

MINUTES
REGULAR CITY COUNCIL WORKSESSION
CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF YUMA, ARIZONA
CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS - YUMA CITY HALL
ONE CITY PLAZA, YUMA, ARIZONA
March 31, 2026
5:30 p.m.

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Nicholls called the Regular City Council Worksession to order at 5:31 p.m.

Councilmembers Present: Martinez, Morris, McClendon, Smith, Morales, Watts, and Mayor Nicholls
Councilmembers Absent: None
Staffmembers Present: Acting City Administrator, John D. Simonton
Various department heads or their representatives
City Attorney, Richard W. Files
Deputy City Clerk, Janet L. Pierson

I. HUMANE SOCIETY OF YUMA

Annette Lagunas, Executive Director of the Humane Society of Yuma (HSOY), presented the following information on animal welfare and the organization's collaboration with the City:

- HSOY's Mission
 - To reduce the number of homeless pets through adoption, rescue, and spay and neuter programs.
- Funding
 - HSOY is an independent 501(c)(3) Nonprofit Organization
 - HSOY receives grants from American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) and Best Friends Animal Society (Best Friends) when awarded.
 - Best Friends has provided training to HSOY staff at Best Friends' expense, but does not provide ongoing funding.
 - HSOY partners with PetSmart Charities and is awarded grant funding yearly.
 - No funding comes from the Humane Society of the United States or any other large animal welfare organization unless granted for a specific project.
- Governance
 - The nonprofit is governed by a Board of Directors whose members typically serve two three-year terms.
 - HSOY employs 46 staff across the shelter, PetSmart location, thrift store, and main facility.
 - The Executive Director, who is the Board's only direct employee, began their career in veterinary medicine and has dedicated nearly 23 years of service to HSOY.
- HSOY Shelter
 - The current shelter can house approximately 238 dogs and cats, a significant increase from the former facility's capacity of about 50 dogs.
 - The shelter includes 93 large dog kennels, each able to hold two or sometimes three dogs, along with 40 small dog kennels.
 - With over 300 animals currently on site and kitten season approaching, the facility consistently operates at maximum capacity.

- Staff work nightly to free three to four kennels to ensure space for incoming animals brought in by Animal Control Officers (ACOs).
- All dogs, except small ones, have indoor/outdoor kennels, and a strong volunteer base helps ensure they receive regular outdoor time.
- The shelter has 105 cat kennels and is already receiving kittens, with expectations of being quickly overwhelmed as kitten season progresses.
- Association of Shelter Veterinarians (ASV) Guidelines
 - HSOY follows established guidelines created by shelter-medicine veterinarians, using these standards to shape procedures, community cat practices, intake protocols, and overall animal care.
 - These guidelines cover numerous operational topics and serve as a reference for both shelter operations and animal control practices.
- History of Animal Welfare in Yuma County
 - Annual intake numbers have decreased significantly from 16,000-17,000 animals in the old facility to just over 9,000 when the new shelter opened, largely due to an aggressive spay and neuter program.
 - Recent grant funding, including \$20,000 from the Arizona pet license plate program and a total of \$77,000 awarded across regional partners, is expected to make a substantial impact on spay and neuter efforts.
 - Intake trends fluctuated during COVID-19, when fewer animals entered the shelter, but numbers have since returned to previous levels as normal activity resumed.
- 2025 Animal Intake
 - A total of 7,361 animals entered the shelter last year, including roughly 3,000 cats.
 - Forty-six percent of all incoming animals originate from City residents, and most arrivals are unidentified strays.
 - Despite free microchipping efforts offered through City and Yuma County support, most incoming animals still arrive without microchips, and some with chips lack owner information.
 - Free microchips will continue to be offered to those unable to pay, while others may obtain one for \$20.
 - ACOs are equipped with scanners that allow them to check for microchips in the field, helping reunite pets with owners without transporting them to the shelter.
- Statutory Requirements
 - State law requires shelters to hold unidentified animals for three days, and animals with identification for five days; the City currently holds identified animals for six days.
 - Any dog or cat involved in a bite incident must be held for a mandatory 10-day quarantine period, as required by statute across all local jurisdictions.
 - ACOs investigate cruelty cases, pick up sick, injured, and abandoned animals, and provide significant public assistance.
 - Although ACOs are not certified peace officers and cannot enforce the state criminal code, they are still able to investigate, engage with the public, and provide education on animal welfare issues.
 - The partnership between ACOs and HSOY is strengthened by officers' field efforts, which support both community safety and humane animal care.

