

**MINUTES FOR STUDY SESSION
ASHLAND PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
September 1, 2021 – 6:00 p.m.
Electronic Meeting**

Present: Commissioners Gardiner (Chair), Landt (Vice-Chair), Bell (departed at 7:24 p.m.), Eldridge, Lewis; Director Black; Deputy Director Dials; Analyst Kiewel; Manager Sullivan

Absent: Senior Services Superintendent Glatt

This meeting was recorded and uploaded to the APRC YouTube Channel: youtube.com/watch?v=eyy80KQIX3E

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m.

II. PUBLIC INPUT

Written testimony was received and can be found on the [APRC website](#).

III. COMMISSIONER FOLLOW-UP DISCUSSION ON CITY COUNCIL/APRC JOINT MEETING (Electronic attachments include: [Joint Meeting Agenda](#); [Joint Meeting Video Recording](#); [APRC Memo to Mayor & City Council](#); [APRC Statement to Mayor & City Council](#))

Gardiner stated that the purpose of the meeting is to recap the August 23, 2021 joint meeting with the City Council and that this Study Session will differ from typical Study Sessions in that this will be more of an open discussion between Commissioners. The following topics were discussed (the entire discussion can be listened to/viewed via the recording uploaded to the [APRC YouTube Page](#)):

- The process of collaborating with City Council needs to be more open and two sided. There looked to have been a plan, by the City of Ashland, to add APRC funding to a City Council agenda without inviting Commissioners to that meeting.
- Multiple Commissioners disputed the statements made on social media stating that APRC is mismanaging funds, does not provide transparency and allegations of unethical activity
- This situation is made more difficult because of the high staff turnover at City Hall. Although current staff are doing the best that they can, a large amount of institutional knowledge has been lost
- There are numerous members of the community, including organized user groups, that rely on and support APRC to provide parks and recreational opportunities. These members of the community have not yet voiced their opinions on APRC to Mayor and Council. A reduction in APRC funding could dramatically impact the level of services and facilities provided and these community members may want to express their thoughts directly to Mayor and Council, so the discussion has more well-rounded community opinions. Commissioners and staff may want to make themselves available to organized groups to attend meetings to answer questions about the funding situation of APRC
- APRC is in compliance with that Charter regarding financial reporting to the City of Ashland. These reports are accessible through [OpenGov](#) and City Administration has made the decision to upload these reports to their website as well
- E Main Park is replacing a park that was sold because there were use restrictions on it because of agreements with the YMCA. The E Main Park property was purchased utilizing funds from the sale of APRC property, some of which was sold for affordable housing
- The City Council appears to be in the process of reviewing the General Fund, which is currently the main funding source for APRC and various City Departments. This review is legal and in line with the goal to cut \$1,000,000 from the General Fund as recommended by the Citizen's Budget Committee and approved by City Council when the budget was adopted
- The intent of the Charter set Ashland Parks aside from the City Council as a means to establish an exceptional parks system. The Charter created an elected body that is charged with management and control of the park system in an intentional effort to remove park decisions from the politics of the City Council. APRC has received reliable funding for over 100 years at \$2.09/\$1,000 of assessed property valuations. This changed in the previous biennium when funding was reduced to \$1.89/\$1,000 which is also the level of funding for the current biennium. Future funding levels are uncertain at this time
- APRC could try to identify other options for dedicated funding sources
- If City Council wanted to amend the Charter, it may be necessary to send the amendment to the voters for approval

- APRC is highly accountable to the residents of Ashland with a direct line from Ashland residents to elected Commissioners who directly oversees the Director of APRC. Ashland residents can run for office, as a Commissioner, to have a direct say in how APRC is managed
- There are difficult choices that will need to be made because expenses have been increasing, mainly due to health insurance and PERS, to a higher level than what can be brought in through property taxes. This issue is addressing APRC and the City of Ashland. A collaborative effort is required to find a solution that works for both elected bodies. The first step in this effort should be to establish APRC funding for the second year of this biennium
- In 2008, as a result of the housing financial crisis, the City of Ashland asked APRC to reduce its budget and to take over the Senior Services Program without receiving any funding to manage the program. APRC agreed to do so. APRC is still willing to work with the City of Ashland to find a way forward under the current fiscal crisis
- It may be beneficial for Commissioners to seek out a third-party analysis of the City Charter to provide an interpretation of how the Charter should be legally implemented in regard to APRC

IV. **COMMISSIONER DISCUSSION AND GUIDANCE ON COMMISSIONER GOAL 1 FOR THE 2021-2023 BIENNIUM:**
INVESTIGATE, DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT A DEDICATED PERMANENT FUNDING SOURCE TO ENSURE THE LONG-TERM FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY OF THE ASHLAND PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION. (A list of all goals is posted to the [APRC website](#))

After discussion on this topic, Landt proposed having staff draft a statement that can be discussed and ratified at the APRC Business Meeting on September 8, 2021. The draft statement would be addressed to Mayor and Council and would include the following points:

- APRC does not have certainty about the amount of funding that will be received in the second fiscal year, starting July 1, 2022, of this biennium, just 10 months from now
- Mayor and Council should be urged and supported to quickly determine the funds that will be allocated to APRC for the second fiscal year of this biennium
- The argument should be made is that APRC has already received reductions in funding and that any additional reductions, if any, should be minimal
- APRC Commissioners should be at the table and have direct input to Mayor and Council during this process rather than having Mayor and Council act unilaterally in determining the funding for APRC
- Eldridge added that the statement should include a reminder that just as Mayor and Council are elected and represent voters, the Commissioners are also an elected body that represent the voters of Ashland.
- Landt added that in addition to the immediate issue of determining the funding for the second fiscal year of this biennium, the long-term financial issues also need to be addressed and APRC is committed to working with Mayor and Council on this matter. Landt reiterated that the funding level for the second year of this biennium needs to be addressed first.

Camping Update

Black provided an update on the authorized car camping situation that is taking place at North Mountain Park. Car camping will no longer be allowed beginning this coming weekend. Car camping was authorized under the Emergency Operations Command managed by the City of Ashland that was formed when the City of Ashland declared an emergency related to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

V.ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 7:33 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted
 Sean Sullivan, Business Operations Manager