



Council candidates clash on some issues at public forum

By Madeline Bates
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Current council members Arlene Chin, Jennifer Adams and Berdetta Hodge joined election newbies Brooke St. George, Bobby Nichols, Joe Forte and Elvis Taska, hosted by the Tempe Chamber of Commerce at the Tempe History Museum, for a recent council forum.

All candidates had one minute to answer questions and spoke to the audience with questions ranging from economic and workforce development to whether or not the candidates support Valley Metro's Streetcar expansion and the proposed drink spiking prevention ordinance that will be voted on in February.

The candidates agreed on issues surrounding the affordable housing crisis and expanding public transit, but disagreed on what changes to make and how to implement them.

Most of the candidates agreed

• See **Forum** on page 24

South Tempe workout studio aims to help members age gracefully



Eric Tobias, Tammy Schlador, Adria Vondra and Kathryn Armenta all participate in a small group class taught by personal trainer Jesse. (Independent Newsmedia/Madeline Bates)

By Madeline Bates
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Dustin Ringer worked in consulting, education and other businesses for years, but in 2025 he wanted to share his love for health and fitness with the beloved community he

knew all too well.

In August 2025 Ringer opened Alloy Fitness in Ahwatukee, at 1327 E. Chandler Blvd., a national franchise that he took interest in after seeing the small group models and personalized take on group training and fitness.

"We don't discriminate against anyone, but I noticed that the age 40 and over community was underserved and I wanted to change that," he said.

• See **Fitness** on page 25

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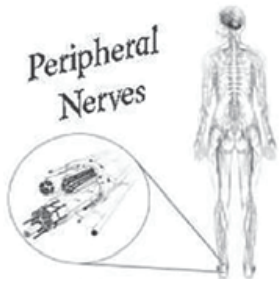


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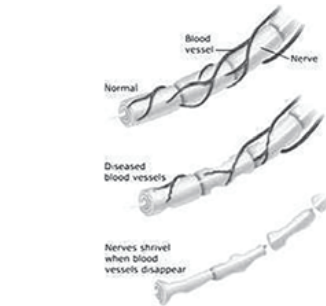
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COMMUNITY NEWS

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Deadline extended for SBA disaster loans for Tempe residents

Tempe residents and business owners impacted by the Oct. 13 microburst storm still have time to apply for U.S. Small Business Administration disaster assistance.

While the initial deadline to apply for physical damage disaster loans was Jan. 13, the SBA extended the application window through March 13 under a 60-day grace period.

Go to <https://tinyurl.com/e5a4u3t9>

Free Art Friday returns

Free Art Friday is back this spring at Edna Vihel Arts Center beginning in February.

Mark your calendars now and come back each month for new themes, engaging activities, and free family fun.

Go to <https://tinyurl.com/yp-whawc2>

Tempe Police find body in construction site

The Tempe Police Department reported a body has been recovered from a construction site near North McClintock and Weber drives.

The department would not confirm their identity until the medical examiner completes the identification process.

Go to <https://tinyurl.com/3whepkhn>

Tempe nonprofits seek further poverty solutions for 2026

By Madeline Bates
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

January is “national poverty month” but nonprofits like Tempe Community Council and Tempe Community Action Agency see it as a time to look back on community successes and plan for another busy year of helping those in need in Tempe and beyond.

In 2025 Tempe reported a 40% decrease in homelessness from 2024. The Maricopa Association of Governments Point-in-Time count of unsheltered individuals counted over 300 in January 2024.

Many public officials and community groups think there’s still more to be done to eliminate homelessness and poverty and are making it a priority.

“For a small nonprofit in Tempe eradicating poverty is a pretty ambitious goal, but we can support community members that are suffering from systematic or oppressive scenarios which oftentimes present themselves as poverty,” said Phillip Scharf, CEO of TCAA.

Scharf explained that small solutions can often prevent larger problems.

“If a bike gets stolen and that is someone’s only means of transportation, they could lose their job if they aren’t able to get to work. Sometimes, all someone needs is \$150 to replace a bicycle to never experience homelessness. TCAA is here to help with that,” he said.

The U.S. Census Bureau defines poverty as an individual making less than \$16,320 a year for an individual under age 65 or making less than \$31,812 for a family with two children and two parents under age 65.



TCAA volunteers Cindy Cross and Katelyn Pickett stand with full boxes for distribution. (Photo Courtesy of TCAA)

A September report from the U.S. Census Bureau of poverty in Arizona from 2023 estimated 900,000 or nearly 12% of Arizona residents live at or below the poverty line.

