



Community

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LITCHFIELD PARK/GOODYEAR INDEPENDENT

Business

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Animal rescue turns foster homes into lifelines for dogs in need

Goodyear-based nonprofit relies on foster families to rescue, rehabilitate and rehome dogs across Arizona. (Submitted photo/Skye Moyer)

By James Goldmeier
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

In living rooms across the West Valley, rescue dogs aren't waiting behind kennel doors. They're curled up on couches, learning routines and sometimes sneaking food from under the dinner table.

West Valley Animal Rescue, a fos-

ter-based nonprofit serving communities including Goodyear, Buckeye and Avondale, is rethinking what animal rescue can look like, without ever operating a traditional shelter.

"We don't want them going from one kennel to another," said Skye Moyer, the organization's director. "We want them in a home, in a bed,

learning what it feels like to be part of a family."

The approach reflects a broader shift in animal welfare, where keeping pets in homes and preventing them from entering shelters in the first place has proven to be one of the

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Goodyear moves to set rules for data centers as industry expands

By James Goldmeier
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Goodyear officials are moving to formally regulate data centers as the fast-growing West Valley city continues attracting digital infrastructure projects, prompting new zoning rules aimed at addressing noise, building design and water-use concerns.

The city currently has six active data center campuses and a seventh under construction, positioning Goodyear as one of the Phoenix area's emerging hubs for the rapidly expanding industry.

During a recent work session, the Goodyear City Council reviewed proposed updates to the city's zoning ordinance that would standardize how future data centers are approved and regulated. The effort would shift the city away from negotiating project requirements case by case and toward a formal framework that establishes clear development standards.

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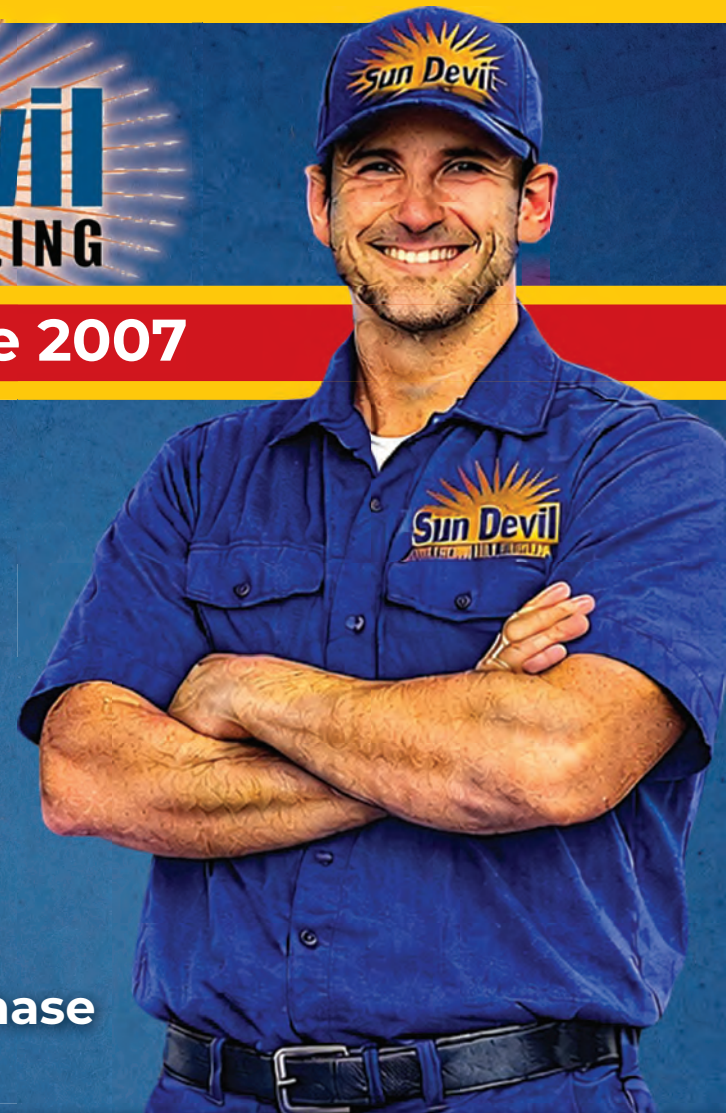
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COMMUNITY

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Police launch a scam awareness campaign urging residents to slow down, recognize warning signs and to report suspicious activity. (Submitted photo/Metro Creative Connection)

Goodyear launches scam awareness campaign

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The City of Goodyear and the Goodyear Police Department have launched a public awareness campaign aimed at helping residents recognize and avoid scams.

The campaign, titled “Stop. Slow Down. Don’t Become a Victim,” focuses on educating residents about common fraud tactics and encouraging them to report suspicious activity.

Officials say scammers often contact people through phone calls, text messages or emails and attempt to create urgency or fear to prompt quick action before information can be verified. The campaign is intended to increase awareness and reduce victimization, particularly among senior residents.

“Because of the pressure to act fast, victims often don’t see the red flags until it’s too late,” Goodyear Police Chief Brian Issitt said. “In fact, pressure to take action immediately is a red flag. If something feels off, it probably is.”

Police said residents should watch for warning signs that may indicate a scam, including immediate demands for payment through

• See **Briefs** on page 6

Litchfield Park voters to decide mayor, council seats in coming elections

By James Goldmeier
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Voters in Litchfield Park will head to the polls this summer to decide key local leadership positions as part of the 2026 election cycle.

A primary election is scheduled for July 21, with one seat for mayor and three seats on the city council on the ballot.

A general election will be held Nov. 3, if necessary.

The West Valley community, known for its small-town character, faces decisions about growth, infrastructure and long-term planning as development continues in surrounding areas. Several candidates with backgrounds in education, law, business and public safety are seeking office.



A primary election is set for July 21 determining Litchfield Park mayor and council members. (James Goldmeier/Independent Newsmedia)

Mayoral candidates Justin James

Justin James, a current city council member, is seeking the mayor’s office.

A graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, he served as a Surface Warfare Officer from 2002 to 2007, including deployments supporting military operations overseas.

After earning an MBA from the

University of Utah, he built a career in logistics and co-owns a transportation freight brokerage business.

James has been active in local civic organizations, including the Wigwam Country Club Board and the West Valley Mavericks. He previously served on the city’s Planning and Zoning Commission. His campaign centers on continued community involvement and guiding future growth in Litchfield Park.

Tom Schoaf

Incumbent Mayor Tom Schoaf is seeking reelection. A longtime resident, Schoaf has been involved in community organizations including youth sports programs, the Litchfield Elementary

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Goodyear municipal elections draw mix of candidates

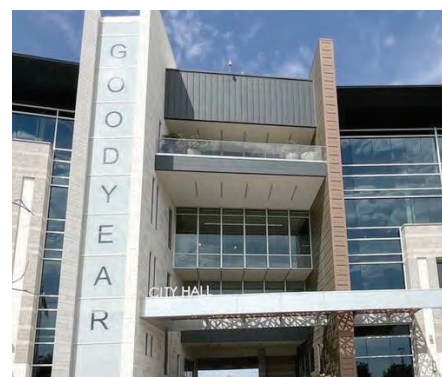
By James Goldmeier
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Candidates for mayor and City Council in Goodyear are outlining their experience and priorities ahead of the city’s July 21 primary election.