- Cost of Care

- The figures listed below represent only the basic intake costs and do not include staff labor, veterinary oversight, vaccine management, microchip inventory, parasite treatment, or other medical needs that require a licensed veterinarian.
- Veterinary staffing shortages are a nationwide issue, making access to veterinary care increasingly difficult, though the shelter is currently supported by a supervising veterinarian.
- Intake costs do not account for daily care needs such as food, water, medication, and thorough kennel cleaning for more than 300 animals, all of which significantly increase operational expenses.

Dogs	Cats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DA2PP-\$2.60 • Kennel Cough Vx-\$2.56 • Rabies-\$1.13 • Microchip-\$4.35 • Food-\$4.00 • Flea/Tick-\$8.00 • Spay/Neuter-\$190.00 • Medical Care-\$50+ • Staff-\$323.00 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FVRCP-\$2.15 • Rabies-\$1.13 • Microchip-\$4.35 • Food-\$6.00 • Spay/Neuter-\$95.00 • Medical Care-\$75+ • Staff-323.00
Estimated cost per Dog: \$585.64	Estimated cost per Cat: \$502.28

- City of Yuma 2025 Animal Intake

- Animal intakes for the City alone last year included roughly 1,400 stray dogs, nearly 1,700 stray cats, and 120 animals received through agency assists.
 - Agency assists include providing shelter for pets whose owners have been arrested or involved in a car accident, for example.
- Seventy-seven animals were involved in bite incidents within the City during the same period.
- When applied to average per-animal costs, the total estimated expense for these intakes approaches \$1.8 million.

Stray Dogs-1,466
 Stray Cats-1,696
 Agency Assist-120
 Bite Animals-77

3,359 total stray, agency assist and bite quarantined animals in 2025.

Average cost of animal \$543.93=\$1,827,060

2026-2027 contract between HSOY and COY=\$500,000

- Other Services Provided
 - HSOY provides multiple community services, including low-cost vaccines, a low-cost spay/neuter clinic, and financial assistance through grants to help offset surgical costs that would otherwise be prohibitively expensive for many pet owners.
 - Additional support includes end-of-life services, pet food distribution, free or low-cost microchipping, minor medical assistance, and public education programs for children promoting humane treatment of animals and one another.
 - Owners who are unable to pay reclaim fees can get fee waivers, helping reunite pets with their families and ensuring sterilization and microchipping.
 - The community cat program altered roughly 1,200 cats last year, contributing to population control, though far greater capacity is needed to meet community demand.

Discussion

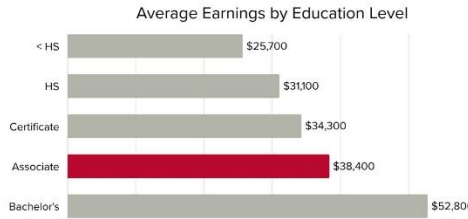
- Animal origins are documented based on the information provided by the individual who brings the animal to the shelter. Because citizens may encounter animals outside their neighborhoods, the reported location is taken at face value and entered into the system as accurately as possible. **(Morris/Lagunas)**
- Inmates currently assist at the shelter by handling most of the daily cleaning, reducing the need for additional staff. Although animal placement programs operate in prisons in other parts of the state, efforts to establish a similar program locally have not been approved. **(Morris/Lagunas)**
- Reviewing the City-mandated six-day hold period for identified animals is worth further discussion, as reducing the required stay could help relieve shelter overcrowding. **(Smith/Simonton/Lagunas)**
- The ongoing shortage of veterinarians remains a significant challenge, though the shelter continues to support education and training opportunities. Interns and veterinary students regularly work on-site, including during recent high-volume spay and neuter clinics that offered hands-on experience. **(Smith/Lagunas)**
- The community cat program requires feeders to register their colonies online, resulting in more than a thousand registered colonies and demand that far exceeds available spay and neuter capacity. Appointment slots fill quickly, prompting large volunteer-supported clinics to help manage volume. While the shelter does not conduct routine monitoring, ACOs respond to complaints, verify registration, and provide education to both feeders and neighbors. **(Morales/Lagunas)**
- Residents who are unable to trap feral cats themselves can contact HSOY for assistance, as staff and volunteers will perform trapping when needed and coordinate appointments with available veterinarians. The community cat coordinator provides direct support, offers deterrent guidance, and works with ACOs when necessary. Cats that go through the program are vaccinated, sterilized, and ear-tipped to identify them as treated. **(Watts/Lagunas)**
- Over a six-year period before the implementation of trap-neuter-return (TNR), approximately 20,000 cats were euthanized, yet cat populations continued to rise, demonstrating that lethal control was ineffective. Visible improvements at locations such as Texas Roadhouse and Sonic show that sustained TNR efforts can significantly reduce community cat numbers over time. **(Lagunas)**

