

City of Ashland  
PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION  
SENIOR PROGRAM SUBCOMMITTEE  
MEETING MINUTES  
August 8, 2017

**Present:** Commissioners Gardiner and Lewis; Director Black; Superintendent Dials; Executive Assistant Dyssegard

**Absent:** Senior Program Manager Dodson

**CALL TO ORDER**

Chair Gardiner called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. at The Grove, Otte-Peterson Room, 1195 E. Main Street in Ashland.

Gardiner stated that the meeting was the sixth and final meeting of the Subcommittee. The agenda for the meeting would be to review the recommendations.

**PUBLIC COMMENT (for items not on the agenda)**

There was none.

**ADDITIONS OR DELETIONS TO THE AGENDA**

There were none.

**NEW BUSINESS**

***a. Receive and Take Action on Recommendations for Senior Center Program of APRC***

Black noted that the recommendations presented at this time, were based on the work completed by the Senior Subcommittee – whose members were tasked with evaluating the Senior Center. He stated that there were no plans to close the Senior Center. The Center was in need of re-organization in order to meet new goals and fiscal requirements.

Black talked about the 2016 Performance Audit, noting that the report included departmental reviews along with information and recommendations. The Audit assessed the Senior Center, concluding that: *“Opportunities were available to increase programming that appeals to underserved groups, such as Active Baby Boomers and Retirees, as well as Senior Citizens and the Elderly.”*

Black explained that the statement became the key in developing an action plan that would focus on expanding senior programs to meet the growing needs of Ashland’s seniors. The Audit report further stated that *“While the current Senior Center program provides some recreational experiences for its participants, the project team believes that there are opportunities to expand the recreation and leisure experiences offered at the Center and therefore has identified senior citizens and the elderly population as an underserved group. The project team believes that recreational opportunities at the Center will increase participation in the program, establish it as a full-service Center and provide greater service to the Senior and Elderly in Ashland.”*

*“The project team believes, as well, that these recreational opportunities can be provided by staff and volunteers and it is critical that additional revenues be generated to support the Center. There are a number of strategies that should be pursued by Center staff to generate added support for the Senior Center, such as research and apply for grant opportunities, create an annual membership fee, establish a Senior Center fundraising program, work with the Ashland Parks Foundation (APF) to develop a Senior Center partnership/sponsorship, creating a task force to establish committees to further explore the potential for individual program strategies....”*

Black highlighted an objective adopted by APRC in 2015 that committed to an evaluation of ways to expand the services and support alternative use of the Senior Center to meet community needs.

Black reported that the goals developed by the Senior Center Subcommittee were as follows:

1. Through the gathering of information, gain a greater understanding of the Senior Program and the function it serves for the citizens of Ashland;
2. Explore new ways of marketing and program innovation to ensure that the greatest number of citizens are benefited by the Senior Program;
3. Evaluate the organizational structure of the program and ensure that the organization of the Senior Program and the goals for innovation are aligned for efficiency and service delivery;
4. Seek advocates of the Senior Program and new ways to increase community involvement through volunteerism;
5. Evaluate the current Senior Program policies and create an official subcommittee of the Ashland Parks and Recreation Commission reporting directly to the Commissioners to ensure collaboration and governance.

Black noted that it had been determined that the current Senior Program would not be sufficient to move the program to the next level. The current budget reflected the necessity that the Center must earn 20% of the Center’s budget over the next two years for a total of \$75,000. He stated that if the program could not meet that goal, then it was possible that drastic action would need to be taken to ensure that the Center did not go over budget. This could include a full closure of the program. The goal of 20% of budget was less than other similar Oregon communities that contributed approximately 47% for their programs.

Black stated that taking action promptly would give the Center the best opportunity to meet the fiscal requirements as well as expand its programs. He explained that an expanded program would result in increased revenue as well as ensure that more Ashland seniors were able to participate in the Center’s programs.

He proposed the following recommendations:

1. Form an official Subcommittee of the Ashland Parks and Recreation Commission to provide oversight and guidance to the Senior Program.
2. Move the Ashland Senior Program back to the Recreation Division with a focus on creating more programming for more of the 55+ population and for achieving cost recovery goals.
3. Reduce operations and staffing at the Senior Center to a bare minimum for at least three months (one fiscal quarter) in order to meet the following objectives:
  - i. Fiscal savings. Due to the need to reduce costs during this fiscal year to meet the adopted budget, reducing staff for a period would be necessary. This reduction would only affect the drop-in traffic

and office hours. The Food & Friends program could continue to function, as well as any recreation programs that were scheduled through the program guide.

