

Big pay bump ahead?/ P. 10



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ZONE 1

City finances face squeeze on many fronts

BY CECILIA CHAN
Tribune Managing Editor

The City of Mesa's upcoming spending plan is being squeezed by a loss of state funding and an increase in operating costs, including a \$23-million pay hike for police and fire for the fiscal year that begins July 1.

Council recently heard a multi-year forecast of the financial pressures through fiscal year 2029-30 and is scheduled to re-

view the city manager's proposed 2025-26 budget on April 3.

"We will probably be recommending very little new programs in the coming budget and probably adjusting and not filling vacancies on a lot of other areas," City Manager Chris Brady said at the March 6 study session.

In addition, many of the programs funded by federal pandemic relief money won't continue into the future, he said.

Mesa's fiscal constraints include the

state's implementation of a flat income tax, the repeal of the residential rental tax in Arizona - just over an \$18 million annual hit to the municipal revenue stream - and slight to no growth in city and state sales tax collections, according to Brian Ritschel, management and budget director.

At the same time, Mesa is seeing rising expenses on a number of fronts, including

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Downtown parking overhaul studied

BY CECILIA CHAN
Tribune Managing Editor

Angled parking, protected bike lanes, fewer travel lanes and improved signage in downtown Mesa could help retain and attract more businesses and people there, according to a consultant.

City Council in last week's study session weighed in on the draft study to improve parking and micro-mobility downtown, which is home to 3,200 residents, has nearly 20,000 daytime workers and sees on average 2.5 million visitors annually.

A final study with priorities is expected to return to council in a couple months.

"We really want to make sure that everything we're doing is

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Remembering Emily



Over 500 mourners gathered March 6 at Encounter AZ Church in Mesa to remember 14-year-old Emily Pike, whose dismembered body was found near Globe on Valentine's Day, about a month after running away from a Mesa group home. For the story, see page 8. (AnnElise Makin/Tribune Contributor)

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Teen's slaying underscores Indigenous females' plight

BY ANNELISE MAKIN

Tribune Contributor

Over 500 relatives, friends and supporters attended a candlelight vigil March 6 for a 14-year-old girl who was found murdered several weeks after running away from a Mesa group home.

Emily Pike, a Kino Junior High student, was last seen in Mesa on Jan. 27 and her dismembered body was found on Valentine's Day near Globe along U.S. 60.

While remembering Emily, the mourners also called attention to what they called the lack of action by police and other authorities toward the number of missing and murdered Indigenous women. The victim was a member of the San Carlos Apache Tribe.

Native music and dance accented the event, which was attended by scores of residents of various tribes in and around the Valley.

To underscore the silence over Native American women who are missing or have been slain, many mourners painted a red hand across their mouth during the vigil at Encounter AZ Church on Mesa Drive in Mesa.

Drivers honked horns passing the outside assembly of people who stood in front of a large screen broadcasting Emily's celebration of life inside the church.

The Gila County Sheriff's Office is heading the investigation and has said little since Emily's body was found.

Relatives described the girl as "creative, kind, and full of joy, with a love for pink, purple, and all things sparkly." They noted she had begun guitar lessons and had dreams of college.

In the meantime, a TikTok reel raised questions about how her case has been handled, asking "Why didn't they call an Amber alert? Why didn't they go looking for her? Who put her in a group home in the first place? Why did nobody care?"

Shannon Bollinger, a Diné woman, said, "I have come across many people who don't know anything about MMIW (Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women) or Facebook groups like Missing Kids of Arizona.

"We used to see kids' pictures on the milk cartons back in the day," she said. "But now we need something stronger than just social media."

Anthony Bush, a U.S. Marine Corps veteran of Desert Storm and the conflict in Somalia, led the San Carlos Apache Honor Guard.

"I support the MMIW cause, because it goes really back to Geronimo," Bush said. "Geronimo went on the warpath because his wife, his mother-in-law, and his daughters were all murdered back in the late 1800s."

Stating "Emily is our Apache baby," he said the details of the murder aggravated him. "If I had the authority to go out and find these people, I would."

"Non-Natives get their pictures and names broadcast all over, even worldwide, right away," Bush said. "As soon as Emily was missing, they should have reported it, not go looking for her a month later."

Aside from the demand for swift action, mourners said, Emily's vigil was foremost about remembrance, healing, and awareness.

Gila River Indian Community member Elisia Manuel, founder and president of the Three Precious Miracles, initiated and conducted the vigil.

"Emily's murder is a heartbreakingly tragic, and it highlights the urgent need for justice around MMIW's child welfare," said Manuel, whose nonprofit provides resources for Native American foster children.

"I wanted to make this vigil happen with honor and respect for all my Native

SEE INDIGENOUS PAGE 9



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PARKING FROM PAGE 4

faces downtown beginning in Fiscal Year 2025-26.

It will be about a four-year project with each quadrant of the downtown worked on separately.

Councilwoman Jenn Duff, whose district includes the downtown, said the area is designed to be "very dense" so that parking is not right in front of a business.

"The downtown is an entirely different environment from suburban shopping malls or whatever," she said. "That's a

completely different thing and we have to put on a different view of how we expect to navigate.

"This is an environment that the businesses depend on people walking and enjoying, usually multiple opportunities for entertainment and eating and shopping events," she continued.

"So, we want to use every square inch we can in that kind of activation and in that kind of activation, we get sales tax revenue that generates that."

She said the city needs to ensure that there is plenty of parking downtown and



that it's welcoming.

She liked the recommendations that would add more centralized parking downtown and increase mobility "for people to walk, bike, strollers, handicap, whatever, for enjoying downtown and activating."

"A downtown is built for people to pass several businesses as they're walking because that provides more enjoyment and exposure of the different amenities in the downtown," Duff continued, adding that downtown now is not a people area but a car area.

"When you build the place for people,



people come," she said. "When you build a place for cars, cars come. We want to have people on the streets because economically we will prosper and then build more density, more activity." ■

INDIGENOUS FROM PAGE 8

relatives, and they showed up in a powerful, profound way from all over," she said.

Mary Kim Titla, executive director of United National Indian Tribal Youth (UNITY), said, "Tears have been shed across Indian country," she said.

"Tears, they say, are an expression of deep love. And that's very true. Emily Pike is one of ours. She is and has be-

come everyone's daughter, everyone's granddaughter."

She said the rate for missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls is 10 times higher than for any other group.

"Murder is the third leading cause of death for Indigenous women," Titla said, adding three women in her family are murder victims and their killers were also never found. ■

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