



## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY BOARD MINUTES

April 7, 2026

The Economic Development Advisory Board of the City of Mesa met in the boardroom at the 120 N. Center St., on April 7, 2026, at 7:30 a.m.

### BOARDMEMBERS PRESENT

Steven Beck  
Kurt D. Ferstl  
Michelle Genereux  
Anthony Ruiz  
Andrew Schreiner  
Susan Stephensen

### BOARDMEMBERS ABSENT

Frank Sanders (excused)

### STAFF PRESENT

Jaye O'Donnell  
Maribeth Smith \*  
Amanda Elliott  
Rob Stirling  
Brent Stoddard

### EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS PRESENT

Mark Freeman, Mayor  
Sally Harrison  
Richard Blake  
Sonny Cave  
Mark Drayna  
Natascha Ovando-Karadsheh

### EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS ABSENT

Scott Butler, City Manager (excused)

### GUESTS

(\*Participated in the meeting via video conference equipment)

#### 1. Call meeting to order.

Chair Michelle Genereux called the meeting to order at 7:30 a.m.

#### 2. Items from citizens present.

Discussion only; no formal action taken by the Board.

#### 3. Approval of minutes from the February 3, 2026, Economic Development Advisory Board meeting.

It was moved by Board member Anthony Ruiz, seconded by Board member Steven Beck, that the February 3, 2026, Economic Development Advisory Board meeting minutes be approved.

Upon tabulation of votes, it showed:

AYES – Beck-Ferstl-Genereux-Ruiz-Schreiner-Stephensen

NAYS – None

ABSENT – Sanders

Chair Genereux declared the motion carried unanimously.

4. Hear an overview presentation on the Economic Development Advisory Board, followed by a discussion.

Economic Development Director Jaye O'Donnell presented an overview of the Economic Development Advisory Board to set expectations for the Board, including newer members. She reviewed the Board's history, noting that it was established in July 1992 with nine members representing specified industry categories (legal, real estate, international business, aerospace, communications, and education), plus the Mayor and an Assistant City Manager as ex-officio members. The ordinance was updated in 2004 to remove specific industry membership categories, broadening the range of qualified members, and again in 2021 to expand the number of ex-officio members, reflecting population growth and the City's allotment on the Greater Phoenix Economic Council (GPEC) Board of Directors. (See pages 1-3 in Attachment 1)

Ms. O'Donnell reviewed the Board's current structure of nine voting members who are City of Mesa residents and up to eight ex-officio non-voting members, three of whom are reserved for the Mayor, City Manager, and President and CEO of the Mesa Chamber of Commerce. Up to five ex-officio members also sit on the Greater Phoenix Economic Council (GPEC) Board of Directors. She noted that the Board currently has two voting-member vacancies, including one created by the resignation of Charles Gregory. (See pages 4-5 in Attachment 1)

Ms. O'Donnell described the Board's mission to advise the City Council on economic development matters, including goal setting, strategic planning, business retention and expansion, policy, and the identification of assets and resources. She explained that Board meeting minutes are forwarded to the City Council for approval, and that a separate City Council Economic Development Committee, chaired by Councilmember Rich Adams and including Councilmembers Francisco Heredia and Alicia Goforth, meets on an as-needed basis. (See page 6 in Attachment 1)

Ms. O'Donnell invited Board members to discuss the effectiveness of the current meeting format and opportunities to strengthen Board engagement. An extended discussion followed, summarized below.

Board members stated that while Board meetings consistently feature high-quality presentations, the Board would benefit from clearer direction on the specific issues and priorities on which the Mayor and City Council need the Board's input. Several members expressed interest in receiving more explicit tasking between meetings, and in understanding the Council's current priorities so the Board can align its work accordingly.

Mayor Mark Freeman stated that he meets monthly with the Economic Development Director and needs direction from the Board on economic priorities for the City. He noted that the City's three primary funding mechanisms are sales tax, state-shared revenue, and transfers from utility funds, and that business attraction, employment growth, and infill development, as the City's remaining greenfield land is absorbed over the next decade, are strategic priorities. He asked Board members to bring forward solutions-oriented recommendations and indicated he would commit to attending Board meetings where possible, and to designating a Councilmember to attend and provide a City update in his absence.

Board members discussed perceived constraints on Board effectiveness relative to prior years, including increased formality, Open Meeting Law considerations, the dissolution of former subject-matter subcommittees (healthcare, education, and defense), and the public nature of Board meetings. Members also discussed whether representatives of large organizations feel authorized by their employers to speak candidly in a formal public setting.