- Social service programs—such as ALIEAP, bus passes and HEAT—would continue to function through a combination of efforts from the City of Ashland staff and Ashland Parks and Recreation staff.
- ii. Reorganize the Senior Program. Revamp the structure and programs of the Senior Program, with the goal of increasing services and cost recovery as predominant factors.
  - iii. Move the major functions of the Senior Program to the Grove, with a goal of creating a “multi-generational center, keeping scheduled classes and Food and Friends program at current Senior Center.
4. Cost Recovery – it had been demonstrated, through the comparable cities analysis, that there is a potential to recover some of the cost of operating a senior program. Elsewhere, within APRC, all programs have some level of cost recovery, aside from unreserved areas in City parks. Based on the research, and the need within the APRC budget to collect some revenue on each program, a reasonable schedule for the Commission to adopt for cost recovery for the senior program would be as follows:
- i. Year One (FY 2018) – 15% or \$25,000.
  - ii. Year Two (FY 2019) – 28% or \$50,000.
  - iii. Each Year Following FY 2019 – at least 28% or at least \$50,000.
  - iv. Request at least full-cost recovery from the City for providing the outreach and coordination of the ALIEP program, bus passes and other utility-related services or discuss other options with the City for providing those services.
  - v. Request that RVCOG begin reimbursing APRC for the use of the Senior Center for Food & Friends, or distribute the funds from the donations to APRC.
5. Perform multiple open house events and conduct a survey of the citizens of Ashland covering all aspects of the Senior Program under the direction of the Recreation Superintendent and Senior Center staff.

## **PUBLIC INPUT**

**Christine Ducey** of 515 Walnut St. Ashland, OR. was called forward.

Ducey spoke about the way the Senior Center creates community in the senior population. She quoted a report from a study completed recently that said “loneliness and isolation contributes more to early death than obesity.” She stressed the importance of the Center intimating, that the Center provides a sense of community and acts as a venue for one-on-one interaction.

**Rich Rohde** of 124 Ohio St. Ashland, OR. was called forward.

Rohde stated that he served on the Ashland Housing and Human Services Commission and has spent over six years with the McKenzie River Gathering Foundation. He expressed concern about human services in Ashland, stating that the quality of Mr. Black’s report was unacceptable. He suggested that most of the goals seemed to be about cost-recovery and recommended collaborating with other organizations with experience in human services on a 360 evaluation prior to completing improved recommendations.

**Susanne Severeid** of Ashland, OR. was called forward.

Severeid stated that she had worked and volunteered at the Senior Center for over a year. She noted that many of the services provided by the Senior Center could not be quantified on a financial statement. Severeid reported that

the Senior Center had been in existence for 43 years, and staff had long experience in working with the seniors. The depth of personal knowledge about the individuals served had in some cases lasted for decades.

Severeid indicated that many of the seniors served were low-income people and for some the suggested donation of \$2.75 per meal was more than they could pay. Severeid noted the lack of fees for use of other APRC services – listing as examples APRC parks, trails and bikeways.

Severeid objected to the short notice and availability of Black's report, noting that there had been little opportunity to prepare an informed response. She stated that in her opinion, the effort to obtain public comment was insufficient.

Severeid questioned whether the 150-page report provided by the Senior Center had been taken into consideration. She reported that Director Black had apparently rebuffed repeated invitations to come and see the program firsthand.

**Sharon Laws** of 968 Hillview Dr. Ashland, OR. was called forward.

Laws relayed that she had served as the Director of Ashland's Senior Program for 17 ½ years. She stated that the program was originally a social program, evolving through the years in response to senior needs. Recreational, educational and health-related programs were additions to the original program. Laws stressed the importance of the human component, noting that caring for seniors was a moral responsibility. She commented that in her opinion, the citizens of Ashland were committed to providing all aspects of care to Ashland's seniors.

**Lonelle** of Ray Ln. Ashland OR. was called forward.

Lonelle stated that she had worked in senior programs for the past 30 years and had coordinated the original meals on wheels program. She indicated that the rules and regulations for conducting a meals program was not addressed in Black's report. Lonelle noted that during the time she had served, there had been restrictions for collecting fees for meals.

Lonelle noted that the lack of a kitchen at The Grove would present obstacles to providing lunches. In addition, there might be an applicable rule regarding serving lunch there. She stated that if the lunch program was eliminated, the detrimental effects would be apparent. Transportation (appropriate for seniors) could also become an issue. Lonelle recommended further research to better understand the needs of seniors and the programs that respond to those needs.