TCAA has a plethora of services for the public such as food and hygiene supplies, and offering utility and rent assistance for people in crisis. For problems that they can’t solve, the organization is able to partner with groups from around the state.

Scharf said both the city and TCAA saw a need for education and one-on-one discussions about money to prevent residents from falling below the poverty line.

The organization will also partner with Tempe Community Council, a

nonprofit contracted with the city of Tempe to ensure that financial stability and financial goals become more accessible to everyone.

In 2026 both agencies will work with the city of Tempe to use resources from the Cities for Financial Empowerment fund, a national model to establish a full-time financial discussion area at the EnVision Center for those looking to meet financial goals in the next year.

Scharf says the program is not “Finance 101” but rather a more accessible financial planner to help low-income households budget, save and gain confidence with negotiating skills to help them prepare for future and un-

• See **Solutions** on page 25



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BUSINESS

SBA administrator visits Tempe to promote manufacturing

By Madeline Bates
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

In an unassuming commercial site on Tempe's north side, a new manufacturing plant is being built to house Sly Energy Drinks, an Arizona brand founded by former doctors who received a loan from the U.S. Small Business Administration to turn their idea into a sip.

Administrator of the SBA and former Georgia Sen. Kelly Loeffler recently visited the site and met with the owners of the brand to tout the successes of the Trump Administration and the importance of American-made products and job creation.

"At the SBA, our focus is to provide small businesses with access to capital and it's great to meet some of our customers and work with local lenders where the SBA provides that guarantee," she said.

Founder and owners of Sly Beverages, Drs. Tom and Amy Czyz (pronounced "chez"), started the brand to accommodate Amy's distaste for unflavored water. After decades of practicing optometry, the couple started the company Intent Brands and created Sly, a non-carbonated and caffeine-free beverage that was designed with the circadian rhythm in mind to prevent a crash in the energy drinks and to accommodate those who have trouble falling asleep.

The facility where they plan to start distributions is an estimated 600,000 square feet on McClintock near the Loop 202 and will host over 100 employees at a time. The Czyzes say that they will also host other beverage distributors in the facility to allow for more local manufacturing and



Tom and Amy Czyz walk with Kelly Loeffler from the SBA at a warehouse in Tempe. (Independent Newsmedia, Madeline Bates)

growth of small businesses.

"We're excited for the future, we're excited for this space and the jobs that we'll create as well as the products we'll be able to deliver to the American people. It's even more exciting to be able to help other small businesses solve issues together so that we can all grow," said Amy Czyz.

SBA Administrator Loeffler says the administration has also worked with Congress to make loans more accessible by expanding the amount of private capital on small businesses and expands the access to funding by allowing funds to be obtained through government sponsored organizations.

In 2025 the House passed five SBA-related bills including the Investing in All of America Act, or HR 2066, which is cosponsored by both democratic and republican represen-

tatives and passed the House through a bipartisan vote and is at the Senate for further discussion.

In fiscal year 2025 over 200 loans were dispersed in Arizona totaling over \$156 million and over \$6 billion in the year.

The SBA also offers loans to homeowners in crisis and has helped 11 homes and businesses in Tempe get assistance with damage and property loss following the Oct. 13 microburst storm.

Residents of Maricopa County can apply for disaster recovery loans through March 13, 2026 and renters, homeowners and business owners are all welcome to apply.

To voice your opinion on this story, connect with us at AzOpinions@iniusa.org.

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Sly drink brand at a warehouse in Tempe. (Independent Newsmedia, Madeline Bates)

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BUSINESS MOVES



Compiled by Richard H. Dyer
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

LIQUOR LICENSES

Public hearings were held Jan. 8 by the Tempe City Council on the following liquor licenses:

- 1 • A series 10 beer and wine store liquor license for Tempe Hospitality Services LLC dba **TBC Store**, 555 N. College Ave. No. 1034 in Tempe. Jeffrey Craig Miller is the agent for this application. This is a new business applying for a new license.
- 2 • A series 12 restaurant liquor license for The Topsy Taps & Grill LLC dba **The Topsy Taps & Grill**, 7192 S. Price Road in Tempe. Michael Raymond Kaffer Jr. is the agent for this application. This is a new business applying for a new license at a location whose previous occupant had a similar type of business operation and liquor license. The applicant is operating with an Interim permit.

