

Public Testimony #1

NEW AND MISCELLANEOUS BUSINESS

Recommendation from the Cost Review Ad-Hoc Committee

Two issues here:

1) The Resolution passed by Council forming the committee is substantively different than the one actually signed by the Mayor on the night passed, (as well as signatures from The City Recorder and City Attorney.) Please explain the discrepancy

08-06 Minutes:

1. Resolution No. 2019-24; a Resolution Approving the Scope of Work and the Timeline for the Cost Review Ad hoc Committee

Madding gave a brief Staff report. She explained that she will bring this back to Council no later than February 4th.

Slattery explained that the Committee will be looking at the General Fund 90% and 10% looking at other issues specifically.

Jensen/Graham moved to approve Resolution No. 2019-24 setting the work program and timeline for the Cost Review Ad Hoc Committee. Discussion: Graham spoke to the importance of getting this done. **Roll Call Vote: Jensen, Seffinger, Akins, Graham and Slattery: YES. Motion passed unanimously.**

Council Communication and Resolution in your 08-06 packet

https://www.ashland.or.us/SIB/files/06182019_Expenditure_Ad_Hoc_CCFinal.pdf

Scope of Work

The purpose of the Cost Review Ad Hoc Committee is to create expenditure recommendations to the City Council that lead to the City's long-term financial sustainability and enhance the City's overall financial resilience.

The Cost Review Ad Hoc Committee will analyze a variety of programs and current operational approaches/systems to determine the long-term financial sustainability of each. These programs may include assessing PERS and Healthcare strategies that would be used in labor negotiations, and conducting cost-benefit analysis of programs such as the City's ambulance service.

Timeline

The Cost Review Ad Hoc Committee will present their findings to-date and the continuation of the Ad Hoc Committee will be reevaluated by the City Council no later than the February 4, 2020 City Council Business meeting.

THE CITY OF ASHLAND RESOLVES AS FOLLOWS:

SECTION 1. The scope of work and associated timeline will be adhered to by the Cost Review Ad Hoc Committee.

Signed Resolution in current packet:

https://www.ashland.or.us/SIB/files/050520_Cost_Ad_Hoc_Update_CCFinal.pdf

Scope of Work

The purpose of the Cost Reduction/Efficiency/Alternative Funding/PERS & Healthcare Strategies Ad Hoc Committee is to create expenditure recommendations to the City Council that lead to the City's long-term financial sustainability and enhance the City's overall financial resilience.

The Cost Reduction/Efficiency/Alternative Funding/PERS & Healthcare Strategies Ad Hoc Committee will analyze a variety of programs and current operational approaches/ systems to determine the long-term financial sustainability of each.

Timeline

The Cost Reduction/Efficiency/Alternative Funding/ PERS & Healthcare Strategies Ad Hoc Committee will present their findings to-date and the continuation of the Ad Hoc Committee will be reevaluated by the City Council no later than the January 7, 2021 City Council Business meeting.

THE CITY OF ASHLAND RESOLVES AS FOLLOWS:

SECTION 1. The scope of work and associated timeline will be adhered to by the Cost Reduction/Efficiency/Alternative Funding/PERS & Healthcare Ad Hoc Committee.

These are not 'scrivener's errors, and the Feb 4th date is clearly mentioned in the minutes, while the Altered Resolution date is different and not in the minutes

Does Council not have a problem with having what they voted on altered?

2) According to "the minutes" a meeting of the committee was held on July 29. One week before the resolution AND the membership of the committee were approved by Council

This seems to be a addition to the web page, and the meeting was never referenced or approved in subsequent meetings. Beyond the obvious, was this properly noticed?

<https://www.ashland.or.us/agendas.asp?sectionID=-1&ccbid=266>

December 4 2019	Cost Review Ad-Hoc Committee Meeting
November 20 2019	Cost Review Ad-Hoc Committee Meeting
November 6 2019	Cost Review Ad-Hoc Committee Meeting
October 16 2019	Cost Review Ad-Hoc Committee Meeting
October 2 2019	Cost Review Ad-Hoc Committee Meeting
September 18 2019	Cost Review Ad-Hoc Committee Meeting
September 4 2019	Cost Review Ad-Hoc Committee Meeting
July 29 2019	Cost Ad-Hoc Committee Meeting

