ARIZONA SPACE COMMISSION
BOARD OF DIRECTORS
PUBLIC MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, April 8, 2026, at 10:00 A.M.
Gila Community College
201 N. Mud Springs Rd. Payson, AZ 85541, (Rm 301)

I. Pledge of Allegiance

Brett Mecum, Chairman, Arizona Space Commission, led the meeting in the Pledge of Allegiance.

II. Call to Order and Roll Call

Chairman Brett Mecum called the meeting of the Arizona Space Commission to order at 10:01 A.M.

Marisa Walker, Executive Vice President and Administrator, Arizona Commerce Authority, proceeded with the roll call. A quorum of voting members confirmed present.

Board Members Present:

- Grant A. Anderson - virtual
- James F. Bell – virtual
- Jim Cantrell – virtual
- Megan Fitzgerald – virtual
- Erika Hamden – virtual
- Shawn Linam – virtual
- Brett Mecum – in person
- Len Munsil – virtual
- Douglas J. Nichols – virtual
- Michael P. Vargas – virtual
- Steve Zylstra – virtual

Board Members Not Present:

- Michael McGuire
- Lisa Morris

III. Consent Agenda

Chairman Mecum began the meeting by introducing the first agenda item: approval of the March 11, 2026, meeting minutes. Commissioner Zylstra moved to approve the minutes, and the motion was seconded by Commissioner Anderson. The minutes were approved without objection.

IV. Welcome Remarks

Dr. Phil McBride, Vice President of Academics at Gila Community College-Payson campus welcomed the Board of Directors, partners and distinguished guest to the campus. He acknowledged Sue Zen and Sharon Ruckert with the Rim County Chamber of Commerce; Steve Christensen, Gila County

Supervisor; Connie Cockrell, Gila County Community College District Governing Board; and Charlie Bell with Payson Town Council. Dr. McBride highlighted GCC's commitment to STEM education, applied research and infrastructure expansion, including an observatory under development on campus. He noted that the meeting coincides with AZ Tech Week, a statewide technology ecosystem event.

Gila Community College: Astronomy Curriculum & Infrastructure

Dr. Russ Genet, Adjunct Professor of Astronomy at GCC, presented the challenges and solutions for STEM education at rural community colleges. He underscored that rural community colleges often lack sufficient enrollment for advanced STEM courses, qualifies instructors, laboratory facilities, and extracurricular opportunities, resulting in a "STEM desert" for students. His approach to address these limitations has been to form a multi-school consortium allowing rural students to participate in publishing astronomical research, providing a competitive advantage for university admissions and scholarships.

Dr. Genet noted that the program leverages astronomy as an accessible research field: amateur-grade telescopes, available instruments and a large community of experienced mentors. A four corners state consortium was established with GCC taking a leadership role, supported by an NSF grant and collaboration with Colorado Mountain College. The program has produced over 200 published papers, co-authored by nearly 1,000 high school and community college students primarily in the southwest.

Students have used facilities including Kitt Peak National Observatory (2.1m telescope); Mount Wilson Observatory (60-inch and 100-inch telescopes); and a 1-meter telescope array. Research courses at GCC include introductory and advanced tracks. Completion of 18 credit hours earns a STEM Research Certificate. A proposed conference in Tucson later this year will showcase small-telescope astronomy research to students, instructors and institutions statewide. Future expansion may include access to small space telescopes for student research.

Vice Chairman Anderson inquired about student preparedness. Dr. Genet responded that students across skill levels participate, including non-STEM students who often shift to STEM careers after engaging in research. Dr. McBride added that dual enrollment partnerships with Payson High School, including strong chemistry and physics offerings, help build the pipeline.

Angus Aron, Vice President of Operations, presented on the GCC Observatory Project noting that the observatory has been designed and engineered; soil testing complete, telescope procured and onsite. To date approximately $370,000 has been expended, funded in part by the WHAT Foundation. Construction bids returned significantly higher than originally estimated due to inflation, resulting in a current funding gap of approximately $220,000. GCC is actively pursuing grant funding and seeking community and Commission support to close the gap. The Observatory is intended as a public destination for Payson, Gila County and the broader Arizona community for research and education.

Commissioners expressed support and discussed 1) providing letters of support for grant applications; and 2) engaging local and congressional policy makers to identify resources.

V. Strategic Plan & Working Group Discussion

Vice Chairman Grant Anderson provided an update on the strategic plan development noting that working groups have been engaged and an outline developed. He asked that all working group leads

submit their recommended conclusions to the shared working folders to enable review and discussion before a formal vote. The goal is to advance conclusions incrementally across upcoming meetings rather than a single up-or-down vote on the full document in October. A working group leads meeting is planned for later this week. A draft plan should be completed by June to allow time for refinement. The final strategic plan is targeted for formal presentation to the Legislature and Governor in December. Commissioner Nicholls expressed support for the incremental approach and socializing conclusions ahead of formal meetings.