II. ARIZONA WESTERN COLLEGE

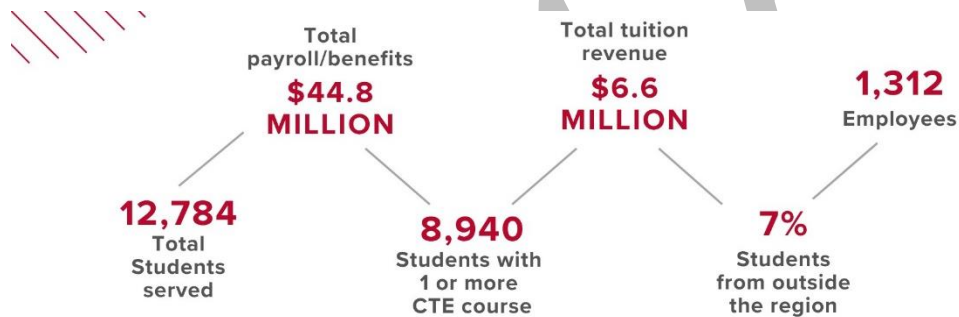
Dr. Daniel Corr, President of Arizona Western College (AWC), presented information on AWC's impact on the Yuma community as follows:

- Mission
 - Transforming lives through education and partnerships to create thriving communities.
- Student Demographics
 - Approximately 60% of students are first-generation, a percentage that has steadily declined over the past several years, reflecting increasing levels of college attainment among parents.
 - About three-quarters of students identify as Hispanic or Latino, and more than half speak a language other than English at home, with Spanish commonly heard across campus.
 - Roughly 30% of current students are still in high school and earn college credit through dual-enrollment programs taught either on campus, online, or by credentialed high-school instructors.
 - These efforts support a college-going culture aligned with the institution's long-term goal of doubling bachelor's degree attainment by 2035.
- Enrollment and Completion
 - AWC is experiencing record enrollment this academic year, the highest in its 63-year history.
 - It also awarded a record number of degrees and certificates last year and is on track to surpass that total again this May.
 - Graduation attendance has outgrown the local football stadium, prompting the addition of a December ceremony to help manage crowd size, especially for large first-generation families.
 - The highly celebratory commencement events reflect strong community support and the college's mission of transforming lives and contributing to a thriving community.
- Transfer Students
 - AWC leads the state in university transfer growth, showing a 14% increase over four years while statewide transfer rates have declined.
 - About 70% of students who transfer from AWC to a state university complete their bachelor's degree within four years, with completion rates rising further beyond that point.
- Early College Experience
 - Discounted dual-enrollment tuition – which is \$30 per credit hour and waived for students unable to pay – has expanded early-college access dramatically.
 - Over the past nine years, high-school participation in early-college courses has increased more than tenfold, moving AWC from last in the state to third in total dual-enrollment students and first in the percentage of local high-school students earning college credit.
 - Last year, 105 high-school students earned associate degrees prior to their high-school graduation, with the number expected to climb to roughly 150 this year.
- Yuma and La Paz Counties
 - The data available represents the full AWC service area, covering both Yuma and La Paz Counties, and cannot be separated to the city or county level.
 - The region's gross regional product is a little over \$10 billion, supporting more than 100,000 jobs.
 - Average annual salaries increase with higher levels of education, with certificates building towards associate degree-level earnings and associate degrees building toward baccalaureate-level earnings.

