

MINUTES
REGULAR CITY COUNCIL WORKSESSION
CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF YUMA, ARIZONA
CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS - YUMA CITY HALL
ONE CITY PLAZA, YUMA, ARIZONA
January 20, 2026
5:30 p.m.

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Nicholls called the Regular City Council Worksession to order at 5:33 p.m.

Councilmembers Present: Martinez, Morris, McClendon, Smith, Morales, Watts, and Mayor Nicholls
Councilmembers Absent: None
Staffmembers Present: Acting City Administrator, John D. Simonton
Executive Director (YCNHA), Cathy Douglas
Deputy City Attorney, Rodney Short
Director of Engineering, David Wostenberg
Chief of Police, Thomas Garrity
Director of Community Development, Alyssa Linville
Various department heads or their representatives
City Attorney, Richard W. Files
Deputy City Clerk, Janet L. Pierson

III. YUMA CROSSING NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA UPDATE

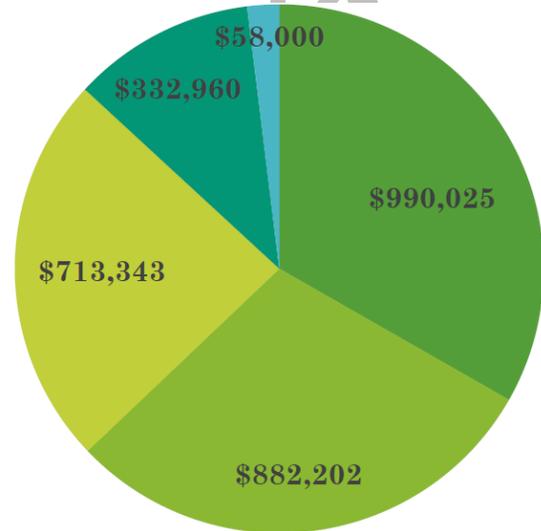
Douglas presented the Yuma Crossing National Heritage Area (YCHNA) update as follows:

- 2025 Primary Accomplishments
 - All figures are based on the fiscal year running from October 1 through September 30.
 - Continued management of the 380-acre East Wetlands conservation area.
 - Planning began for a major infrastructure improvement project funded by a Bureau of Reclamation grant administered through the City.
 - Maintained operations at the Yuma Territorial Prison and the Colorado River State Historic Park (Colorado River Park) without receiving State funding.
 - For every \$1 of National Heritage Area funding, \$6.15 was leveraged, with annual funding totaling \$500,000.
 - Hosted 75 special events and educational programs that served more than 8,500 people.
 - Developed four new signature fundraising events: the Prison-to-Prison Beer Run, Día de los Muertos Festival, Christmas at the Crossing Festival, and Wild West Days.
 - Provided 114 free school field trips for over 6,200 fourth and fifth graders, continuing a program that has been popular for five years.
 - More than 72,000 people participated in YCNHA tours, educational programs, special events, and state park visits.
 - The Arizona Travel Award recognized Yuma Riverfront development projects in the revitalization category, including the Sunset View Wildlife Area at East Wetlands and a seven-acre park improvement at West Wetlands in collaboration with the Parks and Recreation Department.

- Fiscal Year 2025 Revenue

- Total revenue Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 was \$2.9 million.
- Heritage Area federal funding, grants, and private donations accounted for \$990,025, including \$500,000 in National Heritage Area Federal funding.
- Revenue from the 2% Hospitality Tax, of which 10% is allocated to YCNHA, totaled \$882,202.
- State park admissions and gift shop sales generated \$713,343.
- Special events and rental revenue contributed \$333,960.
- In-kind contributions amounted to \$58,000.

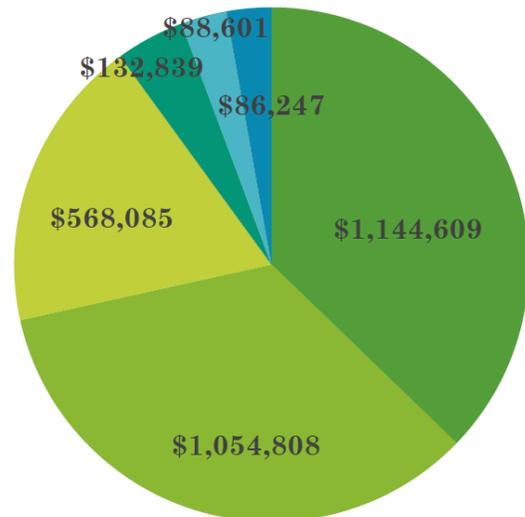
- Heritage Area Federal Funding, Grants & Private Donations (\$990k)
- 2% Hospitality Tax (\$882k)
- State Park Admissions & Gift Shop Sales (\$713k)
- Special Events & Rentals (\$333k)
- In-Kind Contributions (\$58k)