Assistant City Manager Brent Stoddard observed that the current ordinance-based format may no longer be the best fit for the type of substantive, candid engagement the Council and Mayor are seeking from the Board. He suggested that alternative engagement formats, such as business roundtables, may complement or partially substitute for the current meeting structure. Mr. Stoddard indicated he and the Mayor would consult with the City Attorney on Open Meeting Law guardrails, subcommittee feasibility, and potential alternative engagement formats, and would report back to the Board.

Board members requested more proactive and digestible briefings on City priorities, projects in the pipeline, and major developments, including SkyBridge Arizona, the Elliot Road Tech Corridor, the Palo District, Riverview, the Mesa Gateway Airport area, and Arizona State University's 300-acre development at Mesa Gateway. Members noted their interest in having current talking points to use as ambassadors for the City.

At the Mayor's invitation, Board members shared their perceptions of Mesa. Members characterized the City as large but understated nationally, as the 36th largest U.S. city, with strong fundamentals, significant transformation over the past decade, and continued opportunity, particularly in aerospace, advanced manufacturing, and supply-chain development around Mesa Gateway Airport. Members also noted the importance of shortening supply chains for Mesa-based manufacturers and attracting additional suppliers to the region.

Board members and staff discussed the current meeting format and timing. Members expressed interest in incorporating more open discussions, standing report-outs from GPEC representatives, the Mesa Chamber of Commerce, and Salt River Project, and a rotating Councilmember guest slot. Members also discussed whether some meetings should be replaced with site tours, which have been well received in the past, and whether meeting times and locations should be varied across different parts of Mesa.

Ms. O'Donnell summarized the direction from the discussion, noting that staff will investigate retooling the meeting agenda to include standing updates and dedicated time for open discussion, will prepare a clearer written description of Board member roles and expectations, and will share the Council Communique, the Director's Top 5, the Retail Review newsletter, the Economic Reporter, and the Business Advocate newsletter with the Board. Ms. O'Donnell also noted that Economic Development Advisory Board members will be offered host roles for business roundtables planned for the next fiscal year, with the Mayor and City Manager participating.

5. Economic Development Director's current events summary including conferences attended.

Economic Development Director Jaye O'Donnell summarized recent activity and upcoming engagements. She reported that Economic Development hosted more than 100 companies and company representatives across Business-to-Baseball events during Spring Training, and approximately 35 additional companies in the City's suites at Hohokam Stadium and Sloan Park. Prospects included international firms from Taiwan and the Netherlands, the latter introduced through a prior foreign direct investment mission to Japan.

Ms. O'Donnell reviewed upcoming economic development engagements, including the Arizona Association for Economic Development (AAED) Spring Conference in Tucson; the Industrial Asset Management Council (IAMC) Spring Forum in Arkansas, April 18–22, 2026; the Greater Phoenix Economic Council Executive Mission in Washington, D.C., April 27–30, 2026, with tracks including aerospace, semiconductors, climate technology, and foreign direct investment, at which Mayor Mark Freeman, City Manager Scott Butler, Ms. O'Donnell, and Board member Sonny Cave will represent Mesa; and the SelectUSA Investment Summit in Maryland, May 3–6, 2026. She also noted that the Office of Economic Development submitted Boeing for an AAED Best of Arizona Economic Development “Distinguished by Excellence” award.

Ms. O'Donnell announced the groundbreaking of the dual-branded Wingate and Hawthorn Suites by Wyndham hotel at SkyBridge Arizona on April 13, 2026, at 9:00 a.m., and the grand opening of the Swire Coca-Cola facility on Power Road in southeast Mesa on April 17, 2026, at 10:00 a.m.

Ms. O'Donnell previewed the refreshed Office of Economic Development website, which is being updated in alignment with the City's brand refresh and organized around three decision journeys: business attraction and expansion; small business development; and retail development. The Board will receive a preview link for review and feedback, with a formal launch planned for the first week of May 2026.

Board member Natascha Ovando-Karadsheh provided a report from the Greater Phoenix Economic Council annual board retreat. She summarized a presentation from Arizona Public Service (APS) on electric power, noting that power usage historically tracked gross domestic product but decoupled following the last major recession, and that demand has accelerated sharply in the last 24 to 36 months. During the prior low-demand period, producers of grid-related materials, including transmission equipment and generating plant components, reduced output, which has created a supply-chain constraint on grid expansion. Ms. Ovando-Karadsheh reported that APS and Salt River Project both indicated they are actively managing hyperscale loads and reserving capacity for smaller users.

Ms. Ovando-Karadsheh also summarized a water policy presentation delivered by Arizona State University, which addressed Lower Basin allocation issues expected to move to the U.S. Department of the Interior in June 2026. She noted that Arizona has retained a global law firm to represent the State in the anticipated proceedings.