About Yuma and La Paz Counties



- Fiscal Year 2023-2024



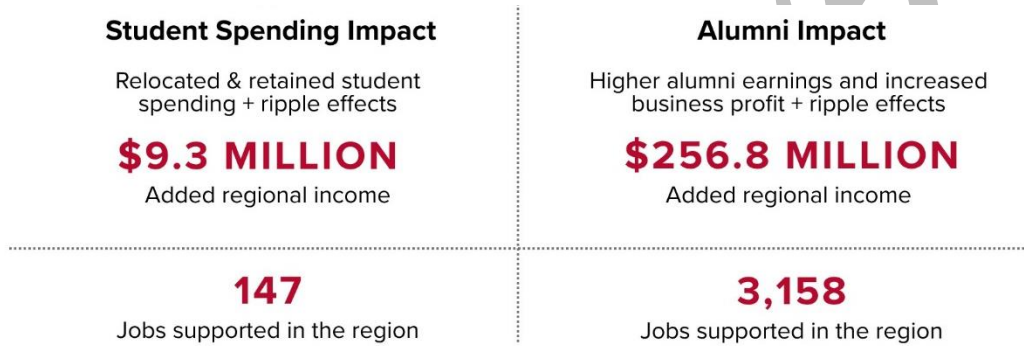
- The following statistics have been updated from the Fiscal Year 2023–2024 figures shown in the image above:

- Total students served – approximately 13,500
- Total payroll/benefits – about \$47 million,
- Total tuition revenue – slightly above \$7 million and
- Students from outside of the region – roughly 7%
- Career and Technical Education (CTE) – around 10,000 students enrolled in at least one CTE course
- Employment – just under 1,400 employees

- Expenditures

- Payroll spending is reported at just over \$51 million, supporting approximately 1,351 local jobs, though actual figures are likely higher due to inflation and institutional growth.
- Significant expansion has occurred across the institution, including the growth of the Wellton Advanced Manufacturing Center, which now serves more than 600 students.
- Recent developments also include the establishment of a Law Enforcement Training Academy, a newly constructed De Anza residence hall, and the Matador Activity Center.
- All major capital projects were funded without local tax increases, relying instead on revenue bonds repaid through housing fees and tuition rather than new levies or voter-approved bonds.

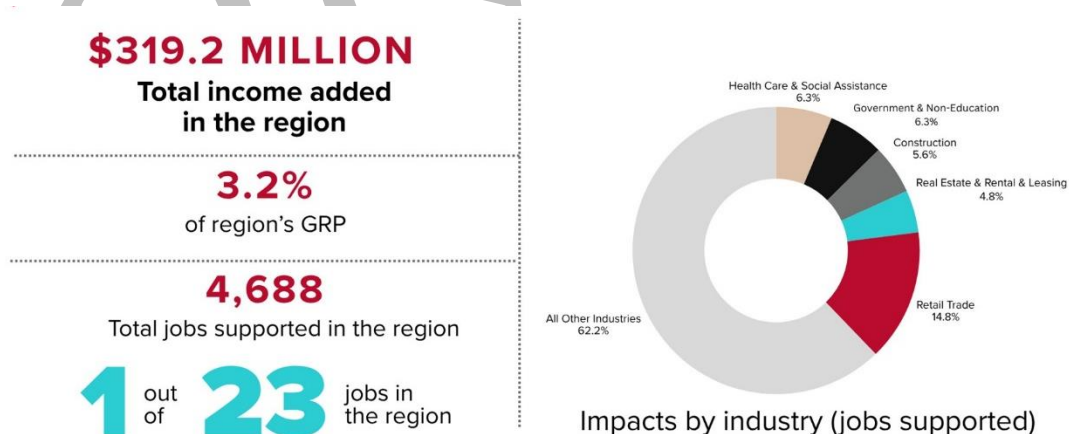
- Strong Fiscal Stewardship
 - AWC maintains strong fiscal stewardship, reflected in its AA+ bond rating from Standard and Poor and AAA bond rating from Moody’s Investors Service.
 - These high ratings are the result of sustained financial management, which has improved incrementally over the past decade.
 - The upcoming budget proposal will include no property tax increase, marking the eighth year out of nine in which AWC has avoided raising taxes.
 - AWC takes pride in consistently delivering budgets that require no additional burden on local taxpayers.
- Student and Alumni Impact