Public Testimony #2

May 5, 2020 Council Business Meeting Comment

Agenda Item # **NEW AND MISCELLANEOUS BUSINESS**

1. [Recommendation from the Cost Review Ad-Hoc Committee](#)

Before accepting this recommendation, much more public input needs to be sought and given in a public manner. This is especially true when it affects our first responders at a very critical time in the life of our country and city. To even suggest changing the fire department's mission by failing to let them bid on the ambulance service in July, 2020 for the immediate area that includes all of Ashland and surrounding areas is not wise is to put all of Ashland in danger. We all know that a transition will take an incredible amount of time. We need the next five years to consider such a recommendation and to hear from the people of Ashland. A small sub-committee of Ashland citizens who were subject to Mercy Flights paid lobbyist does not constitute listening to the voices of Ashland Citizens.

I encourage you to table this item until a later date because our first responder fire fighters don't need this on their plate with fire season looming; the city has an immense budget deficit to correct given the public health and economic impacts of COVID 19 brought about by a decrease in tourism; citizens must have an opportunity to weigh in on the ambulance service costs over a considerable amount of time to look at the alternatives and to weigh the human costs as well as the budgetary costs.

Respectfully,

Dr. Carol Voisin

Ashland

Public Testimony #3

NEW AND MISCELLANEOUS BUSINESS

Recommendation from the Cost Review Ad-Hoc Committee

Let's cut to the chase here: The Cost Cutting Committee failed to recommend a single thing to cut. Not one penny.

Instead, they were led through 6 months of basically Budget Committee presentations, going over the same issues and questions that have all been discussed before over the years.

And the report? Let's look at the stuff we actually should be doing regularly, and /or ones already we have or should have looked at. Without a result.

What you have is a small piece of what direction the Committee should have given staff at the first meeting. **"Bring us the answers to these questions"**

Instead, 11 months after the first 'cost cutting' idea was approved, we are no closer to dealing with the problem, and we are now in the middle of a fiscal crisis which is likely to be more damaging to us than the last recession.

And we have an interim Administrator and Finance Director. And it doesn't appear to be any hurry to deal with that either.

In the end, three Councilors could come up with nothing actionable. And the other three are far more interested in dealing with it by raising taxes.

So, what's the point? Maybe the Budget Committee can fix it. Next year.....

June 4 2019

Slattery/Jensen Moved that we ask the Mayor with the help of the Administrator to form an ad-hoc committee looking at the cost side of things to help the City be financially sustainable and to help the Community be resilient. Discussion: Slattery spoke to the importance of working on this. Jensen spoke that he hopes this can begin soon. Rosenthal spoke that he will vote against this motion and explained that the City does not need another ad-hoc committee and is not efficient. Seffinger agreed with Rosenthal. Graham spoke in support of the motion **Roll Call Vote: Graham, Slattery, Akins and Jensen: YES. Rosenthal and Seffinger: NO. Motion passed 4-2**

Russ Silbiger

Public Testimony #4

To be read aloud during public forum, as to share with the public and the council just like a regular meeting .Thank You!

I am Tom Marr, I live on North Mountain Ave, in Ashland Oregon.

I understand the city of Ashland is planning to repave my street for the price of 2.56 MILLION dollars. This street is fine and all my neighbors agree. It could at the most use a few thousand dollars for maintenance and repair, certainly not Millions of dollars in overlay and rebuild!

I went on to note the \$ 5 million to be spent on clay street, it is in better condition and gets less use. I see Ashland street on the list for another \$ 4.5 million .It is the most damaged and most used of the 3.

Please note the cost of these 3 projects is more than a new city all with Pioneer hall and the community center, even add the solar panels and the water fountain .

Road construction is a major source of greenhouse gas ,and transportation is the number 1 source of co2 in the world !

Please Do Not Pave my street!!

I would prefer you lower my water bill, so I can feed people and not starve, I cannot eat roads.

Thank you for helping to share my concerns with My Mayor, city councillors and fellow citizens

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Public Testimony #5

Council,

It is disappointing that continuation of the drone program is the first Council action in relation to the situation of the homeless since the Covid-19 crisis began. This continues a long series of responses to homelessness that focus on law enforcement and criminalization rather than seeking out solutions to the problem and housing people.

Yes, the risk of fire is a serious threat and this is precisely why we need to make every effort we can to getting people housed with access to services quickly.

