

City of Ashland
PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION
STUDY SESSION
Minutes
January 14, 2019

ATTENDEES

Present: Commissioners Bell, Gardiner, Landt, Lewis, Director Black; Recreation Superintendent Dials; Parks Superintendent Oxendine

Absent: Commissioner Heller, City Council Liaison Mayor Stromberg

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Gardiner called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. at The Grove 1195 E. Main, Ashland, OR.

Gardiner introduced the newest member to the APRC Board of Commissioners – Julian Bell. He stated that the Commissioners were looking forward to working with Bell over the next four years.

JAPANESE GARDEN DISCUSSION (INFORMATION)

Gardiner announced that the evening's discussion regarding the design and implementation of the proposed Japanese Garden improvements was in preparation for approval/denial of the plan submitted by Japanese Garden landscape architect Toru Tanaka and benefactor Jeff Mangin.

Black outlined a short history of the proposal and the number of meetings held for public input during the development process. He stated that a final listening session would be held at the Grove on January 24, 2019 at 5:30 p.m. The meeting would provide a venue for additional public input prior to the final decision by the Commissioners. A schematic of the proposed design would be available for viewing at that time.

Black detailed the process that developed after talks with donor Jeff Mangin. Mangin had expressed a desire to give back to the community he loved and create a memorial to honor of his late wife Beatrice. After several meetings, it was agreed that a plan to transform the existing Japanese-style garden located in Lithia Park into an authentic Japanese garden would be fitting. The renovations would celebrate Japanese culture and provide a garden of lasting beauty to be enjoyed by the citizens of Ashland as well as visitors of the Park.

During the development phase for the Japanese Garden, the planned Lithia Park Master Plan project kicked off three open houses where members of the public could discuss the proposal, share their ideas, and provide feedback. It became apparent that a majority of those who participated, supported the concept that would create an authentic garden sensitive to Japanese heritage. A list of desirable attributes was developed in response to comments from the community.

The ensuing design plan was presented to Ashland's Historic Commission and Tree Commissioner for additional input. Each Commission was asked to review the plan and provide feedback – particularly regarding the proposed removal of two Douglas Firs to accommodate an expansion of the Garden. The plan called for replacing the firs with approximately 200 additional trees that would be more representative of an authentic Japanese Garden.

Black explained that donor Jeff Mangin subsequently donated \$1.3 million dollars to the Ashland Parks Foundation – a 501-C3 tax exempt organization. He expressed his appreciation for Mangin's generosity – noting that an additional grant would ensure that the garden would continue to be maintained.

Black displayed pictures of the Japanese Garden from the earliest times available – stating that garden was depicted in the Lithia Park Master Plan of 1916. The outline of the garden was a V-shaped portion included a tree, a teahouse and a small water feature. Also, early on a rock stairway out of the garden to Granite Street was installed and 12 Douglas Firs were planted adjacent to the garden. In 1950, the garden was refurbished by Chuck Corey. Corey added plantings, including a Gingko tree. By the late 70's and 80's the garden had once again fallen into disrepair. In 1983 the garden was restored largely due to the dedication of Don Todt, a Parks employee. It was Todt that planted the maples and other trees that are part of the garden today.

Black displayed an outline of the existing garden, with an overlay that depicted the proposed expansion - noting that the expanded footprint ranged from about 25 -30 ft. on one side of the garden decreasing to about 8-10- ft. in places.

Mangin spoke briefly about the donation, noting that friends and his late wife's family - the Marechal family - had participated in the donation. He highlighted their commitment to the Japanese Garden.

Mangin noted that planning for development of the garden was an extended process. He noted that those Ashlanders of Japanese heritage, had commented that they enjoyed some elements of the existing garden but found others offensive. Mangin stated that overall, residents that he had come in contact with were supportive of the plan.

A competition between two of the foremost Japanese Garden landscape architects led to Toru Tanaka whose design contained all of the criteria that the competition sought. The basic design would be faithful to Japanese design, and provide a more immersive experience without eliminating the open spaces on each side of the garden. The garden would be protected from wildlife and utmost care would be given to preserving the existing trees. Mangin stated that in his opinion the resulting plan was masterful in design while remaining respectful to the historical aspects of Lithia Park.

