

MINUTES FOR STUDY SESSION
ASHLAND PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
October 4, 2023
Electronic Meeting – 6 P.M.

Present: Commissioners Landt (Chair), Bachman (Vice Chair) Adams, Lewis, Seffinger; Interim Director Eldridge, Deputy Director Dials, Senior Service Superintendent Glatt, Analyst Kiewel, Senior Services Coordinator Mettler

I. CALL TO ORDER

Landt called the meeting to order at 6 p.m.

II. PUBLIC FORUM

NONE

III. CIP DISCUSSION

Eldridge presented slides for the CIP discussion, beginning with a brief review of the CIP budget for the current biennium, and ending fund balance for CIP for fiscal year 2023.

- CIP ending fund balance was projected to be about \$5.5 million.
- The actual ending fund balance for FY23 was \$3,973,971.
- For a variance of about \$1.6 million less than was budgeted.

Table 1
Budgeted CIP Ending Fund Balance
FY 2023

	Total CIP
Budgeted	5,590,786
Actual	3,973,971
Variance	(1,616,815)

- These discrepancies are in projections and financial assumptions, not accounting.
- The reasons for the discrepancies are an overestimate of grant funding of about \$1 million that was not realized in FY23, and a land sales account that had actually been transferred into the CIP fund in 2017 but was still thought to be held in a separate account.

Budget estimates for current Biennium 23-25:

- Ending fund balance for FY23 \$3.9 million
- Projected \$1.6 million from Food & Beverage (F&B) tax (\$800,000 per fiscal year).
- A total of 1.7 million from grants that have been awarded, but not yet paid out.
- \$8.2 million for potential bonds or grants not yet obtained. Potential to enable projects like the Pool Replacement, if funding is realized in this biennium.
- Updated CIP budget for BN23-25 totals about \$15.5 million.

Table 2
Budgeted CIP By Source for BN 23-25

SOURCE	EFB 21-23	New Revenue 23-25	TOTALS
F&B	3,973,971	1,600,000	5,573,971
Grants	NA	1,700,000	1,700,000
Bonds	NA	8,200,000	8,200,000
			15,473,971

Eldridge presented potential scenarios for BN 23-25 CIP project allocations for feedback on Commissioner priorities.

- The scenarios are not staff recommendations, but rather different choices that the Commissioners could make.
- System Development Charges (SDC) have been removed from the CIP budget entirely, so they can be tracked separately. Parks is working with Finance on an updated SDC methodology, and they will not appear on the projected budget spreadsheets at the request of the Finance Director, until an updated SDC methodology has been developed. The SDC revenue amounts that Parks has accumulated over the years of about \$384,000 have been removed from the CIP at the request of the Finance Director. Eldridge noted that current debt payments for the biennium are about \$375,000, which is almost the same amount.
- The CIP budget originally had \$691,000 for the East Main Park project coming from land sales (e.g. YMCA land sale) that was thought to be held in a separate account (see above). The East Main Park project is now funded entirely through CIP. Landt added that the budget for the East Main Park project is coming entirely from F&B as opposed to the land sales account, which doesn't change the bottom-line amount.
- During the reconciliation, it was determined that some of the expenses that Parks had thought had been accounted for in the current biennium were actually paid out in FY23. The purchase of the Palen property at about \$120,000, and the additional expenses for the Japanese Garden budgeted to come out of CIP were paid out in FY23. This amounts to roughly \$450,000 that does not have to be allocated for the current biennium, because it was paid out in the previous biennium.

Eldridge displayed 2 spreadsheets (see packet) outlining two possible updated scenarios for APRC CIP BN 23/25. The major differences are in allocations for the All Parks Master Plan, Daniel Meyer Pool replacement, Oak Knoll Golf Course improvements, and trails.