**Mike Hersh** of 932 Morton St. Ashland, OR. was called forward.

Hersh stated that he had been a volunteer at the Center for approximately 16 years. Hersh emphasized the importance of providing services to the seniors who need them most – particularly the elderly. He referred to Black's report regarding the goals for the Senior Center, suggesting that goal number five—holding open houses and conducting a survey of Ashland residents—should be the first step taken, prior to any other action. He stated that the Senior Center and its programs and services should be under the jurisdiction of the City Council.

**Maureen Battistella** of 395 Hemlock Ln. Ashland, OR. was called forward.

Battistella talked about the focus on cost recovery, stating that those served were the poorest in the community. The services provided were part of a safety net for those who were unable to provide for themselves.

Battistella noted that Ashland residents pay a significant portion of their taxes to APRC and she thanked APRC for their care of Ashland's parks and recreational services. She indicated that taxes should also be used to support people, not just to secure and care for open spaces.

Battistella addressed the possibility for new leadership to move senior services and programs forward, suggesting that such an issue should be addressed by the City's Human Resources Department. She pointed out that the tone of APRC's recommendations for new leadership seemed to be unkind and display a lack of collaboration. Battistella stated that there was no evidence that geriatric experts had been consulted or that organizations that contribute to

senior care were contacted for their advice and assistance. Planning should include those elements before any actions were taken. Battistella asked that a formal evaluation of the needs of the community and the senior program take place prior to the development of any plan.

**Kit Crumb** of 2305 Ashland St. Ashland, OR. was called forward.

Crumb noted that he was the former administrator of a retirement center. He stated that he represented the seniors who were not able to provide for their needs—those who were shut-ins without basic resources. He indicated that those people should be considered without an assigned cost.

**Peggy Duvall** of 165 Meade St. Ashland, OR. was called forward.

Duvall stated that she has paid taxes for 33 years without complaint, especially in support of education. She expressed the hope that she had helped to subsidize the educations of the Commissioners so that when their time came to provide leadership, they would be able to thoughtfully respond. Duvall stated that it was now the elderly's turn to be subsidized.

Duvall talked about the process of change that the Commissioners had instigated. She stated that the seniors were informed about the proposed changes on Monday, with commentary permitted on Tuesday and a decision planned for Wednesday. She noted that Senior Center staff had already been let go – an indication that a decision had already been made.

**Bert Harris** of 1826 Fremont St. Ashland, OR. was called forward.

Harris noted that he had attended programs at the Center for twenty years. Seniors there were family and as such should be able to gather free of charge. He stated that he had to be frugal in order to provide his basic needs – including the 96 square feet he resided in.

**Sue Wilson** of 1056 Dead Indian Rd. Ashland, OR. was called forward.

Wilson stated that she volunteers at the Center two days per week.

Wilson objected to the process of soliciting input from the public, then limiting it to a minute each. She stated that it was disrespectful and short sighted. She criticized the contention that staffing was sufficient, stating that Center staff worked very hard and fulfilling the needs on a reduced basis would be insufficient to meet critical care objectives. She stressed that losing the intellectual capital provided by staff would be detrimental to the program and the people it served.

Wilson stated that the proposed move to The Grove showed a disconnect regarding seniors and their needs. The Meals on Wheels program might no longer be able to provide meals if asked to pay for space.

**Candy Barnhill** of 947 Cyprus Loop Ashland, OR. was called forward.

Barnhill stated that she had worked and volunteered at the Senior Center. She presented a brief history of the Center and the focus the originators had to provide tools for seniors to increase well-being and maintain independence.

Barnhill reported that Christine Dobson has been managing that process for over fourteen years. She and others before her had initiated, expanded and diversified the services provided to seniors. It was now a highly respected resource, providing a unique skillset. As an example, she noted that the Center's staff provided valuable assistance to families living in Ashland but caring for aging family members elsewhere.

The Center's staff remained true to the original mission regardless of changing times and decreasing budgetary support. Barnhill suggested that a better course of action would be to empower Dodson as a manager and leader in providing senior services.

**Jan Robertson** 32 Ravenwood Pl. Ashland, OR. was called forward.

Robertson explained the financial benefit of volunteers. She detailed the many duties she takes on as a volunteer and challenged those present to join her in helping with the chores involved with serving meals and running multiple programs.

**David Hill** of 235 Terrace St. Ashland, OR. was called forward.

Hill stated that he represented St. Vincent DePaul. He stated that in his opinion, the proposed changes represented a drastic and amoral shift of resources away from those who needed such services in order to survive.