Tanaka described elements of the plan, noting that the gardens depicted within the design were venerated by the Japanese. They include a mountain garden – with a forest of bamboo – a natural garden that copies nature. Part of the garden encompasses a pond/stream water feature, a Zen garden with the elements of sand and rock, and a teahouse garden. When completed, the garden would provide Ashland residents a place where they can immerse themselves in Japanese culture and discover the meanings behind each element. Trees, for example perform an important function – much like a jacket wraps the wearer. Just as popular styles change, so too do the trees within the garden and it becomes appropriate to change tree species from time to time.

Black explained that the plan calls for removal of two of twelve Douglas Fir trees and for that reason, feedback and advice was sought from the Ashland Historic Commission and Tree Commission. A site visit allowed the Commissioners to envision the garden in situ. Black noted that the Historic Commission was supportive of the plan as presented.

Parks Superintendent Oxendine reported on the Tree Commission's recommendations, noting that the Commissioners asked APRC to redesign the garden so that the Douglas firs would remain in place and the existing trees would be adequately protected during the construction phase of the plan.

PUBLIC INPUT

Jim Falkenstein of 540 Lakota Way, Ashland, OR. was called forward.

Falkenstein spoke in favor of leaving the firs in place – stating that refurbishment of the garden was not a necessity for the City. He emphasized their age of approximately 100 years and stressed the value of the carbon sequestration that the trees provide. He stated that in his opinion, planting 200 small trees as a replacement would not compensate for the amount of carbon sequestration that the mature trees provide.

JoAnne Eggers of 221 Granite St. Ashland, OR. was called forward.

Eggers talked about a compromise – finding a way to preserve the existing Douglas firs while achieving an authentic Japanese garden. She recommended that Lithia Park should respect both the Japanese culture and the American culture (as represented by the Douglas firs).

Eggers noted concerns about energy conservation, water and parking that would be best addressed at the meeting held on January 24th.

Katheryn Thalden of 550 Ashland Loop, Ashland, OR. was called forward.

Thalden highlighted her experience as a landscape architect who together with her husband had actively participated in beautification projects in Ashland. Thalden stated that she supported removal of the trees – stating that they were not stand-alone trees or specimen trees. She talked about the big picture – stating that removal of two trees out of the twelve Douglas firs was an acceptable loss that would facilitate accommodation of 200 more.

Thalden discussed her opinion that the lean of the trees was a symptom of a root system that could not provide enough support for future growth. She indicated that there was a distinct possibility that the trees could topple in a strong wind with resulting catastrophic damage to the garden.

Thalden urged the Commissioners to consider the big picture, with its focus on the best possible outcome for garden and therefore the residents of Ashland.

Spencer Goddard of 278 Idaho St. #7, Ashland, OR. was called forward.

Goddard advocated for the garden, stating that the design was beautiful and amazing. He also advocated for leaving the Douglas firs in place – urging the Commissioner's to find a solution that would preserve the trees and allow that garden to flourish.

Commissioner Lewis read a letter into the record from **Donna Ree**. (See attachment I)

Ree stated that it was time for a “paradigm shift in our things about the future of Lithia Park.” She talked about the potential for transformation of the Japanese Garden – one that would “incorporate the many outstanding maple trees, evergreens and conifers...” currently in place while creating a place “for Ashland citizens to relax, meditate and gain solace.”

Ree reminded Ashlanders of the gift that benefactor Mangin was providing to the City. She praised Tanaka for his design and discussed the impact of moving the design by 10 ft. to accommodate the Douglas firs. Ree states that the move could “impact the integrity of the design” and the existing plants. She also talked about the value of using the wood from the trees to construct structures within the garden. She recommended that Commissioners approve the plan as submitted.

Commissioner Discussion

There followed a lengthy discussion about the recommendations made by the Tree Commission. Landt was concerned about the health and viability of the two trees. Black stated that Tanaka had talked about the lean of the trees implying a stress position – with one side being pushed and one side pulled. It was intimated that there was a difference of opinion as to the impact of the stress position.

Tanaka explained that the lean and the pressure it exerts was simple mathematics – that a 15% lean would exert enough pressure to keep the trees from growing any further. In his opinion, the existing root system increased the potential for a catastrophic fall. In their recommendation, the Tree Commission appeared to find that the potential for causing damage was negligible.