Source: Lightcast

All results measured in income, not sales. Results are net of counterfactual scenarios.

- Relocated and retained students at AWC contribute directly to the local economy through spending, with ripple effects estimated at approximately \$9.3 million.
- The figures cited reflect only AWC students; additional enrollment from Northern Arizona University (NAU), the University of Arizona, and Arizona State University (ASU) likely amplifies the overall economic impact.
- Alumni further strengthen the regional economy through higher earnings and business activity, with ripple effects estimated at \$256 million and support for more than 3,000 jobs.
- Total Impact



Source: Lightcast

- Investment Analysis

Student Perspective	Taxpayer Perspective	Social Perspective
\$232.6 MILLION Benefit: Higher future earnings	\$70.4 MILLION Benefit: Future tax revenue, government savings	\$903.1 MILLION Benefit: Growth in state economic base, future earnings, and private/social savings
\$48.2 MILLION Cost: Tuition, supplies, opportunity cost	\$62.9 MILLION Cost: State and local funding	\$133.7 MILLION Cost: All college and student costs
4.8 Benefit/Cost Ratio	1.1 Benefit/Cost Ratio	6.8 Benefit/Cost Ratio
16.2% Rate of Return	1.3% Rate of Return	N/A* Rate of Return

Source: Lightcast
 Future benefits are discounted to the present.
 *The rate of return is not reported for the social perspective because the beneficiaries are not necessarily the same as the original investors.

- Student Perspective
 - Students incur tuition, supplies, transportation, and opportunity costs, totaling an estimated \$48.2 million in investment.
 - Their education leads to higher future wages, generating an estimated 16% rate of return, which is considered a strong and reliable investment.
- Taxpayer Perspective
 - Even individuals with no direct connection to the college experience a positive return on their tax contributions.
 - With two-thirds of college funding coming from local property taxes, the benefit-to-cost ratio remains about 1.1 to 1, showing a slight but positive return on investment for taxpayers.
- Social Perspective
 - Higher education contributes to economic growth and increased future earnings across the community.
 - Societal benefits also include reduced incarceration rates, stronger civic participation, and growth in the economic base associated with higher education levels.
- Student Spotlight: Willyam Garcia
 - Keys to Education for Youth Success (KEYS) is a long-standing federal grant-supported initiative at AWC designed to help first-generation, low-income, or otherwise under-represented students succeed in college.
 - Willyam is an AWC graduate who participated in the KEYS program and is continuing studies through ASU Local.
 - AWC is proud to be the first community college campus to host an ASU Local program, which expands bachelor’s degree access to students who want or need to remain in Yuma.
- Program Spotlight: AWC Nursing
 - AWC made a significant investment to double the size of its nursing program, which is one of the institution’s most costly programs due to low faculty-to-student ratios, clinical requirements, and specialized equipment.
 - The expansion was undertaken in response to strong community need and direct requests from healthcare partners such as Onvida.

- The nursing program currently has an employment rate of approximately 95% percent, with most graduates choosing to remain in Yuma County.
- A new Health Careers building will open on the Onvida campus in October, supporting continued program growth and workforce development.
- About half of nursing graduates are expected to continue directly into a Bachelor of Science in Nursing program through AWC's partnership with NAU.

Mayor Nicholls noted that Dr. Corr is leaving AWC at the end of May and thanked him for his commitment to AWC and the Yuma community.

