cases are classified and addressed.

Councilwoman O'Brien shared her appreciation of the team working with the schools to get the information out and encouraged the team to find creative ways to reach young people through partnerships with youth organizations, social media, and community events rather than relying solely on schools due to heavy workload. She shared her experience of dating an abuser in college and explained that she only recognized the abuse after seeing a flyer in a doctor's office. Councilwoman O'Brien stressed the need for broader outreach and education.

Chairman Robinson thanked the team for their hard work.

### **3. Police HEAT Unit Overview**

Police Chief Matthew Giordano thanked the chairman and subcommittee members and stated the team will highlight the work of the Human Exploitation and Trafficking (HEAT) squad. He shared he was once part of an undercover vice team in the Organized Crime Bureau and comparing those investigations to what we're doing today, the progress and impact we've made across the city is truly impressive.

Commander Julie Egea highlighted the HEAT squad investigates and disrupts trafficking and related exploitation, protects victims, and enforces laws through proactive operations, community engagement, and interagency collaboration. She explained the unit is staffed with two sergeants, nine detectives, and three civilians: an analyst, a civilian investigator, and a liquor liaison. Commander Egea emphasized the squad's core functions which include: targeting human and sex traffickers, investigating child and adult sex trafficking, conducting undercover operations, enforcing prostitution and sexually oriented business laws, and reducing demand through commercial sex buyer enforcement. She added the unit also rescues victims and connects them to services.

Commander Egea highlighted 2025 results along the 27 Avenue corridor which includes 27 traffickers arrested, 52 juveniles recovered, 394 arrests from operations, 21 customer apprehension operations resulting in 123 arrests, and 9 hotel outreach operations contacting 79 individuals who were offered services. She announced the partnership with Grand Canyon University (GCU) to integrate GCU technology with the Cactus Park Real-Time Crime Center and conduct joint prostitution operations. She shared the partnership has increased enforcement near campus and the 27 Avenue/Indian School corridor.

Police Lieutenant Chris Parese stated a lot of the work done over the last couple of years involves numerous operations and significant data. He emphasized on major case the Royal Inn Hotel investigation, which was a collaborative effort between the FBI and the Heat Unit. Lieutenant Parese explained that his team handled much of the undercover work, ultimately leading to the shutdown of the hotel, which had essentially operated as a brothel. He noted that many neighborhood complaints originated from Palver Street, and since the operation, visible activity in that area has significantly decreased, though some activity may have shifted elsewhere.

Lieutenant Parese shared the unit it seized 1.2 million dollars and 4.5 million dollars in commercial and residential property through collective surveillance, undercover deals, and numerous arrests. He clarified the individuals involved no longer own these properties and announced that future plans include the demolition of the hotel.

Ms. Edwards shared the Human Services Department's Victim Services Division provides trauma-informed support to individuals who have been victims of human trafficking including assistance with crisis intervention, safety planning, victim's rights, navigation through law enforcement and court systems, emergency shelter and housing, orders of protection, and addressing basic needs disrupted by victimization. She recalled in 2025, HSD served nearly 300 clients who were victims of human trafficking, including prostituted individuals with a total of 1,485 unique services provided to the clients. Ms. Edwards added HSD's mobile victim advocate, focused on human trafficking, partnered with the Phoenix Police Department on 40 separate occasions, including street enforcement and hotel outreach, to connect victims of trafficking and prostitution to essential services. She shared staff also visited the county's intake, transfer, and release facility at the county jail 10 times throughout 2025 to engage victims arrested during street operations the previous night.

Ms. Edwards announced HSD leads the City's efforts to raise awareness about human trafficking among both the community and city staff which is led and chaired by Councilman Waring through the Human Trafficking Task Force. She also announced the City earned the Cities Empowered Against Sexual Exploitation (CEASE) designation in February 2025 from the Arizona Anti-Human Trafficking Network followed by training completed by over 90 percent of City staff.

Chairman Robinson asked Grand Canyon University (GCU) Police Chief Mark Heimall to share what he has been seeing in his area and how the partnership has been going.