Lewis stated that the APRC staff had exposed the roots of the trees for a clearer idea of what was happening underground. He characterized the view as interesting but somewhat shocking.

Landt pointed out a discrepancy as to when the Douglas Firs had been planted – thereby initiating a discussion regarding a possible timeline for the plantings. Gardiner pointed out the facts that were known beginning with the Park’s dedication on July 4, 1916. He noted that the Douglas firs were the result of a Boy Scout project dated 1924.

Bell asked about the appropriateness of the firs as an element of the Japanese garden. Tanaka replied that the species was not usual or customary in Japanese garden design.

Lewis advocated for the big picture. He argued against handicapping or restricting the design, stating that micromanaging the design was counterproductive and narrowed the perspective of a long-range plan – one that would be in place for more years than a person’s lifetime. He stated that looking at the big picture rather than individual trees, would facilitate focused consideration on the health of Lithia Park as a whole. Lewis talked about catastrophic loss in terms of the negative impact the Douglas firs – whether it be by falling into the garden, destroying the vegetation in its path, or by dropping debris.

Gardiner agreed, stating that it was not about this moment in time – rather it was about the garden for the next 100 or more. He stated that over time, he had watched other trees of significant size in the park topple. He indicated that just as one would be concerned if a tree had the potential to fall on one’s residence, so too the Douglas firs have the potential to fall and cause damage to the garden. Gardiner noted that the plan carried with it a responsibility to protect the integrity of the design so that the best possible outcome would ensure longevity once the design is in place.

Landt stated that in his opinion, design projects often begin with constraints – monetary constraints, footprint constraints and other parameters. He explained that in this case one important constraint – what to do about the Douglas firs – was not discussed at the beginning of the project. The design advanced forward without a decision regarding their protection or removal. If a decision had been made early on to keep the trees, the designer would

have designed the project differently. Now the design has a momentum of its own, there is also a conflict with a potential mandate to save the trees.

Landt spoke of his desire to find a solution that would leave the trees in place without compromising the garden. He stated that the trees were magnificent and, in his opinion, healthy. Landt asked that a certified arborist testify as to the health and viability of the trees, noting that the information would be helpful in deciding their fate.

Tanaka stated that he understood the rationale for saving the trees. He noted that in his opinion, the trees would not continue to grow, and their lifespan was threatened because of a weak root system. In addition, there was a very real danger that the trees were vulnerable to the winds and if they were to topple, would threaten the garden. That said, Tanaka acknowledged that he was willing to redesign the garden if asked to do so.

After further discussion, it was agreed that a professional opinion from a certified arborist would be obtained and presented to the Commissioners prior to a decision regarding the proposed garden design.

Lewis talked about the opportunity – stating that the future of Lithia Park was at a crossroads. He highlighted the Lithia Park Master Plan currently underway, noting that the garden was part of a 100-year planning process that would ensure that the Park sparkles for the foreseeable future. With the help of a world-renowned Japanese garden designer, and the funding from a generous benefactor, the garden could become a significant jewel in the crown that is Lithia Park.

Lewis shared stories from Ashland’s past, of similar crossroads and the resulting impacts; urging his fellow Commissioners to consider the Park in its entirety rather than focus on individual trees.

COST AND REVENUE ANALYSIS DISCUSSION (INFORMATION)

Dials noted that APRC began reviewing fees, charges, revenue and expenses in 2006. She stated that there were several different ways to measure cost recovery (the amount of money collected in fees or charges). Dials introduced cost recovery data for fiscal year 2017/2018, indicating that units of measurement would differ depending upon the program or service. Most of the direct and indirect costs were reflected in the data – including personnel expenses, contract services, supplies, materials, and utilities. In response to a question by Gardiner, Dials stated that the frequency of reporting was dictated by the Commissioner’s preferences – and that the report could be prepared either annual or bi-annually.

