



**AGENDA FOR SPECIAL BUSINESS MEETING
ASHLAND PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION**

December 23, 2021

Electronic Meeting – 4:00 p.m.

Public Participation Instructions

This meeting will be held electronically via Zoom Webinar. Registration is required to view the meeting. A link to the meeting will be sent to you once registration has been completed: https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_VMnt6vmpS5ez_a2cZ-XK4Q

Written testimony will be accepted via email sent to sean.sullivan@ashland.or.us. Please include “**Public Testimony for December 23, 2021 Study Session**” in the subject line. Written testimony submitted before Wednesday, December 22, 2021, 12:00 pm will be made available to the Parks Commissioners before the meeting. All testimony will be included in the meetings minutes.

Oral Testimony will be taken during the electronic public meeting. If you wish to provide oral testimony, send an email to sean.sullivan@ashland.or.us, preferably before Wednesday, December 22, 2021, 12:00 pm. Late requests will be honored if possible. Please provide the following information: 1) make the subject line of the email “**December 23 Speaker Request**”, 2) include your name, 3) the agenda item on which you wish to speak on, 4) specify if you will be participating by computer or telephone, and 5) the name you will use if participating by computer (Zoom Name) or the telephone number you will use if participating by telephone. Staff will provide information necessary to join the meeting upon request.

- I. CALL TO ORDER
- II. ADDITIONS OR DELETIONS TO THE AGENDA
- III. PUBLIC FORUM
- IV. UNFINISHED BUSINESS
 - a) APRC Funding (Action)
- V. NEW BUSINESS
- VI. ITEMS FROM COMMISSIONERS/STAFF
- VII. ADJOURNMENT

In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, if you need special assistance to participate in this meeting, please contact the City Administrator's office at (541) 488-6002 (TTY phone number (800) 735-2900). Notification 72 hours prior to the meeting will enable the City to make reasonable arrangements to ensure accessibility to the meeting (28 CFR 35.102-35.104 ADA Title I). Parks Commission meetings are broadcast live on Channel 9, or on CHARTER CABLE CHANNEL 180. Visit the City of Ashland's website at www.ashland.or.us.

ASHLAND PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION

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COMMISSIONERS:

Mike Gardiner
Leslie Eldridge
Rick Landt
Jim Lewis
Julian Bell



Michael A. Black, AICP
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PARKS COMMISSIONER STAFF REPORT

Date: December 21, 2021
To: Ashland Parks and Recreation Commissioners
From: Michael Black
Subject: Long-Term Funding for Ashland Parks and Recreation

The Parks Commissioners adopted the following goal as their number one priority:

“Investigate, develop and implement a dedicated permanent funding source to ensure the long-term financial sustainability of the Ashland Parks and Recreation Commission.”

SITUATION

To sustain the current level of services and restore other services that have already been reduced or eliminated, APRC Board of Commissioners must act quickly to provide the best set of options available for funding APRC operations outside of the City’s general fund.

The Ashland Parks and Recreation Commission (APRC) was formed in 1908 by a vote of the citizens of Ashland and from 1908 through 2021, the organization has been funded primarily through property taxes collected by the City of Ashland and passed through to APRC. The traditional level of funding has been \$2.09/\$1,000 of assessed value. In 2019, the formulation for funding changed to \$1.89/\$1,000 of assessed value, which was a decrease in funding for APRC equal to \$500,000 per year.

In 2022, the formulation will change again, and APRC will receive less funding from property tax and more from Food and Beverage Tax. The result of the new funding will still equal \$1.89/\$1,000 of assessed value, which continues to be less than the traditional funding allotment.ⁱ

Additionally, the funding allocation for 2022 reduces APRC’s CIP by \$562,000 – another cut to our budget.

The outlook for future biennia shows that APRC is in danger of further budget cuts that will exacerbate the current situation and would require reductions in services that are traditionally provided by APRC such as potentially shuttering some recreation programs and reducing maintenance in parks and open spaces.

BACKGROUND

The funding shortfall for the City of Ashland requires them to either reduce expenses or increase revenues – reducing expenses requires a reduction in services to the community and increases in revenue requires more funding from the community to maintain the level of services. This does not appear to be a short-term issue for the City, so budgets for all general fund departments and APRC will need to be rationed – unless additional revenue can be generated.

Simply stated, there isn't enough money to go around. The Council will have to decide on whether to cut services or generate more revenue.

ASSESSMENT

As stated above, cutting expenses means that services will be cut. Cities will generally cut non-essential services first, before cutting essential services. I have heard many definitions of what essential vs non-essential services are. I think I can sum it up with this: essential services are related to the health and safety of the community and non-essential services are everything else.

