

ASHLAND PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION

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MEMORANDUM

TO : APRC Senior Center Subcommittee

FROM: Michael A. Black

DATE: August 7, 2017

SUBJECT: Recommendation Regarding Operations of the APRC Senior Program

The Senior Center Subcommittee held five meetings over several months, plus the meeting on August 8th. Through the process, the Senior Program Manager provided information on the operations and management of the program. The conclusions and recommendations below are based upon the information – written and oral – gathered during the evaluation period.

Other informational sources that are pertinent to the conclusions and recommendations include the 2016 APRC Performance Audit Report performed by an outside consultant and the adopted goals of the Ashland Parks and Recreation Commission – both 2015 and 2017 versions.

The Subcommittee began its evaluation of the Senior Program by establishing the following goals for its efforts:

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; and,
5. Evaluate the current senior program policies and create an official subcommittee of the Ashland Parks and Recreation Commission reporting directly the Commissioners to ensure collaboration and governance.

At the beginning of every meeting, the Subcommittee discussed the goals for this review process. This analysis is likewise structured according to the goals established by the Subcommittee.

GOAL ONE – Through the gathering of information, gain a greater understanding of the senior program and the function it serves the citizens of Ashland.

This goal reflected the Commissioners’ desire to get to know the senior program better. The Commissioners individually and collectively expressed their concern that such a significant program has existed under their governance with little Commission involvement or management oversight, other than approving its budget. The Subcommittee agenda items concerned issues previously raised in the November 2016 request for information addressed to the Senior Center Manager. The agenda for each meeting was published in advance, and the Senior Center Manager was asked to present information according to the outline of the agenda. At each meeting, the Manager had the opportunity to present information on the Senior Center’s functions and value to the community.

The Senior Center Manager’s presentations were brief and provided little substantive basis for evaluating the program’s reach, effectiveness, or operational efficiency. She gave only partial answers to some questions and she appeared to regard the Subcommittee’s evaluation of the current program’s effectiveness as invasive.

Senior Center staff outlined the key elements of the current senior program:

1. Food and Friends –which is offered and managed by the Rogue Valley Council of Governments was brought up most often and referred to as the cornerstone of the senior program. Food and Friends is free to citizens, and APRC receives no set compensation from the RVCOG or citizens for housing it. A “donation” jar is present, and a suggested donation of \$2.75 is encouraged.
2. Outreach – which generally occurs in conjunction with, or around, the Food and Friends program and sometimes in private homes.
3. Recreation Programs – which are currently being offered through the Center for free; a “donation” jar is present and suggested donation is encouraged.
4. Ancillary Programs – such as ALIEP, bus passes and the Senior Utility Discount.

In response to a Subcommittee request, Senior Center staff listed the following activities as examples of the work they perform each day:

1. Responding to requests for information and referrals; pursuing resources for community members
2. Coordinating services with other agencies
3. Creating, mailing and posting monthly newsletters
4. Maintaining mailing lists
5. Coordinating classes and workshops; planning and implementing day trips
6. Assisting with records management and supply inventories
7. Screening for City assistance programs such as ALIEAP, Senior Discount, heating, bus passes, Valley Lift vouchers and others; delivery of some of the vouchers
8. Records management
9. Welfare and wellness checks

GOAL TWO - *Explore new ways of marketing and program innovation to ensure that the greatest number of citizens are benefited by the senior program.*

This goal was discussed generally at every meeting, and a lengthy discussion on this topic occurred on May 17, 2017. Currently, there is no reliable system in place for tracking visits to the Senior Center other than for Food and Friends meals. The manager estimated the Senior Center gets 22,000 visitors per year (84 each day of operation). According to RVCOG records, the Center serves 7,000 congregate meals per year (25 per day). There is no way to substantiate the additional 59 visits per day estimated by the Manager. There is also no way to determine how many visits are from repeat customers and therefore how many individual Ashland residents are being served by the Senior Center.

According to the American Fact Finder on the US Census website, there are approximately 9,000 people in Ashland over the age of 55 – about 36 percent of the total population.¹ Nearly 6,000 of those people are over 62 years old – about a quarter of the population.

It is clear from these statistics that there are many potential beneficiaries of the Senior Center who are not using it.