Dials explained that although cost recovery data was tracked and managed, it simply represented the subsidization of the program or service – and was not a reflection of the value to the community. The numbers as tracked or estimated are as follows:

Program/Service	# of Visits or units	Revenues	Expenses	COST RECOVERY
<i>Daniel Mayer Pool</i>	<i>13,504 visits</i>	<i>\$ 94,919.68</i>	<i>\$172,241</i>	<i>55%</i>
<i>Calle Guanajuato</i>	<i>4733.75 sq. ft.</i>	<i>\$ 32,019.50</i>	<i>\$22,634.00</i>	<i>141%</i>
<i>Ice Rink</i>	<i>21,309 visits</i>	<i>\$118,869.37</i>	<i>\$174,000.87</i>	<i>68%</i>
<i>Oak Knoll Golf</i>	<i>11,400 rounds</i>	<i>\$223,383.87</i>	<i>\$502,116.84</i>	<i>44%</i>
<i>Nature Center</i>	<i>17,937.94 visits</i>	<i>\$33,212.94</i>	<i>\$328,761</i>	<i>9%</i>
<i>Community Gardens</i>	<i>81 gardeners</i>	<i>\$3670.25</i>	<i>\$19183.39</i>	<i>19%</i>

<i>Ball Fields</i>	<i>20,200 visits</i>	<i>\$52,287</i>	<i>\$106,719.48</i>	<i>49%</i>
<i>Park Rentals</i>	<i>103 rentals</i>	<i>\$9,675</i>	<i>\$17,147</i>	<i>56%</i>
<i>Pioneer Hall</i>	<i>401 rentals</i>	<i>\$7,1299</i>	<i>\$26,170.733</i>	<i>27%</i>
<i>Community Center</i>	<i>558 rentals</i>	<i>\$37,942</i>	<i>432,600.14</i>	<i>116%</i>

Dials commented on each category individually, noting for example, that the **Daniel Meyer Pool**: operated 10 months of the year. During the winter season, the pool is leased to various groups, such as the Rogue Valley Master Swimmers.

The **Calle Guanajuato** is leased to vendors and artisans from mid-March through mid-November of each year. Costs include custodial time, staff time to administer contracts, and Parks staff time for maintenance and upkeep.

The **Darex Family Ice Rink** operates from mid-November through late February. Expenses for FY 2017/2018 were higher than normal due to one-time costs for retrofit of a donated trailer. Dials noted that expenses should decrease by approximately \$11,000 for the next FY.

There followed a short discussion initiated by Commissioner Lewis that highlighted year over year increasing revenues and decreasing expenses. Black noted that the expenses had been refined, resulting in the addition of expenses not previously counted. Results excluding the additional expenses would have increased the cost-savings.

Per unit measurements for the **Oak Knoll Golf Course** included the number of rounds, driving range users and gift certificate holders. Special events held at the Golf Course, were not included in the data. Dials indicated that revenue from annual fees, golf cart fees, driving range fees, beer, wine and merchandise was substantial. Maintenance expense, communications and operations accounted for 3 full-time staff. (the unit of measurement is by FTE's or full-time equivalent), temporary staff and seasonal staff.

A short general discussion followed that determined a need to change the report to differentiate between the Oak Knoll Golf Course and Oak Knoll Clubhouse rentals.

Nature Center tracking included school programs, special events, community events, and visitors to the Park. Dials stated that in future reports, visitors would be represented more accurately because of the addition of trail counters. Revenue comprised of community workshops and educational programs. Operating costs for communications, office supplies, contractor services, staff time (3 FTE), and temporary employees were a large part of the expenses. The Community Gardens – which is managed by Nature Center staff was counted separately.

Landt inquired about the number of visits from Ashland schools versus the number of visitors from schools located elsewhere. Dials replied that school programs accounted for approximately 2352 visits, while community programs accounted for 879. 180 people participated in offsite programs, and 2500 people visited the Nature Center. All in all, an estimated 7400 people visited the Nature Park. School programs did not differentiate between School Districts. Landt explained that a request for additional educational programs could be accommodated if the programs were not substantially subsidized.

Discussion focused on the amount of funding needed to subsidize school programs for Ashland versus the amount of subsidy for schools outside the Ashland School District. Black stated that school revenue was counted but expenses included unrelated costs.

Lewis noted that educational programs were labor intensive – with current staffing of 3 FTE's. He commented that the programs higher rate of subsidy pointed to the higher intrinsic value of the service to the community. Lewis stated that the efficiencies were directly related to staff costs and that it would be helpful to know how cost-effective the programs were.