The ballot includes two candidates for mayor and four candidates for three council seats, including incumbents and challengers.

Mayoral Candidates Joe Pizzillo

Joe Pizzillo is the current mayor of Goodyear, first appointed to the role in 2021 following the death of Mayor Georgia Lord and elected to a full term in 2022. He previously served



A July primary election is set to decide key races in Goodyear city government. (James Goldmeier/Independent Newsmedia)

on the City Council beginning in 2009 and as acting mayor in 2010.

Pizzillo has worked in state and

local government finance for four decades, focusing on municipal budgeting and fiscal policy. His experience informs his approach to city governance, with an emphasis on financial management and long-term planning.

In addition to his public service, he teaches accounting and finance as an adjunct professor at multiple institutions. He is also involved in regional and local organizations, including economic development and nonprofit groups.

A longtime Arizona resident, Pizzillo has lived in Goodyear for more than two decades. He cites community investment and maintaining

• See **Goodyear** on page 6

Litchfield

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Governing Board and regional planning groups.

An attorney and University of Notre Dame graduate, Schoaf has also founded businesses with national and international operations.

During his tenure, the city has maintained no property tax while expanding services and amenities. His campaign highlights financial stability, infrastructure projects and preservation of the city's character.

City Council candidates

Lisa Brainard Watson

Lisa Brainard Watson, who is seeking reelection to the council, has lived in Litchfield Park since 1974 and is a retired educator. She taught for 21 years in local school districts, working with a range of students from Advanced Placement to special education and English language learners.

Watson has been active in the Litchfield Park Historical Society, serving in leadership roles.

She was first elected in 2018 and re-elected in 2022. Her candidacy reflects continued involvement in education and community preservation.

Joshua "Cody" Conklin

Joshua "Cody" Conklin is a business manager and community volunteer. He previously served as president of the West Valley Mavericks Foundation and manages Conklin Rose Company, a wholesale rose-growing operation that distributes plants nationwide.

Conklin has prior experience managing another regional agricultural business.

Paul Faith

Paul Faith is an attorney and current council member seeking a full term.

A lifelong West Valley resident, he holds degrees from Arizona State University and the University of Arizona College of Law and is a certified real

estate law specialist.

Faith has served as general counsel for multiple municipalities and has been recognized in several legal publications. On council, he has been involved in long-term development efforts, including the city's downtown project. His priorities include managing growth, maintaining financial stability and preserving quality of life.

Sarah Pearson

Dr. Sarah Pearson has lived in Litchfield Park since 2009 and has a 26-year career in public education. She currently serves as assistant superintendent of teaching and learning for the Agua Fria Union High School District and previously worked as a teacher, principal and district administrator.

Pearson is active in community and faith-based organizations and has served in leadership roles within her church and local youth programs.

Her campaign focuses on fiscal responsibility, managed growth and community engagement. She holds

degrees from Northern Arizona University, Arizona State University and Grand Canyon University.

Tim Wayne

Tim Wayne is a public safety professional with more than 30 years of experience. He currently serves as fire chief for the Goodyear Fire Department and previously worked with the Glendale Fire Department and in the U.S. Air Force as a firefighter.

Wayne holds degrees in fire science and educational leadership and is a Certified Public Manager. A Litchfield Park resident since 2020, he is campaigning on public safety, infrastructure improvements and planned development.

The 2026 elections come as Litchfield Park city leaders and candidates have identified maintaining the community's character while addressing growth as a central issue for voters.

More information is available at litchfieldpark.gov. Visit yourvalley.net for continuing elections coverage.



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Selections
may vary

Goodyear

• From page 4

quality of life as priorities.

Bill Stipp

Bill Stipp is a former Goodyear City Council member who served three four-year terms representing an at-large district.

He brings more than 35 years of experience in government operations and public administration.

Stipp has held leadership roles on regional and state boards, including transportation and water policy organizations, and has participated in national and state committees addressing municipal governance and labor relations.

His work has spanned communities of varying sizes, including administrative leadership roles in Arizona.

He has a background in fire service and emergency management was recognized by the U.S. Army as a subject matter expert in incident command systems, training response forces for several years before retiring in 2025.

Stipp holds a master's degree in public administration and has contributed to professional publications on emergency response and management practices.

City Council Candidates Sheri Lauritano

Sheri Lauritano is a former Goodyear City Council member who has served three terms. She previously served on the city's Planning and Zoning Commission.

Lauritano has professional experience as a small business owner, former prosecutor, and pro tempore judge. She also teaches as an adjunct faculty member at higher education institutions.

Her public service includes leadership roles in regional and national organizations, including water policy and public safety committees. She currently chairs the Goodyear Judicial Selection Advisory Committee.

During her tenure, Lauritano has focused on public safety infrastructure, including fire stations, police facilities, and emergency response systems, as well as community amenities such as parks, libraries and recreational facilities.

Brannon Hampton

Brannon Hampton serves as Goodyear's vice mayor and was first elected to the council in 2017, with reelection in 2022. He has participated in city planning efforts, including the 2025 General Plan committee.

Hampton works as a financial ad-

viser and previously spent more than 17 years at the Palo Verde Generating Station in roles related to operations, quality assurance and project management.

His policy priorities include managing growth, supporting economic development and maintaining balanced budgets. He has served on several regional and national committees related to economic development and municipal policy.

Hampton holds a master's degree in business administration and other professional certifications. He has lived in Goodyear for more than a decade.

Vicki Gillis

Vicki Gillis is a current council member, elected in 2022. She previously worked in the entertainment industry and later became involved in charitable and public policy efforts.

Following the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, Gillis participated in fundraising and advocacy efforts supporting first responders, including work connected to federal legislation addressing health coverage for those affected.

She has also worked with public safety and military communities and has been involved in local efforts addressing homelessness, substance abuse and community safety.

Gillis has identified public safety

and support for first responders as key priorities during her time on the council, along with maintaining services amid the city's growth.

Jason Kish

Jason Kish is a candidate for city council and has served for nine years on Goodyear's Planning and Zoning Commission, including three years as chair. He has also worked with the city's Charter Committee.

Kish's campaign focuses on managing growth, maintaining public safety and promoting community engagement. He has emphasized collaboration and responsiveness in addressing city issues.

He highlights Goodyear's recent development and population growth as key challenges and opportunities, noting the importance of balancing economic expansion with quality of life.

Kish has also pointed to city initiatives in public safety, transportation and community programming as areas he would seek to support and continue if elected.

The primary election will determine which candidates advance, with the general election scheduled for November if required.

More information is available at goodyearaz.gov. Visit yourvalley.net for continuing elections coverage.

Briefs

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gift cards, cryptocurrency, gold or wire transfers; threats of arrest or legal action; requests for personal or financial information; and instructions to keep a transaction or conversation secret.