Discussion

- Career and technical education programs provide pathways for students to enter the workforce directly, including fields such as trades, law enforcement, automotive technology, and other skill-based areas. Local workforce needs continue to expand in advanced manufacturing, healthcare, cybersecurity, and artificial intelligence, leading to ongoing program growth to meet industry demand. These opportunities enable students to remain in the community, build careers, and support their families while benefiting from increasingly sophisticated training and technology. **(McClendon/Corr)**
- The recent expansion of the nursing program, which doubled in size over the past few years, is a significant achievement that supports both student progression and local workforce needs. Graduates are successfully advancing into bachelor's degree programs soon after completing their initial training. The program's responsiveness to community needs and continued efforts to ensure students can study locally and transition into local employment opportunities is appreciated. **(Smith)**

III. REGULAR CITY COUNCIL MEETING AGENDA OF APRIL 1, 2025

Motion Consent Agenda Item C.2 – Bid Award: Pavement Replacement, Yuma Country Club Estates Unit 1 (award a construction services contract to DPE Construction in the amount of \$1,867,800.00) (RFB-26-144) (Eng)

Mayor Nicholls declared a conflict of interest on Motion Consent Agenda Item C.2 as his firm was involved in the project. There being no questions or discussion, **Mayor Nicholls** remained on the dais.

Motion Consent Agenda Item C.6 – Scheduling: 2026 City Council Retreat (approve the scheduling of the annual City Council Retreat to be held on April 6 and 7, 2026)

Discussion

- Retreat locations should be discussed earlier in the planning process to ensure local venues and the hospitality industry have the opportunity to benefit. Local venues are fully capable of hosting such events, and holding them locally supports businesses contributing to the City's hospitality tax. While the upcoming retreat is already set, future decisions should incorporate these considerations before plans are finalized. **(McClendon)**
- The retreat planning process includes identifying informational sessions, and the upcoming schedule features a tour of the San Luis Port of Entry, a major regional investment with significant economic impact. Visiting the site provides valuable firsthand insight for future discussions on economic development and supports relationship building with regional partners. **(Mayor Nicholls)**

- The retreat location was selected as part of an effort to rotate sites throughout the region and strengthen partnerships. Previous retreats have been held both locally and at neighboring regional venues. The intention was to create a setting outside normal work environments to reduce everyday distractions while remaining within a short driving distance and supporting nearby communities. **(Simonton)**
- While it is important to collaborate with other regional entities, future planning should ensure that such partnerships are reciprocal. A lunch meeting with San Luis leadership is being arranged, offering an opportunity to encourage them to host a similar gathering in Yuma as part of strengthening the partnership. **(McClendon/Simonton)**
- There is value in partnering with San Luis and the opportunity provided by the tour, but there is also a desire for City Council to have input on retreat locations. Just under \$24,000 of the retreat's \$30,000 budget covers the facilitator's preparation, travel time, and two-day engagement. Because no food or venue payments have been made, relocating the retreat would not result in significant financial losses, though rescheduling could add minor costs. **(Morales/Simonton)**
- The concerns raised about retreat locations are understandable. Holding retreats in different parts of the region, including San Luis, helps strengthen relationships across Yuma County. The upcoming tour of the new port facility is highly beneficial, offering insight into a major economic asset for the broader community. Continued cross-community collaboration is encouraged, including inviting San Luis representatives to visit Yuma facilities to support mutual engagement and shared regional benefit. **(Morris)**
- Supporting Yuma businesses is important, especially in the current economy. Even though most retreat costs relate to the facilitator, some spending still benefits the local community. Regional partnerships remain valuable, but City Council should discuss retreat locations in advance, including how often events should be held outside of Yuma. Scheduling additional travel can be challenging given full-time workloads, so future planning should include a clearer conversation about preferred retreat locations. **(Smith)**
- The key issue is not the venue itself but ensuring that City Council is included in deciding the location and timing of the retreat. City Council should have a direct role in these decisions as part of the retreat planning process. **(Martinez)**

EXECUTIVE SESSION/ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, **Mayor Nicholls** adjourned the meeting at 6:39 p.m. No Executive Session was held

Janet L. Pierson, Acting City Clerk

APPROVED:

Douglas J. Nicholls, Mayor

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