6. Hear an Economic Development Strategic Plan update, followed by a discussion.

Deputy Economic Development Director Amanda Elliott provided an update on the Office of Economic Development Strategic Plan now in development. For the first time, an external strategic planning consultant was engaged. Through a competitive request for proposal process, twelve qualified firms submitted proposals, three were interviewed, and Hickey Global was ultimately selected. Selection factors included the firm's economic development experience paired with the perspective of its sister site selection practice, Hickey and Associates; a Phoenix-based global managing director; and a Mesa-based chief legal officer. Thank you to Board members Kurt Ferstl and Anthony Ruiz who served on the selection committee. (See pages 1-7 in Attachment 2)

Ms. Elliott reported that the plan will be grounded in economic and market analysis, competitively position Mesa's business districts and redevelopment areas, and focus on the three key growth drivers of business attraction, entrepreneurship, and workforce development. Stakeholder engagement held the prior week included five roundtables, covering city and infrastructure, talent pipeline, development partners, membership partners, and business and industry, with more than 70 participants, along with eight one-on-one interviews with the Mayor, Councilmembers, key employers, utility providers, and state and local partners. Board members who did not participate in a roundtable will receive the survey link. (See pages 8-11 in Attachment 2)

The final plan is targeted for completion by July 31, 2026, with a presentation to the City Council in August 2026. Draft plan components will be brought back to the Board for feedback at the June meeting.

7. Hear a presentation regarding Arizona Tech Week, April 6–12, 2026, followed by a discussion.

Amanda Elliott provided an update on Arizona Tech Week, the State's inaugural statewide decentralized tech conference, led by the Arizona Commerce Authority. She explained that the model, adapted from tech weeks held in New York, Los Angeles, and Miami, was designed to position Arizona as a growing hub for innovation, entrepreneurship, and technology, and bring together founders, investors, developers, and industry leaders across multiple cities simultaneously. (See pages 1-3 in Attachment 3)

Ms. Elliott reported that Mesa is not only participating in Arizona Tech Week but leading a significant share of programming, in partnership with the Mesa Chamber of Commerce. Mesa Business Builder at the Studios, with ASU's Edson Entrepreneurship + Innovation Institute on the first floor, is serving as a preferred vendor location. Monday's programming at The Post featured keynotes and industry panels from global firms including Boeing and Netgear, a Mesa-based founders panel, and a networking event. Tuesday's programming held at Mesa Business Builder at The Studios shifted to hands-on sessions on artificial intelligence, capital access, Meta-led marketing workshops, and cybersecurity. (See pages 4-8 in Attachment 3)

Ms. Elliott shared that, in addition to the Arizona Commerce Authority's statewide website, Economic Development launched [aztechweekmesa.com](http://aztechweekmesa.com) as a dedicated hub listing all Mesa-hosted events, providing wayfinding for attendees, and leveraged the #AZTW hashtag across digital channels. (See pages 9-11 in Attachment 3)

8. Introduction of new business to be discussed at a future meeting.

No new business was introduced.

9. Schedule of meetings.


Next meeting scheduled for Wednesday, May 6, 2026.

10. Adjournment.

Without objection, the Economic Development Advisory Board meeting adjourned at 8:57 a.m.

I hereby certify that the foregoing minutes are a true and correct copy of the minutes of the Economic Development Advisory Board meeting of the City of Mesa, Arizona, held on the 7<sup>th</sup> day of April 2026. I further certify that the meeting was duly called and held and that a quorum was present.

Submitted by:



Jaye O'Donnell  
Economic Development Director

ms

April 7, 2026

# Economic Development Advisory Board Overview



## Our mission.

Act as the advisory board to the Mesa City Council on matters pertaining to economic development.

01

Including goal setting, strategic planning, marketing and business recruitment, retention and expansion.

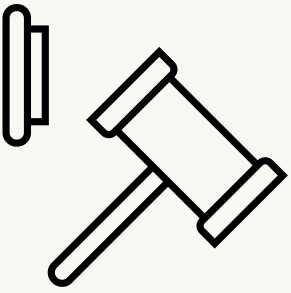
02

A forum for economic development policy discussion, identifying assets and resources appropriate for implementation.

03

Recommending changes to enhance economic development efforts.

# Economic Development Advisory Board.



# Board inception.

- The Economic Development Advisory Board was created through an ordinance on July 6, 1992.
- Membership was composed of nine (9) persons representing legal/real estate, international business, aerospace, communications, and education expertise. Mayor and an Assistant City Manager were ex-officio members.
- The ordinance was updated in 2004, removing specific membership qualifications.
- The ordinance was updated again in 2021, increasing the number of ex-officio members sitting on the Greater Phoenix Economic Council (GPEC) Board of Directors due to the population growth of Mesa.