Officials recommend several steps if a suspicious contact occurs: stop communication immediately, do not send money or share personal information, contact the organization directly using a verified phone number, and report the activity to the Goodyear Police Depart-

ment.

Anyone who believes they may have been the victim of a scam is encouraged to contact the Goodyear Police Department's nonemergency line at 623-932-1220.

Local cancer survivor honored at spring training

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Breast cancer survivor Angela Onodera-Jimenez of Goodyear was honored during the Home Run for Life celebration March 8 at Goodyear Ballpark during a spring training game between

the Cincinnati Reds and the Arizona Diamondbacks.

The recognition was organized by City of Hope Cancer Center Phoenix in partnership with Goodyear Ballpark. The Home Run for Life program recognizes individuals who have undergone cancer treatment.

Onodera-Jimenez was diagnosed in October 2023 during a routine medical exam with a rare form of breast cancer along with signs of metastatic disease. She sought treatment at City of Hope Cancer Center Phoenix, where she received care from a multidisciplinary medical team led by Cynthia Lynch,

medical director of the center's breast program.

Her treatment included chemotherapy, radiation therapy and surgery. During treatment, she also used supportive services such as genetic testing, cognitive therapy, support groups, naturopathic medicine and physical therapy while maintaining physical activity through classes including Zumba, yoga and Pilates.

"You have to choose your emotions," Onodera-Jimenez said. "Life never asks your permission — so you reinvent and go forward."

Visit cityofhope.org.

Litchfield Park to dedicate new library to Max Wilson

By James Goldmeier
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The Litchfield Park City Council has authorized a placement of a memorial plaque dedicating the city's new public library to the memory of Max Wilson, a former city councilmember and Maricopa County supervisor whose influence helped shape the West Valley.

The plaque will be installed at the Rancho La Loma hilltop library, a 10,000-square-foot facility currently under development near Litchfield Road. The project, funded through Maricopa County and managed by the county library district, is expected to open in fall 2026.

Wilson, who died July 30, 2024, served on the Litchfield Park City Council before representing District 4 on the Maricopa County Board of Supervisors from 2002 to 2013. City officials said the dedication reflects

his long-standing commitment to the region.

"Max Wilson was Mr. West Valley, and his influence can be felt across the growing and vibrant district we were both fortunate to represent," said former Maricopa County Supervisor Clint Hickman, who succeeded him in the role.

Hickman said Wilson was a strong advocate for Luke Air Force Base, local business growth and housing development for military families, helping drive economic expansion across the West Valley.

The new library has been a focal point of community discussion in recent years. City leaders approved the project after a series of public meetings in which residents raised concerns about relocating the library from its longtime site on Wigwam Boulevard.

Despite the opposition, officials said the new facility will better serve



City Council approves memorial plaque dedicating new Litchfield Park library to former West Valley leader. (Clint Hickman, Jan Brewer, Max Wilson) (Submitted photo/Clint Hickman)

residents with expanded space, updated technology and enhanced programming. The building will be about 40% larger than the existing library, which opened in 1979.

The project will also anchor a broader cultural campus that includes the P.W. Litchfield Heritage Center and Hilltop Park.

The current library is named after Florence Brinton Litchfield, wife of town founder Paul Litchfield and a Red Cross volunteer during both world wars. Officials have not announced final plans for the existing building once the new library opens.

City leaders said the plaque will ensure Wilson's legacy is recognized as part of the city's future.

"He understood this position is not about the person holding it," Hickman said. "This is the people's seat, and it always will be the people's seat."

Mayor Thomas Schoaf said the project represents a long-term investment in the city's future.

"We're excited to work with Maricopa County on a new library that will better serve our residents for generations to come," Schoaf said. "This investment will strengthen our community and enhance the library experience for families here."

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El Cidro project adds 80 homes in Goodyear. (Submitted photo/Ron Whittington)

New housing development opens in West Valley

By James Goldmeer
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

A new single-family housing development has opened in the West Valley city of Goodyear, adding 80 homes as the region continues to experience residential growth.

The project, known as El Cidro, features a mix of one- and two-story homes with floor plans ranging from approximately 1,500 to 2,900 square feet. Prices start in the high \$300,000s and reach into the \$400,000s.

The neighborhood design includes cul-de-sac streets, walking paths and homes positioned near open space and greenbelt areas. It is also close to local attractions such as Goodyear Ballpark, a spring training facility and event venue.

Residents will have access to nearby shopping and civic destinations, including The Market at Estrella Falls and Goodyear Civic Square, a recently developed downtown area with public gathering spaces.

The development is served by local schools, including Copper

• See **Housing** on page 11

Check out which stores, restaurants are coming to the West Valley

By James Goldmeer
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Business leaders from across the West Valley outlined a surge of retail development, downtown revitalization and regional economic collaboration during the annual City to City Update hosted by the West Valley Regional Chamber.

Officials from Avondale, Goodyear, Surprise, El Mirage, Litchfield Park and Tolleson described a region experiencing rapid population growth and significant commercial investment, driven by a strategy that emphasizes cooperation rather than competition.

City officials repeatedly described economic development as a team sport, noting that shared forums and workforce partnerships have helped transform the West Valley into one of



Leaders from six fast-growing communities highlight downtown projects, new restaurants and investments fueling economic momentum. (James Goldmeer/Independent Newsmedia)

Arizona's fastest-growing economic corridors.

"Our cities and our business communities are deeply connected," said Jeffrey Campos, president of the West

Valley Regional Chamber. "When a city invests in infrastructure, public safety, workforce developments, economic growth, businesses thrive. And

• See **Update** on page 12

Buc-ee's sets opening date for first Arizona travel center, ramps up hiring

By James Goldmeer
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Buc-ee's has confirmed plans to open its first Arizona location this summer, as the popular travel center brand expands into the western United States and begins hiring for hundreds of jobs.

According to reporting by ABC15, the Goodyear location will open to the public at 6 a.m. Monday, June 22.

The 74,000-square-foot facility, under construction near Interstate 10, is expected to draw travelers



Buc-ee's to fill about 200 jobs ahead of Goodyear debut. (Submitted photo/City of Goodyear)

• See **Buc-ee's** on page 12

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BUSINESS MOVES



1 Cox Communications Retail Store

833 S. Cotton Lane, Suite 4, Goodyear

Cox Communications has opened a new retail store offering in-person service, equipment, and mobile plan support.

2 Wilde Wealth Management Group

1626 N. Litchfield Road, Suite 280, Goodyear

Wilde Wealth Management Group has recently opened a new office providing financial planning and investment services.

3 Kura Revolving Sushi Bar

1670 N. Bullard Ave., Suite 100, Goodyear

Kura Revolving Sushi Bar is now open, offering a conveyor-style dining experience with sushi and Japanese dishes.

4 Waaree Solar Facility

1685 S. Litchfield Rd, Goodyear

Waaree is planning a new solar manufacturing facility expected to open in Q2 2026. It is expected to bring about 400 local jobs.