- FY 2025 Expenses

- Total expenses for FY 2025 were slightly over \$3 million.
- Approximately \$1.14 million was allocated to operate the state parks.
- Personnel, general, and administrative expenses for East Wetlands totaled \$1.55 million.
- State parks maintenance and repairs accounted for \$586,085.
- Heritage programming, educational programs, and exhibits required \$132,839.
- Maintenance and improvements for the Historic City Hall building amounted to \$86,601.

- State Parks Operations (\$1.14M)
- Personnel, General and Administration (\$1.05M)
- East Wetlands Personnel, Operation & Maint (\$586k)
- State Parks Maintenance & Repairs (\$133k)
- Heritage Programming, Education & Exhibits (\$88k)
- Historic City Hall (\$86k)



- East Wetlands
 - Operations
 - The East Wetlands is a 380-acre wetlands restoration area maintained by a staff of five on behalf of partners including the City of Yuma, the Quechan Indian Tribe, the Arizona Game and Fish Department, YCNHA, and the Bureau of Reclamation.
 - Federal funding for this site comes from the Bureau of Reclamation as part of the Lower Colorado River Conservation Program.
 - For 2025, \$218,000 was received.
 - For 2026, \$227,000 will be received.
 - An additional \$50,000 from the 2% Hospitality Tax is allocated on behalf of the City.
 - YCNHA contributes a minimum of \$50,000 annually, often exceeding that amount, and actively pursues additional grants.
 - The Arizona Department of Forestry and Fire Management has supported East and West Wetlands projects for several years.
 - In 2025, a \$124,000 grant was received for invasive vegetation removal at East Wetlands and the lower bench of West Wetlands.
 - For 2026, another \$90,000 grant was awarded to control invasive weeds in both wetland areas
 - Improvements
 - An \$8.7 million infrastructure and capital improvement project is being planned in collaboration with the City and East Wetlands partners.
 - The project will replace existing diesel pumps with electric pumps, requiring the addition of an electrical connection to the site.
 - Improvements will enhance water delivery into marsh areas through canal line extensions and replacement of aging infrastructure within the East Wetlands.
 - Completion of the project is scheduled for February 2028.
- Arizona Travel Award – Revitalization Award

YUMA RIVERFRONT WINS REVITALIZATION AWARD



- Historic City Hall Exterior Restoration
 - The historic City Hall building has served as YCNHA’s operational base since its opening.
 - Space within the building is leased to other nonprofits to help offset maintenance expenses.
 - A community-directed spending allocation from Senator Sinema was approved for FY 2025, but the funding was not received because the budget did not pass.
 - The intended allocation would have funded window replacements and restoration of the building’s façade.
 - An application for FY 2026 was submitted, but the project was not taken up by Senator Kelly or Representative Gallego.
 - Efforts will continue to secure funding for these improvements in the future.
- Ongoing Management of State Parks
 - Successes
 - The Colorado River Park and the Yuma Territorial Prison have been managed since 2009 and 2010, respectively.
 - Operations are supported by six full-time staff and six part-time seasonal staff, making for a lean team.
 - Last year, the parks welcomed 55,414 visitors, generating \$713,000 in admissions and gift shop revenue, although visitation has been trending downward due to economic factors and fewer Canadian visitors.
 - Efforts to improve the visitor experience included creating multiple exhibits and new programs to attract guests.
 - Volunteer engagement increased significantly, with 30,594 hours of service valued at \$121,000, supporting tours, programs, and special events.
 - The Yuma Territorial Prison improved its ranking on USA Today’s Best Haunted Destination list, moving from fourth place to third, and continues to draw visitors interested in paranormal activity.
 - Challenges
 - Funding remains a major challenge since the State does not provide operational or maintenance funding for the parks.
 - Both parks have aging infrastructure, requiring significant recent expenditures for plumbing repairs, electrical upgrades, and sidewalk and lighting replacements.
 - Inflation continues to increase costs, and millions of dollars are needed for historic preservation of the buildings.
 - The State has begun contributing some funding for the Yuma Territorial Prison, but operational expenses remain a concern.
 - The Yuma Territorial Prison is nearly operationally self-sufficient due to its strong visitor draw, while the Colorado River Park struggles financially despite being a popular venue for events and weddings.
 - Significant investments of YCNHA funding and 2% Hospitality Tax revenue are required to support the Colorado River Park.
 - The Intergovernmental Agreement between the State and the City to operate the parks locally will expire in 2032, leaving six years to plan and discuss future arrangements with the YCNHA Board and the City.
- Yuma Territorial Prison Sally Port Historic Restoration
 - Last year, the State paid a consultant to create a historic preservation plan for the Yuma Territorial Prison.

