



CITIZEN PETITION

Submitted Pursuant to Phoenix City Charter, Chapter IV, Section 22

2026 JUN 17 PM 5:41
CITY CLERK DEPT.

Date of Formal City Council Meeting: June 17, 2026

Submitted to: Honorable Mayor and Members of the Phoenix City Council

Submitted by: [Name], a resident of the City of Phoenix, on behalf of Good Goat

Re: Petition to Name the Park Formerly Known as Cesar Chavez Park in Honor of Jesse Owens

Honorable Mayor and Councilmembers,

This is a **citizen petition** submitted under Chapter IV, Section 22 of the Phoenix City Charter, which provides that “any citizen of this City may appear before the Council at any regular meeting and present a written petition” and that “such petition shall be acted upon by the Council in the regular course of business, within fifteen (15) days.” I respectfully ask the Council to act on the request below within that period.

On March 23, 2026, this Council directed City staff to begin renaming all municipal facilities named after Cesar Chavez. The Parks and Recreation Board then voted on March 26 to begin the formal renaming process — expressly because the Council directed it. This renaming exists because the Council willed it into being. The Council cannot set a renaming in motion and then treat the outcome as none of its concern. While the Parks and Recreation Board holds final approval authority over park names under Board Policy 3.3, that same policy expressly invites the very name this petition proposes: it directs the Board to consider a name where the individual “is accepted by the general public as being a local, state, or national hero,” and reserves renaming for “extraordinary circumstances of local or national interest.” The body that started this process can, and should, state plainly the outcome it prefers.

Which brings us to the survey. The City’s survey to rename the park (open May 19 through June 14, 2026, with a Parks Board recommendation set for June 25) asked residents to choose from six predetermined names:

1. Arizona Sunset Park
2. Desert Oasis Park
3. Aguila Park
4. Laveen Park
5. Holstein Heritage Park (a tribute to dairy cows)
6. Farmworkers Park

Jesse Owens — named by USA TODAY in May 2026 as “the most important athlete in our nation’s history,” and a man who made Phoenix his home — was not among them. Residents who wanted him had to already know to write his name in. Put plainly: the City reserved a place on the ballot for a tribute to dairy cows, but not for the Olympic hero who lived here. That is not a close call; it is an embarrassment.

Why a Write-in Is Not a Fair Contest

This matters because a write-in option is not the equal of a printed one, and the research on this is not in dispute. When a choice is printed on a ballot, the respondent need only recognize it; when it is omitted, the respondent must recall it unprompted and take the extra step of writing it in. Decades of survey methodology show that this gap is large. In a controlled Pew Research Center experiment, 58% of respondents selected an option when it was listed for them, but only 35% named that same answer when they had to volunteer it — and just 8% of those given a printed list offered any answer beyond the options in front of them.¹

The order of the listed names compounds the problem: options presented earlier in a list are chosen more often than those lower down, an effect strongest in exactly this kind of multi-item, self-administered format.² In short, the City built a contest in which six printed names — including a cow — enjoyed a measurable structural advantage, while the most qualified candidate in the field was buried in a blank write-in box. A survey designed this way does not measure public sentiment so much as shape it. It should not be treated as a fair or reliable basis for naming this park.

¹ Pew Research Center, “Writing Survey Questions.” In a Pew experiment, 58% of respondents chose “the economy” when it was offered as a listed option, versus only 35% who named it on their own in the open-ended version; just 8% of those given the closed list offered any answer beyond the options printed for them. [pewresearch.org/writing-survey-questions](https://www.pewresearch.org/writing-survey-questions)

² Howard Schuman & Stanley Presser, *Questions and Answers in Attitude Surveys: Experiments on Question Form, Wording, and Context* (1981). Primacy effects — listed options appearing earlier are selected more often — are strongest in longer, visually presented lists, and question form and order can shift results by roughly 10–25%.

A process meant to invite public participation should also be willing to explain how it works. Good Goat has formally requested public records showing who selected these six names, when they were finalized, and how the survey was distributed. Transparency and a worthy namesake are not in tension; they reinforce one another.

Why Jesse Owens

At the 1936 Berlin Olympics, a regime built on a rhetoric of hate sought to use the world's stage to broadcast a myth of racial supremacy. One Black American athlete answered it — winning four gold medals as Hitler and his officials watched their theory left in Jesse Owens's dust. He is not only an American hero; he is a hero to everyone, everywhere, who stands for democracy and equality over division. As the nation marks its 250th anniversary this July 4, his legacy is being honored across the country.

And he is ours. Owens made Phoenix his home from 1972 until his death in 1980. He co-chaired the campaign that built South Phoenix's first medical center, became the first Black member of the Phoenix 40, and spoke to students in schools across the Valley. When he died on March 31, 1980 — the very calendar date the City has now set aside as it moves away from the Chavez holiday — Governor Bruce Babbitt declared a day of mourning and Owens's body lay in state at the Arizona Capitol, an honor afforded to only a handful of private citizens in our state's history. Arizona already honors him with the Jesse Owens Olympic Parkway. A park in the city he chose as home is overdue.

WHEREFORE, I respectfully petition the Phoenix City Council to:

1. At a minimum, formally communicate to the Parks and Recreation Board — before its June 25, 2026 recommendation — that the Council's preferred name for the facilities formerly known as Cesar Chavez Park and Cesar Chavez Community Center is "**Jesse Owens Park**" and "**Jesse Owens Community Center**";
2. Direct City staff to advance "Jesse Owens Park" as the recommended name for the Board's consideration — or, to the fullest extent of the Council's authority, direct that the park be so named;
3. Decline to treat the existing survey as a fair or reliable measure of public sentiment, given the structural disadvantage imposed on write-in candidates; and
4. Ensure the remainder of the renaming process is conducted transparently, including prompt and complete disclosure of how the six proposed names were selected and how the survey was designed and distributed.

Because this is a citizen petition under Section 22, I respectfully request that the Council act on it within fifteen (15) days and that I be notified in writing of the date on which it will be heard.

Thank you for your service to our City and for your consideration of this petition.

Respectfully submitted,



Jerry Van Gasse
4610 E. Via Estrella
Phoenix, AZ 85028

Resident, City of Phoenix &
Board President, **GOOD|GOAT**
board@goodgoat.net

