

CITY OF ALBUQUERQUE PARKS & RECREATION DEPARTMENT
METROPOLITAN PARKS AND RECREATION ADVISORY BOARD (MPRAB)

April 1, 2025
MEETING MINUTES

Location: In person at the Parks and Recreation Dept office: 1801 N 4th St NW and Zoom

Board Members Present: ***At-Large*** - Valerie Martinez (Chair); ***At-Large*** - Tony Johnson; ***District 2*** - Julie Radoslovich; (Vice Chair); ***District 4*** - Jim Souter; ***District 7*** - Annie Montes; ***District 9*** - Fredrica “Rickie” Bergquist

Board Members Absent: ***District 1*** – Vacant; ***District 3*** - Vacant; ***District 5*** - John I. Ajie; ***District 6*** - Vacant; ***District 8*** - Vacant

City Staff Members Present: Deputy Director David Flores; Deputy Director Dennis Vasquez; CIP Program Manager Cheryl Somerfeldt

Guests Present: District 8 City Councilor Dan Champine; District 8 Policy Analyst Elaine Romero; The Wilderness Society Hally Bert (see the table below for additional guest speakers related to the High Desert re-name request)

1. Call to Order:

- Chair Valerie Martinez called the meeting to order at 11:30 am.
- Board members were introduced.
- Guests were introduced.

2. Business Meeting:

- Agenda for this April 1, 2025 meeting unanimously approved.
- Minutes for the February 4, 2025 meeting were unanimously approved after stated revisions.

3. Public Comment #1

Chair Martinez:

The MPRAB bylaws designates these meetings as a public forum to discuss requests such as these with respectful comments from all sides.

#	Position	Name	Summary of content
1	Supports	Demetria Vasquez	Attending on behalf of female veterans.
2	Supports	Marlene Arason	Supports.
3	Supports	Liz Bryant	Representing Women Veterans of New Mexico (sergeant major). There has never been a park in Albuquerque named after a female veteran. Dorothy Jensen Blanchard trailblazed women’s roles.
4	Supports	Diane Wong	Representing Tribute to Women in the Military, Women Veterans Warriors, and Honorary Veterans. Dorothy played a significant role in the Tribute to Women in the Military, which has been active for 40 years. Women Veterans Warriors, an all-female veteran color guard team, performed at Dorothy’s funeral and collaborated with Dorothy on many events. Honorary Veterans group identifies veterans in older cemeteries without headstones and honors them.
5	Supports	Karen Piccate	Gives time to district commander. Supports.

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6	Supports	Jim Berdine	District Commander for the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), and supports all veterans. Works at Bear Canyon Senior Center on the memorial wall, and would like to further share the vital history of women in the military within the community. Admires female veterans, and would like more education about the WAVES especially since it was a short time in history, but led to women being permitted in the U.S. regular ranks.
7	Supports	Bomi Parakh	Dorothy Jensen Blanchard's son-in-law. Prepared statement: Mayor Keller wrote why the request is consistent with ABQ "Stories of Us". Dorothy Jensen Blanchard is a symbol of female veterans who have not received the recognition they deserve. When collecting the 280 signature petition submitted at this meeting, two main themes of opposition emerged affecting the renaming effort: 1. Not enough information about Dorothy Jensen Blanchard. However, there is no established channel to exchange information between the military and rank-and-file citizens. 2. Dorothy is good but not good enough, which is what brave women of WWII heard too often and loudly, but Dorothy has proved them wrong. If the renaming effort fails, who is the real loser, Dorothy's family and her supporters, or the community because they have not been educated about her?
8	Supports	Linda Blanchard	Dorothy Jensen Blanchard's daughter. Presented a list of 19 selected honors and recognitions her mother received throughout her lifetime for the record.
9	Supports	Tammy Cobb	The military outreach director of the New Mexico Veterans Memorial Foundation Board. Thanks Dan Champine. Dorothy Jensen Blanchard passed away last year at the age of 101, which was 2 ½ % of the Navy in 1947. Helped to draft the National Security Act, which established what is now Kirtland Air Force Base. In 1948, the Women's Integration Act allowed women to integrate into the military, however, women were not recognized as they should. May this park's name inspire future female leaders to appreciate history and reinforce patriotism.
10	Supports	Mary Cox	Supports.
11	Supports	Anita Sanchez	Representing New Mexico Veterans Memorial and supports.
12	Supports	Jo Ann Hudson	Representing New Mexico Veterans Memorial Foundation and supports request.
13	Supports	J.T. Michelson	Supports request.
14	Supports	Robert Martinez	Representing New Mexico Veterans Memorial and supports.
15	Supports	Diane Remer Thamert	Knew Dorothy for over 30 years and supports.
16	Opposes	Marylin Smiel	Best friend's mother was a nurse during WWII. Her father, a fighter pilot, was awarded for his heroism; and after WWII, and became a sales rep for General Electric in Albuquerque. She reflected on how many heroes moved on and sought peace after the war. While she