Landt opened up the discussion for Commissioners' questions, followed by public participation:

Capital Outlay & Repair Rehab and Restoration Transfer

- Bachman asked what specific expenses are covered by the Capital Outlay
 Eldridge responded that Capital Outlay are expenses tied to lifecycle replacements and facility upgrades meant to improve operational efficiency and enhance customer experience. These are generally medium-sized projects that have been deferred and previously unfunded maintenance on existing Capital Assets. Examples include the swim reservoir silt removal, replacing or rehabilitating picnic shelters, planning or work on a permanent shelter for the ice rink, system-wide fencing replacement through the parks, installation of EV charging stations, replacing restroom trash receptacles and installations damaged by vandalism, sidewalk ADA improvements, or any concrete repairs throughout the parks. \$200,000 for the biennium can't come close to covering all these expenses.
- Bachman noted that if there are more resources in a future biennium, the Capital Outlay budget could increase.
 Bachman asked for clarification of the Repair Rehab and Restoration Transfer line item totaling \$845,000 for the biennium.
 Eldridge explained these are automatic transfers at the beginning of every fiscal year (\$422,545 per fiscal year) that are for City Manager and Council-approved projects that go into the Parks Operations Budget, as specified by language in the Food and Beverage tax that earmarks this money for repair, rehabilitation, and restoration-type activities. This is for ongoing irrigation replacement and improvement, specific types of Building Maintenance, Professional Services, Parks Improvements, etc.

Major Differences Between Scenarios 1 & 2

- Lewis asked for clarification of the differences between the two scenarios and their impacts.
- Eldridge explained that Scenario one reallocates the difference in the updated CIP vs the adopted CIP out of the Daniel Meyer Pool replacement. Discussion is still ongoing regarding different locations and ideas for the Pool. The Commission must agree on a direction for the Pool, and if a bond will be voted on within the current biennium.

- Since recent property purchases were made specifically for trail connectivity, Scenario two significantly decreases the amount from the line item reserved for trails.
- All Parks Master Plan was halved to \$75,000, of which about \$25,000 is needed for Park's expected participation in a contracted city-wide facilities assessment.
- Oak Knoll Golf Course improvements were reduced by \$150,000 (extra money had been budgeted in anticipation of outside management).
- Additionally, \$100,000 is budgeted for the Ashland Creek Park Basketball Sports Court in both scenarios, but Commissioners could have further discussions about this line item.

Kestrel Park Bridge

- Seffinger asked about the Kestrel Park Bridge line item.
- Kestrel Park Bridge is to be a pedestrian-only bridge, except for emergency vehicles.

Eldridge clarified that the \$550,000 budgeted is from an ODOT grant that Parks has already received. Kiewel added that the ODOT grant is a matching grant, so Parks is required to budget some funding. An additional \$150,000 has been allocated in the CIP.

- Bachman asked if bicycles are allowed.

Eldridge confirmed it will be pedestrians and cyclists, similar to bridges on the Bear Creek Greenway.

Daniel Meyer Pool

Landt introduced Rebecca Kay for public comment:

Kay advocated for Scenario two of the CIP, as it allocates the most money for the Daniel Meyer Pool project. Kay stressed that Ashland citizens deserve a public community pool. It is part of what makes Ashland a desirable place to live and to raise a family. She presented the four pillars of aquatic access that are important for a community: learning to swim, community recreation and fitness, rehab and senior fitness, youth competition. Though an aquatic center is opening in Medford, that is not a desirable option for Ashland citizens. Additionally, she pointed out that plans for a new pool have already been approved by APRC and City Council.

Landt thanked staff for presenting options as a great starting point. Commissioners discussed the options extensively.