- This is the first time the State has contributed funding to the park since the City took over in 2009.
- A large investment was anticipated, but due to the State's budget crisis, funds were not allocated.
- Limited restoration work on the sally port is scheduled to begin next month, addressing multiple structural issues.
 - A contractor has been hired to perform initial drainage work to divert rainwater away from the building and protect the adobe.
 - The existing tarp covering the structure will be replaced with a new one to provide continued protection for several years.
 - Adobe restoration will be limited to approximately three feet from the ground up.
- The State's contribution marks a positive step toward preserving the structure, and the progress of the project will be monitored.
- New Exhibits
 - Yuma Territorial Prison
 - The Dark Cell now features a reproduction of the original cage, providing a visual representation of the conditions and how terrifying confinement was.
 - A hologram exhibit has been added to the newly designated Insane Cell.
 - An unveiling of the newest exhibit, the Prison Barber Shop, is scheduled for January 21 at 10:00 a.m.
 - Colorado River Park
 - Several new exhibits have been added to the Corral House building that focus on telling the story of the river, water rights, and the Bureau of Reclamation's role in river allocation.
- Historic and Educational Programming
 - A total of 235 group and general public tours were provided, serving 30,391 people.
 - Sixty-seven outreach, educational, and historical programs were delivered to over 1,700 participants.
 - A new six-week educational youth summer camp was developed and held at the Colorado River Park last year, receiving highly positive reviews. Plans are in place to offer the youth summer camp again this summer.
- Free School Field Trip Program
 - The free school field trip program has been largely funded through grants from the National Park Foundation, private donations, and smaller foundation grants.
 - Free field trips were provided for Yuma County third, fourth, and fifth graders to the Yuma East Wetlands, the Yuma Territorial Prison, and the Colorado River Park.
 - These trips are Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM)-based and include a full curriculum along with an educational video series that teachers can implement virtually in classrooms.
 - A total of 6,200 students participated in these field trips last year.
- Cultural and Community Events
 - Eight cultural and community events were hosted, attracting a total of 7,000 guests.
 - Four signature community fundraising events were developed as part of these efforts.
 - Engagement with the business community increased, with 46 local businesses providing sponsorships to help fund the events.

- The next major event is Wild West Days, scheduled for Saturday, January 31. This popular fundraiser supports park operations and was a big success last year, so a strong turnout is anticipated again.
- America's 250th birthday and the Yuma Territorial Prison's 150th anniversary will be celebrated this year.
 - For the Prison's 150th anniversary, musicians will be invited to recreate the historic prison band.
 - Additionally, the YCNHA has been selected to host the Arizona 250 traveling museum exhibit, which is expected to arrive in Yuma on February 24, with additional details to be announced soon.
- 2026 Primary Goals
 - Work will continue with East Wetlands partners to ensure the facilitation of the \$8.7 million grant and completion of all planned improvements.
 - Operations and maintenance will be sustained for the East Wetlands, Historic City Hall, and the two state parks.
 - The YCNHA management plan is scheduled for an update this year.
 - Educational programming will be implemented and cultural and community events will be improved to increase traffic and raise funds for operational and historic preservation needs.
 - A new revenue stream is anticipated through a Series 7 Beer and Wine Bar liquor license application for the Yuma Territorial Prison, which is expected to support prison operations.
 - Funding will continue to be sought for state park and Historic City Hall preservation projects.
 - Several capital improvement projects are planned for next year, including roofing repairs and replacements, work at City Hall and the Colorado River Park, and major repairs to the new yard wall at the Territorial Prison.
 - Development of the historic downtown walking tour will continue.
 - Congress has approved the Department of Interior budget for FY 2026, which includes \$500,000 for YCNHA.

