

FORMAL RESPONSE

Correcting the Record on Echo Canyon

DATE	September 21, 2026
TO	Mayor Kate Gallego and Members of the Phoenix City Council
COPY	Ed Zuercher, City Manager · David Mathews, Deputy City Manager · Martin Whitfield, Director, Parks and Recreation Department
RE	General Information Packet, September 10, 2026 — Item No. 1, Citizen Request: Tim Sierakowski and Jeremy Thacker, District 6

Mayor Gallego, Members of the Council, Mr. Zuercher, and Mr. Mathews:

The September 10, 2026 General Information Packet responds to public comment we made at the August 26 Formal Meeting regarding the Echo Canyon Trailhead. We have compared that report against the City's own development agreement, permits, and public notices. Several of its characterizations do not hold, and one omission is material. We ask that the record be corrected.

1. The report misstates the development agreement and omits its operative sentence.

The report tells the Council that the agreement "states the Echo Canyon Trailhead shall be open from sunrise to sunset." That is not what it says. Paragraph 14 of Contract No. 135336-0 reads in full:

"The hours of operation for the Park are established by the Board and are currently from sunrise until sunset. The Board will not amend the hours of operation for the Park except at a public meeting after reasonable notice to the EC-HOA."

Two differences matter. The agreement says the hours "are currently" sunrise to sunset — a description of the hours as of 2013, not a mandate. And the report omits the second sentence entirely: the one establishing that hours are amended by the Parks and Recreation Board, at a public meeting. That sentence is the only part of Paragraph 14 that constrains the Department, and the Council was not shown it.

2. The report asserts two different governing rules.

Having told the Council the trailhead “shall be open from sunrise to sunset,” the report states three sentences later that “the department does not intend to open any City trailhead gates before 5:00 a.m.,” and later that “no trailhead opens before 5:00 a.m.” and that Echo Canyon “remains consistent with this system-wide standard.”

These are not the same rule. Sunrise in Phoenix is now after 6:00 a.m. A 5:00 a.m. opening is not sunrise-to-sunset; it is a fixed clock time, and it appears nowhere in the agreement. The Department cannot simultaneously be bound by the agreement’s hours and operating on a different standard of its own adoption. We ask that the Board action establishing the 5:00 a.m. standard be produced. If none exists, the Council should know that.

The preserve system confirms the point: posted signage at Piestewa Peak sets hours of 5:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. — fixed clock times, not sunrise to sunset.

3. The report’s own description of gate operations contradicts its explanation.

The report states that Echo Canyon “has an established manual gate that is closed nightly and reopened each morning,” and separately that “early-morning janitorial crews have left the gates open” during “instances and even long periods of time.”

If the established practice is that the gate is closed nightly and reopened each morning, the question is who performs those acts. Our board president, Jerry Van Gasse, stops at the Echo Canyon trailhead first thing each morning and has done so for years; he knows the custodial staff and the rangers personally. He reports that the gate controlling public entry to the trailhead is opened and closed by City park rangers, and that custodial staff operate gates only for their own access, not for the public.

If that division of duties is accurate, the report’s explanation cannot account for what occurred. A janitorial crew leaving a gate open for its own access would not admit the public through a gate that rangers control. The early opening was a ranger function, performed at 4:30 a.m. as daily routine — which matches the report’s own description of an established practice and contradicts the explanation offered for it. This is a question of assignment, not recollection, and the Department’s own records will resolve it.

The report also states that “park rangers regularly share field observations with department leadership, and those insights are incorporated into operational decision making.” If that is accurate, a 4:30 a.m. opening occurring over “long periods of time” was known to leadership. If it was not known, the feedback process the report describes did not function.

A public records request concerning the gate project is already pending, as described in Section 8 below. In addition to those categories, and directed to the hours rather than the project, we request under the Arizona Public Records Law, A.R.S. § 39-121: Echo Canyon gate-opening logs; ranger assignments and timesheets reflecting gate duty; the June 2026 security notifications referenced in Director Whitfield's August 21 response; any Board action or written directive establishing the 5:00 a.m. opening; and records of the March and May 2026 coordination meetings with the Town of Paradise Valley.

4. The queuing explanation argues against the change the Department made.

The report states that “adjusting the opening time typically shifts, rather than eliminates, when queuing occurs.” We agree. By the Department's own reasoning, moving the opening from 4:30 to 5:00 produced no queuing benefit — it relocated the queue by thirty minutes. What it did produce is thirty fewer minutes before the 8:00 a.m. summer heat closure.

