

Gwen Davies, Ashland

As you know, there is petitioning underway to get recalls of three Parks commissioners on a ballot. The reasons are many ... budget and personnel mis-management, shredding the seniors' safety net, over-use and mis-use of expensive outside consultants, failing to follow public meeting rules, ignoring public input are some of them.

By meeting and talking to Ashland residents for the last couple of months we have heard many people concerned with the direction Parks and the City are going. I am here today to share comments and concerns from Ashland residents we have met.

By far, people, including many long time residents, do not like the way Ashland is changing. Ashland has been a small enlightened community that looks after one another, their town and environment. That is what has attracted people to Ashland for decades.

People feel tourist interests are put above resident interests. Residents feel left out and under-represented. Some avoid downtown.

Related to this, people feel that elected officials and city staff don't listen and are not responsive to neighborhood concerns.

People are struggling to live in a town of increasing taxation, lack of affordable housing, gentrification of land use and lessening social services. Quite a few have recently moved away.

Some people we talked to believe that the City Council should be recalled for not stepping in when Parks shredded the 43-year-old senior safety net.

People feel that there is not enough two-way dialogue in community settings before changes are made. Elected officials erroneously think they know best and don't respect public views.

People believe that the city and Parks are recklessly overspending. They do not like recent decisions made. People think the Council and Parks believe they have a magic checkbook of unlimited funds.

People are concerned that the citizens on the citizens budget committee are not allowed to have much impact. People want more transparency and accountability on the many choices before us.

We encourage each of you to be at public places, such as Safeway or Shop N Kart, to listen for yourself Ashlanders' concerns. We also encourage you to hold many public town halls for open two-way discussions of Ashland's issues and prospective plans.