- Landt laid out how a revenue bond and future F&B receipts were thought to be able to finance the pool over many years. However, this was based on a ballot measure that failed and less money on hand than was thought. Still, there is enough money from F&B to use as seed money for a smaller bond.
- Adams thanked Rebecca Kay for her presentation, as well as June Mather who sent a public comment letter to the Commissioners.. He considered both sides of the pool debate: the community wants it, the commissioners want it, but there doesn't seem to be a way forward in the near future, financially or otherwise.
- Lewis recognizes the pool as a major part of the CIP budget, and hopes the new liner currently being installed could extend the service life of the existing pool and then put a bond package together for which the community would lobby. However, keeping the pool money in the CIP affects the rest of the CIP so much that it's hard to just leave it there.
- Landt reiterated that although Parks doesn't have quite as much money as it thought, there is still more money from F&B (over \$2 million vs \$800,000) than when the budget was originally created. Extra money was budgeted in categories such as trails, Oak Knoll Golf Course, deferred maintenance, and the All Parks Master Plan, so moving or removing it is possible.
- Bachman sought clarification of whether there was an approved plan, as Rebecca Kay stated. Regardless of how long the liner lasts, costs for maintaining Daniel Meyer Pool are going to keep rising. Leaning toward not keeping too much capital in the line item and making a more definite plan soon.
- Seffinger stated we should follow through on old priorities before adding new projects and that community priorities should be considered. The public has advocated for the pool for a long time.

IV. ADVISORY COMMITTEES' DISCUSSION

Eldridge presented slides outlining the organization of Parks committees, based on City Council's approved update and organization of their advisory bodies, designating advisory bodies as either Advisory Committees (ACs) or Management Advisory Committees (MACs).

- Advisory Committees would make recommendations to the APRC Board of Commissioners on policy matters. ACs are subject to public meeting laws. They must have a quorum. They must have staff support and require a lot of staff time. They must have detailed minutes and bylaws. They have a high level of transparency for the public. They are generally long-standing committees that deal with long-term policy issues.
- Management Advisory Committees are formed at the request of the Parks Director and would make recommendations to the Director on management issues, as opposed to policy issues. They don't require strict adherence to public meeting laws, but it is recommended that Commissioners direct staff to adhere as much as possible to certain guidelines, e.g., public noticing or meeting outcomes. They don't require staff support but would allow flexibility for when staff support is appropriate and available.
- There is a level of flexibility with MACs that allows community members to meet. They don't necessarily have to reach a quorum. They can produce and approve work items without having a quorum, and they can provide those items to the Director. The Director would then report anything to the Commission that rose to the level of needing Commissioner approval.
- The Commissioners might want to consider issues of transparency, etc., when creating advisory bodies as either MACs or ACs. Advisory Committees are subject to public meeting laws, and have the highest levels of public transparency, but also require the highest maintenance and burden to staff in terms of staff support.
- Commissioners might also consider who the advisory body is for. Are they management-level advising? One example being proposed by staff is the Oak Knoll Golf Course. As Parks moves towards a potential contract with a management company, staff recommends that a MAC makes more sense for the golf course to receive feedback on management decisions and contract requirements from the Director, to be sent to the Commissioners when needed.
- MACs put less of a burden on staff; Parks administration is short staffed and has struggled to maintain all the existing advisory bodies. Many existing subcommittees and groups that are currently subject to public meeting laws have requested increased flexibility. They're frustrated by the challenge of getting timely staff support or find that reaching a quorum is difficult. Sometimes, subcommittees or groups will make a meeting time and a quorum will not be reached. Then all the community members who have made a commitment and are present are only able to hear about the informational items that can be shared.

Staff is proposing maintaining three standing Advisory Committees (ACs):

- Ashland Senior Advisory Committee (ASAC) is already functioning at a very high level, has committed staff support, and has been able to maintain a high level of transparency and adherence to public meeting laws.
- Recreation Division Advisory Committee (RDAC) conducts long-term policy planning for recreation. What is the future of the North Mountain Park Nature Center, for example? These are questions that require the highest level of transparency for the community.
- Ashland Trails Advisory Committee (ATAC) deals with trails and outdoor recreation, which have been a priority of City Council and the Ashland community in recent years, and there is a high level of public interest and involvement in that issue.

Staff is recommending the following committees become Management Advisory Committees (MACs). Staff has received only favorable responses to these four advisory groups becoming MACs. Again, the increased flexibility and ability to perform and create work products were the highest cited reasons.