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			does not want to diminish Dorothy's contribution and service, recommends keeping the park's current name and instead create a memorial at the New Mexico Veterans Memorial to honor women in the military.
17	Opposes	John Cleary	An insurance professional who played a part in the development of High Desert, and lived in the High Desert community before the park was established. There is a sense of ownership among those who have lived in the High Desert area for many years, and the name is important to long-time residents. The MPRAB Park Naming Policy states that the park's name should align with its location. The residents in his community want the name to remain High Desert Park.
18	Supports (2 nd mtg)	Lynn Beckwith	Worked for national security and knew Dorothy personally. Every part of the military was extremely important during WWII, and played a significant role in shaping today's military and the country as a whole.
19	Supports	Mark Finley	An Army veteran, Deputy County Sheriff, and an EMT. Researched other parks named after female veterans and shocked to find none. Dorothy's work will set the bar since she served in a very high position. Hikes by the park regularly with his granddaughter, and would like her to have a role model and learn of Dorothy's history.
20	Supports	Katie Kaveny	Supports.
21	Supports	Pisces Lovato	Supports.
22	Supports	Catherine Brown	A woman veteran in the woman army corps. The request honors and recognizes women veterans.
23	Supports	Phil & Sandy Warnock	Residents of High Desert. Supports on behalf of two persons.
24	Supports	David Williams	Retired commander of the Navy, president of the Navy League of the U.S., a VFW member, American Legion member, and former director of the High Desert Board. Spoke as a resident and someone who was fortunate to know Dorothy throughout her life. She contributed significantly to the U.S. Navy's evolution in key roles. His niece is now in the U.S. Navy and deployed. There is no better way to recognize the service of women in the military than to approve this request.
25	Supports	Clara Pena	Representing Honoring Our Veterans and lifetime member of the VFW American Legion. Family has been in NM since 1692. Women veterans have not received the honors they deserve. This request will make a difference in educating the community. Understands why some people might be opposed, but believes it can be a hybrid name of <i>Dorothy Jensen Blanchard High Desert Park</i> , because the most important thing is educating the public about the contributions of women in the military and remembering the past.
26	Supports	Candy Baca	6 th generation rancher in New Mexico and a Navy veteran in support. Asks why there aren't more requests like this? While understanding why some might oppose, supports a hybrid name, <i>Dorothy Jensen Blanchard High Desert Park</i> .