Gardiner asked about expenses for maintenance of the natural area as well as for the ballfields. Dials replied that maintenance costs of approximately \$23,300 was primarily Parks staff time. This included maintenance of the ball fields, help with irrigation and the gardens, as well as general maintenance.

Black stated that the school programs could be tracked and reported separately. Landt agreed, stated that the split reporting should occur at a minimum of each biennium.

Community Gardens

Dials reported that with 81 gardens, the count was for 81 gardeners. Approximately 10% of the personnel cost is Nature Center Staff, with the remainder incorporating contract administration and Parks maintenance.

The Grove

Dials stated that tracking units for the Grove was somewhat more complicated. The count includes people who rent the building, those who come to the programs, and others who come for outside services such as AARP tax consulting, people who are interviewed by the volunteer coordinator, and people with general questions. Parks maintenance is minimal but offset by increase office supplies and other program costs. Staff time includes office staff, a Recreation Manager, Volunteer Coordinator and administrative costs.

Landt commented that some of the expenses were office expenses, as well as a custodial contract and utilities that do not provide revenue from Recreational programs. He advocated for a realistic accounting of office expenses as separate from recreational program costs and services.

Ball Fields

Dials stated that the percentages listed represents the Little League fields at Hunter Park as well as those at North Mountain Park. Revenue is derived from lights and user fees – charged per each season. She explained that the fees were minimal – approximately from \$150 to \$300 per entity. Ashland School District contributed revenue of approximately \$45,000 for use of the ball fields. Electrical expenses and maintenance supplies are approximately \$5000. The charge for Parks staff time equates to 1 FTE annually. Ball field expenses account for \$102,000 of the \$106,719.48.

Pioneer Hall

Dials noted that a portion of the rentals were revenue producing – but that there were unpaid rentals as well. She stated use of the facility as a homeless shelter and/or for meals were services provided to the community without charge. The City of Ashland pays the utilities, but APRC incurs approximately \$900 annually for maintenance expenses.

Community Center

Dials relayed that the Center was well used. She stated that it was currently undergoing a cosmetic refurbishment designed to increase the desirability of the facility and that revenue was expected to increase as well.

Dials presented a series of graphs outlining a comparison APRC programs and services per highest percentage of cost recovery. She indicated that the Calle was the most effective program with a percentage of return at 141%, with the Community gardens (19%) and the Nature Center (9%) the least.

Not included in the analysis, were Senior programs and services. Black explained that the new Superintendent of Senior Services had requested a year to prepare for the analysis, given the newly instituted reorganization of the Center and its programs. He stated that the goal was to provide the seniors services needed in a way that was fully funded and the development of revenue sources would be postponed for a period of time.

There followed a brief discussion about the value of the percentage comparisons. Landt pointed out that although the Community Gardens were at 19% cost recovery the dollar amounts were minimal. Dials agreed, noting another dollars and cents example – namely that the Golf Course is the most expensive service offered, but it also returned the most revenue. Landt highlighted the number of users – stating that the Ice Rink had twice as many users as the Golf Course, with considerably less subsidy. The Daniel Mayer Pool attracted about 20% more people than the Golf Course with four times less subsidy. Landt stressed the significance of dollars and cents values rather than an apple to apples comparison. He noted that managing the budget more efficiently – getting the most bang for the buck – was an important component of a cost-recovery analysis.

Lewis stated that the Golf Course had also undergone changes as did the Senior Center. He suggested that the new Golf Course Manager be given time to make improvements. Lewis advocated for the intrinsic value of the recreational services provided – particularly for the more expense programs to administer such as the Daniel Mayer Pool.

Landt commented that it was important for the Commissioners to continue to monitor large budgetary costs and to evaluate the highest use of the lands under APRC stewardship with the initial goal of making the programs and service work as efficiently as possible.

Bell asked about an increase in the Golf Course budget to facilitate expansion of Golf Course programs and services as well as promotions. There followed a short discussion about budgetary efficiencies. Lewis highlighted the impact of deferred maintenance for the Golf Course, stating that deferred maintenance was continual for the foreseeable future. He also noted seasonal variations that greatly affect revenue for the Golf Course – such as the many weeks of wildfire smoke that prevented people from golfing the previous summer.

