



100 years

Chandler woman
still bowls; **16**



CHANDLER

INDEPENDENT



AI help

Partners make
report-writing
app; **6**

January 2026

Volume 4 Issue 6

Your Nonpartisan Community Newspaper • YourValley.net

District draft plan could lead to teacher layoffs

By Jason W. Brooks
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Barb Mozdzen said she can't remember having to discuss potential Chandler Unified teacher layoffs.

That's what the 17-year CUSD Governing Board member and board vice president said toward the end of a Dec. 12 board planning meeting presentation about the district possibly needing to take reduction-in-force action, or RIF, ahead of the 2026-27 school year.

"Even in 2009, when so many things were happening with the economy, we always had a job for everyone," Mozdzen said.

The session followed 2026-27 budget planning and staffing presentations that also had tough terms rarely mentioned in regular CUSD board business meetings.

District chief financial officer Lana Berry's presentation on the budget included a "First Draft - Right-Sizing" for Chandler's 2026-27 maintenance and override spending. M & O spending is Arizona school district's main operating fund, from which nearly all staff salaries are paid.

• See **Layoffs** on page 12

AI DATA CENTERS



Debates rage over use, where centers should be built

By Jason W. Brooks
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Chandler City Council members who spoke during a December meeting regarding an artificial intelligence data center plan explained their reasons for voting it down.

But left open in their denial was the question of

where such data centers are supposed to be built, how many resources should be allotted to such centers, and how much strain do the facilities place on communities.

These are questions Chandler and other municipalities will need to answer if that type of development is going to continue across Arizona. And municipalities putting AI data center development plans under strict scrutiny are seeing it's a new area with many questions that might be difficult to answer.

Chandler Councilmember Jane Poston said council was only provided a copy of a proposed development

• See **Data Centers** on page 32

Chandler native Julio Lopez speaks to the city council on Dec. 11 with a packed chamber behind him during a hearing on a proposed artificial intelligence data center. The Chandler City Council's 7-0 rejection of a development agreement and rezoning shed light on the need for more information on the sustainability, practicality and need for such data centers, and where these centers, if built at all, should be placed. (Jason W. Brooks/Independent Newsmedia)

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**YOUR GATE NEED
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LOCAL FAMILY OWNED & OPERATED

PAGE 7

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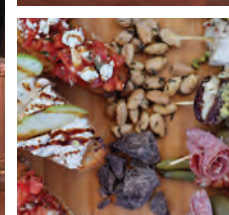
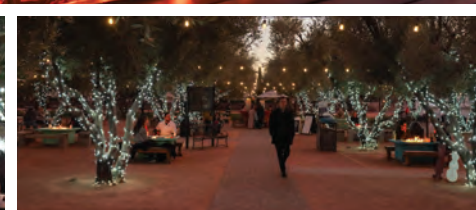
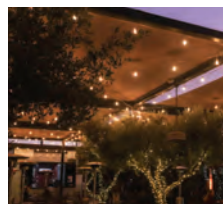
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Chandler removes interim tag for utilities director

Chandler City Manager John Pombier has announced the appointment of Jeremy Abbott as the city's public works and utilities director. Abbott, who joined the city in 2022 as the public works and utilities assistant director, had been working as the acting director since about the time John Knudson retired in September. Read more at tinyurl.com/6kvkx75r

Chandler state senator honored by advocacy group

Stand for Children Arizona has announced state Sen J.D. Mesnard (R-Chandler) and Rep. Consuelo Hernandez (D-Tucson) have been named its 2025 Legislation Champions. Both state lawmakers were selected because of their leadership on several key issues — ninth-grade “On-Track,” child care subsidies, and a child tax credit — all items that will help Arizona children, according to a news release. Read more at tinyurl.com/bduhkt8

City taking apps for disability scholarship, awards

The Chandler Mayor's Committee for People with Disabilities invites the community to participate in two meaningful opportunities: the scholarship program and the 2026 Disability Awareness Awards. The scholarship program invests in Chandler residents who have a disability and are pursuing their educational or career goals. The 2026 Disability Awareness Awards are now accepting nominations as well. Read more at tinyurl.com/bddw6a5a

Council approves 107 homes on former Bashas' site

By Jason W. Brooks
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Emotional testimony, complaints about design and potential added traffic and three lengthy public discussions led up to the Chandler City Council approving a large infill residential development.

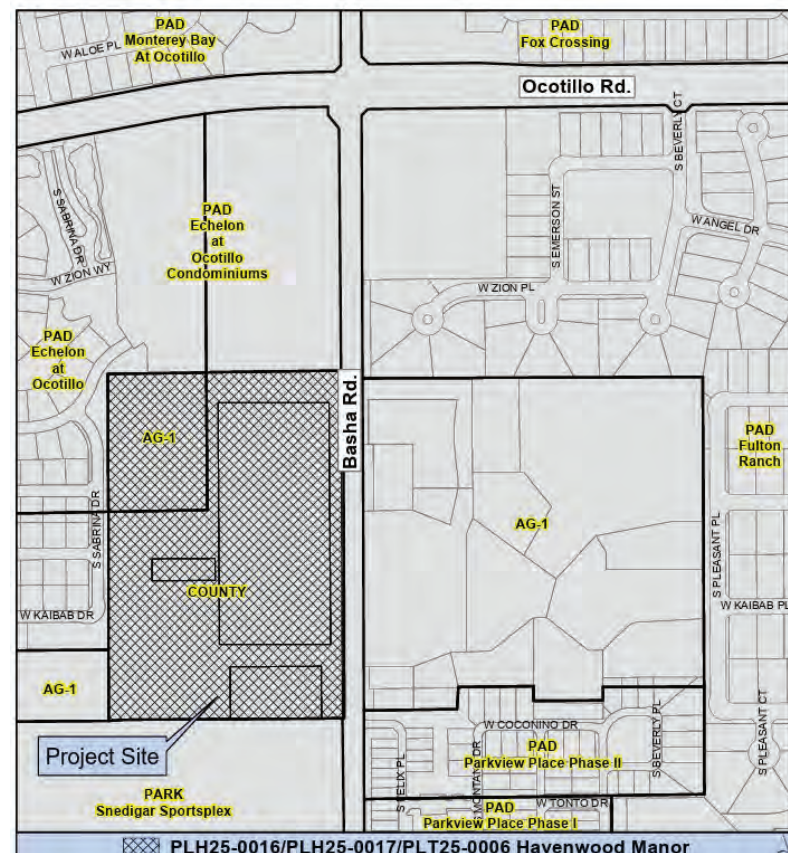
By approving its consent agenda at its Dec. 11 meeting, council greenlighted four items for Havenwood Manor. That's a plan for 107 single-family homes on the former Bashas' grocery facility and corporate headquarters site; the company relocated to a more-modern facility in west Chandler in 2023.

Council approved an area plan amendment, rezoning, preliminary development plan and preliminary plat for the 18.64-acre site, wedged along Basha Road, south of Ocotillo Road and next to the eastern third of Snedigar Park.

Opposition over traffic and to what a few residents felt was destroying the historic legacy of the former Goodyear community and south Chandler were the prevalent concerns voiced at a Nov. 19 Planning and Zoning Commission meeting, at a Dec. 8 Council study session and at Council's Dec. 11 regular meeting.

The buildings on the Bashas' site will be torn down. It wasn't clear if the Bashas' water tower

• See **New Homes** on page 9



A total of 107 homes are set to be built on the former Bashas' grocery warehouse and farm site on Basha Road, near Snedigar Park. Council approved the plan Dec. 11. (Courtesy of city of Chandler)

MEET YOUR NEIGHBOR

Chandler has new city clerk in Ekblad

By Jason W. Brooks
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The Chandler City Council took another step Jan. 8 in its effort to wrap up what's been a year of changes among leadership positions.

Jennifer Ekblad will replace Dana DeLong as city clerk when DeLong

retires in the months ahead. Ekblad officially started Monday, Jan. 12, in an overlap on-the-job training role, though she's really been preparing to take on all of DeLong's duties since the moment she arrived in Chandler almost three years ago.

• See **Ekblad** on page 9

Jennifer Ekblad will replace Dana DeLong as city clerk when DeLong retires in the months ahead. Ekblad officially moved from her deputy city clerk role of the past three years Jan. 12 after the Chandler City Council approved Ekblad's one-year, \$190,000 contract as city clerk on its Jan. 8 consent agenda. (Courtesy of City of Chandler)



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Chandler, Tempe entrepreneurs have tech startup

AI-based app helps write home inspection reports

By Jason W. Brooks
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Mark Garcia said the potentials for artificial intelligence have barely been tapped into.

Garcia, a Chandler resident, and a local business partner have started a company that helps provide a specific service using an AI-based app.

“Innovation spawns more innovation, and overall, it creates more than it destroys,” Garcia said about AI. “Technology will end up being used in ways we can’t even imagine yet. It will come out in amazing ways.”

Garcia, a San Francisco Bay-area native, and Aryash Dubey have started Binsr Inspect. “BINSR” is the acronym for an Arizona inspection form, the “Buyer’s Inspection Notice and Seller’s Response.”

The service is a text-focused AI-based software program that helps home inspectors write reports and other wordy documents more quickly.

“Some inspectors can end up performing about three inspections in a day, leading to three or four hours of typing to do that night,” Garcia said. “Our app helps turn voice and video into reports, 5,000 or 10,000 rows of data at a time.”

Garcia first came to the state to attend Arizona State University, where he earned his bachelor’s in business and communications. He then worked for the cloud-based software company Salesforce, saying he eventually wanted to be involved with startup companies.

Garcia said he was the eighth employee of the commercial real estate startup marketing and data platform Buildout, eventually working as chief revenue officer for three different



Mark Garcia, left, and Aryash Dubey are the founders of Binsr Inspect. The app is meant to make home inspection reports easier to generate, with artificial intelligence assistance. (Courtesy of Binsr Inspect)

startups.

Most recently, he was chief revenue officer for Zendoor, a commercial real estate marketplace backed by Craft Ventures, working on both supply and demand growth and marketing until the company was sold.

