

**Phoenix City Council  
Economic Development and the Arts (EDA) Subcommittee  
Summary Minutes  
Wednesday, December 10, 2025**

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

**Subcommittee Members Present**

Vice Mayor Ann O'Brien, Chair  
Councilwoman Debra Stark  
Councilman Kevin Robinson  
Councilwoman Laura Pastor

**Subcommittee Members Absent**

**CALL TO ORDER**

Vice Mayor O'Brien called the Economic Development and the Arts Subcommittee to order at 10:03 a.m. with Councilwoman Debra Stark, Councilman Kevin Robinson, and Councilwoman Laura Pastor present.

**CALL TO THE PUBLIC**

Ginnie Ann Sumner expressed appreciation for Council members' consideration in the previous month regarding the update on the refurbishing of public art and the old Crosscut Canal Park, spanning from McDowell to Thomas Roads. Ms. Sumner also noted anticipation for future updates on refurbishing of public art.

**MINUTES OF MEETINGS**

**1. Minutes of the Economic Development and the Arts Subcommittee Meeting**

Councilwoman Stark made a motion to approve the minutes of the November 12, 2025, Economic Development and the Arts Subcommittee meeting. Councilwoman Pastor seconded the motion which passed unanimously, 4-0.

**INFORMATION AND DISCUSSION**

**2. Convention Market Industry Update**

Phoenix Convention Center Director Jerry Harper and Visit Phoenix President and CEO Ron Price presented on the item.

Councilwoman Stark stated that roughly eight years ago, Houston had built a convention center. She asked staff if Houston was already constructing another convention center so soon.

Mr. Price stated Houston was already planning the next phase of its convention center development, which included a 15-to-25-year vision involving lowering Highway 59 near the convention center and creating a deck park to allow further expansion.

Vice Mayor O'Brien spoke about feedback she received from attendees of Semicon West, who stated some hotels were too far away from the convention center. She mentioned other destinations often have connected hotels and asked whether Phoenix had similar accommodations.

Mr. Price shared Phoenix does not have a hotel directly connected to the convention center.

Vice Mayor O'Brien inquired whether the lack of a hotel connected to the convention center has contributed to lost business.

Director Harper noted meeting planners prefer hotels connected to convention centers for convenience. He also spoke about a recent study which recommended adding downtown hotel rooms, creating an entertainment district, and expanding the convention center within six to ten years. The proposed plan included an 800 to 1,200-room hotel connected to a potential new south convention center building.

Vice Mayor O'Brien asked how many additional hotel rooms would be needed to help attract business being lost.

Mr. Price said the study recommended an 800 to 1,200-room hotel, but noted more rooms are needed due to rising demand and high convention center occupancy.

Councilman Robinson asked Mr. Price about discrepancies in square footage and costs between competitive destinations, such as Los Angeles and New Orleans, and whether specific features or design elements accounted for the differences.

Mr. Price explained the cost discrepancies between cities were due to the type of space being added. New Orleans added more exposition space, which was less expensive than finished ballroom space and multi-level facilities like those in Los Angeles.

Councilman Robinson explained the American Medical Association expressed interest in hosting future events in Phoenix but cited insufficient space near the convention center as a challenge. He asked if there was progress in securing a major hotel partner downtown and whether discussions were underway with larger hotel chains to increase presence in the City.

Mr. Price noted major hotel brands and developers are highly interested in investing in this project.

Councilwoman Stark asked about how hotel coordination was managed when multiple conferences occur simultaneously.

Mr. Price noted the team at Visit Phoenix worked daily to meet the high demand for the convention center and City hotels. Additionally, because Phoenix was an attractive destination, Visit Phoenix focused on filling the convention center and bringing in new conventions, while hotels aimed to do the same. The team collaborated with hotels regularly to identify open windows of availability and target large events. However, they often had to pull room blocks from multiple hotels to meet the required number of rooms. Mr. Price highlighted the ongoing need for more convention-caliber hotel rooms downtown.

Councilwoman Pastor asked which hotels and competitive destinations were considered top tier.

Mr. Price noted Phoenix competes with major convention destinations such as Houston, Dallas, San Antonio, Austin, Seattle, Los Angeles, New Orleans, Denver, Las Vegas, Orlando, and Nashville. He explained Las Vegas was unique due to its size and capacity, while Nashville was emerging as a strong competitor. Overall, he noted Phoenix competes most closely with cities of similar size and offerings.

Councilwoman Pastor also shared her desire to integrate a hotel with the convention center to remain competitive and maximize economic impact. Councilwoman Pastor asked what steps were required for Council to move the expansion of the convention center forward.

Director Harper stated the presentation was aimed at providing an overview of the convention center's status and industry position. He emphasized the City was in a unique position to advance further and offered to return with additional information or act on recommendations from the council.

Councilwoman Pastor asked whether Phoenix was currently considered a top tier convention destination.

Mr. Price confirmed Phoenix was now a top-tier convention destination, driven by City investments and major events like Semicon and medical conferences. He emphasized this was the right time to plan for future expansion and a connected hotel to maintain competitiveness.