Discussion

- Significant investment was made last year in café lights that illuminate the Colorado River Park and its rooflines, which are visible from the highway. Seasonal lights used for holiday events will also be installed for special occasions such as weddings and corporate events, and will likely be left on starting in October and remaining through the busy season. **(Morales/Douglas)**
- An education grove area was created several years ago in the West Wetlands using grant funding, and the contractor initially built a teepee with available wood. Community members have since expanded on the idea by constructing additional teepees using loose limbs and branches. There is currently no signage explaining the history or purpose of the teepees. **(Morales/Douglas)**
- The school field trips are not funded by the regular \$500,000 allocation but primarily through grants, notably from the National Park Foundation, along with additional support from other foundations and private donations. The program relies on continued external funding to keep providing free field trips, as regular funding alone would not sustain it. **(Smith/Douglas)**
- No State funding has been provided to YCNHA since 2009. When requests are made, the response is that there is no budget available. Despite hopes that COVID-related funds might help, none were allocated to YCNHA. **(Smith/Douglas)**

- This year Christmas at the Crossing generated a small profit, but required significant investment in decorations and resources. While expanding the event would be appealing, financial and staffing constraints make it challenging. Additionally, scheduling is limited to avoid competing with other local holiday events, leaving only the last weekend before Christmas as a viable option. **(Watts/Douglas)**
- The alcohol license will be used for everyday operations, allowing beer and wine sales at the Yuma Territorial prison. Visitors can enjoy drinks at picnic tables and benches throughout the park. For special events where liquor will be served, the regular license must be suspended and replaced with a special event license. **(Watts/Douglas)**
- Sunrise Point has recently undergone improvements, including a major tree planting that is thriving despite the area's high salt content in the soil. These trees will eventually provide ample shade, enhancing the beauty of the entrance to the East Wetlands and creating a scenic and welcoming gateway to the area. **(Watts/Douglas)**
- In 2009, the State planned to close the state parks and heritage areas, but the City partnered with the YCNHA to keep them open. Securing State investment will require ongoing advocacy across multiple legislative sessions. Additionally, the parks are significant for historic preservation and lie within the Yuma Crossing National Historic Landmark, making renewal of the agreement a priority. **(Nicholls/Douglas)**

II. LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Short presented the following update on proposed State and Federal legislation affecting the City:

- City Council's Guiding Legislative Principles
 - Support legislation that protects and enhances the City Council's ability to efficiently serve Yuma residents and visitors in a cost-effective manner
 - Protect local decision-making
 - Protect local revenues and mandates that are unfunded
 - Protect the City's water rights and support water remaining in the region
- State Legislature
 - Commenced on Monday, January 12, 2026, with each political caucus' priorities and then the Governor provided a State of the State to joint session of the Senate and House
 - Tax comity, data centers, and water were notable issues
- State Legislature Important Items and Dates
 - Seven bill limit for each elected State Legislator
 - January 20 (Senate) and February 6 (House) – Last day for legal review
 - February 2 (Senate) and February 9 (House) – Last day for introductions
 - February 20 – Last day for bills in committee
 - February 23 – Cross-Over Week
 - April 17 – Last day for Conference Committees
 - April 21 – 100th Day of Session
- City Council's State Legislative Priorities
 - Maintain shared, voter-approved local revenues
 - Maintain the directed revenue sources
 - Preserve local authority over local taxation
 - Preserve and expand local economic development and job-creation
 - Preserve and expand support for public safety

- Preserve and expand local growth and housing
- Preserve and expand investments in infrastructure, quality of life, and community investment
- Protect local water rights for City of Yuma and region
- City Council's Federal Legislative Priorities
 - Federal support for:
 - Infrastructure projects
 - Public safety
 - Economic development and regional economic opportunities
 - Water
- Post 2026 Operational Guidelines and Strategies for Colorado River Operations
 - On Friday, January 9, the Department of the Interior released the draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).
 - Local leaders are actively engaged with the release, and the document has been widely shared publicly.
 - The draft outlines five possible alternatives, ranging from taking no action – which would likely result in severe river failure – to full federal control. The final path will likely fall somewhere between these extremes.
 - The Upper Basin (Colorado, Wyoming, Utah, and New Mexico) and Lower Basin (California, Nevada, Arizona, and Mexico) still have not agreed on a unified plan, creating significant tension during discussions.
- Post 2026 Guidelines Key Deadlines
 - The public comment period for the EIS opened on Friday, with comments due by March 2.
 - A meeting between the Upper Basin and Lower Basin representatives has been scheduled to discuss the EIS.
 - Additional comments or submissions are due on February 14.
 - There is hope that the discussions will produce a consensus among U.S. stakeholders.