Two years ago, he started his own company.

paragraphs — all of which can be proofed by the author but don’t need to be initially hand-typed or copied and pasted from a form.

He said some reports are not fill-in-the-box, but are pages of text narrative.

“There is real skill in building those reports,” Garcia says, “and the AI can be taught that level of skill.”

Garcia and Dubey, who lives in Tempe, only have three employees now, but are looking to hire more, especially engineers.

“There’s just so much to build,” Garcia said.

Dubey’s posting on LinkedIn about taking applications for engineers is worded in a casual way that shows how he and Garcia might be able to reach multiple generations of potential engineers.

Garcia said the number of tasks in building an app and a business can be overwhelming — especially since everything implemented has to function properly.

“I can’t believe what we’ve built in a year, but there’s still so, so much to do,” he said. “Having the latest technology to help us build it, that helps, but it’s a lot.”

Garcia said everyone with Binsr Inspect works from home, as would any upcoming engineer hires. He eventually sees some kind of hybrid space-sharing arrangement, such as one in which Binsr uses an office one or two days per week.

In the meantime, Garcia said, it’s back to using tech to help create tech.

“There are water and electricity challenges to overcome, no doubt, though I’m a big fan of some new ways to generate and move more power,” Garcia said. “Once we see the ways that AI can be both expanded and sustainable, we’ll see that we are really are only in the early innings of seeing what AI can do.”

“There are so many barriers to home ownership, and we wanted to help find some solutions,” Garcia said. “We’ve found a way to solve one — waiting on reports that could be 150 pages or longer, and other documents to be created.”

Garcia describes how the app saves time by creating whole sentences or

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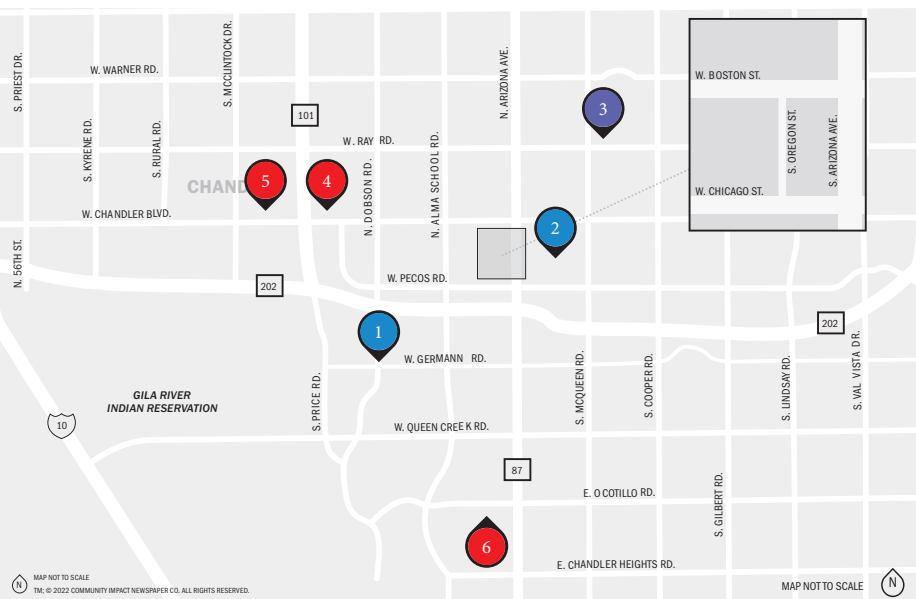


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BUSINESS MOVES



Compiled by Jason Brooks
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

NOW OPEN

1 Itlu USA is a vegetarian Indian eatery that recently opened in south Chandler, at 1890 W Germann Road, No. 1, on the northeast corner of Dobson and Germann roads, in the former La Pen restaurant location. Irani chai, pani puri (Indian vegetables) malai, naan and paneer are all part of the menu. Find Itlu on Instagram: @itluusa or email them at itlusocial@gmail.com.

2 Aristocrat Coffee Roasters is open at 201 S. Washington Street in downtown Chandler, in the former “Civic Market” building, next to QuartHaus Pub, across from the City Hall south parking garage. A presser and fresh beans are used to make a wide variety of coffee beverages. The hours are 7 a.m. to 3 p.m., seven days per week. Find the shop on Instagram: [@aristocratcoffee](#)

ANNIVERSARY

3 Helluva Brewing in west Chandler celebrated its 7-year anniversary in mid-December. The brewery, located at 3950 W Ray Road, No. 5, on the northeast corner of McClintock and

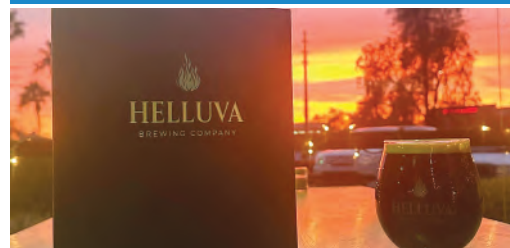
Ray in a CVS-centered shopping center, celebrated its anniversary with several specials, including a pair of special barrel-aged beers, and freshly baked treats. The brewery serves both year-round and seasonal beers and IPAs, along with full brunch and regular menus that include burgers, sandwiches and salads. Reach the brewery online at helluvabrewing.com or by calling 480-664-6488.

COMING SOON

4 Brooker's Founding Flavors Ice Cream is set to open soon in the Chandler Festival shopping center, anchored by Ross, TJ Maxx and Nordstrom Rack. A sign on a door in the center, located at 2560 W. Chandler Blvd., just east of Loop 101, announced the opening, though there was no opening date mentioned. The company's website mentions Utah and Texas locations. The "drinking chocolate" menu includes one item named after each of the original 13 colonies. The ice cream menu includes many combinations; "Alexander Hamilton's Not Throwing Away My Scoop" is chocolate ice cream with chunks of New York cheesecake with both graham and chocolate cookie crust chunks and



ITLU USA



HELLUVA BREWING



BROOKER'S FOUNDING FLAVORS

a chocolate fudge swirl. Check brookersicecream.com for updates on the Chandler store opening.

5 Johnny Rockets, self-described as an all-American burger chain founded in the late 1980s, is set to open a Chandler Fashion Center indoor location in early 2026. Longtime franchise owner Richard “Rip” Riva now owns, including Chandler and the recently opened Arizona Mills location in Tempe, all six Johnny Rockets restaurants in the Valley. The chain specializes in deluxe burgers, though hot dogs, chicken strips, sandwiches, fries, tots, onion rings and shakes are also part of the menu. The Chandler Fashion Center at 3111 W. Chandler Blvd., west Chandler, northwest of the



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loops 101 / 202 interchange. To learn more, visit johnnyrockets.com.

6 16 Handles is coming soon to Fulton Ranch Towne Center in Ocotillo, southwest corner of Ocotillo Road and Arizona Avenue, across from Hamilton High School. It will be the first Arizona store for the frozen yogurt chain, which is currently in New Jersey, Massachusetts, Texas, South Carolina and Florida. Their rotating 16 flavors included, as of Dec. 23, Arriba coffee, birthday cake and black matcha. There are dozens of gluten-free, fat-free, reduced-fat, vegan and artisan options. Party packages and catering are available. Learn more at 16handles.com.

New Homes

• From page 4

will remain; the canal and palm trees along Basha Road are protected historical items, according to staff reports.

One resident tearfully spoke of the help Eddie Basha himself provided for her family, as one of the many historical ties to the property and area.

“When my aunt, Kathy, passed away as a young mom, Eddie catered the funeral and refused to allow my grandparents to pay him for that,” Monique Bogle Fullmer said at the Dec. 11 meeting. She listed other positive characteristics of Eddie Basha and ended with “\$800,000 homes does not honor Chandler’s agricultural, or the Basha family, legacies.”

The design was discussed at the Planning Commission meeting, though one board member disagreed with a resident’s impression the design for the 107 homes was “uncreative.”

Pricing and affordability of \$700,000-plus homes was brought up as well. Planning Commission Chair Rick Huemann said, yes, that’s beyond what most Chandler-area residents can afford, but developments are being sold out quickly at those prices.

Traffic was discussed at all three meetings. Chandler traffic engineer Dana Alvidrez said Dec. 11 a traffic “study” wasn’t done, but staff included a “traffic statement” in the development plan.

The statement uses the estimate of 114 additional vehicle trips daily along Basha Road as its projection. Despite being only one lane in each direction, Basha Road is classified as a “collector street,” the statement reads, that’s only a 1.2% daily increase in traffic, so no adjustments are needed.

“As this development goes in, and people move in, we’ll keep an eye on what that does to the surrounding traffic network,” Alvidrez said.

Ekblad

• From page 4

Ekblad moved to Arizona in March 2023 to become a deputy city clerk in Chandler. When DeLong announced to Council a couple of months ago that she’s retiring, Ekblad’s name was soon mentioned on executive-session agendas as an interim replacement.

The Jan. 8 consent agenda, approved unanimously by council, included approval of a one-year, \$190,000 contract for Ekblad as city clerk. DeLong was set to make about \$199,000 in the second year of a two-year contract that ends in June; there are detailed provisions in her contract for retirement.

Ekblad takes over a department primarily known for overseeing board meeting agendas, procedures and council approvals, though city elections are a main function of Arizona clerk’s offices as well. There’s

also Chandler’s U.S. passport issuing center and management of that small staff, as well as coordinating appointments for Chandler’s 29 volunteer boards and commissions.

“The council is big on succession planning,” Ekblad told Independent Newsmedia after the Jan. 8 meeting. “To Dana’s credit, I had the opportunity to learn a lot in the past three years.”

Ekblad is from the San Diego area, with her nearly nine years combined with the cities of Escondido, where she eventually became the assistant city clerk, and as city clerk with Coronado for almost four years. In Coronado, she performed many of the functions DeLong oversaw in Chandler in terms of meetings and elections.