Councilwoman Pastor asked Mr. Price about the potential consequences of not proceeding with the convention center expansion.

Mr. Price responded that failing to move forward with an expansion would allow other cities to surpass Phoenix.

Councilwoman Pastor noted Phoenix's growth as an international City attracting conventions and stressed the need for future action to expand the Convention Center.

Vice Mayor O'Brien proposed having a follow-up discussion in the spring to determine next steps for the Convention Center.

Mr. Price confirmed March 2026 would be an appropriate time to return for a follow-up discussion on the convention center expansion.

Vice Mayor O'Brien welcomed students from North High School, thanked them for attending the Subcommittee meeting, and noted several had signed up to speak on the item.

Derrik Amador asked what single action the City could take to boost convention attendance.

Director Harper stated the most impactful action would be to add more hotel rooms downtown.

Lucas Van asked about the City's plan to stay competitive with other convention centers, noting that strategies beyond hotels might be needed to attract more conventions.

Mr. Price explained beyond hotels, the City focuses on attractions, such as restaurants, museums, and unique experiences to encourage visitors to extend their stay.

Angelina Reyes expressed neutrality on the convention center expansion and questioned how the project would benefit residents.

Director Harper explained attracting visitors generates tax revenue, which funds essential City services such as parks, libraries, public safety, and infrastructure. He emphasized increased tourism strengthens the City's general fund, benefiting residents directly.

Marcos Hernandez asked how many jobs new hotels create.

Mr. Price explained how larger hotels create significant employment during construction and operations, with some properties employing hundreds of full-time staff. He noted the halo effect, where hotel development stimulates demand for surrounding businesses such as restaurants and florists, further boosting the local economy.

David Lee asked if the City planned to build more hotels and whether this decision was based on data, demand, or other factors.

Director Harper explained the need for additional hotels was identified in a 2019 study, later updated in 2022 after the pandemic. He noted insufficient hotel rooms near the

convention center forces attendees to book outside walking distance, putting Phoenix at a competitive disadvantage. Adding hotels would close this gap and make the City more attractive to meeting planners.

Stephanie Gonzales asked if there were any downtown properties that could be redeveloped into hotels to help address the shortage of rooms.

Director Harper noted downtown has limited vacant land but some underutilized sites, like a parking garage and the south building block, could be redeveloped for hotels and convention center growth.

Andrea Quintana asked whether a proposed hotel connected to the convention center would require purchasing new land or using underutilized property previously discussed.

Director Harper confirmed the hotel would use existing underutilized land and be physically connected to the new south building.

Victor Mendieta asked whether the 20-year-old hotel mentioned would be renovated or rebuilt from scratch.

Director Harper clarified the 20-year-old building referenced was the west building of the Convention Center. He explained if expansion occurs, resources would be dedicated to updating the interior, so it matches the newer facilities and provides a consistent experience for visitors.

Victor Mendieta asked about the estimated cost of building new hotels.

Mr. Price explained that building an upper-upscale convention hotel typically costs \$70,000 to over \$100,000 per room, meaning a 1,000-room hotel could exceed \$100 million. He added that a convention center expansion could range from \$600 million to \$800 million, noting other cities invest billions in similar projects.

Victor Mendieta asked about how many additional hotel rooms the City aimed to add in the future to meet its goals.

Mr. Price explained the City uses data and formulas comparing meeting space to hotel rooms to determine future needs. He noted Phoenix ranks low among competitor cities for rooms within walking distance of the convention center and said the goal could be to add 1,200 to 2,000 rooms, depending on demand and expansion plans.

Victor Mendieta followed up with a question about how much revenue the City would generate if the convention center expansion and additional hotel rooms were fully completed.

Director Harper noted the previous convention center expansion from 2009 to 2024 generated an economic impact of \$5.2 billion. Current annual convention revenue

averages around \$300 million in strong years. He stated a future expansion was projected to increase revenue by approximately 50 percent and improve the ability to host multiple large conventions simultaneously, supported by additional space and hotel accommodations.

Victor Mendieta asked about what attendees typically seek when attending a convention.

Councilwoman Pastor emphasized different factors attendees seek in conventions such as the event's style and atmosphere, vibrant surroundings, quality hotels and restaurants, and opportunities for networking and learning.

Liliana Lopez asked what plans were in place to engage the next generation in supporting and contributing positively to the convention center.

Mr. Price emphasized the broad scope of the hospitality and tourism industry, noting its impact from architecture to zoology and its role in supporting diverse sectors. He noted how travel and tourism provide economic vitality and cultural exchange.

Ariel Johnson expressed appreciation for the opportunity to speak and shared concerns about the lack of community events in the area.

Vice Mayor O'Brien noted the need for better communication with local school districts about available events for both residents and visitors and committed to improving outreach efforts.

Councilwoman Pastor thanked the students for participating, noting the value of real-time learning and exposure to City government. She expressed appreciation to the teachers for organizing the visit and emphasized the importance of hearing from young residents about their vision for the community.

### **CALL TO THE PUBLIC**

None

### **FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS**

None.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

Chairwoman O'Brien adjourned the meeting at 11:29 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Dayana Rosas  
Management Fellow