5 Magdaleña (GSQ District)

1900 N. Civic Square, Goodyear

Magdaleña is coming soon, featuring a wood-fired Latin American dining concept in the GSQ District.

6 Java Autism Services

2970 North Litchfield Road, Suite 110, Goodyear

Java Autism Services opened a Goodyear location to offer Applied Behavior Analysis therapy that strengthen communication, social and self-care skills of children diagnosed with Autism.

7 Angry Chickz

883 S. Cotton Lane, Suite 129, Goodyear

Angry Chickz opens a new restaurant serving Nashville-style hot chicken in Goodyear, marking the chain's first location in the city.

Cox Goodyear location offers equipment, mobile services and customer support. (Submitted photo/Maria Loiseau)



Financial services firm marks opening with ribbon-cutting event. (Submitted photo/Alison Bailin)

Housing

• From page 8

Trails for kindergarten through eighth grade and Goodyear High School.

Visit dreamfindershomes.com for more information.

Goodyear hospital adds system for joint replacement surgeries

Abrazo West Campus has added a robotic surgical system designed to assist with joint replacement procedures, the hospital announced.

The Mako 4 SmartRobotics system will be used for total and partial knee replacements, total hip replacements and some revision procedures using computer-assisted guidance.

Hospital officials said the system represents an investment of about \$870,000 and may support total shoulder procedures when that ca-

pability becomes available.

According to the hospital, the platform uses imaging and data to help surgeons plan procedures and guide instruments during surgery.

Lawrence D'Amico, Abrazo Health's chief strategy officer said the system allows for more individualized surgical planning.

"This investment reinforces a commitment to meeting the growing needs of patients across the West Valley with advanced technology, greater surgical precision, and more personalized orthopedic care," she said.

Demand for joint replacement procedures is expected to grow in the coming years, with some studies indicating a portion of patients report dissatisfaction following conventional surgery.

D'Amico said the addition is part of efforts to expand surgical services in the West Valley.

Visit abrazohealth.com for more information.



Dr. Christina Khoury and Abrazo West Campus says MAKO 4 technology will support knee, hip and future shoulder procedures.. (Submitted photo/Linda Nofer)

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Update

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when businesses grow, they create jobs, strengthen families, and expand our opportunities across the region.”

Goodyear builds walkable downtown

In Goodyear, development is centered on Civic Square at GSQ, a walkable district intended to serve as the city’s new downtown hub.

The district includes restaurants such as The Stillery, Spitz Mediterranean Street Food and Shake Shack. Additional dining concepts planned or under construction include Magdalena, Qdoba Mexican Eats and Berry Divine Acai Bowls.

Retail expansion is also underway, with a recently opened Trader Joe’s and a planned Nordstrom Rack expected next year.

Other restaurants expected to arrive include Firebirds Wood Fired Grill, Kura Revolving Sushi Bar and Califor-

nia Fish Grill.

A 74,000-square-foot family entertainment center featuring go-karts and mini-golf is also under development. Another regional attraction is the upcoming opening of a massive travel center from Buc-ee’s, expected this summer with more than 100 fuel pumps and a large convenience store.

Avondale pushes entertainment corridor

Avondale officials are promoting a mixed-use development corridor known as The BLVD, designed to combine restaurants, nightlife and public gathering spaces.

The project will include a large lawn for community events, a public park and pedestrian-oriented retail space.

A new hotel from Embassy Suites is also under construction and will include a rooftop bar and conference space intended to attract regional meetings and conventions.

Restaurant additions planned for the area include Cooper’s Hawk Winery & Restaurant, Gyu-Kaku Japanese

BBQ, 85°C Bakery Cafe and Arizona Pizza Co.

Surprise expands top retail center

In Surprise, development continues around the sprawling Prasada retail district, which officials say is the highest-ranked retail power center in Arizona.

A new Whole Foods Market has been confirmed for the area, adding to the district’s growing mix of national brands.

The city is also working to create its first true downtown along Elm Street. The district will include Spark Surprise, a storefront resource center offering meeting rooms, podcast space and educational resources for entrepreneurs.

City leaders said retail vacancy in Surprise has dropped to about 2%, highlighting strong demand for storefront space.

Litchfield Park adds urban village

In Litchfield Park, a 25-acre development known as Litchfield Square is

planned as a walkable urban village.

The project includes a 2.5-acre park, a plaza for events and roughly 40,000 square feet of restaurant and retail space.

A nearby residential component will introduce luxury condominiums with ground-floor retail, a new concept for the city.

The development also incorporates the restoration of La Loma, which will house the Agua Fria Hilltop School for the Arts and a 700-seat theater intended to serve the broader West Valley.

Revitalization in Tolleson and El Mirage

Smaller cities in the region are focusing on revitalizing historic downtowns and supporting local entrepreneurs.

Tolleson city leaders highlighted local businesses including Capacito Coffee House and upcoming additions such as Boba Donuts, Creamery Sushi and Just Fresh Mexican Seafood.

Meanwhile, El Mirage recently added its first coffeehouse as part of a downtown revitalization effort.

Buc-ee’s

• From page 8

from across the region while providing a significant boost to the local workforce. Company officials say about 200 full-time positions are being filled ahead of the opening.

Available roles include cashier, deli and food service, grocery, gift shop and maintenance positions.

Starting pay is listed at \$18 per hour, with some roles reaching up to \$23 per hour. Employees are eligible for benefits including medical, dental and vision coverage, a 401(k) match of up to 6% and three weeks of paid time off.

Workers will be required to work weekends and holidays, as Buc-ee’s stores operate 24 hours a day, year-round. The company offers double pay on major holidays.

A mass hiring event is scheduled for May 5 through May 7 at Desert Diamond Arena in Glendale, where applicants can interview for open roles.

Company leaders have described the Goodyear site as a strategic choice along a busy travel corridor. Co-founder Arch “Beaver” Aplin III said at a groundbreaking ceremony that the city’s business-friendly environment and growth made it an

ideal fit.

“We picked Goodyear because it’s just the ideal location for us, a business-friendly community, business-friendly council, amazing opportunity for employment,” Aplin said. “We’re going to blow minimum wage out of the water here.”

The Goodyear store will be Buc-ee’s first location in Arizona.

Visit buc-ees.com/careers for more information.

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Richard Smith
Reporter
rsmith@iniusa.org



Steve Chernek
News Page Designer
schernek@iniusa.org



James Goldmeier
Reporter
JGoldmeier@iniusa.org



Chris Williams
Graphic Designer
cwilliams@iniusa.org



Ann Kampmeyer
Multimedia Advertising Consultant
akampmeyer@iniusa.org

Arizona Leadership

Circulation Manager: Terri Rodgers.....trodgers@iniusa.org
Digital Sales Manager: Austin Moose.....amoose@iniusa.org
Editor-in-Chief: Patrick O’Grady.....pogradey@iniusa.org
Business Operations Manager: Kathleen Kotzbauer.....kkotzbauer@iniusa.org
V.P. of Sales & Marketing: Barbara Wandling.....bwandling@iniusa.org
President & CEO: Charlene Bissón.....cbisson@iniusa.org

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EDUCATION

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Colston Duce-Romero, left, Emma Billhmer and Charlemagne Rafael develop a project exploring ways to reduce classroom noise. (Submitted photo/Ashton Church Billhmer)

Local students win top prize at state science fair

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

A team of students from BASIS Goodyear won first place in the junior division at the Arizona Science and Engineering Fair over the weekend.