“It’s all about relationships,” she said. “I see the clerk as a bridge between the citizens and their gov-

• See **Ekblad** on page 26

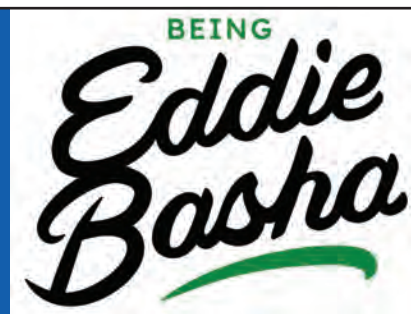


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**SCHEDULE
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Chandler Unified board member Claudia Mendoza speaks during a Dec. 10 meeting. The board got an update from the Chicago-based firm that's leading Chandler's superintendent search, supplying January dates for the various steps in the vetting, interviewing and hiring process. (Jason W. Brooks/Independent Newsmedia)

District superintendent search, appointment to wrap this month

By Jason W. Brooks
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Chandler Unified now has a more definitive timeline with how and when it will finish the process of appointing its next superintendent.

John Bash is the lead associate with Hazard, Young, Attea & Associates. He and two other associates from HYA met with the CUSD Governing Board virtually during a Dec. 10 meeting.

Among other updates, Bash and his HYA associates ran through a calendar of meetings and other events associated with the end of the application process, along with screening, vetting, interviewing and the final hiring process.

The board seemed to be in agreement with the majority of the timeline HYA presented, requesting a few minor adjustments.

Thursday, Jan. 29 is when HYA proposed the board vote, at a special morning meeting, on a contract for the new superintendent, with plenty happening before then.

Dr. Sylvia Ibarra, one of the associates, said as of Dec. 10, only six

• See **Search** on page 26

CUSD board OKs \$42M school rebuild

By Jason W. Brooks
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

One of the campaign selling points of proponents of the \$271.5 million Chandler Unified School District bond this year was that passage would allow CUSD to complete some major remodels.

By approving a contract at its Dec. 10 regular meeting, the CUSD Governing Board green-lighted the main construction phase of its largest and most-visible upcoming remodel.

The board unanimously approved a nearly \$42 million contract with CORE Construction for the rebuild of Hartford Sylvia Encinas Elementary School.

Located in central Chandler, just northwest of downtown, Hartford was completed in 1957, making it the district's oldest in-use elementary school and one of the older active campuses across the entire district.

Assistant Superintendent Tom Dunn explained, at the Dec. 10 meeting, where the funding will come from and where the contract approval fits into the timeline of "re-imagining" Hartford.

"This includes \$39,992,063 from the 2025 bond and \$1,997,798 in Adjacent Ways funding," Dunn said. "Grace (Design Studios), formerly Orcutt Winslow, engaged with students, teachers, administrators and community members over two years ago about the design of the replacement campus, taking their input and designing a school for the community."

CUSD Board Vice President Barb Mozdzen asked when the public will be able to see some designs — typically available at this stage.

"We showed some drawings at the (Sept. 3) joint CUSD / Chandler City Council meeting, and I'll have some for you to see at this Friday's (Dec. 12 planning) meeting," Dunn



Students put on a holiday presentation at Hartford Sylvia Encinas Elementary School in November. The district will spend at least \$42 million to rebuild the 1957 school, using mostly bond funds. (Courtesy of Chandler USD)

said. "But a lot of the final colors of things like tile, carpet, wall paint etc. are still being finalized."

Rebuilding is meant to boost enrollment to a maximum of 750 pre-K-6 students and reduce repair, maintenance and operating costs. Parking and dropoff /pickup areas are meant to be improved as well.

Hartford will be the second CUSD elementary completely rebuilt in recent years, having converted nearby Galveston Elementary from a high-maintenance, 1960s single-story school to a more efficient two-story facility.

The replacement school building will be about 83,000 square feet, Dunn said. Parts of the classroom buildings will be two stories, like the Galveston rebuild, with a single story closest to the north edge of campus.

Dunn said district staff have been talking regularly with city of Chandler officials to help make the permit-

ting process go as smoothly as possible. He said CORE Construction should be able to "start turning dirt" by the end of February, with a goal of students moving into the new buildings in July 2027.

Full completion of the demolition of the old campus will then be done in late 2027 and early 2028, he said, with new play areas to be constructed on the sites of the demolished buildings.

The new construction will be done mainly in the north athletic field area of the campus, Dunn said. Among the first tasks will be to both move swing sets and other play equipment to the south third of the campus and expand the west parking lot.

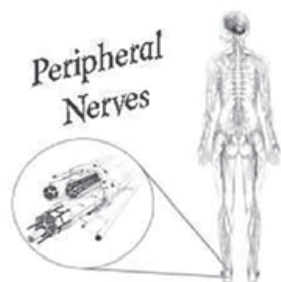
Students will be able to remain on campus throughout construction, Dunn said, even though the Hartford buildings are centered and aren't built on one end of the site, as with Galveston.

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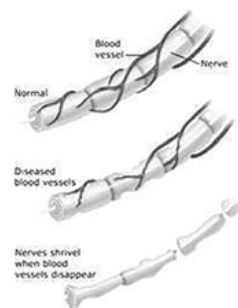
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The amount of treatment needed to allow the nerves to fully recover varies from person to person and can only be determined after a detailed neurological and vascular evaluation. As long as you have not sustained at least 95% nerve damage there is hope!

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Aspen Medical will be offering this chronic pain and neuropathy severity examination from now until February 28, 2026. Call 480-796-1136 to make an appointment to determine if your chronic pain and peripheral neuropathy can be successfully treated.

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FROM THE COVER

Layoffs

• From page 1

The first draft proposes the district eliminate 79.15 teaching positions, along with 28.8 classified positions and four administrative positions.

District Superintendent Frank Narducci told the board he believes retirements and annual resignations will account for much of the “right-sizing,” helping CUSD administration only RIF-eliminate the positions absolutely necessary to make the 2026-27 budget balance. “And even then, I think we would find that many, many teachers will be able to transfer and stay with us,” Narducci said.

Using position totals that aren’t whole numbers is common in budget discussions, as the district is simply talking math and balancing the budget at that stage. Also, not all teachers are necessarily “1.0” full-time employees.

But what’s uncommon, at least for CUSD, is to be discussing such a degree of right-sizing at all. The district grew nearly exponentially in enrollment for decades leading up to 2018-19, when slowing birth rates, city buildout, private and charter school proliferation, expensive housing and, eventually, the COVID-19 pandemic all contributed to CUSD’s enrollment slowly decreasing and is likely to continue to shrink.

The loss is coming primarily from

1st Draft Right Sizing – M&O 12/12/2025

M&O									
Right Sizing			NP5000 Requests			Shift of Funding			
Oversight	FTE	Potential Savings				Oversight	FTE		
District Department	(14.500)	\$ (1,739,473.39)				District Department	(3.50)		
District Wide	(3.000)	\$ (2,169,401.07)				District Wide	-		
School	(94.450)	\$ (8,308,052.68)				School	(7.00)		
	(111.950)	\$ (12,216,927.15)					(10.50)		
Classification	FTE	Potential Savings	Classification	FTE	Potential Adds	Classification	FTE		
All	-	\$ (380,000.00)	All	5.00	\$ 640,000.00	All	-		
Administrative	(4.000)	\$ (600,925.36)	Administrative	-	\$ -	Administrative	-		
Certified	(79.150)	\$ (8,024,960.13)	Certified	1.00	\$ 230,807.20	Certified	(1.00)		
Classified	(28.800)	\$ (3,211,041.67)	Classified	-	\$ 225,458.84	Classified	(9.50)		
	(111.950)	\$ (12,216,927.15)		6.00	\$ 1,096,266.04		(10.50)		

This first draft of a Chandler Unified School District “right-sizing” document, presented at a Dec. 12 planning meeting, mentions the 79.15 proposed certified employee reduction for the 2026-27 school year. (Courtesy of Chandler USD)

the pre-K-3 grades, with each incoming kindergarten class smaller than the prior one. That’s led to several elementary schools operating well below capacity.

Among other efforts to retain or boost enrollment the right-sizing will affect total employment.

District Assistant Superintendent Chris Rossini presented at the planning meeting mostly on the procedural aspects of the RIF process. He began by pointing out that attorneys guide the process and that it’s important to distinguish a RIF action from simply not funding positions.

“The board’s decision to not fund some positions in a particular budget year, that’s a one-year budget decision,” Rossini said. “But RIF is a

board policy decision that’s voted on publicly as its own item.”

Rossini explained that once the board takes the action of permanently eliminating positions, affected employees must be notified immediately, even though their jobs are safe for the rest of the current school year.

Rossini also pointed out that:

- Certificated (certified) employees who are either probationary or continuing teachers have rights to a position
- The RIF decision doesn’t include any type of appeal process.
- There are 175 CUSD teachers on “one-year contracts.” The district hired 168 teachers last year.
- The transfer process is involuntary in that teachers or other staff whose

positions were RIF-eliminated can look to work elsewhere in the district.

• Any board elimination of an entire grade level is considered a RIF action.

Board Chair Patti Serrano said both the board and administrative team should consider pushing out a public message about what it’s considering in its right-sizing process, including the potential layoffs, in something like a schoolwide announcement.

“Remember that we talked about creating the headlines we want to see,” Serrano said.

After the initial online publication of this story, Chandler Unified issued this statement:

“What is occurring is CUSD is staffing to enrollment. Enrollment decline is 3% but the proposed staffing adjustment is 2.2%. By aligning staffing and budgets to current enrollment trends, we can continue to position CUSD as the premier district of choice, prioritize academic achievement and extracurricular excellence, protect class size ratios, and redirect new funding to competitive salaries and benefits. This approach also honors the values of our community by maintaining strong fiscal responsibility as good stewards of taxpayer dollars.”

Go online to tinyurl.com/4rewdf3v to read about the action the CUSD board took on staffing Jan. 14.



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David Foster &
Katharine McPhee | 3/28



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OPINION

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Your Opinion

Our opinions page is to provide an open forum for our readers. We hope to stimulate debate, not to dominate or control it. We reserve the right to edit our opinions, and we insist on civility. Please include your name and phone number, so we can contact you for clarification or confirmation. We welcome your photo. All opinions must be no more than 300 words.