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27	Supports	Paul Temple	Knew Dorothy and her family. Dorothy's influence inspired him to join the Navy. Losing history means losing oneself. Dorothy's contributions made everyone safer.
28	Supports	Marian Matthews	New Mexico State Representative for House District 27. Dorothy was recognized by the House of Representatives in New Mexico, and received a certificate in recognition of her accomplishments, service, and contributions. Dorothy joined the WAVES with 81,000 other women and was in the top 1% of her class, and honored by Eleanor Roosevelt. Worked to ensure safety of merchant ships, and afterward reassigned to assist Admiral Burke on top secret documents, and left the Navy as a Chief Petty Officer. Dorothy is fondly remembered for her sense of humor.
29	Supports	Dan Champine	District 8 City Councilor. Mayor Keller's letter aligns the request with the goals of the "ABQ Stories of Us" initiative. The name of a park is noticed and important or no one would be here in opposition or support. The process of collecting signatures revealed mostly positive responses. Ms. Blanchard's accomplishments were eye-opening, and many would feel proud if they knew her story. If the renaming does not occur, who truly loses, Dorothy and her family, or the broader community that misses an opportunity to honor her and learn about her? Dorothy had a crucial role writing legislation that led to Kirtland Air Force Base, which was a significant in Albuquerque's growth. It would be historic for High Desert Park to be the first park to be renamed after a female veteran.
30	Supports	Amberly Viner	Program Manager for the state of New Mexico in the Department of Veterans Services. The request would be important to the community and female veterans living in NM. This will signify that it is beneficial to stand up and be proud of being a veteran. The request will honor their past and shape the future.
31	Supports	Dolores Gaviola Feck	Representing Tribute to Women in the Military. Liked the hybrid name <i>Dorothy Jensen Blanchard High Desert Park</i> . As a former member of the Air Force, part of the global war on terrorism. Encourages this opportunity to honor military women.
32	Supports	Geraldine Yahnozha	Supports.
33	Supports	Marita Roth	Navajo Nation member and served 20 years in the Air Force. Member of Tribute to Women in the Military, Women's Veterans of New Mexico, and Women's Memorial in Washington DC.
34	Opposes	Idalia Lechuga-Tena	Vice President of the District 8 Coalition of Neighborhood Associations in the Northeast Heights. During the last meeting on March 27, 2025, the Coalition with 10 Neighborhood Associations present, voted unanimously against renaming the park.
35	Opposes	Vicky Estrada Bustillo	Lives in District 8 in Peppertree neighborhood (across Tramway from High Desert) for 19 years, and in Albuquerque for 30 years. Her neighborhood, with over 700 people, voted against the request. Cautions against renaming as there are many significant

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			people in the neighborhood who also deserve a park named after them. Applauds and acknowledges veterans; however, a name change does not educate people. Believes it would be more appropriate to add Dorothy Jensen Blanchard to the Veterans Memorial Park. Also supports a plaque or memorial in High Desert.
36	Supports	Marilla Cushman	25-year veteran of the U.S. Army and employee at the Military Women's Memorial at Arlington National Cemetery, which tells the story of women's service. Important that the community honors veterans. Dorothy led the way for 400,000 women to serve in WWII. The request will educate younger generations.
37	Supports	Phyllis Wilson	President of the Military Women's Memorial at Arlington National Cemetery. Had the honor of signing a Living Legend proclamation for Dorothy's 100th birthday, which was presented by past president Major General D. McWilliams. Women freed men to serve on the front line. Dorothy was featured in a PBS documentary about the WAVES on Rt 66 (The Untold Story of Women on the Mother Road). Points out that Albuquerque does not have a park named after the hundreds of thousands of women who have and are serving.
38	Supports (2 nd mtg)	Charles Powell	Representing Veterans for Peace.

4. Old Business

- Update on appointments to the board.

Two new board members introduced themselves:

- *Annie Montez*, new board member from Council District 7, works for the Ciudad Water District, has a strong background in biology, botany, and ecology.
- *Jim Souter*, new board member from Council District 4, from a military family. His father and mother served in the military, and his mother may have known Dorothy. Jim served in the Marines. Does not support the request, but would like to speak further with the representative and councilor to find a way to create a memorial for women's service.

- Update on Boards and Commissions training program - MPRAB progress.

Tony Johnson is the only board member yet to update, and will work on it immediately.

- Request to rename "High Desert Park" to "Dorothy Jensen Blanchard Park" (District 8).

