

City of Ashland
ASHLAND PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION (APRC)
ASHLAND SENIOR ADVISORY COMMITTEE (ASAC)
Meeting Minutes
March 13, 2023

Committee Members Present:

- Anne Bellegia
- Cori Frank
- Mike Gardiner, Chair
- Debra Johnson, Vice Chair
- Kathy McNeal
- Sandy Theis
- Noriko Toyokawa

Committee Members Absent:

- Jim Bachman

Staff Present:

- Michael Black
- Isleen Glatt
- Natalie Mettler

CALL TO ORDER

Gardiner called the meeting to order at 3:31pm.

OPENING

Gardiner welcomed Bob Kaplan as the new City Council Liaison to ASAC.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion: Theis/Johnson m/s to approve the minutes from January 9, 2022. Voice vote – all AYES. Minutes approved.

ADDITIONS OR DELETIONS TO AGENDA

None.

PUBLIC INPUT

None.

ST. VINCENT DE PAUL: SUPPORT FOR VERY LOW-INCOME SENIORS IN ASHLAND

John Engelhardt, President of the St. Vincent de Paul (SVdP) Ashland chapter, presented on the financial assistance and navigation help they provide for very low-income community members. See [presentation documents](#).

Engelhardt added the following information during a question-and-answer period:

- *How does SVdP help clients access the City's utility discounts?*
Volunteers have helped people get signed up for the senior/disabled discount and Ashland Low Income Energy Assistance Program (ALIEAP), offering different levels of assistance depending on client ability. Engelhardt asked if the City might be able to take initiative in identifying residents in need and create a program in which residents could opt in or out of utility discounts.
- *What are SVdP's funding sources?*
60-70% of funds come from the agency's thrift store in Medford, 25% from grants and the rest from donations and contributions from parishioners.
- *Does SVdP Ashland have a physical office?*
They have a small space where volunteers operate their phone line, usually Monday-Friday, 8am-4pm. They handle between 60-80 cases/month, or 3-4 daily.
- *Does SVdP collaborate with the Rogue Valley Council of Governments (RVCOG) in connecting to services such as Program to Encourage Active Rewarding Lives (PEARLS)?*

SVdP Ashland mostly works with Options for Helping Residents of Ashland (OHRA). SVdP Medford might have more connections with RVCOG. They are trying to connect more with ACCESS. Toyokawa invited SVdP to discuss options to serve clients with SOU students who are getting trained as interns in PEARLS.

- *Are clients vetted prior to receiving help with rental deposits to ensure they are able to cover their future rent? If their circumstances change, can they receive rental assistance? How does SVdP follow up with clients, especially those who get help with rental deposits, to check they are staying housed?*

Yes, regarding vetting and subsequent rental assistance if needed. SVdP has national database software developed specifically for the agency, and SVdP Ashland joined in October 2021. This has been a great tool in tracking client histories. SVdP tries to limit help to clients to once per year, but clients may receive help more than once if for small amounts of money.

- *How does SVdP work with Ashland Senior Services Division (ASSD) staff?*

ASSD staff often refer clients to SVdP. SVdP have consulted with ASSD staff on more complex client cases for guidance with navigation and available resources. Mettler thanked SVdP for their service, quick response time and good follow-through. Engelhardt added that they try to do same-day service for clients.

- *Does SVdP provide mental health services?*

No, they refer clients to other agencies that provide such services.

- *Where do SVdP volunteers come from?*

Most are from the Our Lady of the Mountain Catholic parish. There is no requirement to be Catholic to volunteer, and there are several volunteers from other sources.

BUDGET LISTENING SESSION AND PROGRESS REPORT

APRC Director Black reported that, generally, the ASSD budget for the upcoming biennium is staying level. The original budget for the current biennium funded 2.75 staff but was amended to 2 staff due to cuts in 2022; staffing will continue at 2.0 FTE for Biennium 2023-2025. Funding for materials and services will increase 3-5% for inflation. A new roof for Ashland Senior Center will come out of Capital Improvement Project (CIP) funds.