Those that are judged as personal attacks or complaints about neighbors, businesses or other opinion writers will not be considered. No person may submit more than two opinions for publication during a calendar month. Two submissions in the same issue will not be published. The content of a submission is the responsibility of the person who submitted it.

Speak Up

We support the use of pen names. Too many people don't speak up because they fear intimidation or even danger to their families and/or careers. Pen names are an important part of our nation's history.

Corrections

We will promptly correct all factual errors. We offer a "right of reply" to the people about whom we write. Readers who disagree with a news story are welcome to respond with a letter.

The value of Chandler Unified's career and technical-ed programs

As educators for career and technical education programs in the Chandler Unified School District, we have collectively spent decades teaching agriscience, medical professions, and other career-focused programs across district high schools.

As Career and Technical Education teachers in Chandler Unified School District, we have spent decades watching our students grow into skilled employees, business owners, healthcare professionals, and community leaders.

Their success reflects what strong CTE programs do best: provide real skills, confidence, and opportunity. That's why recent claims that CUSD has misused CTE funding are so damaging — they ignore the reality of the well-run programs that help our students grow.

Students stay in CTE because our programs work. Over the past five years, Basha's Agriscience program retained 79% of students from the second to the third year.

At Chandler High School, students run a four-acre sweet corn farm and manage a broiler — authentic business experiences not possible in a traditional classroom. Even modest cuts to CTE funding would limit these choices.

That same value is also clear in Medical Professions — a fast-growing, high-need field. Students learn patient care, volunteer in clinical settings, and earn CNA licenses. Last year, students achieved a 100% pass rate, with many moving directly into nursing or accelerated medical programs.

Please send your comments to
AzOpinions@iniusa.org.

We are committed to publishing a wide variety of reader opinions, as long as they meet our Civility Guidelines.

Some have even used their training to help save family members' lives.

Satellite programs like these ensure equitable access for students who cannot leave their home schools because of transportation, jobs, athletics, special education needs, or family responsibilities. These programs allow students — especially those with the fewest options — to receive full CTE training without sacrificing stability.

CUSD follows state law. CTE funds support teachers, equipment, certifications, and 71 classrooms across six high schools. There has been no misuse of funding. A responsible carry-forward balance sustains high-cost programs and replaces aging equipment.

The truth is straightforward: these programs work. They prepare students for high-demand careers, strengthen Arizona's workforce, and change lives. We urge our community to continue supporting these programs that deliver every day.

AJ Argueta, Taylor Rutherford and Sharon Metzger

Chandler Unified High School teachers

The authors are Career & Technical Education teachers in the Chandler Unified School District and members of the Chandler Education Association.

SPEAK UP

Here are some recent online comments about Chandler Independent items:

"ARIZONA LEGISLATOR SEEKS TO NAME LOOP 202 AFTER CHARLIE KIRK":

"I disagree wholeheartedly with the scheme to name the Loop 202 after Charlie Kirk. We shouldn't be naming roads after people much less after Kirk. If it's named after him, I will never drive on it again."
— **Julianne M. Bergstrom via email**

"This man was no hero. Usually, people who are this pious are usually not who they claim to be. They have unusual ideals and frankly, I don't want anything named after people because you never know what goes on behind closed doors and what's truly in their hearts and it would be shameful to have to remove their name later. That tax money should be used on infrastructure not street signs!" — **Shelli Thompson via email**

"I'm conservative. He is a bad example. Do not name a freeway after him. He only benefited himself. He was smug and arrogant with little life experience. It's why he got shot; so arrogant, he went out with no security when in weeks before, kids were killed at a church. I'd rather have the highway named after the women who exposed Epstein for what he did to them."

— **Asha Paris via story comment**

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Corona "Mae" Howard, left, turned 100 years old in November and is still living life with the same energy and humor that carried her from the farm fields of Colorado to her bowling league in Chandler, according to a news release. (Courtesy of Dillon Media Consulting)

Chandler's newest centenarian still a bowler

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Corona "Mae" Howard turned 100 years old in November and is still living life with the same energy and humor that carried her from the farm fields of Colorado to her bowling league in Chandler, according to a news release.

Born Nov. 8, 1925, in Greeley, Colo., Howard grew up on a family farm where she worked the fields with six horses, canned everything from peaches to pickles, and learned that "sadness was not an option," in her words.

Her parents were German farmers who immigrated to the U.S. through Ellis Island, bringing with them a deep work ethic that Mae carried throughout her life.

At age 18, Howard answered her country's call as a true "Rosie the Riveter," working on B-17 and B-24 bombers in Cheyenne, Wyo. — oiling engines, fixing rivets, and helping keep planes flying strong during World War II.

Howard later became one of the only female cab drivers in Colorado in the 1940s — so fearless, she said, that

• See **Centenarian** on page 38

Chandler 'Road to Riches' showcases rides, nonprofits

New and classic cars, barking dogs, car show tunes, tasty food and holiday gifts were all available at the Dec. 13 Road to Riches Santa event in Chandler.

The city of Chandler and the Be A Mushroom Foundation co-hosted the car show and holiday market event at City Hall.

The free community event show-

cased classic and newer show vehicles, holiday shopping for gifts and trinkets, local food trucks, music from a live deejay and booths to help visitors learn about local nonprofit organizations.

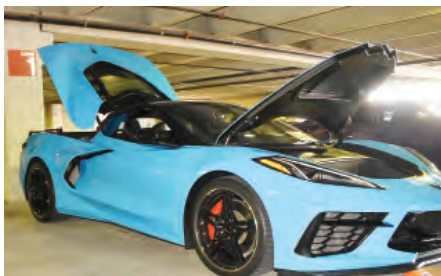
One of the nonprofit booths, for PAWSS, or Pups and Warriors Side by Side, had trained service dogs standing by, looking forward to

demonstrating their skills.

Event proceeds benefit the Chandler Public Housing Authority's Road to Riches financial literacy program. That's also one of the main goals of the Be A Mushroom Foundation, or BAM, which can be contacted at info@beamushroom.com for more information about its programs.



Doug Powell Jr.'s 2017 Lamborghini Huracán Spyder was one of the more late-model vehicles on display Dec. 13 during the Road to Riches Santa event at Chandler City Hall. (Jason W. Brooks/Independent Newsmedia)



Nelson Guzzo's 2023 Chevy Corvette Stingray was one of the more late-model vehicles on display Dec. 13 during the Road to Riches Santa event at Chandler City Hall. (Jason W. Brooks/Independent Newsmedia)



Kevin Williams' 1962 Chevy C1 Corvette was one of the older vehicles on display Dec. 13 during the Road to Riches Santa event at Chandler City Hall. (Jason W. Brooks/Independent Newsmedia)



Forrest Ward's 2025 Porsche 911 was one of the more late-model vehicles on display Dec. 13 during the Road to Riches Santa event at Chandler City Hall. (Jason W. Brooks/Independent Newsmedia)



Connie Meeks' 2020 Dodge Challenger was one of the more late-model vehicles on display Dec. 13 during the Road to Riches Santa event at Chandler City Hall. (Jason W. Brooks/Independent Newsmedia)



Emery Meeks' 2025 Lucid Air was one of the more late-model vehicles on display Dec. 13 during the Road to Riches Santa event at Chandler City Hall. (Jason W. Brooks/Independent Newsmedia)



Britt Swann's 2021 Porsche Cayman 718 was one of the more late-model vehicles on display Dec. 13 during the Road to Riches Santa event at Chandler City Hall. (Jason W. Brooks/Independent Newsmedia)

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FESTIVAL



"System Overload" is the name of an electronic show, set for Friday and Saturday, Feb. 27 and 28, at the Rawhide Event Center, near I-10 and Wild Horse Pass Boulevard. (Courtesy of Caren West PR)

'Bass festival experience' show in Chandler Feb. 27-28

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Relentless Beats, and its sub-brand, Aftershock, has announced its lineup for what it calls a "new bass festival experience" show in the Wild Horse Pass area in Chandler.

"System Overload" is the name of an electronic show, set for Friday and Saturday, Feb. 27 and 28, at the Rawhide Event Center, near I-10 and Wild Horse Pass Boulevard.

The lineup —according to a news release — features a mix of big and burgeoning, underground artists and fan-favorites, promising high intensity, the release states.

Artists scheduled to perform at the two-day festival include Akeos, Badklaat, Blvncspvce b2b Sqishi, Bommer, Canabliss, Codd Dubz, Don Jamal, Eptic, HOL!, Liquid Stranger, M?stic, MADVKTm (Mad Dubz b2b VKTM), Mile32, NG-HTMLRE, Richard Finger, Samplifire, Sis-to b2b 7L, Slander, Sythyst b2b Hexxa, Stoned to Death, Warload and Wooli.

Tickets for System Overload, including general admission and VIP, are on sale now at SystemOverloadFest.com for all ticket options and extras.

More show information will become available as the date approaches, the release states. Visit relentlessbeats.com for information on other shows.

Orchestra's Jan. 25 pops guest artists are local

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The Chandler Symphony Orchestra has announced its guest artists for its Jan. 25, 2026 pops concert.

Fronting the orchestra this season will be Jordan and Kaitlynn Bluth. They're a Mesa couple who will be singing the timeless songs of Frank Sinatra, Tony Bennett and others.

The couple will perform again at the Chandler Center for the Arts in what the orchestra calls, in a news release, a fortunate win.

Tickets start at \$32 and can be purchased by clicking here: tinyurl.com/25yauvck

Donations are gratefully received by CSO at its concerts, or online anytime at chandlercenter.org.



Jordan and Kaitlyn Bluth are a Mesa couple who will sing the songs of Frank Sinatra, Tony Bennett and others. The couple will return to the Chandler Center for the Arts as the Chandler Symphony Orchestra's guest artists for its Jan. 25, 2026 pops concert. (Courtesy of Jordan and Kaitlyn Bluth)

Donation checks can be mailed to the Chandler Symphony Orchestra, P.O. Box 6475, Chandler, AZ 85246. IRA funds available for donations can be sent directly from

an account to CSO; email info@chandlersymphony.com for details.