GOAL THREE - *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.*

The organizational structure was presented to the Subcommittee on March 28, 2017. The Ashland Senior Program currently has 1.95 FTEs budgeted. The program has had this level of staffing for at least the last five years.

A comparison was done with three other senior programs in Oregon considered to be our “comparable cities.” Those cities are: 1. McMinnville; 2. Bend; and, 3. Willamalane.² The level of staffing at the Ashland Senior Center for the majority of the last five years is comparable to Willamalane – the highest of the three comparable cities – when breaking down staff by population.

With regard to service delivery, all of the comparable cities were actively involved in the community and their list of program offerings is a testament to that. Each of the other comparable cities had expenses similar to Ashland’s, and all of the other cities produced significant revenue to offset their costs. The average revenue generated through the senior programs reviewed is \$5,400/1,000 residents. The revenue generated from the Ashland Senior Program is \$90/1,000 residents.

Using the current biennium as the history for revenue, Ashland’s senior program has netted a total of \$2,550 in revenue. Compared to the average revenue of all comparable cities of \$5,411 of revenue per 1,000 of population per year and an average of 47% cost recovery, Ashland is very far behind in making revenue at the senior program.

According to the data, Senior Center expenses will be lower than the comparable average of \$10,900 in the new biennium. Prior to the FTE reduction which is the period of time that was reviewed, Ashland’s senior program was closer to the average at about \$10,217/1,000 of population.

¹ The American Fact Finder disseminates information by zip code, so the total population figures are 24,469 for the 97520 zip code.

² The information contained in the graphs was compiled by Rachael Dials, APRC Recreation Superintendent, after interviewing each of the senior program directors from the referenced communities.

GOAL FOUR - *Seek advocates of the senior program and new ways to increase community involvement through volunteerism.*

There was some time dedicated to this topic in a few meetings. Increasing exposure and activity at the Center, seems likely increase community involvement.

GOAL FIVE - *Evaluate the current senior program policies and create an official subcommittee of the Ashland Parks and Recreation Commission reporting directly the Commissioners to ensure collaboration and governance.*

At times, Senior Center staff has used a small number of staff-selected or self-selected individuals as a sounding board. At the time of evaluation, this “advisory board” had not been serving in an advisory capacity to the Parks Commissioners and had not made any recommendations to the Commissioners. Indeed, minutes of this Advisory Board reflect its desire to bypass the Parks Commissioners and the parks administration by seeking to disconnect themselves from Parks and get the program transferred to the City. This significant policy initiative was never discussed with the Parks Director or Parks Commissioners.

CONCLUSIONS

The senior program could offer much more to the members of the Ashland community than it currently does. The data from comparable senior agencies shows that our senior program is staffed and funded comfortably; the Ashland Senior Center’s cost recovery, however, is almost non-existent. Other comparable communities also provide many more senior services than Ashland, with overnight trips, café type lunches with third party catering, passes for programming, bingo and many other activities. Additionally, each of the other comparable senior programs relies on other agencies to perform social services.

In order for the senior program to continue to function, even at its current level, it will need to start earning revenue. The current budget – adopted in June of 2017 – depends on the senior programs’ ability to earn at least \$75,000 in revenue to offset expenses. If we fail in this endeavor, it is possible that we will not be able to afford the program and any service that we currently offer, and those that we have the potential to offer, could be lost.

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 the 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 :
 - a. Fiscal savings. Due to the need to reduce costs during this fiscal year to meet the adopted budget, reducing staff for a period will be necessary. This reduction would only affect the drop-in traffic and office hours. The Food and Friends program could continue to function, as well as any recreation programs that are scheduled through the program

guide.

- i. Social service programs, such as ALIEAP, bus passes and HEAT will continue to function through a combination of efforts from the City of Ashland staff and Ashland Parks and Recreation staff.
 - b. 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.
 - c. 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 has 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:
 - a. Year One (FY 2018) – 15% or \$25,000
 - b. Year Two (FY 2019) - 28% or \$50,000
 - c. Each Year Following FY 2019 – at least 28% or at least \$50,000
 - d. 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.
 - e. Request that RVCOG begin reimbursing APRC for the use of the senior center for Food and 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 on the recreation superintendent and the senior center staff.