# Current membership.

- **Nine (9) voting members** who are residents of Mesa.
- **Up to eight (8) ex-officio non-voting members** who are residents of Mesa.
  - Three (3) of the ex-officio members shall be the Mayor, City Manager, and President/CEO of Mesa Chamber of Commerce.
  - Five (5) of the ex-officio members may sit on the GPEC Board of Directors (including the City Manager).

## oting Members

- **Michelle Genereux - Chair**  
Manager, Land Rights Management, Salt River Project
- **Kurt D. Ferstl – Vice Chair**  
Senior Counsel, Mesa Site & Attack Programs,  
The Boeing Company
- **J. Steven Beck**, President & Associate Broker,  
COBE Real Estate
- **Charles Gregory**, President Emeritus, Benedictine  
University
- **Anthony Ruiz**, Senior Associate, EDGE Realty Partners
- **Frank Sanders**, Corporate Vice President, Global Supply  
Chain, Intel Corporation
- **Andrew Schreiner**, President / General Manager, Nammo  
Defense Systems Inc.
- **Susan Stephensen**, Local Government Affairs Director,  
HonorHealth
- **Vacant**

## Ex-Officio Members

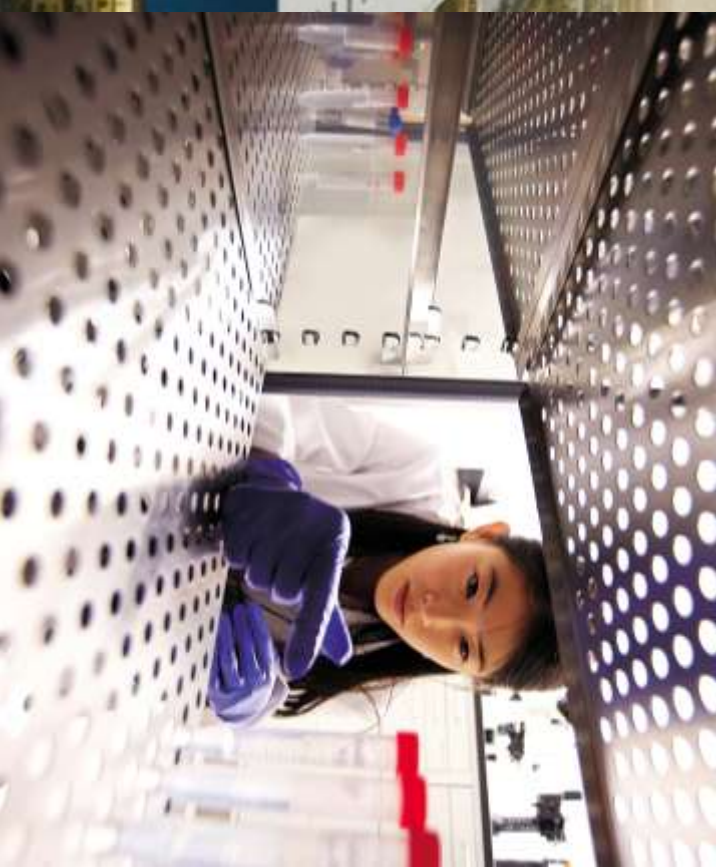
- **Mark Freeman**, Mayor, City of Mesa
- **Scott Butler**, City Manager, City of Mesa\*
- **Sally Harrison**, President & CEO, Mesa  
Chamber of Commerce
- **Richard Blake**, Senior Supply Chain /  
Commodity Director, Virgin Galactic\*
- **Sonny Cave**, Retired, ON Semiconductor  
Corporation\*
- **Natascha Ovando-Karadshen**, Associate  
Broker/Owner, KOR Properties\*
- **Mark Drayna**, Retired, FUJIFILM Electronic  
Chemicals\*

\* *GPEC Board of Directors*

## Staff

- **Jaye O'Donnell**, Economic Dev. Director, City of Mesa
- **Maribeth Smith**, ASAILL, City of Mesa

# City of Mesa Economic Development Council Committee.



## MISSION

Foster an environment for business retention and growth, and the creation of high-quality jobs.

## MEMBERS

Councilmember Rich Adams, Chair  
Councilmember Francisco Heredia  
Councilmember Alicia Goforth

## SCHEDULE

Meets as needed.

01

# Discussion.



# Stay connected.

Jaye O'Donnell

Economic Development Director

City of Mesa, Arizona

Office of Economic Development

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MesaBusinessBuilder.com

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# Economic Development Strategic Plan.

Strategic Plan.