All donations are fully tax-deductible.

PERFORMANCE

Yearwood, country star, to perform at Center for Arts

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Three-time Grammy Award winner Trisha Yearwood comes to the Chandler Center for the Arts on March 6 as part of "The Mirror Tour."

Tickets start at \$74 and are on sale now via Ticketmaster, through chandlercenter.org or by calling 480-782-2680, according to a news release.

Yearwood's The Mirror (Deluxe) is due for release Jan. 23. It's an expanded digital edition of her acclaimed album The Mirror, released this past July, and features four new songs.

The Georgia native hit the road in late 2025 for a symphony tour to promote her recently released Christmas album.

The 14-date Mirror Tour is about six weeks long, starting in California in early March and heading east, ending Pennsylvania in mid April.

"When we recorded The Mirror, I had such a hard time narrowing it



Three-time Grammy Award winner Trisha Yearwood comes to the Chandler Center for the Arts March 6 as part of "The Mirror Tour." Tickets start at \$74 and are on sale now via Ticketmaster, through chandlercenter.org or by calling 480-782-2680. (Russ Harrington via Chandler Center for the Arts)



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Date Night Out	Queen Creek Olive Mill DC Steakhouse Hales Center Theatre
Event Planner	Queen Creek Olive Mill Bente Perfect Party Planner
Event Venue	Queen Creek Olive Mill Schnepf Farms Superstition Manor Wedding and Event Center The Ashley Castle
Festival	Queen Creek Olive Mill Garlic Festival Tempe Festival of the Arts Ostrich Festival
Hotel/Resort	Fairmont Scottsdale Princess Arizona Grand San Marcos Crown Plaza
Live Theatre	Chandler Center for the Arts ASU Gammage Hale Theatre
Local Attraction	Phoenix Zoo Pecan Lake San Tan Flat
Local Author	Lawley Publishing Mark Driscoll Jenn McKinlay
Movie Theater	Fat Cats Queen Creek Harkins Queen Creek AMC

Museum	Chandler Museum Musical Instrument Museum (MIM) Superstition Mountain Lost Dutchman Museum
Music School/Instruction	Mad Music East Valley Yamaha Music School The Music Store Studio
Music Venue	Chandler Center for the Arts The Nile Theater Queen Creek Olive Mill
Musical Instrument Store	Mad Music Milanos Musical Instrument Museum
Place to People Watch	Chandler Fashion Center Old Town Scottsdale Queen Creek Olive Mill
Place to Have a Birthday Party	Queen Creek Olive Mill Main Event Jake's Unlimited
Place to Take the Kids	Musical Instrument Museum Main Event Pecan Lake
Tourist Destination	Phoenix Zoo Queen Creek Olive Mill Old Town Scottsdale
Wedding Venue	Queen Creek Olive Mill Windmill Winery The Ashley Castle

COMMUNITY

Administrative Assistant/Receptionist	Cassie Kennedy - QCUSD Mary Gloria Foundation
Charter School	Benjamin Franklin Charter Schools Tempe Preparatory American Leadership Academy - Mesa North Elementary

College/University	Arizona State University Grand Canyon University Chandler Gilbert Community College
Community Event	Mary Gloria Foundation Heart Cry Church Fall Festival Queen Creek Family Market
Community Outreach	Mary Gloria Foundation Heart Cry Church Fall Festival Nancy's Closet
Fundraising Event	Mary Gloria Foundation Nancy's Closet East Valley Giving Circle
Non-Profit Civic Organization	The Mary Gloria Foundation Queen Creek Resource Center Nancy's Closet
Non-Profit Multi-Cultural	The Mary Gloria Foundation Nancy's closet United Food Bank
Park	Frontier Family Park Gilbert Regional Park Kiwanas
Philanthropic Individual/Organization	Mary Gloria Foundation United Food Bank National Charity League- Santan
Place for a Quiet Stroll	Riparian Wildlife Preserve Queen Creek Olive Mill Queen Creek Wash
Place for a one day trip	Sedona Queen Creek Olive Mill Bisbee
Place to Worship	Heart Cry Church The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints Flatiron Church
Place to Watch a Sunset	Superstition Mountains Queen Creek Olive Mill
Place to Work	Heart Cry Christian Academy Queen Creek Unified School District City of Chandler

Pre-School	International School of Arizona Heart Cry Pre-School WonderWise Preschool	Butcher/Meat Market	The Pork Shop Von Hanson's Meats & Spirits Gilbert Butchery	French Fries	In-N-Out Burger Five Guys Queen Creek Olive Mill
Private School	International School of Arizona Heart Cry Christian Academy Gilbert Christian	Caterer	Queen Creek Olive Mill Portillos M Culinary Concepts	Fried Chicken	Chick Fil A Raising Cane's Chicken Fingers Dave's Hot Chicken
Public School District	Queen Creek Unified School District Chandler Unified School District American Leadership Academy (ALA)	Cheesesteak	Portillos Eddie's Cheesesteaks & Hoagies	Frozen Treats	Andy's Frozen Custard Queen Creek Olive Mill Milkshake Factory Playa Bowls
Teacher	Diana Ramirez - International School of AZ Lori Sterenberg Emmanuel Del Caro Castillo Mary Fort Melissa Martin	Chicken	Chick-Fil-A Dave's Hot Chicken Thirsty Lion	Gourmet Specialty Shop	Queen Creek Olive Mill Sip N Shop D'Vine Gourmet
Technical & Trade School	EVIT Power Campus American Leadership Academy Applied Technologies Pima Medical Institute	Chinese Restaurant	Jade Palace Dragon Wok Hong Kong Kitchen	Grocery Store	Trader Joes Fry's Sprouts
Youth Organization	Paladin Sports The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter day Saints Sun Valley Community Church	Classic Cocktails	The Ostrich Hidden House Thirsty Lion	Happy Hour	Postino's Queen Creek Olive Mill Firebirds
FOOD & DRINK		Coffee Shop	Peixoto Black Rock Third Place Cup	Health Food Store	Trader Joes Sprouts Whole Foods
Asian Restaurant	Mekong Palace Dragon Wok China Chef Taste of China	Comfort Food	Blue 32 Joe's Farm Grill Portillos	Ice Cream	Handel's Cold Stone Creamery Andy's Frozen Custard
BBQ	Caldwell County BBQ Queen Creek Woodbarn BBQ Joes BBQ -Gilbert Lil Miss BBQ	Country Cooking	Original Biscuits Cheddars SugarJam The Southern Kitchen	Italian Restaurant	Queen Creek Olive Mill Salerno's Pizzeria North Italia
Bakery	Nothing Bundt Cakes Queen Creek Olive Mill Piefection Rise Up Bakery	Crab Legs	Angry Crab Shack High Tide	Local Brewery	Catalyst Crafted Ales Ellsworth Brewing Pedal Haus Brewery
Bar	Catalyst Crafted Ales Thirsty Lion The Handlebar Pub and Grill	Craft Beer	Catalyst Crafted Ales Ellsworth Brewing Hundred Mile Brewery	Local Winery	Windmill Winery Garage-East Down Time Wines
Breakfast	Over Easy Queen Creek Olive Mill Topsy Egg	Date Night Restaurant	Queen Creek Olive Mill DC Steakhouse Francine Restaurant	Mexican Restaurant	Nando's La Ristra Salt + Lime Modern Mexican Grill
Brunch	Queen Creek Olive Mill Brunch Snob Topsy Egg Toast Gio's Breakfast & Lunch	Deli	Chompies Jason's Deli Downtown Chandler Cafe	New Restaurant	Cold Beer & Cheeseburgers Portillos Mexicano Chandler
Burger	Culver's Five Guys Arizona Wilderness Zin Burger	Dessert	Queen Creek Olive Mill Insomnia Cookies Chompies	Outdoor Dining	Queen Creek Olive Mill O.H.S.O. Hidden House
		Dinner Under \$10	Salad & Go Portillos Ghett Yo Taco	Pizzeria	Vero Chicago Pizza Queen Creek Olive Mill Salerno's Pizzeria
		Donuts	Bosa Hurts Donut Company Randy's	Restaurant	Queen Creek Olive Mill Salerno's Pizzeria Cold Beers & Cheeseburgers
		Family Restaurant	Queen Creek Olive Mill San Tan Flats Black Bear	Seafood Restaurant	Salt Cellar Blue Wasabi Red Lobster
		Fine Dining Restaurant	The Ra Ra Room Cooper's Hawk Hidden House		

FOOD & DRINK

Sports Bar	Cold Beer & Cheeseburgers Zipps Goldie's Sports Cafe
Sushi	Blue Wasabi Ra Sushi Bar Restaurant Sushi Creek
Takeout Food	Salad N Go Portillos Yaos Chinese Restaurant
Taproom	The Sugar Bar Craft Beer & Wine Taproom & Bottleshop Whining Pig Quarthaus
Wine Bar	Queen Creek Olive Mill Postino's Black Sheep Wine Bar
Wings	Zipps Buffalo Wild Wings, Gilbert Cogburns

HEALTH, FITNESS & WELLNESS

Chiropractor	AFC Physical Medicine & Chiropractic Centers Dr Chrissy at Advanced Physical Medicine Edified Chiropractic
Day Spa/Massage	Therapeutic Massage by Maya Arizona Soul Healer Gateway Health Wellness & Aesthetics
Dentistry	Crockett Dental Dynamic Family Dentistry
Dentistry: Cosmetic	Smiles by Hanna
Dentistry:	
Dental Implants	New Horizon Dental Center
Dentistry: Family	Crockett Dental Nielson Family Dentistry Dynamic Family Dentistry
Dentistry: Orthodontic	Rollins & Petersen Orthodontics Wright Orthodontics
Dentistry: Pediatric	Sun Valley Pediatric Dentistry
Dentistry: Surgical	New Horizon Dental Center Brent Boyse Matheson Dentistry
Dermatologist	Skin & Cancer Center of Arizona Bingham Dermatology Desert Sky Dermatology Red Mountain Dermatology