VI. Discussion

a) Meeting Cadence—Commissioner Linam proposed shifting to a bimonthly (every other month) meeting schedule with the off-months dedicated to working group and strategic plan development. Chairman Mecum proposed the following schedule for the remainder of the year under the new cadence. May (no formal meeting, working group sessions); June (formal meeting); July (no formal meeting); August (virtual meeting); September (no formal meeting); October (formal meeting at Thunderbird with external expert review of strategic plan draft); November (no formal meeting); December (formal meeting with presentation of strategic plan and holiday celebration).

Commission Zylstra noted that the Arizona Aerospace Summit is scheduled for July 15 at the Tucson Convention Center. Gwen Griffin, Chairwoman of the Texas Space Commission, will be in attendance.

The commission agreed to suspend the May meeting and adopt a bimonthly cadence, with the schedule above as a framework. No formal vote was required as meeting frequency is not prescribed.

b) The Charter and the Space Marshall Designation Process—tabled for a future meeting.

c) Commissioner Updates

- Commissioner Linam—attended the Artemis 2 launch. She reported that Qwaltec personnel were instrumental in recovering a termination system failure during the countdown that would otherwise have prevented launch. Qwaltec employees also operated communications antennas a Wallops Island for the mission.

- Commissioner Nicholls—emphasized that the land acquisition for the Yuma Spaceport is nearly finalized. The FAA application has been resubmitted. Environmental reviews are wrapping up. During an upcoming Arizona-Mexico Commission meeting, a draft memorandum of understanding with Mexico including both the federal and Sonora state governments—will be discussed.

- Commissioner Zylstra—highlighted the Arizona Aerospace Summit which is scheduled in Tucson on July 15th. The event is seeking exhibitors, sponsors, and attendees. Commissioner Cantrell will deliver a keynote and other Commissioners are encouraged to reach out for information.

- Vice Chairman Anderson noted that the Space Symposium is scheduled the following week in Colorado Springs. The ACA will be hosting a booth of Arizona entities. The Vice Chairman encouraged Commissioners attending the Symposium to connect informally. Commissioner Cantrell extended an invitation to the Texas Space Commission happy hour scheduled for next Wednesday.

- Commissioners Vargas and Zylstra highlighted the recently submitted NASA STEM grant application. It included significant collaborative effort, such as letters of commitment from the Commission, many of the organizations they represent and several additional companies. Results are expected in June or July.

- Chairman Mecum noted that the Governor signed SB 1020 the Arizona Space Commission License Plate bill. This reflects the Commission's first piece of signed legislation. Next steps include securing $32K which must be delivered to ADOT by December 31, 2026, to activate the program. This amount equates to approximately $2,500 per Commissioner if distributed evenly. The Aerospace States Association is a 501(c)(3) and is being evaluated as a depository for funding raising. Commissioner Zylstra offered the SciTech Institute which is also a legal entity as an alternative. Commissioner Vargas has collected design concepts and volunteered to coordinate the design. Commissioners interested in contribution to the design process are encouraged to reach out.

- Chairman Mecum concluded by indicating that he received an invitation to a Space Policy Listening Session hosted by the US Office of Space Commerce in Washington D.C. on May 7th 2026. He plans to attend in person and represent the Commission.

VII. Call to the Public

Charlie Bell, Payson Town Council Member: Expressed enthusiasm for the observatory project and its potential to put Payson on the map alongside institutions such as Embry-Riddle in Prescott. He emphasized the dark sky environment in the area and expressed interest in seeing future degree programs in astronomy or STEM developed in collaboration with ASU, NAU, and the University of Arizona.

Colleen McLeod Garner: Informed the Commission of the passing of Arizona Space Marshal Nicholas Pope (known for the television program Ancient Aliens), who died of stage 4 cancer. Chairman Meacham noted that Mr. Pope, a Tucson resident, had received his Space Marshal certificate two weeks prior and had sent a personal note of appreciation. Chairman Meacham also disclosed that a launch provider has agreed to carry Space Marshal certificate papers into orbit and return it, allowing future certificates to be certified as having traveled to space.

Sue Zen, Rim Country Chamber of Commerce expressed the Chamber's interest in aligning with the space initiative as an economic development opportunity and a means of promoting space-related businesses in the Payson region.

Amanda Hendrix, Planetary Science Institute (Tucson): Announced that PSI now has four scientists selected to join the NASA Artemis science team (up from three recently announced). PSI will be responding to RFIs under the NASA Administrator's Ignition Program.

James Hanusa, Stardust Studios: Announced the inaugural Phoenix Global Space Week, scheduled for the last week of April, coinciding with National Space Day and the Arizona Space Congress. The event is an online forum series involving international participants. Alignment with the U.S. Office of Space Commerce's May 7 Space Workforce Forum was noted. Commissioners were directed to contact Commission staff for participation opportunities.

Taryn Struck: Announced the Arizona Space Congress, taking place April 29 at the Hyatt Regency in downtown Phoenix, sponsored in part by the Arizona Commerce Authority. All commissioners will receive invitations by end of week.

VIII. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 12:00 P.M. following a motion by Commissioner Zylstra, seconded by Commissioner Nicholls, and unanimously approved.