CLOSED

- 3 **Smokin Fins** recently closed at 900 N. 54th St. Suite No. 1 in West Chandler. In an Instagram post @smokinfinrestaurant, it states in part, "After 9 wonderful years, we're saying goodbye to Smokin Fins Chandler... Though this goodbye is bittersweet, we will always cherish the moments shared here. From the bottom of our hearts, thank you for being part of our story and for allowing us to be part of yours. It has been an honor."

NOW OPEN

Twist Hot Chicken recently opened at

- 4 245 W. Elliott Road Suite No. 103 in Tempe. Go to <https://www.twisthotchicken.com>.

- 5 **Dolce Vita Gelato** recently opened its its second Valley location. The Italian owned gelato shop, 1342 W. Warner Road in Tempe held grand opening celebrations offering a complimentary scoop of its beloved house-made Lemon or Stracciatella gelato. Dolce Vita is open every 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday-Saturday and closed on Sundays. Go to dolcevita-groupaz.com or follow its Facebook and Instagram pages.

- 6 **Bagelfeld's** bakery recently opened at 5154 S. Rural Road in Tempe with hopes of bringing more Brooklyn themed bagels to the East Valley and beyond. Open from 6 a.m. to 12 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday or until sold out. Go to <https://www.bagelfeld.com>.

IN THE NEWS

- 7 **Tracy Dempsey Originals**, a bakery and bottle shop with unique sweet and savory confections at 1323 W. University Drive in Tempe, is offering a hands-on cooking class titled "Comforting Soups & Quick Breads" 11 a.m.-1:30 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 21. Cost is \$85. Sign up by sending an email to tracy@tracydempsey-originals.com.

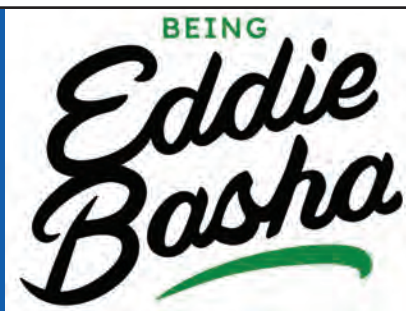
- 8 A \$50,000 Powerball winning ticket was sold in Tempe for the Dec. 22 drawing. The winner was purchased at **QuikTrip**, 918 E. Baseline Road in Tempe, Arizona Lottery officials said.



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EDUCATION

Kyrene school district board votes for new president

By Madeline Bates
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Triné Nelson, former board vice president, was selected president of the Kyrene Elementary School District Governing Board and member Amy Satre vice president in a unanimous vote at the Jan. 13 regular board meeting.



Triné Nelson

Before the vote former president Kevin Walsh announced that he would not be seeking another term in leadership after five years of service as president and seven years on the board. He also announced that their family welcomed a fifth child and while he will be stepping back to spend more time with family, he will be supporting the new

president in any way he can.

"This has been the honor of my life, but I would like to step back and let others have a chance to serve in a leadership position," Walsh said.

Cedric Collins nominated Nelson and Bunny Davis nominated Satre for the role of vice president. Both accepted the position but neither had a comment or discussion.

Nelson has been on the Kyrene Governing Board for three years and her seat will be up for reelection in 2027. She has worked previously in youth care and justice systems and Arizona State University's W.P. Carey School of Business. She has been part of the Kyrene community for over a decade.

Satre is a parent of a Kyrene student and has been on the board for



Amy Satre

one year.

Both Satre and Nelson have had students attend and age out of the district.

During her announcements at the meeting Superintendent Laura Toenjes announced that January is school board recognition month and honored the board on Tuesday night following the vote.

"Our board members give generously of their time and energy and in the past year they have continued to demonstrate that they approach challenging decisions with a deep commitment to students and our community," she said.

On Dec. 16 the board voted to close six schools in the district citing

lack of enrollment and inadequate funding. Students, staff and employees have all shared their support for the care and attention that the board took when making the decisions to close schools despite an emotional outcome from the vote.

The first speaker of the meeting, a student at Pueblo Middle School named Sabrina Pratt, echoed this in her statement to the board.

"Even though this vote didn't mostly go my way, there are still going to be hard parts involved but this community that we brought together must stay intact," Pratt said.

To learn more about the Governing Board visit -Governing Board - Kyrene School District

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ACHIEVEMENT

ASU graduates 1,000 Starbucks workers

By Madeline Bates

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Of the over 12,000 graduates from Arizona State University, more than 1000 are part of the Starbucks College Achievement Program.