Students Emma Billhmer,

• See **Science** on page 14

Liberty school district welcomes Litchfield Elementary leadership

By James Goldmeier
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The Liberty Elementary School District governing board confirmed that Dr. Bridget Duzy is set to become the district's next superintendent.

Board members Kellie Zimmerman and Kris Kenyon welcomed her in a recent board meeting when her contract was officially approved. "I'm very thrilled about Dr. Duzy wanting to come and be our superintendent. I had a number of people reach out to me to say, 'wow, you were able to pull her away (from Litchfield Elementary School District),' ...but even people in her own district were happy for us," Kenyon said.

Duzy will start as the district's superintendent on Wednesday, July 1 with a

base salary of \$185,000 for her first year.

She was one of 24 applicants to the position, but the only one local to the



Bridget Duzy

West Valley, as she currently serves as the deputy superintendent for Litchfield Elementary School District.

She said connecting with the community was an important part of the interview process.

"Listening and learning about the community's needs and their celebrations, their fears, their wants and their needs is really helpful," Duzy said during a community meet-and-greet with residents and staff. "And also just connecting. On paper you're a candidate, but meeting people makes it real."

During her visit, Duzy toured two district campuses and observed classrooms.

"I got to see incredible things going on in the classrooms," she said. "It amazes me to see the wonderful things teachers and staff are doing for kids in Arizona. It's something to be proud of."

Duzy said she was drawn to the district because she believes her experience could help guide the district forward during a period of leadership turnover.

"I really enjoy my work and I love my team, but when I learned about Liberty's situation, I felt like I could use my talents and skills to help move the district in a good direction," she said. "I'm not afraid of hard work. I think it will be rewarding."

Visit liberty25.org for information.

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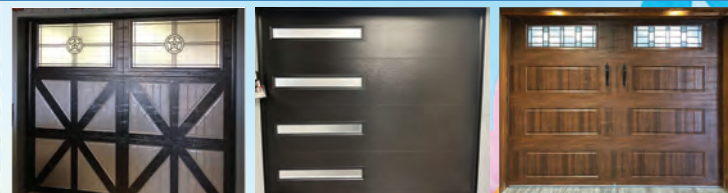
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Goodyear Fire Department to host summer camp for high school girls

By James Goldmeer
 INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The Goodyear Fire Department will once again host its Camp F.I.R.E.S. program this summer, offering high school girls a hands-on introduction to emergency services while building confidence and leadership skills.

The four-day camp, scheduled for June 15–18, is open to girls entering high school or currently enrolled. Organizers say the program is designed for those “looking to try something new, build confidence, and connect with others in a fun and supportive environment,” according to a department announcement.

Camp F.I.R.E.S., which stands for Females in Responding Emergency Services, gives participants the opportunity to work alongside firefighters and paramedics while engaging in physically and mentally challenging activities. Applications are expected to open soon, and officials noted that spots typically fill quickly each year.

The program builds on years of growth and community interest. Last year, about 30 students participated in the immersive experience, which included climbing ladders, navigating confined spaces, performing search-and-rescue exercises and completing



The annual Camp F.I.R.E.S. program focuses on confidence, teamwork and careers in emergency services. (James Goldmeer/ Independent News-media)

daily workouts designed to mirror real-world emergency response tasks.

“We do skills courses in the morning. We put our gear on and exercise to do things that mimic things we do every day at work,” said Meghan Golbach, a captain paramedic with the department. “We want to show them that they’re capable of doing hard things, whether or not they want to be a firefighter in the future.”

Now in its tenth year, the camp emphasizes teamwork, resilience and mentorship, pairing students with experienced first responders. Organizers say participants often show noticeable growth over the course of the program.

Science

- From page 13

Colston Duce-Romero and Charlemagne Rafaei developed a project examining the use of sound-absorbing paint to reduce classroom noise. The idea originated from their own experience with noise disruptions from neighboring classrooms.

The project focused on identifying a cost-effective method schools could use to improve classroom conditions.

The team also received recognition from the Thermo Fisher Scientific Junior Innovators Challenge, a national program that highlights middle school science, technology, engineering and math projects.

The students worked under the guidance of teachers Zack Tran and Marcos Guillen.

The Arizona Science and Engineering Fair brings together top projects from school, district, county and regional competitions across Arizona.

Visit azscience.org/azsef.

Goodyear Ballpark caps 2026 spring training season with strong attendance

By James Goldmeer
and Steve Stockmar
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The 2026 spring training season at Goodyear Ballpark drew strong crowds and community engagement, as the facility hosted 30 games over 30 days from February into March.

Total attendance reached 146,446 fans, contributing to a broader Cactus League total of 1,753,849 visitors across 10 Valley ballparks.

The league's attendance marked a 3.4% increase over 2025 and the highest single-season total since 2018, according to league officials. The most attended games in Goodyear came March 16, when the Chicago Cubs faced the Cleveland Guardians before a crowd of 8,008, and March 5, when the Los Angeles Dodgers played the Cincinnati Reds, drawing 7,869 fans.

"It was another great spring training season with the Cleveland Guardians

and Cincinnati Reds," said Goodyear Ballpark General Manager Bruce Kesman. "This season was highlighted by special moments including the City of Hope's Home Run for Life experience honoring a local cancer survivor. I'm always impressed with our ballpark staff that continues to be known for creating a welcoming, high-quality fan experience."

Across the league, average attendance was 7,400 per game, slightly down from last year. The highest single-day turnout came March 20, when 78,638 fans attended games across the Valley despite temperatures reaching 105 degrees. Most games that day were played in the evening.

Beyond attendance figures, the Goodyear season featured several community moments. On March 8, breast cancer survivor Angela Onodera-Jimenez of Goodyear was honored

• See **Attendance** on page 24



More than 1.75 million fans attended spring training games in Arizona in 2026. (James Goldmeer/Independent Newsmedia)

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SPORTS

Work pays off for Millennium senior star Perrin

By Richard Smith
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

All the work Brady Perrin banked during his first three years at Millennium has paid back with interest in his senior year.

In his junior year he became a full time starter, batting .321 with a .519 slugging percentage, two home runs and 23 RBI.

Through seven less games this year, Perrin is batting .407 with a .833 slugging percentage, five home runs and 23 RBI.

"Our freshman group naturally all look up to Brady. They're all out there starting to do the mannerisms and things that he does. They're starting to do the characteristics he does because they see him as a leader. No one told them to do that. They've naturally done it," Millennium Coach James McDonald said. "I've seen most teams so far and I've yet to see a player outplay him. He's been the best player on the field every game we've played, win or loss."

