



**CITY OF SCOTTSDALE
COUNCIL SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
REGULAR MEETING – MINUTES**

2:00 p.m., Monday, September 15, 2025
City Hall Kiva Conference Room
3939 N. Drinkwater Blvd., Scottsdale, AZ 85251

PRESENT: Councilman Adam Kwasman, Chair
Vice Mayor Jan Dubauskas
Councilwoman Solange Whitehead

STAFF: Rachel Smetana, Tourism and Events Director
Greg Caton, City Manager
Judy Doyle, Senior Director of Enterprise Operations
Josh Utterback, Economic Development Program Manager
Kirsten Hushagan, Marketing Manager for Economic Development
Desirae Phrasavath, Economic Development Specialist

GUESTS: Gregg Tryhus, President, Arizona Alliance for Golf
Katie Pendergrast, Executive Director, Arizona Alliance for Golf
Rachel Sacco, Experience Scottsdale
Rachel Pearson, Experience Scottsdale
Ethan Knowlton, Citizen

Call to Order

Chair Kwasman called the Council Subcommittee on Economic Development to order at 2:03 p.m.

Roll Call

A formal roll call confirmed the presence of Subcommittee Members as noted above.

Public Comment

There were no members of the public who wished to speak or written comments submitted.

1. Approval of June 9, 2025, Summarized Minutes of Regular Meeting

CHAIR KWASMAN MOVED TO APPROVE THE JUNE 9, 2025, COUNCIL SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT REGULAR MEETING MINUTES. VICE MAYOR DUBAUSKAS SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED THREE (3) TO ZERO (0). CHAIR KWASMAN, VICE MAYOR DUBAUSKAS, AND COUNCILWOMAN WHITEHEAD VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. THERE WERE NO DISSENTING VOTES.

2. Golf in Scottsdale

Chair Kwasman requested an update on changing the Council Subcommittee on Economic Development to a committee. He was informed of an initiative by the City Attorney's Office to change all subcommittees to committees. The Subcommittee will be informed when that becomes official.

Katie Pendergrast, Executive Director of the Arizona Alliance for Golf, spoke about the importance of golf to Scottsdale's identity. Gregg Tryhus, President of the Arizona Alliance for Golf, discussed his relationship with different agencies. The two of them conducted a slideshow presentation together and reviewed slides with the following titles: Impact of Arizona Golf; Golf and Tourism; Economic Development and Lifestyle Promotion; Access to Water; and Challenges Ahead.

Ms. Pendergrast talked about Mr. Tryhus' efforts to bring all Arizona golf associations together to work with tourism industry leaders such as Experience Scottsdale to share messaging. One of the first things this alliance did was commission a statewide economic impact analysis. Mr. Tryhus noted the last survey conducted by the City was more than 30 years ago, despite the fact that the top reason people came to Scottsdale at that time was to play golf. He provided the history of golf in Scottsdale and its relation to the high-end resort boom in the 1980s. He brought up the foresight of a water expert at the time to keep some effluent water for use by North Scottsdale golf courses. Because of that foresight, nearly all of the land in North Scottsdale has been sold. Rachel Sacco of Experience Scottsdale discussed the role of resorts as a driver of tourism and economic development.

Ms. Pendergrast indicated that \$3 billion of the \$6 billion in economic impact the industry provides to the State comes from tourists. She listed some of the large events in the area, including one that features 264 players from 45 states and 13 countries. The Phoenix Open regenerates \$400 million in economic impact, one of the largest events in North America.

Mr. Tryhus spoke about a three-year effort to turn the effluent plant into a reverse osmosis (RO) plant, noted the water rate has tripled for golf courses. He discussed the challenges of effluent water, including difficulty in growing grass given the water's high sodium content. He mentioned upcoming challenges with reductions in Central Arizona Project (CAP) water and how they worked with the City to inject fully-treated RO water into the aquifer, adding 15 years to North Scottsdale's supply.

Chair Kwasman said he has long been an advocate for working with an agronomist on sustainability. Mr. Tryhus said Scottsdale has the most advanced irrigation systems in the country, and agronomists only use the minimum amount required to stay in business. He remarked that no hybrid grass seed exists that fits Scottsdale's microclimate, though Arizona State University and others are working to solve the problem. He described some of the solutions that have been tried locally.

In response to member questions, Mr. Tryhus said agriculture uses 74 percent of all water while golf only uses 2 percent. The vast majority of the agricultural use is for alfalfa and hay, nearly all of which is shipped out of the country. He thought it would be more advantageous to buy the feed stock than use so much water to grow it. He noted that North Scottsdale Golf is still supplemented by CAP water, but not as much as it used to be. Building additional treatment capacity made a lot of sense, he felt, as did working with the Cities of Tempe and Mesa, who are also CAP dependent.

Mr. Tryhus noted that Phoenix already hosts the premier senior golf event in the country, and if they choose not to keep the event, an effort will be made to move it to Papago Golf Club. He pointed out that even though the Phoenix Open happens in Scottsdale, it is actually called the Waste Management Open, which comes with a \$10 million check annually. Scottsdale is the beneficiary of that event.