Discussion

- Staff are reviewing options to prepare an official position on the water issue and will present them in a future worksession, then prepare a resolution for adoption. **(Mayor Nicholls/Simonton)**
- The City's water contract is federal, so Arizona cannot change it directly but may influence federal action. Yuma has strong water rights, though some proposals could penalize its conservation efforts. Unused Yuma water can also be reallocated to the Central Arizona Project under federal law. **(Mayor Nicholls/Short)**
- Arizona's new property-tax relief for 100% disabled veterans now includes a \$46,000 income cap, and state lawmakers are still reviewing multiple related bills as they determine how to cover the revenue impacts. Progress is slow until updated budget numbers and federal funding estimates are available, and it will take time to see which proposals advance. **(Martinez/Short)**
- The state eliminated the tax on long-term residential rentals, but short-term rentals like Airbnb's are still taxed and treated the same as hotel stays. Short-term rental taxes remain in effect under local ordinances and the Model City Tax Code. The only rentals no longer taxable are stays of 30 days or more, which previously provided revenue the City had to replace during the budget process. **(Watts/Short)**
- Regular legislative updates will be presented during worksessions to keep Councilmembers and the public informed. Future presentations will include bill numbers along with short titles to make them easier to follow. **(Mayor Nicholls/Simonton)**

III. REGULAR CITY COUNCIL MEETING AGENDA OF JANUARY 21, 2026

Motion Consent Agenda Item C.4 – Ratification of Contract Increase: Entertainment Promoter Services (ratify a contract increase for entertainment promoter services to BMC Productions & Entertainment LLC in the amount of \$164,600.00 for a total estimated cost of \$272,600.00) (RFB-24-172) (City Admin/Comm)

McClendon declared a conflict of interest on Motion Consent Agenda Item C.4. There being no questions or discussion, **McClendon** remained on the dais.

Motion Consent Agenda Item C.3 – Bid Award: La Mesa Vista and La Mesa Hermosa Pavement Replacement (construction services contract with Gutierrez Canales Engineering in the amount of \$2,171,326.66) (RFB-24-275) (Eng)

Discussion

- The \$339,326.66 listed as Available to Transfer on the City Council Report is covered by the Series 2025 Bonds and funds pulled from a project for the 16th Street Corridor that has been delayed due to the complexity of the utility and right-of-way acquisition. (**Morales/Wostenberg**)
 - The project on 16th Street, which is the main artery of Yuma, will be delayed about six months; the design contract is expected to be finalized within the next month. (**Morales/Wostenberg**)
-

Resolution R2026-001 – Intergovernmental Agreement: United States Drug Enforcement Administration – Yuma (five-year intergovernmental agreement for use of the City of Yuma Public Safety Training Facility) (YPD)

Discussion

- The intergovernmental agreement is only for Drug Enforcement Administration training, not Immigration and Customs Enforcement. It is a continuation of a previous five-year agreement and covers co-training sessions only – when training occurs, YPD is always present. (**Watts/Garrity**)
-

Ordinance O2026-002 – Rezoning of Property: 1980 W. Colorado Street (rezone approximately 2.78 acres from the Manufactured Housing Park (MHP) District to High Density Residential (R-3) District) (ZONE-44544-2025) (Comm Dev/Comm Plng)

Morris declared a conflict of interest on Ordinance O2026-002 as his firm is involved in the design process. There being no questions or discussion, **Morris** remained on the dais.

Ordinance O2026-004 – Vacation and Authorization to Sell Surplus Property: Livingston Ranch Phase I (vacate 1,457 feet of 30-foot right-of-way north of Livingston Ranch Phase I and authorize sale of the surplus property to adjacent landowners in Livingston Ranch) (Comm Dev)

Discussion

- Fourteen out of 19 property owners have signed agreements with the City. The remaining five owners have not signed; until they do, they cannot use the land, and it will remain under City ownership. This option will stay available for them or future owners whenever they are ready to participate. The average reimbursement amount per household is not currently available but will be provided to City Council. **(Morales/Linville)**
- The City plans to build the entire wall as one continuous structure, even if all 19 agreements are not signed. If the remaining five residents choose to participate later, they can add to their side walls to connect and expand their yards. **(Watts/Linville)**
- If a property owner does not sign the agreement but adjacent owners do, the City will still build the wall, leaving the non-participating property enclosed by its existing three walls. That owner cannot remove the back wall or use the extended area until they reimburse the City. The City will monitor compliance to ensure non-participating residents do not use the land prematurely. **(Morris/Linville)**

EXECUTIVE SESSION/ADJOURNMENT

Motion (Morales/McClendon): To adjourn the meeting to Executive Session. Voice vote: **approved** 7-0. The meeting adjourned at 6:42 p.m.

Lynda L. Bushong, City Clerk

APPROVED:

Douglas J. Nicholls, Mayor

Approved at the City Council Meeting of: _____ City Clerk: _____
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