The report also does not address the substance of the concern, which is not congestion but that the Town of Paradise Valley prohibits vehicles from waiting outside the gate. The report notes coordination with Paradise Valley in March and May 2026. We ask whether that conflict was raised, and how it is to be resolved.

5. The report omits the safety concern that prompted our comment.

Our comment concerned the compression of the usable morning window. In summer the trail closes at 8:00 a.m. for excessive heat, and an Echo Canyon round trip can take up to three hours. The report does not mention the 8:00 a.m. closure, does not mention the prior 4:30 a.m. opening, does not acknowledge that any change occurred, and does not state what the “established automated gate opening time” will be. We ask that it be stated.

6. Information provided to us was not provided to the Council.

Director Whitfield's August 21 response advised that the new gate software “will also allow the gate to be closed during extreme heat warnings.” The September 10 report does not mention this capability. Closing the Park at times it would otherwise be open is an amendment to the hours of operation, which under Paragraph 14 requires Board action at a public meeting. The Council should be informed of it, and it should be adopted through that process, with published criteria and advance notice.

7. The Department gives notice when it chooses to.

The report describes, in detail, the notice given for the September 2–18 construction closure: on-site signage, a web banner across all phoenix.gov/parks pages, Camelback webpage updates, social media, and the Trail Updates email list. Parks also announced the Cholla Trailhead closure to the press on August 10, eleven days in advance.

The Department therefore has five established channels for notifying trailhead users, and uses them readily. The change to the daily opening time — the change affecting hikers every morning, and the one Paragraph 14 says requires a public meeting — was communicated through none of them.

8. The report's representations remain untested, and the records were requested first.

On August 20, 2026 — twenty-one days before this report was submitted — a public records request was made on our behalf under A.R.S. § 39-121 seeking, among other categories, all records reflecting the dates on which notice of the gate project was first posted online and on-site; all press releases concerning it; all departmental directives, memoranda, work orders and internal communications related to it; all records of public meetings held to discuss it; records identifying its funding sources and total cost; and records identifying the contractors engaged. As of today — thirty-two days after the request — no records have been produced.

The result is that the report's account of its own notice reached the Council before the records that would substantiate it reached us. We do not suggest the delay is deliberate; requests are often slow for ordinary reasons. But the Department holds the documents that would confirm or correct what it told the Council, and those documents were requested first. We ask that production be completed promptly.

We note one category in particular: records of public meetings held to discuss the project. If no responsive records exist, that answer bears directly on Paragraph 14 and on everything above.

9. The construction timeline warrants an update.

The report states the trailhead was closed September 2 through 18 to install the automatic gates, and the trailhead reopened on schedule. As of September 21, work remains visibly incomplete — open trench, unset conduit, and crews on site — and the electrical permit for the gate operators, ELEC-268105353, was not issued until September 10, the date of this report. We ask the Department to state what work remains, whether the end-of-September completion date holds, and whether additional closures are anticipated.

What we ask of the Council

- 1 Direct that the Echo Canyon hours of operation be placed on a Parks and Recreation Board agenda for action at a public meeting, consistent with Paragraph 14.
- 2 Direct the Department to produce the Board action establishing the current 5:00 a.m. opening, or to state that none exists.
- 3 Direct prompt completion of the public records request submitted August 20, 2026, which remains outstanding.
- 4 Restore the 4:30 a.m. opening, at minimum through the summer heat-restriction season and on any day the trail closes at 8:00 a.m.
- 5 Require that the automated gate schedule and any extreme-heat closure criteria be adopted publicly and published in advance.
- 6 Direct resolution of the conflict with Paradise Valley's prohibition on vehicles waiting outside the gate.

We are not asking the Council to credit our account over the Department's. We are asking that the Department's report be read against the agreement it cites. Where the two diverge — and on the text of Paragraph 14 they plainly do — the document should govern.

Sincerely,

GOOD|GOAT

The Board of Directors
board@goodgoat.net

ENCLOSURES

- 1 Development Agreement, City of Phoenix and Echo Canyon Estates HOA, Contract No. 135336-0 — Paragraph 14
- 2 Posted permits F157-269003000 (issued July 29, 2026) and ELEC-268105353 (issued September 10, 2026)
- 3 Photographs of the Echo Canyon trailhead, September 21, 2026
- 4 Posted preserve hours, Piastewa Peak trailhead
- 5 Public records request submitted to the City of Phoenix, August 20, 2026, with intake acknowledgment