The Starbucks College Achievement Program allows Starbucks workers who have been employed for at least one year with the company to attend ASU Online and earn a bachelor's degree fully funded and with scholarships available. Employees have to work a minimum of 20 hours a week and must be in good standing to keep receiving aid and support from the program.

There is also no requirement to stay with Starbucks following graduation. That is exactly what recent graduate Jessica Horvatin plans to do.

"I learned so much by being able to

work and put my business skills into practice, and that experience is invaluable," she said.

Horvatin started working with Starbucks in 2017 in Wisconsin. Later, she decided to move to Arizona for warm weather and desert sunsets. She was able to get a job at a Tempe Starbucks and worked her way up to a shift lead while she attended ASU.

Since Horvatin lived in Tempe, she had the unique experience of attending school online while also being able to use student services like the library and student centers. This also led to her coworkers becoming a support system and many of them being able to see her graduate.

"They cheered for me, and I got to see a few of my other coworkers graduate from the same program," she said.

Nearly 90% of all Starbucks stores have employees who are part of the program and there are over 27,000 enrolled in 2025.

Horvatin graduated with honors with a degree in Applied Business and a minor in Global Marketing, where she worked with students from Shanghai, China, through her classes as well as other Starbucks employees around the world.

Now that she's graduated, Horvatin is looking for full-time employment and other opportunities where she can use her marketing and management experience. She hopes to travel abroad soon and meet more people from other countries.

To voice your opinion on this story, connect with us at AzOpinions@iniusa.org.



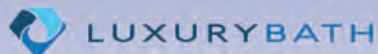
Jessica Horvatin graduated from the W.P Carey School of Business this December. (Jessica Horvatin)

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BEFORE



AFTER



NEIGHBORS

Tempe honors recipients of the Martin Luther King Diversity Awards

By Madeline Bates
INDEPENDENT
NEWSMEDIA

The city of Tempe recently honored four individuals and two groups that have done work in the community to make the city a more inclusive and welcoming space for years to come as part of its Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Awards for Diversity program.

Event speakers included Tempe Mayor Corey Woods, Pastor Michael D. Long and chair of the Tempe Human Relations Commission, Rabbanni Fur-Quaan.

Singer Sandra Bassett opened the event with gospel music and ceremonial songs like the national anthem and “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” often referred to as the Black national anthem.



Tempe hosted the MLK Diversity Awards at the Double Butte Resort. (Independent Newsmedia, Madeline Bates)

Woods shared his praise for city staff and officials who make Tempe more diverse and inclusive.

“When Dr. King

spoke about community, he wasn’t speaking in the abstract. He was describing the responsibility that requires courage, compassion

and consistent action,” he said.

Woods is Arizona’s only Black mayor and only the second in the state’s history. While

Arizona has representations of all races and backgrounds in city governments across the state, Woods and the council saw that hate

crimes and targeted attacks were still occurring. With this, the city changed the way these crimes are reported and allowed reporters to share information anonymously to protect privacy of victims.

Tempe is also improving inclusion through infrastructure. The Tempe ADA Transition plan is now in its third phase, building on the 28 intersections that have been changed to include accessibility features. Tempe and other cities in Maricopa County also have chosen to keep offices related to diversity, equity and inclusion open while other cities have shuttered them following executive orders from President Donald Trump.

Long, the pastor

• See **Awards** on page 13


INDEPENDENT

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Awards

• From page 12

at Dayspring United Methodist Church, spoke about King's words, and the changes Christianity has gone through in his keynote speech.

"When cruelty is marked as strength, when truth is blurred, when Christianity is trying to be co-opted by White supremacy and nationalism, and communities are afraid to go outside in fear of not returning home, King's vision calls us back to a better way," he said.

Long noted the intersection of faith and community are strong and using faith to come together for the better was what King and other civil rights leaders intended.

The award recipients did not speak but instead offered smiles to the crowd before standing for photos with the city council.

