

City of Ashland
PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION
STUDY SESSION
Minutes
May 14, 2018

ATTENDEES

Present: Commissioners Gardiner (5:45), Heller, Landt, Lewis, Director Black; Recreation Superintendent Dials; Interim Parks Superintendent McFarland; Forestry Division Supervisor Minica; Executive Assistant Dyssegard; Minute-taker Manuel

Absent: City Council Liaison Mayor Stromberg; Commissioner Miller

CALL TO ORDER

Acting Chair Landt called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. at The Grove 1195 E. Main.

PUBLIC INPUT

There was none.

BICYCLE SKILLS PARK PROPOSAL (INFORMATION)

Minica noted that a group of interested citizens had approached APRC with a request to build a bicycle skills park. Initiated by Casey Botts and supported by Bill Roussel, President of the Rogue Valley Mountain Bike Association (RVMBA), would present a proposal for consideration. The plan would be based upon locating the facility on public land – with Ashland Creek Park (ACP) as the preferred location. Staff was asking for input from the Commissioners regarding the plan, primarily because Ashland Creek Park was governed by a Master Plan that would have to be amended.

Black stated that Botts approached APRC because the mountain bike community had identified a need for a bicycle skills park. He explained that APRC had considered a pump-track some years ago but were unable to determine a suitable location. Black indicated that Botts had evaluated several possible locations, of which Ashland Creek Park was one.

Black relayed that further discussion should not focus on specifics, as no decision was needed at this time. The proposal would be developed if the Commissioners had an interest in the project. He pointed out that staff was concerned about the appropriateness of the location, given the phased development of ACP per the Master Plan. Black stated that the addition of a bicycle skills park at Ashland Creek Park would depend upon direction from the Commissioners indicating that the preferred location was appropriate.

Landt called **Casey Botts** of 456 Baker St. Ashland and **Bill Roussel**, President of Rogue Valley Mountain Bike Association (RVMBA) forward.

Landt suggested that the two present their idea without specifics - focusing instead on the benefits to the community.

Botts stated that the proposed bike skills park was based upon a need to provide a facility in Ashland for one of the fastest growing sports in the country - mountain biking. He noted that Ashland would benefit by becoming a bike-tourist destination, tapping into mountain bike demographics that had not yet been targeted.

Botts proposed a multi-phased facility that could accommodate a growing number of youthful mountain bikers. He noted that the emphasis would be on bike safety, progression, sustainability and community. Botts indicated that plans would include areas for intermediate and advanced riders as well.

Botts described the bike park as a collection of features consisting of variable terrain surfaces, riding lanes and berms and rollers shaped in such a way as to offer a safe experience for all who chose to ride there. He said circular or connecting features are called pump-tracks. Smaller areas of individual features are called skill areas – like practicing twists and turns. Trails are called flow trails or slopestyle trails.

Botts explained that a bike park was needed in Ashland because it would provide an additional opportunity for children in Ashland to experience a sport promoting active, healthy lifestyles. The facility would create space for beginning riders to become practiced before attempting the watershed trails - trails that are more suited for advanced riders. Beginning bikers would then become the next generation of mountain bikers.

Botts stated that children would be taught good stewardship and mountain bikers in Ashland would host outdoor events, festivals and other activities that would add an element of fun to responsible trail riding and trail stewardship.

The first phase of the plan would be to build an asphalt surfaced pump-track. Phase II would be a skills zone featuring ramps, twists and turns to develop balance and confidence. Phase III would be a flow-trail or slopestyle line to offer short trail experiences more in line with an actual bike trail.

Botts highlighted the proposed location at Ashland Creek Park because of its accessibility to area schools, the existing infrastructure such as benches, restrooms and pathways and the connectivity to the Skate Park and playground. Construction of the mountain bike park would be undertaken by professionals in the field with a projected cost of \$250,000. Project costs would be raised through local sponsorships, grants, private donations and fundraising events.

Botts requested that APRC dedicate public space for the project - preferably within Ashland Creek Park. He described his vision as a community gathering place where beginners and advanced riders could safely and sustainably ride. Botts emphasized the return on investment as the engagement of Ashland's youth in a healthy lifestyle sport.

Roussel thanked the Commissioners for the opportunity to speak. He relayed his experience with the annual CR Mountain Bike Festival – where attendance is approximately 50,000 people with 10,000 bikers participating in mountain bike competitions. He said a significant number of youth also participated.