Perrin and McDonald arrived at the Goodyear school before the 2023 season.

The freshman center fielder's competitive nature made an impression on the former Los Angeles Dodgers and Pittsburgh Pirates pitcher.

"He wanted something out of the game of baseball. He took instruction really well, He's gritty and he didn't have the success he wanted early but he always fought. He always competed and never complained," MacDonald said.

Their first two years with the Tigers were in the 5A Conference and, for the most part, a middling team. Millennium was the 24th and final seed in the play-in tournament in 2024 and upset No. 9



Millennium baseball Coach James McDonald and senior outfielder Brady Perrin smile after a 9-2 win at Mountain Ridge High School in Glendale March 27. (Independent Newsmedia/Richard Smith)

Scottsdale Desert Mountain to make the main draw before losing to eventual champion Queen Creek Casteel.

Millennium moved up to 6A last year and was ready for the challenge. Seniors David Sheppard, Josue Malave and Preston Armstrong and juniors Perrin and Xavier Candelaria were ready.

They also became mentors to talented Class of 2028 — freshmen Chase Fillman, Peyton Burgess, Landon Swinheart and Juan Cuen.

"I definitely tried to hop on board with the seniors and kind of take a bit of a mentor role, learn from them and see what I needed to do to be a better mentor this year," Perrin said. "It was great to see us make the playoffs and get a win in the playoffs."

The Tigers improved to 21-10 in 6A, earning the No. 6 seed and winning their first round playoff game against Mountain Ridge.

With most of the team coming back, Millennium was invited to The Boras Classic in March. The team started with a 6-5 win in 13 innings against

• See **Perrin** on page 24

Residents respond to utility rate increase push in the Southwest Valley

By James Goldmeier
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

A proposed rate increase by Liberty Utilities that would significantly raise water and wastewater bills for West Valley residents is moving into the next phase, with a formal hearing before the Arizona Corporation Commission drawing strong reaction from local officials and customers.

The hearing, which started on March 23, is focused on the company's request to boost revenue to recover nearly \$200 million in infrastructure investments. Liberty Utilities Litchfield Park, which serves customers in Litchfield Park, Goodyear, Glendale and Avondale, is seeking increases tied to about \$197 million in system upgrades and regulatory compliance costs.



West Valley customers could see water and wastewater bills rise sharply as regulators weigh Liberty Utilities' request at its Arizona Corporation Commission hearing. (James Goldmeier/ Independent Newsmedia)

If approved, the new rates could take effect in the third quarter of 2026. Under the proposal, average residential water bills would increase by about 43%, while wastewater bills could rise

by roughly 54%.

Company officials say the increases are necessary to recover costs from major capital improvements, particularly in wastewater infrastructure.

"The case really carries the most significant amount of investment in infrastructure," said Regina Wise, a Liberty Water representative. "Wastewater is the major driver and the rate increases that folks are seeing."

Of the total investment, about \$145 million is tied to wastewater projects, while roughly \$52 million has been spent on water system improvements, including new wells aimed at strengthening supply reliability.

"We're investing in our community," said Liberty President Moses

• See **Water** on page 18

ON YOURVALLEY.NET

Litchfield Park resident elected secretary of community college district

By James Goldmeier
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Donna Davis, a resident of Litchfield Park, has been elected secretary of the Maricopa Community College District Governing Board.



Donna Davis

The secretary is one of the board's officer positions and helps maintain official records of board actions, including meeting minutes, votes and policy decisions, while ensuring proceedings follow public meeting laws.

• See **Davis** on page 18

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Davis

• From page 17

"I'm honored by the trust my fellow board members have placed in me, and I accept this responsibility with a focus on ensuring our community colleges remain high-quality, affordable and accessible," Davis said.

Davis represents District 4 on the board, which includes West Valley communities such as Litchfield Park. Glendale Community College and Estrella Mountain Community College are located in the district.

She works as senior community impact manager at Education Forward Arizona and serves on the Arizona Governor's Commission on Service and Volunteerism.

The Maricopa Community College District serves more than 140,000 students each year.

Water

• From page 17

Thompson. "A good portion of that is these wells that provide additional water sources that make us resilient and consistent for our customers."

Local officials urge caution, phased approach

During the hearing, Litchfield Park City Manager Matthew Williams said the scale of the increase could be difficult for residents to absorb all at once, even if infrastructure investments are necessary.

Matthew Williams, city manager of Litchfield Park, urged regulators to consider spreading the increase over time.

"It's much easier to swallow 3 or 5% every year than it is 50%," Williams said.

Williams also pointed to ongoing concerns about water pressure.

"I would love to see the law change

... to maintain a minimal pressure of 40 pounds," he said. "The current state law is 20, and 20 is not sufficient."

Residents cite affordability concerns

Public comments submitted to the Commission reflect widespread concern about the financial impact of the proposed increases, particularly among seniors and families on fixed incomes.

Marcie Patrovich, a Goodyear resident, described the strain on families.

"Increasing bills for those things that are required to survive will negatively impact the local businesses and have a negative impact on our cities' economies," Patrovich said.

Corinna Lopardo, a Litchfield Park resident, warned about broader impacts.

"The cumulative impact of utility rate hikes ... can be devastating for households on fixed incomes, seniors, and working families," Lopardo said.

Beyond cost, residents also raised concerns about system reliability and safety, pointing to past service issues.

Timothy Morris, a Litchfield Park resident, described severe pressure problems.

"Residents experienced near-zero water pressure, with some faucets delivering little to no output," Morris said. "System pressure dropped as low as 4 psi."

Paul Tighe, a Litchfield Park resident, criticized service reliability.

"Liberty has demonstrated poor management ... resulting in unsafe low water pressure conditions (and) inadequate supply for fire suppression," Tighe said.

What's next

In addition to base rate increases, Liberty is requesting approval for a temporary surcharge to recover rate case expenses and authorization to issue up to \$65 million in long-term debt. The company is also proposing a formula rate plan that would allow for smaller, more frequent adjustments in the future.

Visit azcc.gov for more information.



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Readers who disagree with a news story are welcome to respond with a letter.

From the Desk of James Goldmeier

As we head deeper into spring here in Litchfield Park and Goodyear, I wanted to take a moment to reintroduce myself. I've been covering this community for over a year and a half now, and as a Goodyear resident, it's been a privilege to share the stories and milestones that make the West Valley feel like home.



James Goldmeier

Before the summer heat settles in, now is the perfect time to get outside. Goodyear pools have already opened early for the season, and local favorites like Tierra Verde Lake Park, Estrella Mountain Regional Park or the Victory Steps in nearby Buckeye offer great spots to walk, jog or just enjoy the fresh air.

April is also Autism Acceptance Month, which centers on inclusion and understanding. It's a chance to recognize the many autistic people and their networks in our community and the local efforts, like Sounds of Autism based here in Goodyear, that support them throughout the year.