Winners of the 2026 awards are:

Individuals:

- ♦ Ashley Maddox
- ♦ Billie Harris
- ♦ Sreevarenya Jonnalagadda
- ♦ Felicia Durden

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- ♦ Peer Solutions
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ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Art Gallery	Mesa Arts Center HD South The Music Store
Bowling Alley	Fat Cats Queen Creek Main Event AMF Bowling Alley
Casino	Wild Horse Pass Gila River San Tan Mountain We-Ko-Pa Casino Resort
Dance Studio	NuEvolution Dance Studio The School of Ballet Arizona Fred Astaire Dance Studios -Las Sendas Mesa
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
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Fitness Center/Gym	DI training - Joshua Brinkman Mountainside Fitness Planet Fitness
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Health Insurance Agent	Alicia Rosenquist Arizona Health Insider
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Hearing Aid Center	ABC Hearing Mesa Livingston Hearing Aids
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Home Health Care	Right at Home Queen Creek Seniors Helping Seniors East Valley Always Best Care Senior Services
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Hospital	Banner Mercy Gilbert East Valley ER
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IV Therapy	IV League Arizona Prime IV Hydration & Wellness - Red Mountain Gateway Health, Wellness & Aesthetics
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Local Pharmacy	CVS Mixtures Pharmacy Ahwatukee
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Med Spa	Wallflower Beauty & Wellness Flawless Faces Med Spa Gateway Health Wellness & Aesthetics
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Medicare Insurance Agent	Alicia Rosenquist The Medicare Navigators Greg Gudis
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Mental Health Therapist	East Valley Psychiatric Services Warm Milk and Honey Healing Psychotherapy Services, LLC AZ Whole Heart Connection Horizon Health & Wellness
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Physical Therapist	AFC Physical Medicine & Chiropractic Centers Spoonier Jim Coleman at Welch Physical Therapy
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Physical Therapy Center	AVC - Mesa Spoonier
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Physician: Family	Rock Point Family Medicine Premier Health Family Practice Dr. Ann Marie Padilla
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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
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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
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Heating & AC Services	MechaniCool Simper Fi Heating & Cooling True Home Maintenance AC & Heating LLC
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Home Appliance Store	Spencer's The Home Depot Lowe's
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Home Repair Company	Voda Cleaning and Restoration of Phoenix Bulldog Design/Build LLC HomeLyfe
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House Cleaning	Two Maids Voda Cleaning & Restoration Of Phoenix Barazza's House cleaning Merry Maids
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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
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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 Companion Insurance The Medicare Navigators Calvert Agency LLC
Insurance Agent	Jennifer Goedken, The Benefits Gallery Alicia Rosenquist Jarrett Christianson Companion 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



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OPINIONS

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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.

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.

Supports Kyrene board decision to close six schools

Kyrene School District has concluded its long-range planning process. The effort began when the district formed a Long-Range Planning Committee to examine potential school consolidation, followed by seven regional public hearings to receive feedback.

On Dec. 16, 2025, the Governing Board made the difficult decision to close six Kyrene schools due to declining enrollment. Colina, Estrella and Manitas will close for the 2026-2027 school year, while Akimel A-Al, Kyrene Traditional Academy and Pueblo will follow in the 2027-2028 school year.

While no person, myself included, wants schools to close, the governing board had to act to achieve \$7 million in savings over the next five years. The closures will likely result in \$5.8 million in savings. The remaining \$1.2 million will be achieved by finding and creating efficiencies and generating new revenue streams.

Since Arizona provides most school funding based on the number of students enrolled, Kyrene could not continue to operate a footprint designed for 20,000 students with a little under 13,000 students attending today. Originally, the district's proposal called for closing eight schools, and the board carefully weighed the community's desire to keep more schools open with the financial realities to determine its

OPINIONS

Schools

• From page 19

course of action.

While this decision will cause short-term challenges, I am heartened by stories of how Kyrene rallied in a moment of need to support Sierra following its roofing issues. Both Altadena and Cerritos hosted Sierra students throughout the fall semester, and many Sierra students made the adjustment to a new campus within a few days.

Our Kyrene kids are resilient and will still have the opportunity to receive a quality Kyrene education if their current school closes. I intend to work with the Kyrene Community to move forward as “One Kyrene” to support our students, parents, faculty and staff during this transition and beyond.