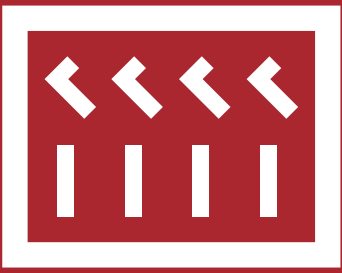
**Define Mesa's long-term vision and economic priorities, providing a clear roadmap to align resources, guide decision-making, and achieve measurable results.**



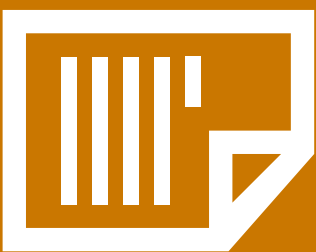
## Scope of Work (FY27-29 Strategic Plan).

- Economic & Market Analysis
  - Business District & Redevelopment Area Positioning
  - Business Attraction
  - Entrepreneurship
  - Workforce Development
- Strategy & Implementation Plan
  - Metrics & Performance
  - Funding & Resource Strategy
  - Marketing & Communications Alignment

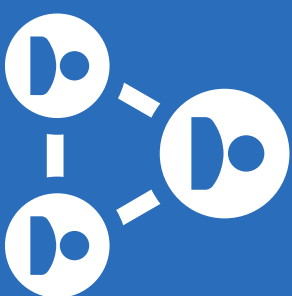
# Request for Proposal Process.



OCTOBER 2025  
Solicited for RFPs.



DECEMBER 2025  
12 responses.



DECEMBER 2025  
Three interviews.



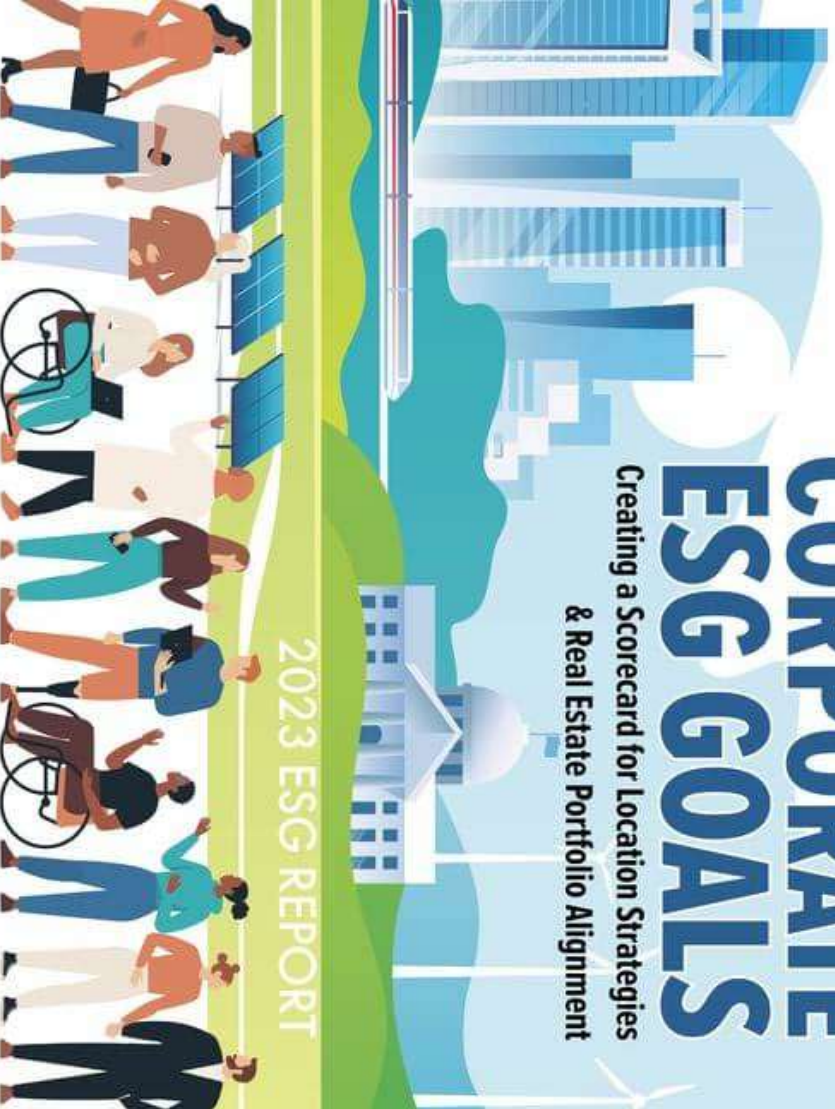
JANUARY 2025  
Selected Hickey  
Global.

# HICKEY

NEW ERA IN SITE SELECTION

## EXECUTING CORPORATE ESG GOALS

Creating a Scorecard for Location Strategies  
& Real Estate Portfolio Alignment



2023 ESG REPORT

Hickey Global.