Chief Heimall stated Lieutenant Parese and his team have been exceptional in their service, collaboration, and intelligence sharing. He acknowledged the team has also welcomed innovative ideas on potential solutions to address the issue.

Councilman Waring acknowledged Lieutenant Parese has done a fantastic job Councilman Waring stated that people convicted of these crimes deserve their punishments and expressed that he was very glad sentences tend to be heightened. He praised the dedication and care of the unit's members, noting that they clearly understand the importance of their work and approach it with a robustness he personally appreciates. He concluded by thanking them for their efforts.

Councilwoman Guardado thanked the team for their hard work and thanked Senator Flavio Bravo for his hard work at the State level. She asked Chief Giordano if staff is experiencing backlogs, delayed timelines, or difficulty meeting expectations for constraints.

Chief Giordano replied staffing issues and resource allocation remain ongoing challenges. He stated that timelines could always be adjusted with more manpower. He reflected on his own time working in the unit, noting it was completely different, and suggested that there are things that can be done differently now. He explained that they had a brief conversation last week and that the lieutenant has creative ideas, such as temporarily moving staff from patrol for short stints, both to learn the issues and techniques and to act as a force multiplier. Chief Giordano confirmed that the unit struggles with caseload and workload and responded to the question about staffing needs by stating that the team believes a fully staffed unit would include one sergeant and eight detectives for street investigations, plus one sergeant and eight detectives for background and intel work; about 16 personnel with two sergeants.

Councilwoman Guardado asked what are the consequences of the unit being stretched too thin due to case outcomes, response times, staff burnout, or retention.

Chief Giordano replied stated that the biggest hindrance for the unit is the inability to help as many victims as they could if they were fully staffed and had more personnel. He acknowledged that, despite this limitation, the team does a phenomenal job assisting members of the community but emphasized the desire to do more.

Councilwoman Guardado asked if there are tests and cases being delayed or deprioritized due to limited staffing.

Chief Matthew Giordano stated, as with anything involving finite resources, priorities must be set. He explained that the team focuses on the most severe cases and places those at the top of the list.

Councilwoman Guardado asked if staff compared HEAT unit staffing levels to peer cities.

Chief Giordano stated staff has not looked at peer staffing models around the country but shared this is something staff can do.

Councilwoman Guardado requested those staffing models be looked into and discussed at the next briefing.

Councilwoman Guardado asked what does a well-resourced unit typically look like for a city of Phoenix's size and demand.

Chief Giordano replied that would be a part of the same research done on the previous question.

Councilwoman Guardado asked Lieutenant Parese how long the Royal Inn investigation took from beginning to end.

Lieutenant Parese replied about two years.

Councilwoman Guardado asked if it would have taken less time if the department had more resources.

Lieutenant Parese answered it would not have taken less time due to the nature of the investigation.

Councilwoman Guardado stated she supports the mission of the HEAT Unit and acknowledged the significant workload the unit has taken on. Councilwoman Guardado expressed gratitude to GCU for partnering with the City and acknowledged the many efforts from the Human Services Department, as well as support from the State. She requested another HEAT update that includes staffing and budget recommendations to increase levels and implement relevant best practices. She noted that these improvements should provide clear timelines for achieving objectives.

Chairman Robinson thanked the unit for their hard work.

## **5. Community Assistance Program (CAP) Expansion Implementation Report**

Community Assistance Program Administrator DC Ernst presented the first class of 2026, noting that the slide displayed the current group. She stated that another recruitment closed on February 2, with over 170 applications submitted, and expressed anticipation in reviewing those applications as the program works toward achieving 10 crisis response teams and nine behavioral health teams. Ms. Ernst reported that the program has reached its goal of nine behavioral health units in service, available 24/7 and dispatched through the 911 system. She emphasized ongoing collaboration with Alexandra Edwards from Police Communications to ensure proper call transfers.