**Mort Perle** of 491 Courtney St. Ashland, OR. was called forward.

Perle challenged the necessity for a cost recovery goal for the Senior Center. He stated that it seemed inconsistent with other services provided by APRC such as tennis courts that remained free of charge for users. He stated that APRC built and maintained playgrounds, suggesting that the children be asked to contribute towards the service. He suggested that seniors should not be targeted for funding goals.

**Willow Morningsky** of 132 6<sup>th</sup> St. Ashland, OR. was called forward.

Morningsky suggested that Ashland emulate Sun City with their transportation alternatives so that seniors could provide transportation for themselves when vehicular transportation was no longer available. She spoke about the terror of those who cannot leave their homes and those who see their powers slipping - leaving them vulnerable to the vicissitudes of life.

She shared an experience where a young person exhibited disrespect and a lack of understanding regarding seniors. She stressed that the elderly deserve more than that. She proposed a process of mediation that might bridge the gap between seniors with specific needs and those who provide them.

**John Hawksley** of 1230 Ashland Mine Rd. Ashland, OR. was called forward.

Hawksley supported the value of additional public input. He suggested that the information presented did not address a myriad of questions that would promote understanding. He stated that additional public input might change the conclusions and recommendations presented by APRC.

**Barb Settles** of 333 Idaho, Ashland, OR. was called forward.

Settle stated that Ashland itself was under scrutiny over the Senior Center controversy. She advocated for a respectful dialogue.

**Corey McEnroe** was called forward.

Nine-year old McEnroe stated that many of his friends were older. He stated his appreciation for those who are adults: i.e. seniors.

## **DISCUSSION**

Black stated that he was legally bound by the City of Ashland and APRC to meet APRC budgetary requirements. He explained that his purpose in addressing the Senior Center was to find a creative way to continue to provide the highest level of services given budgetary constraints.

He referred to the commentary regarding Parks, noting that his responsibilities included budgetary constraints there as well. He noted that he accepted those responsibilities as the downside to being an administrator. Black stated that he had not yet laid off staff at the Senior Center; however, if the Commissioners accept his recommendations, then the layoffs would occur.

Black's initial conversation with Food & Friends about contributing to the cost of the meals program led to a better understanding of the constraints for both organizations. Food & Friends had agreed to assist with maintenance costs by performing janitorial duties from time to time. He stated that APRC's budget was so tight that he also helped with janitorial maintenance as did all APRC staff.

Black stated that the recommendations presented today represented his best shot at preserving programs and creating the revenues that were needed to run them.

Lewis stated that he had volunteered in Ashland for the last 30 years and, as such, was appreciative of the people who supported the Center and its services. He assured those present that the Senior Center would not be closed; rather, APRC would work toward improving senior services. He stated that change was scary but inevitable.

Lewis stressed the importance of the Performance Audit, noting that it was a comprehensive review of all APRC divisions with a series of recommendations to improve efficiencies throughout the organization. The Audit was completed by an independent consulting group at a cost of \$49,000.

Lewis stressed that the Audit uncovered the need to reach a larger group of seniors. Reviewing the demographics in Ashland, it was noted that those 55 and older were a large segment of the community. Many people were already volunteering and, after many meetings, it became obvious that reorganization of the Senior Center and senior programs was essential. He referred to the six Subcommittee meetings that allowed for in-depth discussions. During the restructuring, there would be no loss of essential services and at-risk seniors would not be turned away. Lewis noted that APRC was determined to complete the process by creating a more efficient, progressive and inclusive Senior Center. Lewis asked everyone to see these changes as an opportunity to improve the Senior Center and the services it provided. He invited those present to help make things better.

Gardiner noted that the Subcommittee would end the session with a vote that would result in a recommendation for consideration of the Ashland Parks and Recreation Commission. He thanked those present for their civility.

Gardiner stated that the Subcommittee's process has been much longer than was commonly known. He noted that all Subcommittee meetings were open to the public and publicly noticed. At those meetings, people had been welcomed and invited to contribute.

Gardiner highlighted many constructive comments from the commentary shared at the meeting. He stated he would vote for the proposed recommendations by taking into account the feedback given. He stated that he was convinced that the recommendations would allow APRC to move forward in their efforts to expand the Senior Center and its programs.

**Motion:** Gardiner moved that the Subcommittee support the recommendations presented by Director Black and forward the recommendations to the Commissioners for final approval. Lewis seconded.

The vote was all yes.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 3:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Betsy Manuel, Minute-taker  
Ashland Parks and Recreation Commission

These 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.