In response to a question by Gardiner, Dials suggested that she prepare some potential goals for cost recovery for Commissioner review and/or approval. Lewis noted that the data provided a starting point for important discussions that facilitate good stewardship.

Bell asked about accounting for deferred maintenance. Black explained the difference between funding for general operations and funding for capital improvements. He stated that the cost recovery account, for example, is detailing actual dollars – revenue and expenses – from the General operating fund. Funded and known unfunded liabilities over a certain dollar amount are recorded under capital improvements. Black talked about ways to quantify the

unknowns, stating that a Master Plan for each of the facilities would help to reduce the unknowns and quantify deferred maintenance.

In response to a comment by Landt, Black stated that determining the capital improvement priorities was a component of goal setting.

GOAL SETTING – PUBLIC INPUT PROCESS

Black proposed February 22, 2019 from 1:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. or 7:00 p.m. for setting goals for the upcoming fiscal year and next biennium. He suggested that the goal setting be limited to the one day, stating that any follow-up could be completed at a work session or regular meeting.

Black proposed a systemic approach to public input – describing a process completed by the City Council that had been successful with the idea that APRC might try something similar. Alternatively, he proposed a listening session as a way to gather information prior to goal setting.

Lewis recalled that several groups had given presentations during goal setting two years previously. He commented that it had been helpful in establishing goal setting priorities. Black advocated for both a listening session for input from individuals as well as presentations from groups who are more focused on a particular mission.

Discussion focused on a number of ways to connect with the public for feedback opportunities. Gardiner noted that a February article in the Park Views could provide information about the goal setting process and ways to provide feedback. Landt suggested a survey with three open ended questions. Solicitations could also include email with links on the APRC and City of Ashland websites and APRC's Facebook page. Bell proposed a canvass of Ashland neighborhoods. Dials indicated that paper surveys at the Senior Center and the Grove would be helpful.

It was agreed that solicitations would include a basic survey, Park Views, a press release, information and links on the APRC website and Facebook page, a listening session (to be held at the Study Session on February 11, 2019) and paper surveys available at APRC facilities.

SUBCOMMITTEE REORGANIZATION

Gardiner introduced a plan to reorganize and consolidate APRC Subcommittees. He proposed five Subcommittees as follows:

- Aquatics (Pool) Subcommittee
This Subcommittee will take the place of the current Pool Ad-Hoc Subcommittee.
- Dogs Subcommittee
This Subcommittee would be combined with Current Parks, Conservation and Maintenance Subcommittee's.
- Real Estate/Open Space Subcommittee
This Subcommittee would incorporate the Long-Range Park Planning Subcommittee.
- Signs, Plaques & Memorials Subcommittee
This Subcommittee would be combined with Current Parks, Conservation and Maintenance Subcommittee
- Recreation Subcommittee

This is a newly formed Subcommittee that will act as an Advisory Board for Recreation programs and services.

APRC representatives also hold positions as a voting member for the Ashland Parks Foundation and the Forest Lands Commission and liaison with the Ashland Public Arts Commission and Joint Powers Committee.

Landt advocated for a stand-alone Subcommittee for Conservation. He conveyed a sense of urgency when working towards a reduced carbon footprint and stated that a separate Subcommittee devoted to Conservation was a value statement that signaled APRC's commitment.

Lewis suggested that conservation was an important component of all APRC Committees and Subcommittees. He talked about the Golf Subcommittee as a case in point. With conservation as a priority, the Subcommittee could begin to plan for reducing dependence on gas-powered golf carts in preparation for more energy efficient models. After further discussion, it was agreed that conservation should be a priority for APRC at every level.

Gardiner stated that condensing subcommittees would standardize the processes and allow for more frequent – quarterly or monthly - meetings of substance.

ITEMS FROM COMISSIONERS AND STAFF

Lewis suggested that a future topic for discussion might be how to reduce the carbon footprint of APRC's special events. He noted as an example, the amount of trash generated by the Salmon Festival dinner – a successful event appreciated by all – but one that generated multiple bags of trash.

ADJORNMENT

There being no further business the meeting adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Betsy Manuel, Assistant

The Minutes are not a verbatim record. The narrative has been condensed and paraphrased at times to reflect the discussions and decisions made. Ashland Parks and Recreation Commission Study Sessions and Regular meetings are digitally recorded and are available upon online.