Black added the following information during a question-and-answer period:

- *What percentage of the total APRC budget funds ASSD?*

About 5% of the total budget; around \$390,000/year.

- *Cutting back on 0.75 staff positions for ASSD impacts the hours that Ashland Senior Center can stay open. What can be done to make ASSD services more available to constituents, such as funding more staff?*

Historically, APRC received the equivalent of \$2.09/\$1000 of assessed property value through a levy. Measure 50, passed in the 1990s, changed that funding to come through the City's General Fund. For the past four years, that funding has been reduced to \$1.89/\$1000. To maintain the current status quo with staffing, APRC is having to expand their budget by \$800,000 due to projected increases like Cost of Living Adjustments, so are now requesting \$2.00/\$1000. There is no funding to bring back eliminated office assistant positions this biennium, such as the 0.75 at ASSD.

- *To address the concern about the high proportion of Ashland citizens in the older adult category, appropriate staffing could mitigate the unmet need of providing navigation to social services. Filling in with volunteers for staff roles is not what ASSD should be doing. How can ASAC advocate to the City to recognize this important need and address it with sensitivity, avoiding putting APRC in a position where they can't adequately meet community need?*

Having a City Council liaison on ASAC provides such education. Kaplan added that sharing this information via public testimony, and backing it up with data, would be effective. ASAC members could do this at the upcoming Citizen Budget Committee meetings during April-May and to the City Council when they receive the budget recommendations in June. To expand these critical services for seniors, the

Council would have to balance competing needs. Bellegia added that older adults also benefit from all-age services such as green spaces and outdoor recreation opportunities, and ASSD should not be competing with other APRC projects for funding. This isn't just a senior issue, because working adults have to care for aging parents. As the growing older adult demographic grows older and more vulnerable, we are already seeing more unhoused seniors due to lack of access to services.

- *Can APRC generate additional revenue with events such as pickleball tournaments, and earmark those funds for senior programs?*

APRC continues to be conservative with predicting recreation revenue, as it has still not improved to 2019 levels. Black is open is looking at innovative revenue sources such as tournaments. Additional funding is necessary to add more employees. APRC has drafted a budget for the upcoming biennium that they believe will be acceptable to the City Council and within the means of the General Fund. In addition to funding from the City, APRC also receives income from recreation revenue, grants and contracts.

- *How can the measure on the May ballot dedicating Food & Beverage Tax to the APRC budget help?*
If passed, this ballot measure would help ensure sustainable funding for APRC. It wouldn't cover all needs but provide a critical "floor." ASAC members can help by advocating to citizens to support the ballot measure. The Food & Beverage Tax is currently designated for capital expenses for either APRC or the Streets Division (Public Works). Shifting more APRC funding to Food & Beverage Tax would only affect the source of budget funding, not amount; less funding would come out of the General Fund. Kaplan added that the City has typically predicted Food & Beverage Tax revenue conservatively so resources could accumulate in the ending fund balance towards the next biennium. Black noted that this potential carry-forward balance is one of the arguments for APRC to keep its Parks Fund at the end of each fiscal year.

STANDING REPORTS

- a. **APRC Liaison** - Commissioner Bachman was absent.