Donald “Franklin” Zyriek
TEMPE

SPEAK UP

Here are some comments about stories happening in your area: comment

ASU GRADUATES 1,000 STARBUCKS WORKERS

“ASU graduated a heck of a lot more than 1,000 future Starbucks employees.” — **John O.** via Nextdoor comment

“John, Starbucks paid for their college while they were working at Starbucks.” — **Karla B.** via Nextdoor comment

“John, yeah I was thinking that too. I am happy they have the program. I hope the degrees that people get with it are productive..” — **Dan Taifer** via Nextdoor comment

“It’s phenomenal.” — **Bonnie Levine** via Nextdoor

ARIZONA STATE COACH KENNY DILLINGHAM SIGNS 5-YEAR EXTENSION AVERAGING \$7.5M A YEAR

“Awesome. It’s about time.” — **Vic Rodriguez** via Nextdoor comment

“Why \$7.5 million? Why not lower tuition and give the students a break? Don’t tell me football makes money. Some players get full-ride scholarships to play.” — **Roy Schultz** via Nextdoor comment

“I feel he is a class young man and loves the university. If he continues to win, I can’t see how you could keep him here. He could make much, much more elsewhere.” — **Richard B.** via Nextdoor comment

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chandleraz.gov/passports



JAN. 27-FEB. 1**'A Beautiful Noise'**

Neil Diamond musical packed with iconic songs, big emotions and nonstop feel-good moments. From "Sweet Caroline" to "America," this hit-filled Broadway musical celebrates the life, music and magic of a legend. You'll be singing along before the first chorus ends. Eight shows at ASU Gammage, 1200 S. Forest Ave. in Tempe.

Tickets at <https://tinyurl.com/54sbd5tc>

FEB. 1**El Puente Festival**

Cultural Coalition and Tempe Center for the Arts present the 14th Annual El Puente Festival from 2 to 6 p.m. at the TCA, 700 W. Rio Salado Parkway in Tempe.

The free community event invites families to bridge generations through a vibrant showcase of traditional cultural arts.

The festival features a diverse lineup of youth and professional performers from across the Valley, including ballet folklórico, mariachi, hoop dancing, and storytelling. Beyond the stage, attendees can enjoy interactive arts and crafts, free books from the Barrio Bookmobile and local food vendors.

The afternoon culminates in the festival's signature community sunset parade. Led by the giant puppets and masked characters of Master Sculptor and Cultural Coalition Co-Founder Zarco Guerrero, attendees are invited to march across the Tempe Pedestrian Bridge for a commemorative group photograph by the lake.

Individual shows require a ticket from <https://tinyurl.com/yck2pyfn>

FEB. 27-28**'A Teen Odyssey'**

A cutting-edge, immersive physical theatre experience from Mallorca combining live physical performance with smartphone interaction. Using La Fura dels Baus' Kalliópē app, the show transforms audience members into active participants, exploring identity, belonging and intergenerational connection.

The production is designed to captivate both teens and adults. La Mecànica crafts a unique, high-impact theatrical journey that resonates with contemporary audiences.

Bring your phone fully charged.

Four performances at ASU Gammage, 1200 S. Forest Ave. in Tempe.

Tickets at <https://tinyurl.com/hd439nhn>

EVENT**'Regroup in the Desert' bike show Jan. 31**

Set your sights on dream bikes at Regroup in the Desert, a free, open-to-the-public, one-day bike show in January at Regroup, 1205 N. Scottsdale Road in Tempe.

It is 10 a.m.–3 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 31, plus an optional 8 a.m. early-bird road ride, it states in a release.

Explore and test-ride top brands such as Bastion, Factor, Sarto, Parlee, Time, Mosaic, Open, Orbea and more. Meet the people behind the builds, and enjoy food, a live DJ, a static trainer power challenge with prizes and Regroup's café serving up specialty coffee throughout the day, it states.

Go to <https://regroupwithus.com/rides-and-events/regroup-in-the-desert-2026>.



It is 10 a.m.–3 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 31, plus an optional 8 a.m. early-bird road ride. (Metro Creative)

BENEFIT**Tempe leadership class presents 'Art Takes Root'**

Tempe leadership class XLI is hosting an art show fundraiser to support its "Storm to Shade" initiative.

Art is needed for the event in all mediums that represent community resilience and green space. To submit a piece of art, go to <https://tinyurl.com/yv2uuax8>.

The fundraiser is 6-9 p.m. Friday, Feb. 13, at Rocket Space Gallery, 37 W. Southern Ave. in Tempe.

Pay as you wish; suggested donation is \$20.

Entry includes silent auction, Cash Bar and an artwork raffle.

Additional gallery hours are Feb. 14-24.

About the fundraiser

When the recent microburst swept through Tempe, the com-



Art is needed for the event in all mediums that represent community resilience and green space. (Metro Creative)

munity's landscape changed overnight. Streets once lined with leafy canopies now stand bare. Parks that offered shade and solace now feel exposed. Storm to Shade was born from that loss.