Roussel noted that Ashland does not have a mountain bike facility. He reviewed various options in Ashland where children learn to bike - noting that most are problematic. He explained that Ashland's trails are too advanced for children who are not skilled and he advocated for support of the proposed mountain bike skills park.

Heller commented that the proposal to build and operate a bicycle skills park was commendable, but that one of the concerns APRC would have was the upkeep and maintenance of the facility once it was in place. Roussel replied that the Rogue Valley Mountain Bike Association had an established record of working with APRC to maintain the trails. He stated that an asphalt pump-track would require very little if any maintenance and the company providing the track would include upkeep.

In response to a question by Heller, Botts indicated that the number of young people learning to ride bikes was growing. Roussel agreed, stating that the number of people riding along the White Rabbit Trail in particular had increased dramatically.

There followed a brief discussion about hardscape in the parks and whether there were alternatives more in keeping with the natural environment. Black noted that the details of the project had yet to be worked out and staff's intent was to determine the level of Commissioner interest for a bike skills facility.

Public Comment

David Young of 747 Oak St. Ashland was called forward.

Young referred to his background as a member and former Chair of the Bicycle/Pedestrian Commission, noting his support for bicycle sports.

Young noted that Ashland Creek Park had been developed with a Master Plan in place. He indicated that the plan was to be implemented in phases – with an intent to preserve its importance as a riparian area. The Master Plan emphasized that protection of the natural landscape was a priority. Young talked about the unfinished phases for the Park and the community gardens housed there, stating that although a bicycle skills park was a good idea, Ashland Creek Park was not a suitable location.

Michael Niemann of 31 W Hersey St. Ashland was called forward.

Niemann talked about the oasis that characterized Ashland Creek Park. He stated that in his opinion, the site was not large enough to include the features planned for the bike park. He cited constraints such as the lack of parking, the removal of green space and the lack of scale. Maintenance issues would be long-term; he noted that even asphalt degrades over time.

Niemann suggested that the BMX Park would be a viable alternative. He stated that a bicycle skills facility was a good idea - it was just the location in Ashland Creek Park that was out of place.

Jeff Withol of 589 Oak St. Ashland, was called forward.

Withol described current activities in the park, noting that park users did so because of its quiet and peaceful atmosphere; a place where people could go to enjoy nature and regenerate.

Withol stated that the park was originally envisioned as a natural area with a portion of the property left undeveloped. He noted that ADA access to Ashland Creek could be compromised if the bicycle park was developed in the area. Withol highlighted references to water permeable surfaces – noting the park's location in the flood zone. He stated that in his opinion, the bike park would diminish the uses that were planned for the park.

Withol advocated against amending the Ashland Creek Park Master Plan and suggested that renovating the BMX Park would be more appropriate.

Marvin Webster of 603 Oak St. Ashland, was called forward.

Webster reiterated that the park was envisioned as open space. He described multiple uses, including a larger-than-planned community garden. He advocated against paving a portion of the green space to accommodate a bicycle skills park.

Don Morehouse of 325 Stoneridge, Ashland was called forward.

Morehouse supported the proposed bike skills area at Ashland Creek Park, noting that the location was in close proximity to the Ashland Skate Park and schools. He said the central location would enhance connectivity.

Black stressed that the proposal was in the initial stages and a decision to approve or deny the proposal was not required at this time. He stated that if the project were approved for the Ashland Creek Park location, an amendment to the Master Plan would be required. Black noted that the specifics had not yet been defined and there were no criteria to consider. He asked for direction for staff regarding working with Botts to further develop a plan.

Commissioner Discussion

Landt led discussion with two questions:

- Is a bike facility something that APRC would like to have in the APRC system?
- If affirmative – where would the facility be located?

Landt explained that the question of a pump-track had come up before and had been considered at a goal-setting session. At that time, there were competing goals, and public input supporting the project was lacking. After a lengthy review, the Commissioners decided that a pump-track was not a priority at that time. Landt applauded the enthusiasm for the project stating that the proposal could be a factor in the next goal-setting session. He noted that public support was a great beginning.

Lewis talked about the Trail Master Plan project currently underway. He stated Ashland's trail system was impressive. Lewis commented that 16 years prior, mountain biking was a fledgling sport and now it was a sanctioned activity. He commented that it was a good fit for Ashland and indicative of the outdoor life that enjoyed by Ashlanders.

Lewis reported that Ashland Creek Park was originally planned as a two-acre neighborhood park. As it turned out, it grew to be a six-acre park – supported because of the importance of protection for a valuable riparian area.