- Bee City USA
- Current Parks, Conservation, and Maintenance
- Ashland Japanese Garden
- Oak Knoll Golf Course

Staff has identified four groups that do not need to exist any longer:

- East Main Park and Lithia Park Master Plan (below) advisory groups have completed their group process and are not meeting anymore, so staff recommends they be dissolved.

- Lithia Park Master Plan
- Parks, Trails, and Open Space Map Update and Long Range Planning (below) have concluded their work, as approved at the October 11, 2023 Regular Business Meeting.
- Long Range Planning

Eldridge reiterated that staff examined existing missions and bylaws for the standing ACs and noticed that each committee had slightly different bylaws. Staff will create a template that is consistent for all ACs, so moving forward they will adhere to a specific format listing membership, functions, goals, etc. for assisting APRC. Committee chairs might present an “annual report” to the Commission about what their committees had accomplished that year, what they expect to accomplish the next year, or if they have a new mission statement, etc. followed by an “appreciation event” afterwards. The packet includes a proposed draft policy, modeled closely after the City Council adopted policy, yet modified to suit APRC.

- Landt gave the following edits:
 - 1) strike Section V entirely
 - 2) add guidelines and/or policy on if group members need to be asked to leave an advisory committee, for absenteeism or other reasons
 - 3) Section II. J.: Strike “City Attorney” from last sentence to read “advise APRC management to ensure their committee recommendations are aligned with APRC priorities and can be implemented within APRC resources and legal authority”
- Seffinger asked for clarification on membership composition and ensuring diverse membership. Eldridge read Section II. H. which addresses the diversity, equity, and inclusion goals of APRC.
- Adams referred to Section II. C. about the composition of ATAC. Would like to add a 10th member, potentially a geologist, hydrologist or a retired national parks trail boss from the community. Eldridge answered that ATAC bylaws have not yet been adopted, so a 10th member could be added.
- Lewis asked about plaques and memorials in current parks. Will there be continued staff input on these? Eldridge answered that the intent is not to eliminate staff support for MACs. It is to allow increased flexibility for groups that need it. There will be knowledgeable staff involved when considering a Memorial Bench. etc., followed by consideration by the Commission.

V. SALMON SAFE CERTIFICATION DISCUSSION

Eldridge introduced Dan Kent, the co-founder and Executive Director of Salmon Safe. Eldridge recapped Lulu Brazeau’s presentation from the October 11, 2023, Regular Business Meeting regarding Salmon Safe certification for East Main Park, and system-wide.

Dan Kent gave an extensive introduction to Salmon Safe, why they exist, their certification programs, and their work with park systems around the Pacific Northwest. He praised Brazeau’s previous presentation about Salmon Safe (see October 11 meeting). After detailing the history of Salmon Safe and many of its current and past projects, Kent presented a summary of Salmon Safe’s system-wide certification:

- **Review of environmental guidelines and policies.** Rather than looking at each individual park, Salmon Safe evaluates overall environmental management, programs, policies, protocols, master planning, integrated pest management, restoration plans, etc. Every park system has different priorities and documentation. Salmon Safe doesn’t expect park systems to create dedicated reporting or programs. They conduct a review of existing programs and policies, then site assessment with an independent science team, then make specific recommendations.
- **Site assessment with independent science team.** A team of experts would visit a cross-section of Ashland parks, natural areas, neighborhood parks, ball fields, the golf course, etc., and then present an assessment report to Ashland Parks.
- **Assessment report issued with recommendations.** Once the assessment is agreed to by all parties, Salmon Safe will propose a timeline, (e.g., a riparian corridor in a neighborhood park needs to be restored in 12 months) to be negotiated with the park system.
- **Formalize certification and annual verification.** The 4th step is to formalize certification, followed by an annual verification process.

Salmon Safe works to make this process as seamless as possible for cities, with their science team doing the bulk of the work, and the park system staff providing guidance, input, and some of the policies and programs.

