

From: John Williams [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, November 30, 2021 7:46 PM
To: Sean Sullivan <sean.sullivan@ashland.or.us>
Subject: Public Testimony for December 7 Current Parks Subcommittee Meeting

Dear Current Parks Subcommittee,

As a 3rd-generation Ashlander, I'd like to offer my observations about Lithia Park, our oft-described "crown jewel" of Ashland.

I'm deeply disappointed in the priorities Ashland has set for Lithia Park maintenance. Many of the signature features of Lithia Park are literally crumbling, and have been doing so for years. Spend a Saturday at the Butler-Perozzi Fountain, where generations of visitors and locals have taken photos for special events, and you will hear a constant stream of laments over the poor state of the fountain's cement. Estimates I've seen publicized to repair the fountain's cement are, frankly, laughable, and reflect the city government pattern of grotesquely inflating repair and maintenance costs to such a high degree that they become paralyzed (e.g. Pioneer Hall and the Community Center). The state of the upper duck pond is so bad that it should probably be closed, with putrid, un-oxygenated water choking the ecosystem of the pond, pipes and branches sticking out of the water for months or years on end, and significant pavement heave all the way around.

Much of the critical maintenance needed in Lithia Park, like most of the upper duck pond maintenance, is not complicated, time-consuming, or even expensive; it just needs to be prioritized. Repairing and adding pond fountains may be a larger project, but such a long-term water quality solution would be extremely successful both with visitors and fish. It's mind-blowing to have witnessed 20+ years of this issue being discussed, only to see the City implement one ineffective remedy after another, or do nothing at all. Bigger projects such as replacing the cement foundations of the Butler-Perozzi Fountain will take funding, but nothing close to the ridiculous estimates I've read publicized. A recent ad-hoc city council committee created to formulate repairs for Pioneer Hall and the Community Center found solutions for a fraction of the cost the City was planning to spend. I'm confident the same could be done for big Lithia Park landmarks which need significant repairs.

Rather than fixing and properly maintaining our existing iconic landmarks and parks, Ashland's priorities seem often distracted by shiny new projects, expanding parks, and politics. We often hear every excuse imaginable why we can't maintain Lithia Park. But we must. We must be able to accept and implement wonderful public donations, such as the funds used for the Japanese Garden rebuild, while still setting aside the resources needed to adequately maintain our existing parks. Especially Lithia Park, since it's our public-facing crown jewel. Ashland must learn how to properly repair and prioritize our critical infrastructure, and iconic landmarks which help drive tourism should be considered critical infrastructure. After hearing all of the arguments from the stakeholders and City, I'm convinced that affordable, actionable solutions exist. In the short term, City Council may need to provide extra funds for Parks to repair a few critical items like the Butler-Perozzi Fountain, based on value engineering with quality designs and workmanship. We also need the leadership and mandate to get our crumbling Lithia Park repaired.

Thanks for listening and working on this important issue,
John Williams

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John Williams, Ashland, Oregon

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