A traditional example of health and safety services would be clean water, adequate wastewater disposal and police and fire protection.

The reality is, however, that the community decides what is essential and what is not. In recent surveys, our community has placed a high value on the availability and maintenance of parks and trails. This is an argument for parks and open space being an essential service but given the current methodology of funding APRC – receiving our funds through the City of Ashland – APRC Commissioners may not have a say in determining what is an essential service vs. non-essential service.

APRC believes that the community places a high value on the services provided by APRC and given the opportunity, I believe they would support APRC. Regardless, the problem remains – most of the services provided by the City of Ashland are essential and there aren't enough resources to continue to do everything. Something must give.

RECENT MEETINGS on LONG-TERM FUNDING

The Commissioners have considered moving forward with a levy proposal, and on November 10, 2021, the Parks Commissioners approved a motion to move forward with a \$2.09/\$1,000 special levy for APRC operations by presenting it to the City Council to refer a ballot measure to the May 2022 election. At the most recent APRC business meeting, the Commissioners heard from me that, although the motion for the \$2.09 levy was still valid, it did not appear that all of the City Councilors would be in favor of approving a ballot measure for a levy in May 2022. The Commissioner took a pause, as a result.

Recently, however, two Commissioners – Chair Gardiner and Vice-Chair Landt – have requested that the Commissioners move forward with the proposal to the Council for the May 2022 ballot measure. Time is of the essence and the Commissioners will be meeting on December 23, 2021 in a special meeting to either affirm the desires of the two Commissioners to move forward with the original direction, due to the matter of timing, or not.

RECOMENDATION

While APRC continues forward and discusses the potential for a recommendation to the Council that will address the long-term funding for our organization, I recommend that the Parks Commissioners focus on solutions that will not require services to be cut. In order to accomplish this, it seems imperative that APRC Operations be separated from the City's general fund.

Although the City Charter states specifically that APRC will be funded separately from the general fund, Measure 50, which was enacted in May 1997 changed City finances so much so that funds that were traditionally entitled to APRC, at the rate of \$2.09/\$1,000 of assessed property value, were rolled into the City's general fund. Since measure 50 was passed in 1997 previous City Councils voluntarily continued to provide APRC with \$2.09/\$1,000 of assessed value to APRC until 2018 when funding was reduced. The comingling of funds resulted in a situation where APRC's dedicated funding was no longer identified by the Council as dedicated and became part of the whole general fund to be divided by the Council between all general fund departments and APRC by Council priorities.

There is not enough money in the City's general fund to fully fund all of the general fund departments and APRC. As stated previously, not all of APRC's operational services will likely be determined to be essential when compared to the services that are provided by general fund departments like police and fire, which provide direct public health, safety and welfare services. APRC is still highly valued in the community and many Ashland residents identify with and rely upon the services that APRC provides to support their quality of life.

To ensure that APRC can continue to provide the current community services, that play a major role in the livability of Ashland, and even restore those services to their traditional level, it is imperative that APRC separate its funding from the City's general fund and restore the traditional funding level and methodology as stated in City Charter. This matter should be referred to the voters via a ballot measure in May 2022. A ballot measure would provide the direction from the electors of the City of Ashland as to whether they still place a high value on the services APRC currently provides and if they would like to see traditional services restored.

The electors of Ashland formed the Ashland Parks and Recreation Commission in 1908 and endowed the organization with a dedicated funding source. In 2022, we are seeking affirmation from the current electors that they continue to place a high level of importance in the organization and services provided by APRC.

My recommendation is that the Commissioners consider that if their collective desire is to have a ballot measure for a levy ready for the May election, you have two options:

- 1. The Council refers the special levy measure on the May 2022 ballot for the consideration of the citizens of Ashland; or,**
- 2. The Commissioners elect to follow the path of a public initiative to have the special measure placed on the ballot in May of 2022, by following the statutory requirements for initiatives in Oregon and Jackson County.**

Either path requires action to take to place on an accelerated schedule.

Possible Motion: I move to strongly recommend City Council, at the earliest date possible, refer a ballot measure for the May 2022 election for a special five-year levy of \$2.09/\$1,000 of assessed property value to fund APRC operations.

ⁱ People have asked why APRC refers to a millage, ie: dollars per thousand of assessed valuation, instead of a dollar amount. The easiest response to that is tradition. Article 19, Section 3 of the current City Charter refers to our funding terms of millage, and therefore APRC has always done the same.