- Lewis acknowledged the thoroughness and excellence of both Salmon Safe presentations. He noted that Parks and the City of Ashland have considerable aquatic habitat that might already meet Salmon Safe criteria. Seems like a great fit but might be a budget issue.

Eldridge and Kent reiterated that the cost of \$20,000 for system-wide certification is a considerable discount because Salmon Safe is very interested in the opportunity of working in Ashland and re-establishing a presence in the Rogue Valley in a significant way. Kent noted that Salmon Safe is a non-profit organization. The assessment fee is the full cost of Salmon Safe participation for the full five-year certification cycle, including all the annual verification and so on. That fee is based on their costs of having the science team and Salmon Safe staff involved over that period. The \$20,000 fee for City of Ashland just covers direct costs.

- Eldridge noted that Commissioners will be receiving multiple letters of support, including from SOU's Institute for Applied Sustainability, who have committed to cost match. Of the \$20,000, the Institute for Applied Sustainability would contribute half of that—\$10,000—to the certification, as well as providing paid internships, faculty engagement, a potential capstone and class work to support the mapping and any type of monitoring that might need to be done, in addition to what Parks already does. Going over the required criteria with Parks staff, there isn't anything that seemed an unnecessary burden on staff. So that leaves \$10,000 for the five years in terms of APRC financial responsibility, which would come out of the Professional Services line item in the operations budget if Commissioners want to move forward with the certification.
- Seffinger wondered about the cost initially versus continued cost for having to get recertified after 5 years, and the potential of losing certification if you can't pay for things that Salmon Safe might want the park system to do. Parks needs to be careful in terms of budget and in terms of letting the public know what the benefit is versus what the cost will be. She also asked about SOU involvement, having students and staff involved, etc.

Eldridge answered that yes, SOU has committed both half the cost, as well as staff and student support and paid internships. Also, the five-year recertification was not considered lightly, but with the level of support and expertise, and benefits of the collaboration with SOU and academic rigor with having students and faculty involved was well worth the cost, even if it was only for five years. It would still give Parks access to critical expertise and recommendations for moving into the future. Even the worst-case scenario would be well worth the \$10,000 investment for Parks. SOU and the Institute for Applied Sustainability have already met with Salmon Safe to look at adopting a campus-wide certification themselves, after the Parks system.

- Seffinger asked if Salmon Safe saw this certification as a model for other areas in Southern Oregon, so that if this is successful with Parks, others will follow? She also asked if the scientific expertise provided would cover areas like pesticide-free weed control, etc.

Kent agreed that they see Ashland Parks as a flagship, not necessarily just for other municipalities, but even beyond park systems, for all types of agriculture, etc. He answered that the science team members have relevant backgrounds, acknowledging that large-scale restoration is very difficult to do without significant scientific expertise.

VI. LOOKAHEAD REVIEW

Eldridge presented a spreadsheet of the Ashland Parks and Recreation Commission Lookahead. One correction: Oak Knoll Golf Course Management Contract scheduled for 11/8/23 should be in January.

VII. ITEMS FROM COMMISSIONERS/STAFF

Seffinger has received inquiries from citizens regarding the leasing of Pioneer Hall and the Community Center. Does APRC still schedule leases for those venues?

Eldridge clarified that at the end of the last budget cycle, Commissioners determined they would no longer be leasing out Pioneer Hall or the Community Center. Currently, neither building is fit for public use. Staff has discussed a design plan with Public Works to do a complete renovation of both buildings within the year. When renovation is complete, Parks will likely schedule and manage events and activities again, but the City is currently responsible for both facilities.

Eldridge made two announcements:

- Forestry staff have removed about 25 dead trees for active fuels removal from the recently purchased Liberty Street property.

- Electric will be clearing trees along Granite to complete a Firewise Project, so that trees are not touching or close to electrical wires.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 8:15 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Judy Plapinger

APRC Temporary Office Assistant

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