Summary of comments were prepared by staff and considered by the board:

OPPOSE

EMAILS: 82

PETITION: 120 signatures

TOTAL: 202

SUPPORT

EMAILS/LETTERS: 45

PETITION 1: 225 signatures

TOTAL: 270

PETITION 2 (submitted at this meeting): 330 signatures

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SPEAKERS first mtg: 2

SPEAKERS new second mtg: 2

TOTAL: 206

SPEAKERS first mtg: 13

SPEAKERS new second mtg: 30

TOTAL: 643

- Staff suggests that the monument sign simply removes the word "Park" and leaves the name as "High Desert" for the community, and the only change would be the standard park sign.
- The question was asked if we have communication from the HOA? *Answer:* The current representative group is from the District 8 Coalition? We do not currently have comment from the HOA.
- *Chair Valerie Martinez:* Beyond the number of supporters or opponents, there are other decision factors to consider. She has family members who served in the military, but concerned about making a decision that could divide the community. The current request does not fully have overwhelming community support, and she really wants the community to be happy together with the result. A memorial may be considered by the Arts Board or Veterans group; however, the MPRAB is charged with park name changes, so a recommendation should be made.
- *District 8 City Councilor Dan Champine:* George Marsh who represents the HOA sent a letter in support. There will never be overwhelming support. In City Council meetings, there is usually an opportunity for an amendment based on public comment, and he suggests amending the request to the hybrid name of "Dorothy Jensen Blanchard High Desert Park". He is looking into options to educate the public about the WAVES and Dorothy Jensen Blanchard in other ways as well.
- *District 8 Coalition Vice President Idalia Lechuga-Tena:* Received a letter in February describing this request, then discussed the request at their meeting on March 27, and the District 8 Coalition voted to oppose. The D8 Coalition supported a memorial to honor Dorothy Jensen Blanchard in the High Desert Park. The coalition only meets every other month and Councilor Champine was invited but was unable to attend.
- *Tony Johnson:* Is a veteran and honors veterans, but it is important to respect the comments from the immediate community near park.
- *Annie Montes:* Surprised at the lack of parks named after female veterans in Albuquerque. She considers whether a change will benefit the community. She believes this as an historic opportunity to honor women in the military.
- *Rickie Bergquist:* Would like to add Dorothy's name to the monument sign not sure if the smaller sign will impact others, but is open to a hybrid name change.
- *Jim Souter:* Based on current policy, the proposed name change would not meet the necessary requirements for approval. However, Dorothy should be honored in a meaningful way.
- *Julie Radoslovich:* Husband is a veteran, and father served in World War II. Acknowledged significance of honoring veterans but emphasized there is an established governing park renaming policy.
- Motion by Annie Montes to make an amendment to the original request and propose a third option for a hybrid of the original and proposed name to: "Dorothy Jensen Blanchard High Desert Park", second by Rickie Bergquist.
- *Julie Radoslovich:* Opposition to the name change does not mean that Dorothy Jensen Blanchard should not be honored in another meaningful way such as a memorial garden or statue. These are options that have been mentioned today.

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- *Valerie Martinez*: A vote either way does not preclude a memorial garden or statue for Ms. Blanchard as well as educational programs. These can be requested directly from the PRD and do not need to be reviewed nor voted on by this board.
- **The board voted 4 to 2 in favor of re-naming “High Desert Park” to “Dorothy Jensen Blanchard High Desert Park.”**

5. New Business

- Introduction to new board members Jim Souter (Dist 4) and Annie Montes (Dist 7)
Discussed earlier under Old Business.

6. Reports

- Deputy Director Vasquez Report:

Three park opening ceremonies are currently being scheduled: Phil Chacon Park, Wells Park, and Phase 2 of Los Altos Park. Commemorative plaque was installed at Matheson Park, as part of an early entry into the mayor’s “Stories of UJs” initiative. A commemorative brick area and pavilion will be created for the South Valley Gateway Park community. Manzano Mesa Park, a pickleball court will be named in honor of an individual recognized for their significant contributions to the community. Additionally, two new park naming requests were submitted for consideration. In light of growing public interest in park re-naming, the board is considering revisiting and potentially revising the MPRAB Park Naming Policy. Suggestions include a prompt to read the existing policy on the name change submission form, and an open-ended prompt for the applicant to “demonstrate efforts of community engagement”. Deputy Director Vasquez suggests a subcommittee meet to review the policy and make wording suggestions to the board (to include Deputy Director Vasquez, Vice Chair Julie Radoslovich, and Cheryl Somerfeldt).