Doctor	Keystone Natural Family Medicine Premier Health Family Practice Dr. Ann Marie Padilla Dr. Carlblom at Protea PA Trevor Whiting
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Emergency/ Safety Services (First Aid, CPR, AED, etc)	Staying Alive LLC Snappy CPR
--	--

Fitness Center/Gym	DI training - Joshua Brinkman Mountainside Fitness Planet Fitness
--------------------	--

Health Insurance Agent	Alicia Rosenquist Arizona Health Insider
------------------------	--

Hearing Aid Center	ABC Hearing Mesa Livingston Hearing Aids
--------------------	--

Home Health Care	Right at Home Queen Creek Seniors Helping Seniors East Valley Always Best Care Senior Services
------------------	---

Hospital	Banner Mercy Gilbert East Valley ER
----------	--

IV Therapy	IV League Arizona Prime IV Hydration & Wellness - Red Mountain Gateway Health, Wellness & Aesthetics
------------	---

Local Pharmacy	CVS Mixtures Pharmacy Ahwatukee
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Med Spa	Wallflower Beauty & Wellness Flawless Faces Med Spa Gateway Health Wellness & Aesthetics
---------	--

Medicare Insurance Agent	Alicia Rosenquist The Medicare Navigators Greg Gudis
--------------------------	---

Mental Health Therapist	East Valley Psychiatric Services Warm Milk and Honey Healing Psychotherapy Services, LLC AZ Whole Heart Connection Horizon Health & Wellness
-------------------------	---

Physical Therapist	AFC Physical Medicine & Chiropractic Centers Spooners Jim Coleman at Welch Physical Therapy
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Physical Therapy Center	AVC - Mesa Spooners
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Physician: Family	Rock Point Family Medicine Premier Health Family Practice Dr. Ann Marie Padilla
-------------------	--

Physician: Pediatrics	Premier Health Family Practice Natural Pediatrix Dr Heather Dirkmaat Dr. Sonal Shah of Sunrise Pediatrics
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Primary Care Office	Hope Heart Heal Premier Health Family Practice Natural Pediatrix
Vein Treatment Center	Natural Pediatrix Advanced Vein Center

HOME & GARDEN

Carpet Cleaning Company	SkyBlue Carpet & Tile Cleaning Voda Cleaning & Restoration Of Phoenix Zero Rez
-------------------------	--

Contractors/General	Bulldog Design/Build LLC
Exterminator/Pest Control	American Desert Pest Control Magic Pest Control Pest R Us

Floor Covering Store	Floor Daddy
Furniture Store	American Furniture Warehouse Norwood Furniture Furniture Brat

Garage Door Sales & Service	Triple B Garage Doors State 48 Garage Doors
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Hardware Store	Ace Kabats Ace
----------------	--------------------------

Heating & AC Services	MechaniCool Simper Fi Heating & Cooling True Home Maintenance AC & Heating LLC
-----------------------	--

Home Appliance Store	Spencer's The Home Depot Lowe's
----------------------	--

Home Repair Company	Voda Cleaning and Restoration of Phoenix Bulldog Design/Build LLC HomeLyfe
---------------------	---

House Cleaning	Two Maids Voda Cleaning & Restoration Of Phoenix Barazza's House cleaning Merry Maids
----------------	--

Outdoor Living	Southwest Spas
Plumber/Plumbing Company	Steadfast Plumbing Flying Plumber

Remodeling Company	Bulldog Design/Build LLC
Restoration Services	Best Option Restoration 1-800-Water Damage

Tree Service	Family Tree Trimming Caretaker Landscape
--------------	--

PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

Assisted Living Facility	The Summit at Sunland Springs Mirabella The Opportunity Tree
Attorney/Law Firm	AVID Esq. Group LLC The Parker Law Office, LLC - Heather L. Parker, Esq. Lerner & Rowe Injury Attorneys
Bank	Midfirst Bank Academy Bank Chase
Business/Corporate Attorney or Law Firm	Harrison Law Peterson Law Offices
Childcare/Daycare Facility	Wonderwise Preschool Lil' Einsteins Busy Bees
Commercial Real Estate Agent/Agency	Suzanne Dye Janine Iglione Adrienne Lynch, the Lynch Team
Credit Union	Desert Financial Credit Union Arizona Financial Credit Union
Customer Service	DeBellevue Global Marketing Premier Health Family Practice Lerner & Rowe Injury Attorneys
Estate/Trust Attorney or Law Firm	AVID Esq. Group LLC The Parker Law Office, LLC Walk-in Wills
Final Resting Place	Mountain View Funeral Home and Cemetery San Tan Memorial Gardens Legacy Funeral Home
Financial Advisor	Erick Geryol - Edward Jones Ann Martin, Apricity Wealth Management James Hundley - Edward Jones
Funeral Home	Gilbert Memorial Park Valley of the Sun Red Mountain Funeral Home
Independent Senior Living Community	The Summit at Sunland Springs Mirabella Solterra
Insurance Agency	Jarrett Christianson Comparion Insurance The Medicare Navigators Calvert Agency LLC
Insurance Agent	Jennifer Goedken, The Benefits Gallery Alicia Rosenquist Jarrett Christianson Comparion Insurance

Mortgage Lender	Teresa Dempsey, Cornerstone First Mortgage Movement Mortgage
Personal Injury Attorney Law/Firm	The Husband & Wife Law Team Lerner & Rowe Injury Attorneys East Valley Injury Law
Pet Boarding	Dogtopia Pete & Mac Gilbert K9 Resorts Top Dog
Pet Grooming	Petco Pawgo
Photographer	Heather Robinson, One Shot Beyond Photography Flovara
Printer/Photocopying	Printing Specialists Minuteman Press Queen Creek UPS Store - Queen Creek
Real Estate Agent	Heather Werner, Ravenswood Realty Janine Iglione Randy Courtney
Residential Real Estate Agency	Ravenswood Realty The Home Selling Team The Lynch Team
Residential Real Estate Team	The Home Selling Team The Goodman Taylor Team Courtney Valleywide
Senior Living Community	The Summit at Sunland Springs Brookdale Gilbert North Mirabella
Senior Resource/Placement	EverCare Placement All About You Senior Placement and Resources The Senior Solution Group
Signage	Minuteman Press Queen Creek Speed Pro Mesa Gilbert Signarama
Title Company	Magnus Title Pioneer Title Mesa American Title East Mesa
Travel Agent	Ashley Leatham Linda's Travel Hut Pam Hunley

SHOPPING & BEAUTY

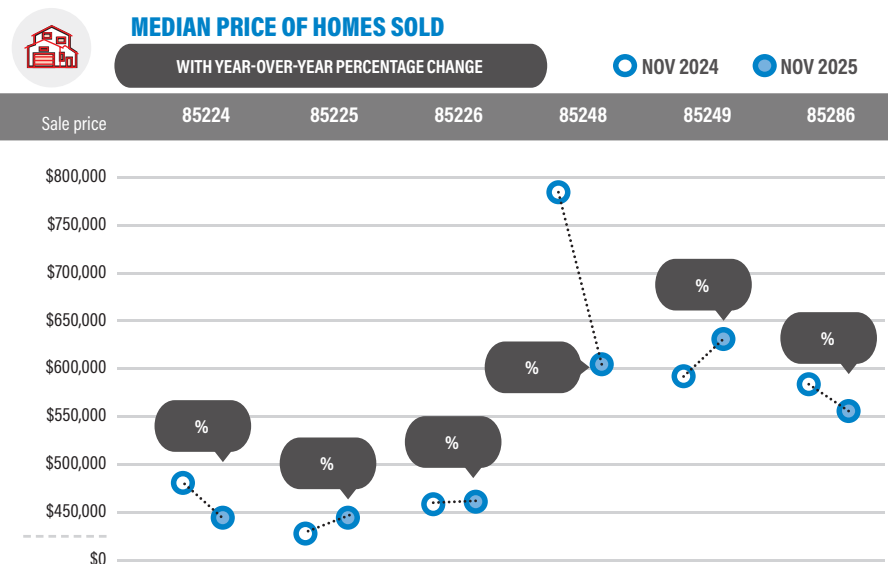
Aesthetician	Emily Smolke Wildflower Beauty Bar
Cannabis Store	Ponderosa Dispensary Nature's Wonder

Gift Store	Olivespa Queen Creek Olive Mill D'Vine Gourmet
Hair Salon	Toni & Guy Mozzie Fox Salon Boardroom Styling Lounge Chatti Chix Eden - Aveda Lifestyle Salon
Jewelry Store	J'Renee Bejeweled Kyhn's Jewelers Myranda Fine Jewelry
Paddle, Racket, and Apparel Sales	Scheels Dick's Sporting Goods
Sporting Goods store	Scheels The Shooting Range AZ Gun Safe
Women's Clothing Store	Nordstrom Rack Ross Apricot Lane

VEHICLES & SERVICES

Auto Dealership	Elohim Auto Sales Chapman Chevrolet Cardinal Way Mazda
Auto Detailing	Nine Star Detailing Signature Auto Detailing Bodega Details
Auto Glass Repair	Mr. Auto Glass Diamondback Auto Glass Bang AutoGlass
Auto Service Department	Ooroo Auto H&I Automotive Good Works Auto Repair
Golf Cart Store	World of Golf Carts East Valley Carts Flivver
Oil Change	OOROO Auto H&I Automotive Good Works Auto Repair
Tire Services	Discount Tire H&I Automotive
Towing Service	Camel Towing Phoenix Metro Towing Valley Express Towing

REAL ESTATE



DATA PROVIDED BY KATIE TAYLOR OF THE GOODMAN
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NUMBER OF HOMES ON THE MARKET

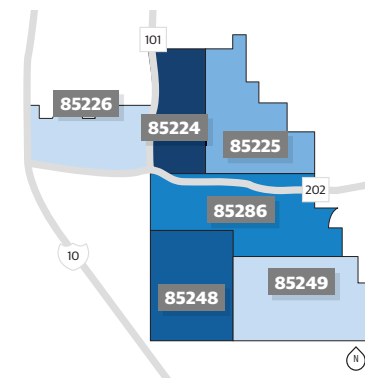
	NOV 2024	NOV 2025
85224	63	70
85225	119	141
85226	64	60
85248	61	86
85249	153	181
85286	93	95

AVERAGE DAYS ON THE MARKET

	NOV 2024	NOV 2025
85224	61	71
85225	45	73
85226	76	53
85248	33	80
85249	60	79
85286	54	97

NUMBER OF HOMES UNDER CONTRACT

	NOV 2024	NOV 2025
85224	22	22
85225	52	57
85226	22	19
85248	25	26
85249	41	58
85286	43	55



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Peoria - March 26, 2026 - Westbrook Village

Sun City West - April 22, 2026 - SCW Foundation

Sun City - May 4, 2026 - Sundial Rec Center

Fountain Hills - July 7, 2026 - Fountain Hills Community Center

Surprise - August 18, 2026 - The Colonnade

Sun City - September 23, 2026 - Sundial Recreation Center

Sun City West - October 28, 2026 - SCW Foundation Center

Mesa - November 13, 2026 - Mesa Marketplace Swap Meet

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Search

• From page 10

applicants had completed part of the online application process and six had completed all of it, adding that HYA expected that number to grow significantly, especially over the holiday break.

