

ASHLAND PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION

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January 6, 2022

Honorable Mayor and City Council
City of Ashland, OR
20 E Main Street
Ashland, OR 97520

Re: Long-Term Funding for Ashland Parks and Recreation Commission

Mayor and Councilors:

Ashland Parks and Recreation Commission (APRC) and its Board of Commissioners offer this letter as a statement of the Commissioners current position on dedicated long-term funding options for APRC.

APRC received consistent, dedicated funding until 2019. Since 2019, APRC's funding has been reduced while payments to the City for central services have been increased dramatically. The reason for this is understood to be that City expenses are outpacing revenue. The solution has been identified as being one of two possibilities: A) reduce services to the public to save on expenses; or, B) provide historic levels of service by increasing revenues.

Keeping with the solution-oriented approach, the Commissioners forwarded a request to the Council to refer a special operating levy for APRC to the ballot for May of 2022. The rationale for this request was to separate the funding requirement for APRC from the City of Ashland, as enshrined in the City Charter, and to request about a \$.20/\$1,000 increase in residents' taxes to restore APRC services to their traditional level. This approach would have also opened opportunities for the City of Ashland to explore revenue enhancements to support their general fund departments. The time sensitive request was left unanswered, effectively denying the request.

As outlined in APRC Commissioners' request, we reserved the right to use the initiative process to place the measure on the May ballot. It appears that approach, based on Council's inaction, is not favored by the City Council. Furthermore, with Covid-19 cases again spiking, this is not an appropriate time to be gathering signatures.

This reasonable pause in efforts to find a long-term funding solution for APRC and re-establishing the funding that APRC has had for all but four years of its hundred plus years of existence presents an opportunity for collaboration.

Commissioners are determined to continue to defend the mission of APRC and the letter of, and intent, of the City Charter. However, it appears that the path forward with the best chance of success, for both the City of Ashland and APRC, is to build on collaboration, respect and trust between the Councilors and Commissioners. As a step in this direction, we are supporting the Council's goal of a public survey and public process prior to setting priorities to align the budget and address budget gaps. The Commissioners wish to work with the Council in this effort to propose a solution to the public for the purpose of addressing the current budget complications that the City of Ashland and APRC are experiencing, and time is of the essence.

Commissioners respect the mission of every department and division of the City, and we believe that there is a path forward that can benefit all the citizens of Ashland by restoring services from every department that have been reduced due to the outpacing of expenses over revenues. We have faith that the citizens value the services they have grown accustomed to receiving, that they will recognize the problem and support action to correct it to ensure that Ashland remains the distinct community that it is.

APRC funding for the next biennium – beginning on July 1, 2023 – is uncertain at best. To ensure that we take advantage of the time we have to plan and implement, the Commissioners urge the Council to continue to move forward on this matter in collaboration with Commissioners. Although we believe that the best path forward is to work together, it must be restated that the intent of the Commissioners is to attempt to separate the funding requirement for APRC from the City of Ashland and to establish a dedicated funding source for APRC prior to the next biennium.

We look forward to discussing this matter further with the Council and urge you to continue to move the matter forward without delay.

With respect,

Ashland Parks and Recreation Commissioners:

Michael Gardiner – Chair

Rick Landt – Vice-chair

Jim Lewis - Commissioner

Leslie Eldridge – Commissioner

Julian Bell - Commissioner