If you haven't already, consider signing up for our free weekly newsletter. It's an easy way to stay in the loop with local happenings, events, and updates all delivered straight to your inbox only once a week. You can also connect with us on Facebook, where we share even more community news day-to-day.

As always, thank you for reading and being part of this community.

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INDEPENDENT
NEWSMEDIA

FROM THE COVER

Rescue

• From page 1

most effective strategies.

“Supporting the community through wellness, diversion and (spaying and neutering) remains one of the most effective ways to help shelter pets,” stated Debbie McKnight, director of Maricopa County Animal Care & Control. “When families can access resources, pets stay where they belong.”

For West Valley Animal Rescue, that philosophy shows up in daily operations.

The organization works closely with county shelters and humane societies, stepping in when overcrowding reaches critical levels.

“When we take one dog, it opens a kennel for another,” Moyer said. “That’s how this works. It’s a ripple effect.”

In some cases, that ripple starts with urgency.

Moyer told a story about a call she received from a shelter regarding a rural property where dozens of dogs needed immediate help. What began as a plan to take in 20 dogs quickly escalated.

“We showed up the next morning and ended up taking 39,” she said. “There was nowhere else for them to go.”

Those dogs, like every animal the rescue accepts, were quickly vaccinated, dewormed, microchipped and scheduled for a spay or neuter surgery within days.

But their most important transition is not medical, it is emotional.

Many arrive frightened, undersocialized or recovering from neglect. Without a shelter facility, every dog is placed directly into a foster home,

• See **Foster** on page 21



Skye Moyer runs a Goodyear based foster operation. (Submitted photo/Skye Moyer)



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Foster

• From page 20

where they can decompress in a quieter, more stable environment.

"I can't tell you how many of them come in just petrified," Moyer said. "They need time. They need patience. They need someone to show them they're safe."

That's where the community comes in.

The rescue relies entirely on foster families, a rotating network of volunteers who open their homes to dogs in need.

Even short-term fosters can make a difference.

"If someone can take a dog for a week, that means we can say yes to another dog," Moyer said.

Still, the need outweighs availability, especially for larger dogs.

"We have to say 'no' more than we ever want to," she said. "Not because we don't want to help, but because we don't have anywhere for them to go."

For those who do foster, Moyer says the experience can be meaningful, but not always easy.

"You fall in love with them," Moyer said. "And then you have to let them go."

Despite the emotional toll, many fosters return again and again.

"The reward is bigger than the goodbye," she said. "You get to watch a dog go from its worst day to its best life."

The organization has also worked to remove barriers on the adoption side, streamlining a process that can sometimes be lengthy or restrictive at other rescues.

Approved adopters can often meet and take home a dog the same day.

"If it's a good match, we're not going to make people jump through hoops for weeks," Moyer said. "There's a dog for everyone, we just have to find the right fit."

Adoption donations typically range from \$300 to \$1,000, depending on the dog. The funds cover veterinary care, food, transportation and support for animals with more extensive medical needs.

As a nonprofit, the rescue receives no government funding, making community support essential.

"Every dollar goes back into the dogs," Moyer said. "Without that, we can't keep going."

Beyond adoptions and fostering, the group is focused on prevention, helping families before situations become crises.

In a recent outreach effort, the rescue encouraged people overwhelmed with too many animals to ask for help early, emphasizing a judgment-free approach.

"We are not the police. We're not here to punish anyone," Moyer stated. "We just want the dogs to be safe."

That can mean assisting with spay and neuter services, rehoming some animals while families keep others, or connecting people with resources.

"Reaching out early can completely change the outcome," she said.

For Moyer, the mission is both personal and communal. What started nearly two decades ago as a family effort has grown into a network of volunteers, adopters and supporters across the West Valley.

"We've built a community through this," she said. "Not just saving dogs, but connecting people who care about the same thing."

While the work is constant, and often urgent, the goal remains simple.

"Adoption is the most powerful thing people can do right now," Moyer said. "Every time a dog goes home, it opens space for the next one."

In homes across the West Valley, that next chapter is already beginning, one foster dog at a time.

Visit westvalleyanimalrescue.com for information on fostering, adopting and donating.

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FROM THE COVER

Data

- From page 1

Development Services Director Katie Wilkin said the city has gained experience since its first data center project opened in 2011.

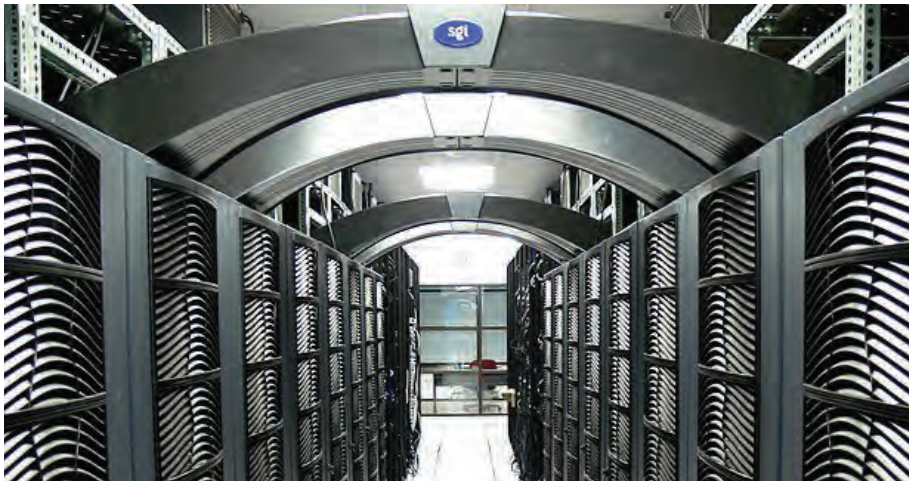
“Now we’re codifying a lot of that learning so that there’s clarity and consistency in the process,” Wilkin told the council.

Design and neighborhood concerns

Council members said one of the most common complaints about data centers involves the buildings’ massive, boxlike appearance.

Councilmember Trey Terry said the structures often stand out visually compared with surrounding development.

“I think one of the biggest reasons modern data centers get bad PR is they look like blocks out of Minecraft,” Terry said, referencing the block-style



City leaders debate design, noise and water concerns while crafting regulations for a fast-growing tech sector that now includes six campuses and another under construction. (Submitted photo/Christopher Bowns, Wikipedia Commons)

graphics of the popular video game.

Council members discussed potential design guidelines that could encourage developers to incorporate architectural features that make the buildings resemble office or commercial structures rather than industrial

facilities.

Councilmember Laura Kaino pointed to an existing facility along Bullard Avenue as an example of a more compatible design, noting the building’s appearance blends into nearby commercial development.

The draft zoning proposal would also establish standards for noise and building placement.

While data centers themselves typically operate quietly, backup generators used during emergencies must be tested regularly. Those tests can generate noticeable noise, particularly in areas near residential neighborhoods.

Under the proposed ordinance, operators would provide testing schedules and limit the times and days generator testing can occur. Facilities located within 500 feet of residential areas could also be required to submit annual noise monitoring reports.