Alexandra Edwards shared on December 15, 2025, 911 operators began asking a new triage question: “Do you need police, fire, or behavioral health?” She explained that the goal is to identify at the start of the call whether the caller needs police, fire, behavioral health services, or a combination of those. Ms. Edwards noted that this additional question provides more insight into what is occurring and helps operators triage calls to ensure the right services are dispatched from the beginning. She reported that since implementing the new question, there has been a significant increase in calls directed to behavioral health units. Comparing the first eight months of 2024 to the same period in 2025, there was a 98 percent increase in call volume. She highlighted that the 701 calls transferred in December 2025 represent the highest number recorded since the call transfer procedures were established. This milestone demonstrates the continued growth and utilization of the system and the increasing demand for coordinated behavioral health response. Ms. Edwards concluded by noting the effectiveness of the assessment process and the impact of adding the additional question, as well as the ongoing partnership between Phoenix PD 911, the behavioral health team, and fire services.

Ms. Ernst presented that not only has there been an increase in call volume transferred to behavioral health units, but actual calls for service have also risen, reaching a

milestone of over 1,000 calls in one month. She reported that when comparing total calls in 2024 to 2025, there was a 96 percent increase in calls for behavioral health units. Ms. Ernst explained that December's data shows whether responses were handled as a singular unit or in a co-response model, noting that 79 percent of calls were responded to as a singular unit. She added that crisis response units are still hiring, currently at 60 percent of the goal of 10 units. However, due to reallocation of shifts in January 2026, the program now provides 24/7 coverage for crisis response units citywide. She noted that call volumes for crisis response teams have remained consistent over the past three years, with December recording 481 calls for service. Despite the increase in behavioral health calls, average response times have remained under 25 minutes, with behavioral health units responding in 20 minutes in December. She highlighted a map illustrating current and future locations.

Councilwoman O'Brien stated that she wanted to thank everyone for their hard work and congratulated them on the successes they have achieved and will continue to achieve. She acknowledged the number of calls being handled is remarkable. Councilwoman O'Brien requested that staff keep an eye on call volume and ensure the council is alerted about the impact on staff and response times, emphasizing the importance of taking care of employees while serving citizens.

Chairman Robinson asked Ms. Edwards when operators ask if a caller needs police, fire, or behavioral health, what responses are typically received. Chairman Robinson inquired if she could share what callers are telling operators and how those responses guide the decision-making process for dispatching services.

Ms. Edwards explained that some members of the community understand what the term behavioral health means and can answer the question appropriately, indicating the call is tied to a behavioral health situation. She noted that others are unsure of the term, emphasizing that continuing education around behavioral health is important for everyone. Ms. Edwards clarified that if callers do not answer the question or are unsure, operators use a set of four additional questions during the call to determine whether it needs to be transferred to behavioral health or has a behavioral health component.

Chairman Robinson thanked the team for the presentation.

### **INFORMATION ONLY (ITEMS 6-7 varies)**

#### **6. Phoenix Fire Department Staffing and Response Time Report**

Information only. No Councilmember requested additional information.

#### **7. Phoenix Police Department Recruitment, Hiring, and Attrition Update**

Information only. No Councilmember requested additional information.

### **CALL TO THE PUBLIC**

Elizabeth Venable stated that there is a need to see services fully integrated into law enforcement rather than siloed. She observed that there has been more of a one-size-fits-all approach but emphasized that better outcomes occur when different approaches are combined. Ms. Venable reiterated the importance of keeping shelters open and investing more into those services and public safety.

Dorian Vrenden stated that police should not escort or assist Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), as doing so decreases the promised and projected coverage of city assistance that officers are jurisdictionally obligated to provide. He explained that less coverage results in either broken promises to the community or overextension of officers and budgets not approved by that community. Mr. Vrenden highlighted the recent purchase of the Surprise Warehouse by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) for 70 million in cash, noting that this demonstrates DHS has its own budget and does not need local officer assistance.

### **FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS**

Councilwoman O'Brien stated that in May, when the school resource officer agreements come forward relative to the grant application, she would like the presentation to include how the city will handle rehiring retired officers to help fill SRO positions. She noted that there was recently a conference related to school safety where all districts were encouraged to request SROs. Councilwoman O'Brien emphasized the need to ensure the city is prepared to handle these requests as best as possible, as she anticipates they will significantly increase.

Ms. Bays replied, staff are planning to include this information.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

Chairman Robinson adjourned the meeting at 12:23 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Taniya Williams  
Management Fellow