“As associates, we continue to reach out to prospective candidates and encourage them to apply for the position,” Ibarra said.

Ibarra said HYA has already begun screening, background checks and vetting candidates who’ve applied.

The application portal will close to applicants Friday, Jan. 2. Next, vetting and screening continues, culminating in a Jan. 13 reduction to semifinalists and an online interview workshop with the CUSD board. Applicant information will be available online to board members Jan. 8.

“We need a little time for vetting and background checks, as some applicants do tend to apply right at the end of the time window,” Bash said.

A daylong set of closed sessions of about six semifinalists will then take place with the board Saturday, Jan. 24. Two hours are set aside at the

end of that day for deliberations, after which the board will publicly announce the names of as many as three finalists.

Those finalists will then be present in Chandler on Wednesday, Jan. 28. That’s when a full day and evening of in-person candidate evaluation takes place, starting with a presentation of the district’s annual report, along with community forums and panels, a board interview, school tours and a cabinet — administrators — interview.

Bash said HYA recommends then waiting a day to make a decision.

The firm confirmed with district staff that there are no major CUSD board or other events set for Jan. 28 or 29, so a board executive session and meeting can be scheduled the morning of Thursday, Jan. 29 to determine which finalist to select and announce.

Bash said if the board has a strong consensus on a choice after the Jan. 28 activities and interviews, it’s possible the board could decide that evening, canceling the Jan. 29 executive session and meeting.

Bash clarified the difference between a panel and a forum is that a panel is typically a cross-section of panelists asking questions, while a forum is typically more of a “meet-and-greet” where all members of the community ask the questions.

Ekblad

• From page 4

ernment. There are so many opportunities for citizens to participate in government. And the clerk’s office is a part of all of those.”

Ekblad, who has a master’s degree in public administration from San Diego State University, said she was focused on moving to Arizona for some time before getting the Chandler job, though she certainly misses coastal Coronado and the San Diego shorelines and architecture.

“I didn’t appreciate it until I left, because when you’re working there, it’s a different experience,” she said. “But I was focused on coming here

(to Arizona) for a while. I’d done a lot to network with Arizona city clerks and a state association.”

Ekblad said one thing DeLong emphasized is for a clerk to always be “forward, future-thinking.”

“I’ve always been focused on executing, so working with Dana has really developed that forward-thinking part of me, I think,” she said.

Ekblad said DeLong’s innovation and constant problem-solving approach and focus have been helpful.

“Dana tends to have really big ideas,” Ekblad said. “So that made me a good fit for her department. Now, I have the opportunity to take on the big ideas.”

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City's pavement improving, but costs rising

By Jason W. Brooks
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

When a city of Chandler department is about to ask for even more money than the millions it's been spending, it's always welcome when a presentation includes a mention of what good the money has done so far.

The digital presentation that public works leaders used in a Dec. 11 Chandler City Council work session on pavement quality, not only explained the pavement quality index system, or PQI, but also showed how those numbers have improved in recent years.

"\$30 million in one-time General Fund additions (FY 2023–26) has moved the needle," the presentation states.

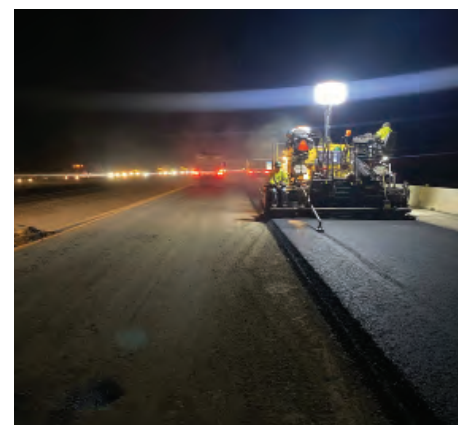
Public Works and Utilities Director Jeremy Abbott and pavement presentation program manager Charlie Serna told the council about the program and how after John Knudson told council in 2023 that the city's PQI is dropping, more funding made a difference.

The city's been able to raise its PQI to 65.8 for its 2,090 lane miles that are Chandler's responsibility. That compares to 81.7 for Mesa's 3,735 lane miles and the 62 PQI Scottsdale has maintained for its 2,902 lane miles.

"Every street in Chandler has its own readings, post to post," Serna explained. "For example, McQueen Road from Pecos Road to Chandler Boulevard, there are actually four different readings in between. That's how we label it in our matrix — in street sections."

PQI is a widely used scoring system of measurement of the smoothness of the roadway and any distress in the pavement surface that assigns ratings to sections of roadway on a scale of 0 to 100, Abbot explained.

Serna said as the city was still



Chandler Streets Division staff say they've made some progress in improving the overall pavement quality of city streets, but inflation means it will take more dollars in the years ahead to keep up with the city's 2,090 lane miles of paved streets. (Courtesy of Arizona Department of Transportation)

building many streets of all types, especially in the south half of the city, in the late 2010s, it's easy for new roadways to maintain a high PQI, but the older-built north and west parts of Chandler have aged.

Chandler had a three-year rolling average PQI of 59 in 2016, peaked at 69.5 in 2019 and dropped to 61.0 again by 2023 before steadily rebounding.

Abbott and Serna agreed it will take even more investment from the city for streets projects in the years ahead.

Not only does inflation mean the same amount of slurry or other paving material cost more than it did five years ago, there are often Americans with Disabilities Act requirements attached to major projects.

There are mandated curb ramp and sidewalk upgrades required on every mill-and-overlay project, Abbott explained.

"ADA improvements now consume roughly one-third of the repaving budget," Abbott explained.



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TRANSPORTATION

Compiled by
Jason W. Brooks
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

1 Price Road, southbound from the Loop 101 off-ramp north of Loop 202 to West Continuum Drive, along with northbound from south of Germann Road to Loop 202, will be the site of major restrictions through Thursday, Jan. 22. The estimated 62-day project is to remove the sewer bypass chute from a prior sewer re-lining operation and for repaving.

2 Arizona Avenue, under and on both the north and south sides of Loop 202, will be the site of major northbound and southbound daytime and nighttime restrictions through Thursday, Jan. 29. The estimated 25-day project is for punch list repairs and for Arizona De-

partment of Transportation project equipment in the Chandler right-of-way.

3 Arizona Avenue's right southbound lane will be the site of major restrictions near Queen Creek Road through Friday, Jan. 30. The estimated 82-day project is for paving.

4 Knox Road, from Alma School Road to Arizona Avenue, will be the site of weekend closures, either eastbound or westbound, through Thursday, Jan. 22. The estimated 53-day project is for boring, trenching and pothole restoration.

5 Colt Court and Colt Road, between Villas Lane and Pennington Drive, will be the site of weekend closures of the U-shaped alley that wraps behind the cul-de-sac homes through Feb. 5. The estimated 16-



day project is for bore trenching.

6 Queen Creek Road, between Old Price and Dobson roads, will be the site of both eastbound and west-

bound weekend restrictions through Saturday, Feb. 7. The estimated 62-day project is for sewer bypass removal.



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FROM THE COVER

Data Centers

• From page 1

agreement with developer ActiveInfrastructure about a week prior to the anticipated council vote on approving the agreement and rezoning for a large project. The proposed plan is for a 420,000-square-foot artificial-intelligence data center to be the centerpiece of a campus with five smaller research-type buildings to be constructed over about a five-year span.

"There were still a lot of questions, including how such a center was going to help us attract new employers to that Price Road corridor," Poston said. "And we needed a better understanding of a data center versus an AI data center, and we got conflicting information each time. There just wasn't enough time to sort all that out."

The Chandler proposal, even though it was on that Price Road corridor, drew criticism from residents amid concerns it might bring noise and water pollution. That's aside from concerns that massive electricity and water use at a time when AI data centers were meeting resistance across the U.S.

David De La Torre, Chandler's acting planning administrator, said even with a committee having helped generate a new 10-year city gener-



This rendering shows what one of the main buildings might look like at an artificial intelligence data center. A plan to build the data center was rejected by the Chandler City Council in December, prompting questions in the Valley about the ideal location, specifications and resource use for A.I. data center plans going forward. (Courtesy of city of Chandler)

al plan, guidelines still won't go into great detail on data center restrictions and limits.

"There are no proposed major changes in the draft general plan regarding data centers," De La Torre said. "An economic growth policy was added, reiterating what the zoning code already requires — that data centers are not permitted by right unless approved by city council through rezoning."

Chandler passed a 2022 ordinance that addressed regulating data center

noise, but also specified the centers as a primary use of a property, are only permitted in planned-area development zoning areas, as approved by council. If created as an ancillary use, data centers will have size limitations, must indicate a purpose and be located on-site.