With respect to federal and state partnerships, Ms. Prendergrast indicated there is a group of lawmakers committed to protecting golf, which has not typically been represented as a regulated water user. Growing golf's legislature presence was a main reason for establishing the alliance. She spoke about a grant program to help older courses with turf production. She said educating people about how water efficient golf courses are is part of the alliance's job.

Mr. Tryhus remarked that they have not been able to build more golf courses in this state, so supply is not growing with the population; the Paradise Valley Country Club has a 13-year wait list. Chair Kwasman proposed that various stakeholders draft a memorandum to explore purchasing public land with the intent of taking care of the golf and resort industries. Mr. Tryhus said there is not much developable land left, but Scottsdale could partner with the tribes as well as North Phoenix, both of whom have available land.

Ms. Prendergrast felt that water users are sophisticated in messaging how they will use their water, and she worries how golf will fare if constituents are not properly educated. Mr. Tryhus said the perception of golf is not positive among those who do not play, though 80 percent of food and beverage revenue comes from non-golfers.

Councilmember Whitehead stressed the importance of golf courses as open space for wildlife. She wondered why some golf courses are closing or shrinking in size. Mr. Tryhus believed that Scottsdale needs as many golf courses as it has, though he recognized the difficulty in mandating the amount of acreage that courses use. Councilmember Whitehead thought people needed to be educated on functional versus nonfunctional grass. Ms. Prendergrast noted that removing every golf course in Arizona would do very little to conserve water. Mr. Tryhus suggested conducting a survey correlating the number of golf holes in the area with the number of hotel rooms.

Regarding greens fees, Mr. Tryhus acknowledged that Scottsdale is expensive, but so are other cities, and part of that rise in cost is due to the explosion of demand during the COVID-19 pandemic. Demographics have also changed, and affordability will be driven by the market and supply. Chair Kwasman expressed concern that Scottsdale will not have the resources or focus to provide the infrastructure for residents to live, work, and play.

Ms. Sacco commented that the restaurant and retail industries in Scottsdale have grown due to the number of visitors. It is now known as a safe and authentic place where people can experience things they cannot experience elsewhere. She spoke about visitors being immersed in the beauty of the destination, which can also benefit personal wellness. She saw value in marketing Scottsdale as an authentic destination. Mr. Tryhus added that Scottsdale is friendly.

City Manager Greg Caton wondered about the average wait list to join country clubs and where there may be opportunities to fill in gaps. If rates were increased but wait lists remained the same, that would reflect a lack of supply. He also believed some courses are not being utilized. Chair Kwasman agreed there are opportunities here for entry-level golfers that are different than other areas. Mr. Tryhus pointed out that building more golf courses may not result in a reduction in prices. He noted that golf is being subsidized in some areas by food and beverage sales.

3. Economic Development Department Update

Judy Doyle, Senior Director of Enterprise Operations, discussed the national recruitment for the economic development director position vacated by Teri Kilgore. During this time, Josh Utterback has been appointed as the interim economic development director. She reviewed his professional and educational background. She said the position is being modified to oversee both the economic development and tourism and events departments. She discussed how the two departments overlap and could benefit from an alignment in strategies. The position will close on October 15, and it is being advertised through national- and state-level economic development organizations. She reviewed the expected timeline for the recruitment.

Ms. Doyle mentioned the business attraction manager position has also become available, but she hoped to hold off on recruiting for it so the new senior director could appoint someone to the position. If the process takes too long, a recruitment may take place. She will continue to update the Subcommittee on this matter.

4. Open Call to the Public (A.R.S. §38-431.02)

There was no response to the call for public comment.

5. Identification of Future Agenda Items

It was determined that one more meeting will be held in 2025 in November sometime before Thanksgiving. Future agenda items can be submitted in writing.

Vice Mayor Dubauskas requested a discussion about utilizing partnerships to hold super events rather than holding siloed events. She also wanted a discussion on the strategic plan goal of attracting companies to the area. Chair Kwasman suggested assembling a nonpartisan coalition of Councilmembers to participate in that effort.

The Chair also requested an item on the November agenda about forming private/public partnerships with international relations regarding economic development. Councilmember Whitehead spoke about a tech alliance with Israel, and she felt groups like that should be included.

Chair Kwasman wanted to ensure that the City is preparing for the Waste Management Open so it will be successful, as well as for the spring training season, all of which makes up Scottsdale's showcase season.

6. Adjournment

CHAIR KWASMAN MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING. COUNCILWOMAN WHITEHEAD SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED THREE (3) TO ZERO (0). CHAIR KWASMAN, VICE MAYOR DUBAUSKAS, AND COUNCILWOMAN WHITEHEAD VOTED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. THERE WERE NO DISSENTING VOTES

With no further business to discuss, Chair Kwasman adjourned the regular meeting at 3:14 p.m.

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