The community-driven fundraiser is dedicated to replanting trees in

Mitchell and Jaycee Parks. Every donation helps turn devastation into renewal — transforming the scars of the storm into new roots, new growth and new shade for generations to come.

Learn more about the cause at www.stormtoshade.com.

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BENEFIT



The Bone Daddies, a local band from Tempe raised over \$66K for local nonprofits. (Angela Vaughan)

Tempe 'dad' band wins contest, raises money for community

Tempe-based dad band The Bone Daddies struck a winning chord at the annual Law Rocks Phoenix event in December, earning the coveted Judges' Choice Award while helping raise critical funds for Skate After School, a Tempe nonprofit dedicated to empowering youth through skateboarding, education, and mentorship.

Law Rocks, a global fundraiser with stops in over 30 cities, brings together attorneys and local musicians for a high-energy night of live music in support of nonprofit organizations in Phoenix.

The band's story is deeply rooted in the Tempe community. Many of the members grew up in South Tempe and later connected through their children, who attend Waggoner Elementary School in the Kyrene School District. What began as conversations on school drop-off lines, birthday parties and side-lines eventually evolved into jam sessions, gigs, and now an award-winning performance on one of Phoenix's most unique charitable stages.

"When Law Rocks launched, we jumped at the chance to support Skate After School," said Nik Boca, drummer for The Bone Daddies and Manag-

ing Partner at DM Cantor. "It allowed us to give back while doing what we love most—playing music together as friends and fathers. Winning the Judges' Choice award was truly the icing on the cake."

Proceeds from the bands fundraising efforted directly benefited Skate After School, a Tempe-based nonprofit that provides safe, inclusive after-school programming focused on skateboarding, academic support, and social-emotional development for youth.

The 2025 Law Rocks Phoenix event raised over \$66,000 for local nonprofits, with a portion of that going to Skate After School.

"The energy and support from The Bone Daddies and the Law Rocks Phoenix community directly help us create positive, engaging spaces for kids after school," said Tim Ward from Skate After School. "We're incredibly grateful for their commitment and creativity in giving back."

For information on The Bone Daddies, visit bonedaddiesband.com or follow on Instagram at [@bonedaddies_band](https://www.instagram.com/bonedaddies_band)

To voice your opinion on this story, connect with us at AzOpinions@iniusa.org.

Tempe explores solutions to prevent drink spiking

By Madeline Bates
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Councilmember Randy Keating at a meeting Jan. 22 presented the drink-spiking prevention ordinance to show the work of the Drink Spiking Prevention Subcommittee, which established an ordinance that would require drink-spiking testing kits at bars and restaurants in Tempe.

The ordinance would also encourage venues to offer drink covers or allow patrons to bring personal clear cups with lids.

Businesses with series 6 bar and series 12 restaurant liquor licenses that serve alcohol after midnight would be affected. Keating estimates between 65 and 70 establishments are to participate with hundreds eligible for the tax benefits if they comply.

"We know that where young

women go, young men are likely to follow so my hope is that any cost to the businesses will be offset by foot traffic and that more people are more likely to visit a bar with these measurements in place," Keating said during his presentation.

Venues would also be required to keep 10 kits available to patrons at all times. These kits could also be sold at a 50% markup, which would mean a test worth \$1.50-5.00 at wholesale could not be sold at a higher price than \$2.25-7.50.

Penalties for noncompliance will result in the city submitting a letter to the Arizona Department of Liquor Licenses and Control to determine the future of the venue's license.

Keating and the committee surveyed Arizona State University students and city residents to find that over 70% said they have been or know someone who has been affect-



Knope and Nightcap are two products created to prevent and stop drink spiking. (Independent Newsmedia, Madeline Bates)

ed by a drink being spiked.

Keating hoped that by passing the ordinance that this would bring more business to Mill Avenue restaurants and bars and would help make the city a safer place for party goers.

Chandler and Phoenix are exploring similar ordinances as this ordinance has gained popularity online

and with other public officials.

Public support and concerns Tempe Police Officer and public information officer Jessica Ells spoke following Keating's presentation in support of the ordinance.

"Usually our biggest setback is the identification of the drug; this ordinance will allow those kits to be available right away and give us evidence right there," she said.

Ells is a former officer with the Special Victims Unit and said sex crimes are often part of drink spiking and drug misuse, and victims often feel like they can't come forward without hard evidence.

The second and final reading of the ordinance will be Feb. 5, where the public can provide further comment.