I personally live in a building downtown that was nearly burned down as the result of an arson attempt by a mentally unstable homeless man. Were his issues exacerbated by his condition of homelessness, police harassment, social exclusion, and lack of access to medical attention, most definitely!

I am confident that there is an equal threat from arson as there is from negligence. Antagonistic tactics of aggressive law enforcement, harassment, and fines will not address this problem and will likely make the situation worse.

We need to find solutions quickly as fire season approaches to get people into housing and find them access to services. This should be a top priority. There are too many risks associated with the potential for compounded crises.

Fire evacuations and emergency shelters are a potential reality no one wants to consider with Covid-19 continuing to be a threat.

Respectfully,
Eric Navickas

Public Testimony #6

To whom it may concern,

I am writing on behalf of all the local small businesses in Ashland. This past weekend, our business, **Bestow & Bloom** located at 149 N Pioneer St., closed it's doors for good. We are heartbroken. We just celebrated our 3rd anniversary on April 7th. Actually, it was not much of a celebration because we had been closed due to Covid-19 since March 16th. It's hard to think that just 5 months ago Bestow & Bloom was awarded "Emerging Business of 2019" at an awards ceremony hosted by the Chamber of Commerce, and now our business is closed. Please consider funding small business grants to local businesses, so this does not continue to happen to our town.

Sincerely,

Nyki and Chris
Keefe

Public Testimony #7

Council,

My name is Andy Card and I own Oberon's Restaurant and Bar in the Plaza. Oberon's has been completely shut down since Governor Brown gave her orders for restaurants to close their in-dining operations on March 17th. It's now May 4th. Today marks 49 days of 0 revenue generated.

When my wife and I quit our corporate jobs and invested everything we had in Oberon's, we knew that managing cashflow was always the key to survival in the restaurant industry. We were responsible. We always made sure to leave money in the company in case of an economic slowdown in Ashland. For example, a bad few weeks of smoke, an extra snowy January or February, a very wet April, etc.

However, we never thought we'd have to create a financial model based on 49 days of 0 revenue. There's no point because if that situation were to occur then the entire Ashland economy would be in jeopardy. But this is where we find ourselves today. 49 days of 0 revenue.

Yes, there has been Federal support. Let's start with the Paycheck Protection Program. It offers businesses money for 8 weeks of Payroll, Utilities, and Rent. However, the rules are murky. Forgiveness guidelines have yet to be finalized. Most businesses are unsure of how to use them. And if they do use them, how do we get employees to come back to work when they're making more than their normal pay from State and Federal unemployment? All you have to do is read the most recent article in the Mail Tribune about Common Block Brewery in Medford to understand how the Paycheck Protection Program is a total failure and will not help many small businesses.

Suffice it to say, we are struggling to survive. We are not optimistic about Phase 1 opening either. Tables 6ft apart? No bar seating? Closed by 10pm? Having to take the information of each customer that dines? We would have to hire someone specifically to do just that. We can't justify that labor cost. It may not even be worth it until Phase 2 or 3, but we do not know how long it will take to reach each of the subsequent phases.

The city has offered deferral on utilities and food/bev tax. It's helpful for now from a cashflow perspective, but it does not solve the problem. That money is still owed, but we still have not generated any revenue. Every month our bank account is less, so how are we expected to pay the owed utilities and Food/Bev tax? How are we expected to pay rent? How are we expected to survive the winter when that survival relies on tourist revenue from the Summer?

OSF is slated to reopen in September, but there are no guarantees. What happens when infection rates rise in the Fall because we've opened the economy back up? Considering OSF's demographic, there's a fair chance that the festival may not open this year. This would be the final nail in the coffin.

Is the council, the Mayor, and the interim City Administrator okay with having several downtown vacancies for the next year to 18 months? Does it matter? Or will they just be rebuilding years? But who will have the money to rebuild? Big corporations I suspect. Is that what we want for Ashland? I don't and many of the citizens certainly do not either.

It's unconscionable that the City of Ashland would not do everything in their power to save the small businesses in Ashland. We are the pulse of the city. We provide jobs to thousands. We are a gathering place for the hundreds of thousands of tourists that come every year. Which tourist will come back to Ashland after their visit in 2020 or 2021 if many of their favorite restaurant or retail businesses are closed. How depressing would it be to visit a once vibrant tourist town and be met with vacancies on every block? Your rebuilding years will take much longer than you'd expect it to.