- Full-service economic development consulting firm supporting private, public, and non-profit economic development organizations around the world.
- Services: Research & Analytics, Strategy & Business Development, Insights & Incentives, Organizational Development, Workforce Development
- Sister company to Hickey & Associates – global leader in site selection, location strategy, credits & incentives advisory, and labor analytics

## Schedule.

- Phase 1 (Kick off and Discovery) | Jan 30 – Feb 27
- Phase 2 (Stakeholder Engagement) | Mar 6 – Apr 24
- Phase 3 (Economic & Market Analysis) | Feb 13 – May 1
- Phase 4 (Business Development & Workforce) | Mar 13 – May 29
- Phase 5 (Strategy Development & Implementation) May 1 – Jul 3
- **Phase 6 (Final Document) | Jun 20 – Jul 31**
- **Council Presentation – August 2026**



Stakeholder Engagement.

# 70 Participants

## 5 Roundtables

- City and Infrastructure
- Talent Pipeline
- Development Partners
- Membership Partners
- Business & Industry

## 8 Interviews

- Mayor & Council
- Employers
- Utility Providers
- State & Local Partners



Stakeholder Engagement.

# Survey – Closes April 15



# Discussion.



# Stay connected.

Amanda Elliott

Deputy Director

City of Mesa, Arizona

Office of Economic Development

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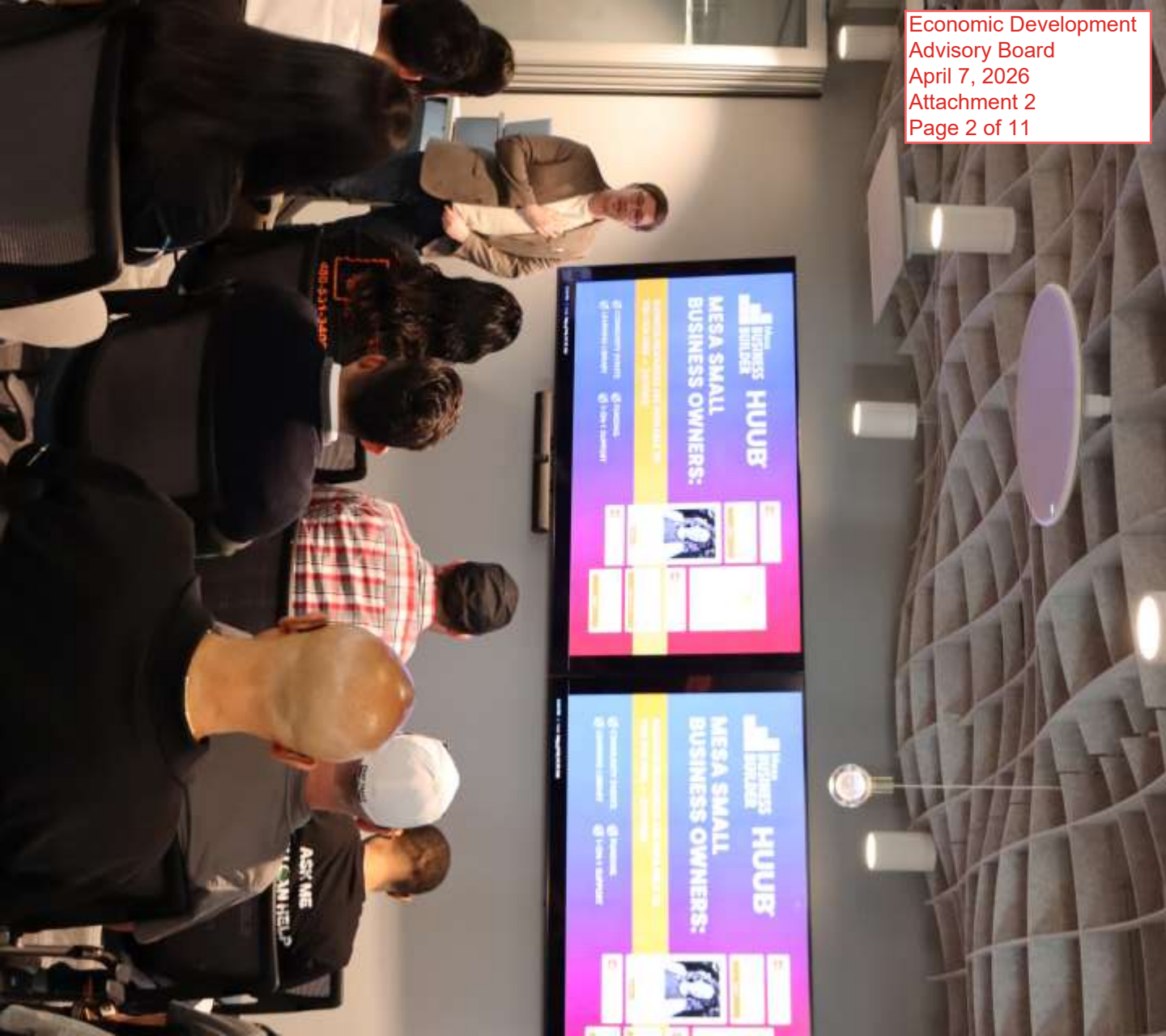
[Mesabusinessbuilder.com](http://Mesabusinessbuilder.com)