Lewis expressed an interest in developing the BMX Park as a suitable place for a bicycle skills park. He noted that APRC would need to conduct further research to determine whether a bicycle skills facility could be viable. He was supportive of the public's interest in pursuing the project.

Heller relayed his support as well, noting that alternative sites should be considered.

Landt noted that the Skate Park near Ashland Creek Park was not appropriate to the location because the land was in a flood plain. As an avid cyclist, he was supportive of the potential for a bike skills facility in an alternative location.

Landt expressed concern about maintenance of the facility, emphasizing short-term maintenance on a bike track made of dirt, and/or long-term maintenance if asphalt were used. He highlighted the high cost of asphalt - citing as one example APRC's project to refurbish tennis courts.

Landt advised that a needs assessment might provide further information regarding the community's interest in the project. Lewis stated that the most heavily used park in APRC's system was the Skate Park. He suggested that if the bike skills park were built it would be well used.

Black called for direction as to how to proceed. He stated that Ashland had a very active outdoor population and a bike skills facility would be appropriate. Black noted that Ashland's trails were "black-diamond" trails due to challenging terrain and that finding an alternative for beginners would be fitting.

Lewis noted the consensus among Commissioners that they would be supportive of the project - with a preference for a location other than ACP. He suggested that staff work with Botts to determine a suitable alternative. Landt agreed, noting that there were other sites with potential. He stated that the group's commitment to raise the money to construct the facility would take time as well.

McFarland shared that people had been proposing a bike skills area for many years. He confirmed that Ashland's trails were too difficult for those learning to ride and that APRC had made fruitless efforts to find a trail that could work for beginners.

It was agreed by consensus that staff would work with Botts to discuss options for a bicycle skills facility. Landt thanked Botts and Roussel for their presentation.

PIONEER HALL AND COMMUNITY CENTER DISCUSSION (INFORMATION)

- ***Pioneer Hall***

Dials reported that on April 16, 2018, the Ashland City Council discussed the future of Pioneer Hall. Public Works Director Paula Brown presented the following options:

1. Retain the Assembly Occupancy Classification for recreational meeting space to code as emergency overnight shelter only (\$325,409)
2. Convert the zoning to R1 "residential occupancy" to allow transient lodging as a regularly scheduled overnight shelter (\$404,195) or
3. Remove the property from the City's inventory and potentially transfer or divest the asset.

After some discussion, Council directed City staff to prepare a Request for Proposal (RFP) to seek bids for use of the facility. The plan was to release the RFP in mid-to-late June. The open application period would be thirty days.

Dials noted that Pioneer Hall had been used as a community recreation hall for many years. APRC leased the property from the City for \$15,000 annually, renting the building for public and private events. She explained that for the past five years, the City has used the Hall as a winter shelter three to five days per week, significantly decreasing rental opportunities.

Dials detailed the direct costs incurred by APRC for lease of the facility:

- \$15,000 annually for the property paid to the City of Ashland for use of the facility;
- \$13,000 to a contracted custodial company, Pathways, for cleaning the facility;
- Various utility costs;
- APRC custodial staff time at approximately \$3,000 annually.

Revenue generated from use of the building in 2016 / 2017 was approximately \$18,000.

Dials recommended retaining the facility for recreational use by the community, depending upon the level of needed repairs and improvements. She stated that there was a donor interested in discussing the Hall with APRC to explore various options for its use. Dials asked the Commissioners for approval of an initial conversation with the potential donor.

In response to a question by Landt, Dials stated that she had reported direct costs only; administrative costs had not been factored in. She noted that there were groups that used the facility free of charge – either currently or in the recent past – including AARP, American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Boy Scout Troop 112, the Women’s Civic Club and the Ashland Garden Club.

Gardiner asked if APRC had approximately one month to determine a response to the RFP; Black replied affirmatively. He highlighted the restricted use and negative earnings, stating that he would recommend divestiture if APRC continued to pay rent for the building. If the City found another building to house the homeless shelter, then APRC would be able to increase public use, increasing the potential for a profitable outcome.

Lewis suggested using Pioneer Hall without costly upgrades. Black replied that continued use of the non-conforming structure was permitted as long as there was no change in use.

Lewis emphasized the historic nature of the building, noting that there were ways to stabilize and preserve the building without losing the building’s historic integrity. Black agreed, stating that APRC would be supportive of efforts to stabilize the building to ensure public safety.