I'm asking the City to allow us to keep food/bev tax for Q1 and Q2 or come up with grant money to distribute to the small businesses in Ashland.

Thank you.

Public Testimony #8

Good Evening, Mayor and Council,

I want to take this opportunity to thank Councilor Akins for placing on tonight's agenda a discussion of a small business grant program to help businesses like mine during this difficult time. I also want to thank Councilor Slattery for his excellent recommendation on April 7 that the council support a "NO" vote for the bond measure in order to not appear tone-deaf to the community. That would have been a very wise position for the council to take and I was sorry to see it not adopted. As a result, the ensuing efforts to advocate for the passing of the bond has put you directly at odds with the community and certainly with the small businesses in this town for seeming to place your priority on City Hall instead of assisting the entire community of struggling small businesses.

I run a guest suite listed on AirBnB, VRBO, Booking.com and FlipKey. My entire calendar for May, June, July and the first half of August has been essentially wiped clean with cancellations save for just a small handful of short-term reservations.

To date, I have applied for the PPP, unemployment, and filed my 2019 taxes to ensure that I was in line to receive the federal stimulus check. To date, I have not received a penny of assistance through any one of these means. I am also an AirBnB Superhost and was told by them that there was a possibility of receiving an invitation to their grant program. Nothing. I am already in a precarious financial situation as the last two seasons of my rental have suffered losses due to wildfire smoke. In addition, we are just emerging from our 4-5 month "slow season" where we cannot depend on adequate income from our rentals.

We have grave concerns for our incomes moving forward and I have some suggestions for remedies further down in this letter. As you may well know, our rental season correlates directly with OSF's season (specifically the outdoor plays). March through May are typically considered our shoulder season with June through November 1 being the high season. You can see our concern moving forward as the Oregon Shakespeare Festival MIGHT re-open in September. Other draws to Southern Oregon include the Britt Music Festival, nearby wineries, outdoor adventure outfitters (rafting, for example), and other public events such as the town's film festival, chocolate festival, parades, 4th of July activities - all of which are likely to be cancelled or scaled back due to their nature of drawing crowds.

We fill a significant and vital role in the city's economic structure. We work extremely hard to maintain attractive, clean, sanitary, inviting spaces for visitors to Ashland, and pay dearly for that through our utility bills. I encourage you to read some of our reviews - we are delivering far more than a place to sleep...we are shuttling visitors to plays/the airport, leaving them local bottles of wine, pastries and stocking our guest rooms with other local goods. We are patronizing the Ashland Co-op, the Grange, and other local businesses as we shop for our rooms and gardens. We are recommending our favorite restaurants, events, and shops. We arrange for hiking, biking and rafting excursions. We inform visitors about the local farmer's markets, hot springs, community events, classes, winter sports, and art walks. We drive business in Ashland! We are on the front lines of promoting all of the wonderful ways visitors can enjoy our town and region. And, we do this at no extra cost to the visitor or the city. We are motivated to offer the highest-quality experience we can possibly create and our five-star reviews speak to that!

I have already spent time and money as I do every year during the slow season in order to continue to deliver a high-quality experience here at Stone's Throw Bungalow. I am extremely dependent on my rental income to pay my bills and cover my expenses. I have been a resident of Ashland for 22 years and have been in the hospitality industry for the past 12 years. And, yes, I am a licensed and legal operation. In addition to my bungalow rental, I work as a graphic designer/environmental educator (and, as a result, hold a SECOND business license within the city of Ashland). I don't have to remind you that living in this town is becoming increasingly expensive. I have noticed a disturbing trend over the past 22 years as more and more, I'm unable to enjoy what Ashland has to offer as I struggle to keep my income in line with the cost of living in Ashland.

Suggestions for remedying the immediate situation: 1) using TOT reserves to serve as a "rainy day" fund to infuse these tiny businesses with a source of relief in the coming months and continuing to have TOT reserves set aside for this purpose due to unforeseen impacts, including wildfires; 2) issuing a credit on our utility bills including revisiting the sewer rates you charge for even the smallest guest rental property. I live alone and rent to two guests maximum in my business. Three people cannot be having such a severe impact on the sewer system; 3) providing direct relief to our industry through other financial means that you are currently exploring and securing.

Thank you so much for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Karin Onkka, Proprietor

Stone's Throw Bungalow Ashland, Oregon