The Chandler Council has since approved a handful of plans for an existing data center expansion, but staff reports stated the facility is switching from water cooling to air cooling.

Since 2022, the proliferation of

AI funding and promotion and the growing awareness of some challenges of having data centers anywhere have taken off. Data Center Watch, a group funded by AI firm 10a Labs that tracks local opposition to the centers, reported in May 2025 that \$64 billion in data center developments in the U.S. had been blocked or delayed in the previous 12 months.

Likewise, industry groups have lobbied both the Biden and Trump administrations for more ways to greenlight growth in the AI sector.

A group called the Data Center Coalition said part of its mission is to "advocate for a highly skilled and diverse technology workforce, greater access to clean energy, and competitive business and tax policies to support the growth and success of this essential business sector."

On its website, DCC quotes Secretary of Energy Chris Wright saying, during his confirmation hearing, "I am committed to growing our electricity grid and our energy production and removing those barriers that are standing in the way."

A lobbying group for tech firms hired former U.S. Sen. Kyrsten Sinema last spring. The Arizona senator came to both Chandler Planning and Zoning Commission and council meetings in October to threaten "fed-

• See **Data Centers** on page 34

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Doors open 5:30 p.m | Program begins 6:30 p.m

RSVP: chandleraz.gov/StateOfTheCity



FROM THE COVER

Data Centers

• From page 32

eral preemption” if the ActiveInfrastructure plan wasn’t approved. She said winning the AI race against China is imperative.

DCC echoed that sentiment in a thank-you letter to the Trump Administration in July for its pro-AI stance.

“With the right approach to deploying data center infrastructure, the U.S. can win the AI race safely, securely, and to the benefit of all Americans,” it wrote.

Water use

One element lost in some recent proposal discussions was water use. Simone Kjolsrud, Chandler’s water resources manager, spent time at the podium during the December hearing detailing the amount of water the



Elizabeth Lee of Gilbert speaks during a December hearing on a proposed artificial intelligence data center. The Chandler City Council’s 7-0 rejection of a development agreement and rezoning plan shed light on the need for more information on the sustainability, practicality and the need for such data centers, along with where these centers, if built at all, should be placed. (Jason W. Brooks/Independent Newsmedia)

proposed Price Road plant could use, given the hardware the city would involve in water delivery.

“In the case of ActiveInfrastruc-

ture, they proposed a closed-loop, air-cooled system, and the Tier 1 allocation was sufficient for their needs,” Kjolsrud told Independent Newsmedia. “Tier 1 allocation ... is the threshold by which the regulations distinguish an average water user from a large water user. For developments requesting more water than average, more than the Tier 1 allocation, the city would apply the regulations for large water users and discuss options available for a Tier 2 or Tier 3 high volume user. Tier 2 or Tier 3 water requires city council approval.”

While switching from water cooling to closed-loop air cooling appears to be the main industry talking point used to address water use, the general public appears either unconvinced or unfamiliar with that message. Nearly all of the 30-plus opponents who spoke during Chandler’s December

hearing — coupled with hundreds of submitted and online comments — said something to the effect of “data centers use too much water.”

Yegor Zenkov, a Chandler resident who said he works in the industry, said the closed-loop air-cooling concept is mysterious and unproven.

“If no one actually needs this (A.I. technology), then why are we building this?” Zenkov asked. “The scope of the misdirection makes my position clear.”

More power to them

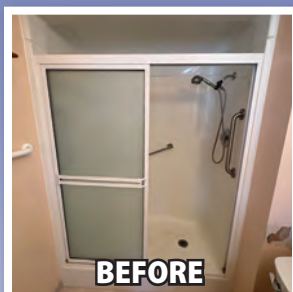
Salt River Project spokesperson Jennifer Schuricht said the utility relies on its customer to provide accurate estimates about power load requirements so it can properly size equipment and infrastructure to fit the customer’s needs and account for

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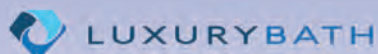


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FROM THE COVER

Data Centers

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this power load in SRP's load forecasts and plans.

ActiveInfrastructure, according to plans presented, entailed burying an all-new high-megawatt line across south Chandler, which recently endured the headaches of its streets being torn up to bury a similar line for Intel's expansion.

Even with ActiveInfrastructure on the hook, in writing, for much of the cost, the power delivery itself was a detailed, multiyear process that would take careful planning and coordination.

"This year, SRP launched a new large customer integration process to better address customer requests for major infrastructure and load," Schuricht said. "This process includes a transmission cluster load im-

pact study, which reviews multiple large transmission-load projects together to determine what additional infrastructure is needed to meet their service needs."

Once the initial cluster study is completed, Schuricht said, SRP provides financial estimates to these potential large load customers about their specific incremental infrastructure costs.

"That's so that these costs are borne by the large load customer, not SRP's other customers, including residential and low-income customers," she said. "Participants must make payments and satisfy other conditions to continue in the process."

As part of its 2025 pricing process, Schuricht said, SRP's board of directors modified the standard price plan for large load substations customers — known as its E-67 category — to ensure capacity and energy costs are not borne by other customers.

"Under the updated E-67 rate plan, new accounts with at least 20 MW of forecasted load will be subject to minimum billing requirements based on the greater of their actual demand or 80% of their forecasted load," she said.

Faced with a massive cost of building infrastructure or facing high bills for years to come, Schuricht said some potential customers work with SRP to find ways to limit electricity use for their operations.

"SRP does offer options to large load customers, including data centers, that can help them reduce their projected load," Schuricht said.

A plan that gets support

Chandler's Development Services staff told the Planning and Zoning Commission, in writing, it was recommending disapproval of ActiveInfrastructure's plans. As an alternative, staff put together a long list of

detailed stipulations, and insisted the developer negotiate a development agreement with the city.

That development plan includes guarantees of certain quantities of on-site, high-paying jobs by specific dates. But Chandler councilors — particular Matt Orlando — seemed doubtful ActiveInfrastructure could find investors willing to wait years into massive electrical infrastructure buildup and campus construction before making any products to sell.

De La Torre said while the business sense of a project is largely for council to consider, location and fit are staff's responsibility.

"Both location fit and potential resources used are taken into equal consideration when reviewing a proposed development," De La Torre stated. "One does not weigh more heavily than the other because both factors need to comply with city adopted policies."

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Pinnacle assistant to lead Chandler's Seton Catholic football

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Seton Catholic Prep Principal Victor Serna and Athletic Director Jim Shewbridge have made a joint announcement about their choice as the next Sentinels football coach.

Matt Hanshaw joins Seton Catholic with more than a decade of coaching experience, including what a news release states was a successful eight years at 6A Pinnacle in north Phoenix.

During his time with the Pioneers, Hanshaw served as varsity offensive coordinator, assistant head coach and running backs coach.

During his time with the Pioneers, Hanshaw served as varsity offensive coordinator, assistant head coach and running backs coach. The varsity had four post-season appearances that in-

cluded a 6A runner-up finish in 2022.

Prior to that, Hanshaw was head junior varsity and freshman coach and offensive coordinator. The Pinnacle JV had two undefeated seasons.

Hanshaw is a credentialed educator who attended Methodist University in North Carolina, completing his post-baccalaureate studies and credentialing at East Carolina University, the release states.

"I am excited to welcome Coach Hanshaw and his staff in support of our mission and student-athletes," Serna stated in the news release. "His philosophy, vision and values align well with Seton's, and I am confident in his ability to lead our football program."

Shewbridge said working with

6A players headed for a national stage is the kind of experience that will benefit the Sentinels.

"Matt brings a wealth of knowledge and experience from working with some of the top athletes in the state at Pinnacle," Shewbridge said. "He brings a lot of energy and enthusiasm to our football program and is looking forward to working with the Seton Catholic community."

Hanshaw comes over from a Pinnacle program that produced current NFL quarterback Spencer Rattler and many successful FBS college players.

The Sentinels went 4-7 in 2025 and were 1-4 in the 3A Metro Region under coach Pete Wahlheim, bowing out of the 3A playoffs in the first round. They went 8-3 in 2024.



Seton Catholic Prep in Chandler has hired Pinnacle assistant Matt Hanshaw to be its next head football coach. (Courtesy of Pinnacle High School)

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even being kidnapped at gunpoint on the job didn't stop her. She calmly reasoned with her abductors until they let her go unharmed, a story she tells with a smile to this day.

Howard spent three decades working for the federal government, from commissary checker to clothing sales, before retiring and following her husband to Arizona, where she's lived ever since.

Today, Howard is best known not only for her incredible life story, but also for her continued passion for bowling — a hobby that has taken her to every U.S. state tournament except Delaware and Maryland.

Howard still bowls weekly with her league at Bolero Bowling Alley in Chandler, where she's known



Corona "Mae" Howard, left, turned 100 years old in November. (Courtesy of Dillon Media Consulting)

for her competitive spirit and quick wit.

When asked about the secret to a long and happy life, Howard's advice was simple.

"Be nice to people, stay active, eat one good meal a day, and drink water. Maybe a little wine too,"

she said.

Howard's curiosity and optimism remain unshakable. A dedicated coin collector, she owns a rare 1909 S-VDB penny and eagerly awaits being able to add Puerto Rico to her 50-state quarter collection.

Yearwood

• From page 18

down," Yearwood stated in the news release. "I'd co-written so many songs for this project, and I just didn't want any of them to get lost. This whole writing portal opened for me, and these songs were too important to leave behind. The deluxe really feels like an extension of the album, every track could have lived on the original record because they're all part of the same story."

Yearwood stated the tour is really about bringing these songs to life in the way they were written, with just a guitar and a story.

"It's intimate and stripped down, which is how I love to share music," she stated. "I can't wait for folks to hear The Mirror in this setting, alongside the songs that have been part of my career all along. It's going to be a fun way to share this chapter."

Yearwood has sold more than 15 million albums sold and has had multiple No. 1 hits. She co-wrote every song on The Mirror — her sixteenth studio album.

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