**in** Mesa-Economic-Development

**f** Mesa Business Builder

**@** BetterLifeMesa

# Arizona Tech Week in Mesa.



## About AZTech Week.

- Statewide decentralized tech conference
- Led by Arizona Commerce Authority
- Brings together the best and brightest from around the world to share future-forward perspectives on tech, entrepreneurship, breakthroughs and more
- Events of all sizes happen across the state with featured events in different cities throughout the state
- Detroit, Chicago, New York, Dallas, Los Angeles, Miami, Washington, Kansas

# See You at

# AZTECH

# WEEK

20  
26

POWERED BY **ARIZONA**  
COMMERCE AUTHORITY

## APRIL 6-12, 2026

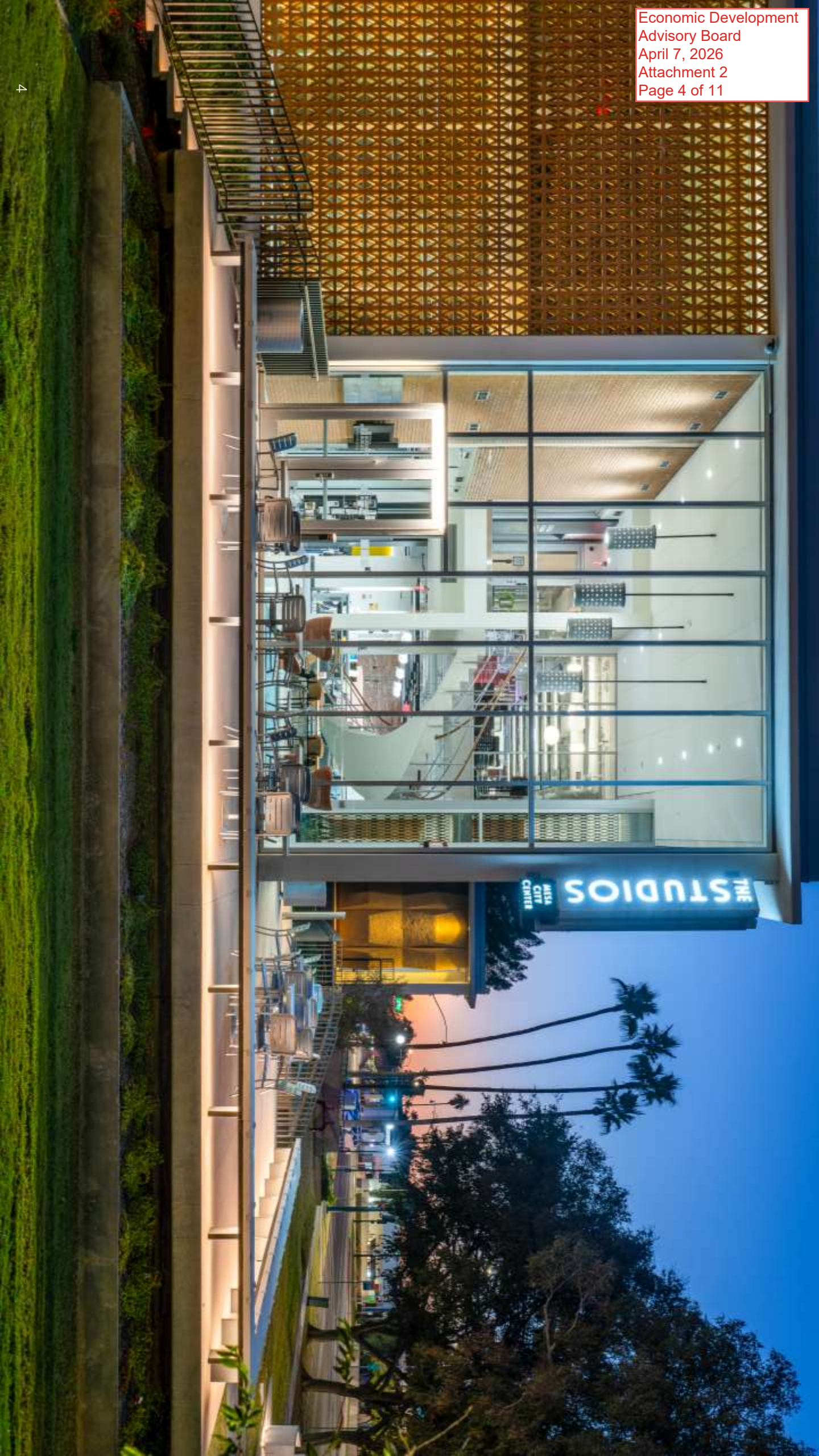
## Who.