Landt reviewed the investment potential of the building. He talked about putting money into upgrades and the extended amount of time it would take to achieve a return on the investment. He stated that transferring the building to APRC rather than continuing to pay the City of Ashland \$15,000 annually for use of the facility was preferable. Either way, the building would continue to serve the community. He cautioned against accepting donations to upgrade the building because of the importance of maintaining the historic integrity of the property.

Lewis commented that there were liability issues when attempting to repair or upgrade a historic building. The challenge would be to preserve the structure *as it was* while attempting to meet current safety standards. The building was originally a log cabin – and therefore it was not constructed to current building code.

Lewis noted that using Pioneer Hall for recreational purposes was of value in the community because of the growing demand for recreational services.

Black talked about the safety evaluation that had caused the City to look for other options for a winter shelter. The Fire Marshal had noted that there were no sprinklers in the building and the building had not been retrofitted to withstand potential earthquakes.

Gardiner noted that the City would save money by transferring ownership of the building to APRC. Recreational uses would be day use only - eliminating the need for substantial upgrades. Lewis agreed, stating that there were zoning restrictions as well. He also questioned whether the deed to the property was free and clear - a hurdle that must be addressed if the City intended to sell the building outright.

Landt spoke in support of transferring ownership of the building to APRC. He indicated that APRC could create a more usable space with some cosmetic repairs and cleanup work. Landt advised against continuing to lease the facility.

- ***The Community Center***

Black asked about seeking a transfer for the adjacent Community Center as well. In response to a question by Heller, he stated that the Community Center was also leased at \$15,000 annually. The City set the rates that APRC could charge for activities in the building.

Gardiner stated that the Community Center was also used for recreational purposes. He stated that without renovation, the Center could become a liability for the City. Lewis agreed, stating that much of APRC's business was renting space for public and private use. He commented that transfer of the buildings to APRC would create a healthier balance sheet while benefiting the public by providing space for community gatherings.

Landt suggested that a business plan for the ownership and use of the buildings could provide a snapshot for the City about projected expenses and revenues. He stated that it would also be prudent to help determine whether the buildings could be self-supporting. In his opinion, APRC should not be subsidizing the properties. Lewis commented that if the properties were to break even, rental prices would be more affordable.

Heller asked whether the proposed transfer of the buildings would be in perpetuity. Black replied that APRC's proposal would be that the transfers were held in perpetuity. He stated that the Parks Fund (monies from property taxes) was subsidizing the buildings currently and there was a substantial amount of deferred maintenance. Donor assistance would be helpful.

There followed a discussion focused on the cost-to-benefit ratio. Landt stated that the properties should be profitable and such a goal should be attainable. Gardiner noted that APRC served the citizens of Ashland and represented its residents. Any upgrades for the buildings would benefit the City and its residents.

Lewis stated that the \$800,000 renovation of Garfield Park was a case in point. He noted that in his opinion, there was a balancing act between generating more revenue, as Council had asked, with continuing to provide parks and services to Ashland residents.

Dials reported that there were a limited number of groups using the buildings free of charge. She explained that historically, the waived fees were returned to APRC in the form of thousands of hours of donated time that kept the APRC system beautiful.

Gardiner stated that improving the facilities would yield increased returns. He explained that the properties would become more marketable and people would use the facilities more frequently. Heller remarked that it would also open up evening use, expanding the hours the facilities were available.

Landt described distinctions between APRC's parks (a public trust) and the ownership of buildings (an entrepreneurial opportunity) within the APRC system. He advocated for buildings that would pay for themselves with enough money left over to establish a fund for maintenance of the facilities.

Gardiner directed staff to respond to the RFP with a proposal that included a business plan.

STAFF AND COMMISSIONER UPDATES

Dials invited the Commissioners to the free Ashland World Music Festival scheduled on Saturday May 19, 2018, from noon – 6:00 p.m. in Lithia Park.

ADJOURNMENT INTO EXECUTIVE SESSION

By consensus, Gardiner adjourned into executive session at 7:20 p.m.

Executive Session: Real Estate Discussion and Disposition, ORS 192.660 (2)(e)

ADJOURNMENT OUT OF EXECUTIVE SESSION

By consensus, Gardiner adjourned out of executive session at 7:45 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 7:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Betsy Manuel, Assistant
Ashland Parks and Recreation Commission

These Minutes are not a verbatim record. The narrative has been condensed and paraphrased at times to reflect the discussions and decisions made. Ashland Parks and Recreation Commission Study Sessions and Regular Meetings are digitally recorded and available upon request.