Read the full story at <https://www.yourvalley.net/tempe-independent>.

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Tempe City Council candidates sit at the front of the room with an audience at the Tempe History Museum. (Independent Newsmedia, Madeline Bates)

Forum

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that there should not be more or higher taxes in the city, but Bobby Nichols and Elvis Taska both have ideas on new taxes for the city.

As stated on his website, Nichols proposes a 2% city tax on construction contracting, hotels and short term rentals and rental cars, citing that the city could make at least \$40 million for the city budget “overnight.”

“We need to be getting the best services that we can to the people of Tempe,” Nichols said as he explained his reasoning for raising taxes.

Taska had a similar approach, saying, “You have to pay for what you get” and explaining that he is against taxes generally, but open to taxing tourists if it meant an improvement on city resources.

All of the candidates said that they would support the Valley Metro Streetcar expansion to Mesa, with St. George, Chin and Adams saying that the funding would be a shared responsibility with the city of Mesa.

“Tempe would be willing to pay our fair share but I would expect that Mesa pays and there is federal funding as well,” Chin said.

All of the candidates agreed that an expansion would make the city better from economic expansion and growth by visiting Mesa’s

Sloan Park, which Forte stated, to making it easier for residents to get to and from work and other activities which Nichols argued.

Many were also concerned about the small businesses that would be impacted during construction and said that they would find ways to support businesses should construction prevent customers from getting to and from their businesses.

The Valley Metro Light Rail is expanding through Phoenix to the West Valley with new lines expected to open in late 2026.

Candidates also showed concern for businesses and patrons regarding the proposed drink spiking ordinance.

Currently, the only proposed requirement for businesses would be to have items for testing and prevention stocked for purchase, as well as signage with educational tools. These products would be cost-neutral for businesses to ensure that there is no strain on

Businesses would have an option to opt in to the Tempe Safe Bar Program which would require them to provide drink covers for free, but give a 25% reduction to the annual liquor license fees.

The city council general election will take place on March 10, 2026. If 3 candidates are not able to obtain a majority vote, then there will be a runoff election on May 19, 2026.

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Fitness

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Many Alloy members range from age 40 to 70 as Ringer wanted to find solutions to fitness problems that are often inevitable with aging.

In September he opened the South Tempe location at 1720 E. Warner Road where it serves over 40 members full time and has classes of no more than six with an instructor tailoring each exercise to the individual after hours of complimentary one-on-one discussion and full body scans to create a workout for each individual regardless of age, past injuries or previous experience with movement.

The Ahwatukee location serves over 80 members and has eight employees between the two locations keeping with the intimate atmosphere and the connection to community.

For Ringer and his general manager Emily Pineda, community is the best part.

“Even in a short time, seeing our members grow and come together on a regular basis has helped them make connections and that brings me a lot of joy,” she said.

Pineda has worked at other national chains but likes Alloy for the small-group style and community that is consistent. Ringer says 2026 will bring more members -only events and gatherings to help.

Alloy is looking for more people to join the community and the public is invited to an open house 11 a.m.-1 p.m. Jan. 31.

Both locations are open to new members and new members will qualify for the founder's rate pricing at less than \$80 per session at <https://alloypersonaltraining.com/location/south-tempe-az/>.

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Solutions

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expected expenses.

Classes and services like this are part of why Tim Burch, interim director of Tempe Community Council, loves seeing community involvement grow every year.

“We're eager to engage with the upcoming generations to keep Tempe one of the most collaborative and giving cities in the state,” Burch said.

Burch is also the director of community health and human services for the city of Tempe and works to ensure that Tempe residents are receiving care and resources to improve their health and wellbeing.

TCC offers parenting classes, tax preparation classes and clothing drives for teens in need. The group also manages the annual \$1.1 million of city funds with community volunteers to determine which nonprofits will receive grants and support throughout

the year. While these programs were successful in 2025, Burch is most proud of the volunteers and collaboration after the Oct. 13 microburst storm.

Following the storm TCC raised over \$23,000 to help the community rebuild and relocate after thousands of buildings were damaged and destroyed from hurricane level winds.

“After seeing the response to the microburst and the amount of community support I could not be prouder of this community,” he said.

While Burch will not be in his position with TCC much longer, he says he looks forward to what is in store for 2026 as the organization has moved locations to downtown Tempe, will hire a new executive director and create a three-year plan for funding and service.

“We're coming off of a really strong year and I'm really excited to see what the future holds for the city,” he said.

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