- Tech Companies
- Founders
- Creators
- Engineers
- Startups
- Venture Capitalists

## How.

- Register Locations
- Host Events
- Join the Conversation #AZTW









April 6, 2026

🕒 8:40am - 9:30am

## Powering Arizona's Connected Future: AI Defined Networking with NETGEAR - Click Here to Register

Discover how AI-defined networking is transforming the way Arizona businesses connect, compete, and grow. In this session, we'll explore cutting-edge NETGEAR solutions designed to simplify network management, boost performance, and harness the power of AI – giving you the tools to build a smarter, more connected future.



April 7, 2026

🕒 9:00am - 12:00pm

## Curated Coffee and Revenue Growth - Click Here to Register

Funding the Future of Social Innovation is an interactive, high-energy discussion for founders, operators, and community builders who want to grow impact and revenue at the same time. If you've ever wondered whether you're leaving money on the table, this session will show you where it is and how to bring it into your revenue model. Attendees do not need to be a nonprofit to access charitable revenue. We'll walk through how social innovators can tap into philanthropy through tools like fiscal sponsorship and partnerships with the third sector, with clear guidance on how to do it in a credible, compliant way. Except real examples, audience prompts, and practical takeaways that can increase employee fulfillment, deepen client loyalty, attract new customers, and unlock new revenue streams.



April 9, 2026

🕒 9:40am - 10:25am

## The Efficiency Frontier: Reimagining Every Industry in the Age of AI - Click Here to Register

Presented by Joe Vadakkan, Founder of Atomic Zero. Research shows that 49% of all jobs can now have at least 30-40% of their core tasks performed by AI agents. If you haven't automated 30% of your week yet, you are effectively working at a 30% "inefficiency tax" compared to your competition. AI is no longer a "tech trend" it is a universal utility, as fundamental as electricity, currently re-baselining efficiency across every industry and domain. From the construction site to the creative studio, the "cold start" of manual labor is being replaced by the speed of automated iteration.



April 10, 2026

# Mesa Economic Development & Mesa Chamber Led.

## MONDAY, APRIL 6 at THE POST

- Powering Arizona's Future: AI Defined Networking with Netgear
- The Efficiency Frontier: Reimagining Every Industry in the Age of AI
- 15 Days of Work in 2: A Live Look at Scaling a Tech Company with Claude Work
- Boeing – From Automation to Autonomy: The Next Path for Aviation
- Relationship Economy: Why Arizona's Next Billion Dollar Companies Will be Built on Engineered Trust in the Age of A.I.
- Founder/Entrepreneur Panel
- Networking Reception

## TUESDAY, APRIL 7 at MBB @ THE STUDIOS

- Scaling Smarter: How Technology Enables Sustainable Business Growth
- Looking for Investor Capital? Get the Inside Scoop
- Agentic AI in Action: 3 AI Strategies to Create More Growth, Profit & Freedom in Your Business
- Modernizing Revenue: The Tech Stack Behind Faster Payments
- Prompt Engineering for Marketers with Meta
- You're Not Too Small to Be Targeted: Cybersecurity for Business Owners
- Establishing Your Presence with Meta Business Tools
- From Content to Customers: Building a Personal Brand that Drives Business Growth

# Booked at The Studios at City Center (MBB & ASU Edson E+I).

## MONDAY, APRIL 6

- Curated Coffee and Revenue Growth
- Brand & Marketing Master Blueprint

## TUESDAY, APRIL 7

- From Idea to MVP Workshop with AI

## WEDNESDAY, APRIL 8

- Startups: Powered by AI & Fireside Chat
- Reclaiming Reality: Media Literacy in the Age of A.I.

## THURSDAY, APRIL 9

- The AI Ready Classroom: A Teachers Guide to the New Frontier
- Future of Work: Thriving in an Automated Economy
- Automation & Integration

## FRIDAY, APRIL 10

- AI at the Edge
- Does Your Data Spark Joy?
- Vibe-Coding: From Idea to Prototype in Hours

## SATURDAY, APRIL 11

- Engineering Women at the Frontier: Designing Intelligent Systems

## Marketing & Promotion.

- Events
- Mesa Tech Stories

# #AZTW



# Discussion.



# Stay connected.

Amanda Elliott

Deputy Director

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