- Director David Simon Report:

The 2025 Capital Outlay Bill is awaiting the Governor’s final action on April 11. The proposed legislation includes approximately \$21.5 million in funding for park-related projects of which, \$4 million is for North Domingo Baca Aquatic Center, and \$2 million is for Little leagues. Geneivas Arroyo project received extra funding. Balloon Fiesta Park received \$2.4 million with \$2 million of that for landing sites.

Unfortunately, funding does not necessarily match Park’s top priorities. The Sunport pool is currently closed and needs 2 million in repairs or it may be closed for 2-3 years. The Barelas Park project remains unfinished despite being an ongoing initiative for the past 6-7 years in Council District 2. 4H Park at 12th and Menaul, which affects every tribe and pueblo in New Mexico, needs approx.. \$1million to construct. The USS Albuquerque Monument, an amazing tribute honoring the Navy at Tingley Beach, still needs about \$4-5 million to construct.

City council has not yet finalized the GO Bond, which will be discussed at their next meeting on April 7. GO Bond is supposed to be 80% for repair and rehabilitation. PRD asked for \$18 million from the GO Bond, and is currently designated for \$21million; however, the majority is designated for specific projects. PRD favors flexibility to meet changing needs.

Afterward the GO Bond, Council will go directly into considering the 2026 budget. It is a very tight fiscal year and next one will be worse. Construction costs are up 30-40%.

The work of the board is two-directional feedback with an emphasis on the importance of parks. Interpretive signage important for all parks.

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- *Vice Chair Julie Radoslovich* asked if park activation funding is in budget or not? It is believed that it is a non-recurring item.
- *Chair Valerie Martinez* mentions that it is time to revisit creating a nonprofit organization.
- *Jim Souter* asks about the bill from City Councilor Baca District 2? *Answer:* The bill levy would generate between 30-50 million a year, and it appears to rotate districts. The City had similar quality of life tax before but it moved to roads and transportation needs. This should address the highest burning needs of community.
- Subcommittee Reports

None.
- Board Members Roundtable
 - *Jim Souter* requests more information on Tuscany dog park, PdN Nature Center, Vineyard Estates Park, Balloon Fiesta stadium and NDB Aquatic Center in preparation for the coalition report meets on third Wed, and Alameda Little League for the 5th/opening day. PRD will meet with Jim outside of this meeting.
 - *Julie Radoslovich* asked for comment on the opioid settlement. Local government are putting forth recommendations. City Councilor Rogers District 6 asked for ideas on set her aside funds, and the public voting must live and work in area. Projects discussed are: parklets greening up vacant parking spots \$400k item and San Pedro and Kathryn food truck plaza.
 - *Chair Valerie Martinez* would like to address larger issues for the Parks Department as a whole in future meetings. Begin work on a report/platform to present to the community to create more leverage and action. Potentially review a parks master plan with priority projects. How would they advocate for Parks and the priority projects? *Answer:* Support flexibility.
 - *Rickie Berquist:* Can a splashpad be added at Sunport pool? *Answer:* the plumbing would need to be fixed first.

7. Public Comment # 2

- Hally Bert expressed that the tone and care of the board regarding how comments are delivered and accepted is exemplary. Urban to Wild is eager to celebrate Phil Chacon and Wells Park openings. Expressed gratitude toward Dave, Dennis, and David for their thoughtful response on the International District Library Park project community engagement with Spanish speakers and Together for Brothers. Her coalition is eager to advocate for parks during the process of designating money. They are creating a tool for individual neighborhood groups to work with their City Councilors and State Legislators. Increasing efforts for more fluid neighborhood communication. Will participate in public comment for budget process. Phil Chacon opening is May 3rd.

8. Action Items

Send MPRAB list of State Capital Outlay grants.

9. Next Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, May 6, 2025 at 11:30 am

Meeting adjourned at 2:40 pm.