The proposal also calls for a 300-foot setback from residential zones and 100-foot setbacks from commercial or industrial areas.

Power and infrastructure

Council members also addressed common misconceptions about how

- See **Expands** on page 23

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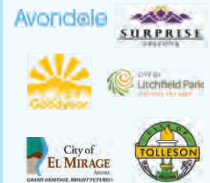
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Expands

• From page 22

data centers affect local utilities.

Councilmember Brandon Hampton said many facilities in Goodyear fund their own electrical infrastructure rather than relying on existing residential systems.

"Data center brings our own power," Hampton said. "It's not like a lot of data centers throughout the country where they lump that all together with residential and commercial."

Hampton said the city still expects operators to integrate responsibly with surrounding communities.

"But I do want them to be good neighbors," he said.

Hampton also noted Arizona's relatively stable climate has helped attract the industry.

"Our lack of natural disasters is one of the reasons why data centers are really moving here," he said. "We don't deal with tornadoes, hurricanes."

Water use remains one of the most common concerns residents raise about data centers, though some councilmembers said many of those concerns are based on outdated assumptions.

Councilmember Vicki Gillis said she frequently hears from residents worried about the industry's water consumption.

"I just think I get a lot of people that say to me, 'Data centers take so much water,'" Gillis said. "Well, they really don't today."

City officials say water demand is carefully regulated through Goodyear's water allocation policies.

"We look at it just like a financial budget," said Barbara Chappell, the city's water services director. "We only have so much money to go around, or water in this instance. And so we give a developer a budget for a parcel."

The city's Water Resources Allocation Policy requires large water use,

including data centers, to justify projected demand while remaining within Goodyear's long-term supply planning.

Ray Diaz, the city's water resources manager, said developers must also file water usage reports with state regulators.

"We have to show every 10 years that we have a 100-year supply of water to meet our current and future demands," Diaz said.

Across Arizona, the number of data centers has grown rapidly as demand for cloud computing, artificial intelligence and online services expands.

Researchers say the infrastructure requires significant cooling to manage the heat produced by constantly running servers.

Carrie Hiddenbottom, an associate professor at the University of Arizona who studies water and energy use in data centers, said communities throughout the region are increasingly focused on how the facilities affect local resources.

"It's one of the most pressing challenges in our region," Hiddenbottom said. "Communities are worried that data centers are especially going to take all of the water and energy in those areas."

Research into cooling systems shows a trade-off between water and electricity use. Facilities that rely on air-cooled systems generally use less water but require more electricity, while evaporative cooling systems conserve energy but consume significantly more water.

Part of a broader zoning overhaul

The proposed data center rules are part of a broader effort to modernize Goodyear's zoning ordinance.

City planning manager Christian Williams said the update is intended to give the city more control over how growth occurs as development accelerates across the West Valley.

Visit goodyearaz.gov for more information.

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Perrin

• From page 16

Henderson Basic, one of the best teams in Nevada.

In the next two rounds, the Tigers beat Chandler Hamilton 7-1 and Scottsdale Chaparral 15-7. Casteel won the final 12-4 but Millennium made its name.

"When we play good baseball, we can compete with and beat anybody, I believe, in the country," McDonald

said. "When we don't play, we don't hold ourselves accountable and don't do the little things and kind of come in arrogant, anyone can beat us. I think that's what Boras taught us."

Boras built the team's confidence. Back to back losses the next week to region rival Phoenix Desert Vista put a chip on the team's shoulder, and it was needed.

Perrin drove in six runs during The Boras Classic.

"I'm seeing the ball deeper this year and letting the ball travel," Perrin said.

More colleges are talking to him after that performance.

He said he is not close to making a decision on what school to attend. Perrin has not decided on a major, but wants to study a business field.

"There's been a few more since then," Perrin said. "I want to go somewhere I can grow and improve, and become a better player and person."

McDonald said Perrin is starting to become a vocal leader, which is not natural for him.

Millennium is 11-8 after another

tough region loss to Phoenix Brophy College Prep. The Tigers still have title dreams but, as McDonald said, the main goal is to produce good citizens and good people in the community.

"I want them to be able to reach their dreams and be able to learn something from our program. At the end, yes we want to chase a championship. But ultimately I'm trying to push these kids to be better men," McDonald said. "I like who they're becoming in this journey. That's the important thing for me leading this program."

Attendance

• From page 15

during a "Home Run for Life" ceremony before a spring training game between the Reds and Arizona Diamondbacks. Players from both teams lined the baselines as she circled the bases in recognition of her cancer journey.

"You have to choose your emo-

tions," she said. "Life never asks your permission — so you reinvent and go forward."

The ballpark's atmosphere was also shaped by longtime volunteers like Judy Tarkowski and JoAnn Terry, sisters affectionately known as the "Minnesota Twins" by returning fans. The pair, who have served in a variety of roles over the years, are best known for greeting fans at the gates.

"By the time they walk through, they're already having a good day," Tarkowski said.

Terry added that connections formed over the course of a game often extend beyond a single visit. "By the end of nine innings, you're not just volunteers and fans anymore — you feel like family," she said.

Kessman said that sense of familiarity is a hallmark of Goodyear Ballpark,

where many season ticket holders return annually and build relationships with staff and volunteers.

The impact of spring training extends beyond the games themselves. According to an Arizona State University study, the Cactus League generated \$710.2 million in economic impact and \$418.5 million in gross domestic product for Arizona in 2023, underscoring its importance to the region.



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*How to engage in respectful, honest
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- ☐ **Take the high road.** Respond to the topic — not the person. Refrain from demonizing others for their opinions. Assume those you disagree with are, like you, genuinely interested in improving the community.
- ☐ **Be respectful.** Bullying, public humiliation, insults, name-calling, harassment, and threats directed at another person — or that person's race, gender, religion, ethnicity, etc. — have no place in civil discussions. Find ways to respectfully disagree without questioning someone's character or motives.
- ☐ **Be truthful.** Base your opinions/arguments on facts. Value honesty. Make only accurate statements when making your point and avoid exaggeration and stereotypes. When appropriate, cite your sources of information that others may question.
- ☐ **Don't misrepresent.** Always identify your opinions as opinions (not stating opinions as facts). Never misrepresent the views of others or falsely claim your opinions represent someone else. If quoting the words of others, identify and credit the source.
- ☐ **Listen & learn.** It's both polite and respectful to listen to those we disagree with (as well as those we support) and be genuine in our attempts to understand their point of view. Expand your mind by thoughtfully seeking out views that don't agree with your own.
- ☐ **Look for common ground.** When disagreeing with others, look for even small areas of agreement — which can be the gateway to working together for the greater good.
- ☐ **Respect privacy.** Keep private things private — whether it involves your own information or those with whom you disagree. Revealing private information about someone else is rude, unethical, potentially harmful and, in many cases, illegal.
- ☐ **Set a good example.** Practice civil behavior online as well as in public and in your interaction with others. Encourage others to practice these civil behaviors. And it's OK to challenge disrespectful behavior — but be courteous, respectful and helpful in your approach.



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