- b. City Council Liaison**

Councilor Kaplan reported about changes to the City Council: former Councilor Graham is the new Mayor and two new Councilors are planned to be announced at the March 15 Council meeting. The January 30 town hall was a great success, with over 300 attendees and over 150 community members participating in dot-voting via the City website. Senior programming received 90 votes, in comparison with parks & open space (450), wildfire risk reduction (350), affordable housing (250) and economic diversification (250). Bellegia noted that 90 votes for senior programming is not necessarily representative as it's hard for the average resident to understand these different "buckets;" votes for parks & open space might be meant for senior programming, since both are under the umbrella of APRC. McNeal noted that she has lived here since 2007 and doesn't remember a town hall meeting in the past; she asked if the Council plans to hold these at least annually, preferably more often. Kaplan agreed he would like to hold town halls more frequently, at least annually, but noted the burden on staff. These events are valuable to rebuild the social fabric of civic participation that has become frayed due to social isolation. Kaplan mentioned the Council hosted an economic roundtable last Monday with representatives from major economic players including OSF, SOU, Asante Ashland Community Hospital, the Ashland School District and the Chamber of Commerce. All shared trends that their institution is facing. There have been five Council Business meetings since the last ASAC meeting, primarily addressing land use measures, but also the Food & Beverage Tax ballot measure. Five new members have been appointed to the Citizen Budget Committee, including Gardiner. Gardiner asked if the March 15 Council meeting will address City priorities; Kaplan replied that such a presentation from the City Manager is expected.

- c. Education Report**

Mettler shared about planned educational and social events for the upcoming summer season: Smokewise education with Ashland Fire & Rescue (May 31), Disaster Preparedness for Seniors (June 28), Sue DeMarinis

Author Talk (July 26); Cookout with Ashland Police Department (June 10), Britt Concert Fieldtrip (June 29), Ice Cream Social (August 9). She also reported deepening collaboration with Jackson County Library Services to provide digital technology education and about Frank's new initiative to provide tutoring on using supermarket coupon smartphone apps.

d. Senior Services Superintendent Report

Glatt referred to her report in the agenda package. She added that, with support from Bellegia and Black, she just submitted an application for an AARP Community Challenge Grant to fund a demonstration project of conversation cluster outdoor seating. If funded, there will be three sites modeling different styles of seating, in Lithia, Garfield, and Glenwood parks. Once this model for facilitating outdoor socializing has been tested, HoAs may choose to implement as well, meeting Livable Ashland Alliance goals for Outdoor Spaces and Social Participation, which benefit all age groups.

Glatt also noted that Theis and McNeal are both nearing the end of their terms. Theis has completed the two terms allowed by the bylaws; McNeal has not yet decided whether to renew. Glatt invited ASAC members to think about potential recruits for new members.

ITEMS FROM ASAC MEMBERS OR WORK GROUPS

a. Intergenerational Dialogue in SOU Psychology of Aging Class

Toyokawa reported on the intergenerational discussion about the meaning of romantic relationships in later life that she facilitated between older adult community guests and SOU psychology students last month. Both community participants and students gave positive feedback. Students saw unexpected commonalities with their elders and were struck by the latter's "wisdom" and "intelligence," which seemed to counter previous stereotypes. Prior class exercises had revealed student perceptions of elders as marginal and a lack of knowledge about stages of adulthood. Toyokawa noticed students are now seeking mentors among such elders, as the cultural expectation of independence makes it difficult for youth to share challenges with parents. She hopes to facilitate more intergenerational discussions and events at SOU and invited ASAC members to submit ideas.

b. Livable Ashland Alliance update

Theis reported that Livable Ashland is in talks with the Ashland Community Health Foundation as a potential fiscal sponsor. Bellegia noted that the increasing collaboration across Livable Ashland Alliance member organizations is mirrored in collaboration among ASAC members, such as Johnson attending Toyokawa's intergenerational SOU class discussions. She remarked that such successful collaborations inspire other groups to engage similarly. She added that having a fiscal sponsor would facilitate creating a website where all area groups working on livability projects can share and collaborate, further supporting such efforts.

c. Other items from ASAC members

Frank shared progress on her initiative to tutor seniors on using supermarket coupon smartphone apps, which can significantly help stretch budgets. She has recruited three more volunteers, and all will receive training from a SOU business major student who works part-time at Albertson's. They plan to start offering tutoring in May at Ashland Senior Center.

Next meeting – Monday, May 8, 2023, 3:30-5:00pm (Zoom)

Adjournment – 5:01pm

Respectfully submitted by Natalie Mettler, Senior & Adult Services Coordinator, Ashland Parks and Recreation Commission