

City of Ashland
PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
August 9, 2017

Present: Commissioners Gardiner, Landt, Lewis, Miller; Director Black; Recreation Superintendent Dials; Interim Parks Superintendent McFarland; Executive Assistant Dyssegard

Absent: Commissioner Heller; Assistant Manuel

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Gardiner called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m. in Council Chambers, 1175 E. Main Street.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There were none.

ITEMS FROM COMMISSIONERS

There were none.

ADDITIONS OR DELETIONS TO THE AGENDA

There were none.

REVIEW AND APPROVE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM SENIOR CENTER SUBCOMMITTEE

Black reviewed the historical context for plans to expand senior programs beginning in 2015. He noted that the adopted goals for APRC (Ashland Parks and Recreation Commission) for that year included the following:

- *“Evaluate the expanded and alternative use of the Senior Center to meet community needs.”*

A comprehensive Performance Audit of APRC was conducted by an outside consultant and subsequently adopted in 2016. All APRC divisions were evaluated, with benchmarks established. The Performance Review for the Senior Center highlighted the following:

- *“Opportunities were available to increase programming that appeals to underserved groups, such as Active Baby Boomers and Retirees, as well as Senior Citizens and the Elderly.”*

In early 2017, a Senior Center Subcommittee was established with the following goals:

- *Gain a greater understanding of the Senior Program and the function it serves (for) the citizens of Ashland. Explore new ways of marketing and program innovation to ensure that the greatest number of citizens are benefited by the Senior Program.*
- *Evaluate the organizational structure of the program to ensure that the organization of the Senior Center and the goals for innovation are aligned for efficiency and service delivery.*

- *Seek advocates of the Senior Program and new ways to increase community involvement through volunteerism.*
- *Evaluate the current Senior Program policies and create an official subcommittee of the Ashland Parks and Recreation Commission reporting directly to the Commissioners to ensure collaboration and governance.*

After the goals were established, a six-month evaluation followed.

Black stated that public discussion held the previous day at the final Senior Program Subcommittee meeting seemed to emphasize cost recovery rather than the needs of the seniors. He noted that the evaluation process focused on establishing goals that would enhance and expand senior programming and services.

Black said he revised the recommendations to better explain the cost recovery model. He relayed that APRC's programs are not offered to the community toward generating a profit. Parks and Rec programs are subsidized by Ashland taxpayers. The cost recovery model is applicable to those groups who use services that others do not; therefore, they receive a disproportionate benefit. Examples include programs offered at the ice rink, swimming pool and golf course. The norm is to establish cost recovery goals that are a percentage of the true cost of the service or program. Users contribute, creating more balanced programs that benefit the community as a whole.

Black noted that the priority for the Senior Center was to expand senior outreach and offer more robust programming. In discussing ways to reach those goals, the Senior Program Subcommittee completed a series of recommendations. Those recommendations were revised to better reflect public input and a broader view, Revised recommendations were outlined as follows:

Revised Recommendations

1. Form an official Subcommittee of the Ashland Parks and Recreation Commission to provide oversight and guidance to the Senior Program.
2. Switch operational oversight and management of the Ashland Senior Program to APRC's Recreation Division.
3. Move the physical oversight and management of the Senior Program to The Grove, with the goal of creating a "multi-generational" center, keeping a presence at the current center through scheduled classes and the Food & Friends meals program.
4. For a period of three months or so, temporarily cut back on center operating hours and some functions; focus on redesigning the Senior Program to make it more robust and inclusive.
 - *Ensure that throughout the transition, core services are preserved and the center is open and accessible to seniors for scheduled appointments and classes and for drop-in-visits on a slightly more limited basis than the current schedule.*
 - *During the transition period, develop a plan for invigorating and expanding senior programming; present it to the Commissioners for review.*

- *Perform multiple open house events and conduct a survey of Ashland citizens covering all aspects of the Senior Program.*
 - *To accomplish the transition to a new Senior Program, lay off current staff (1.7 FTE) and temporarily reassign duties among other APRC employees to maintain core services.*
5. Implement the plan for increasing recreation and other program offerings to better serve the senior population; revise Senior Program functions, staffing and job descriptions accordingly.
 6. Through the process of reorganization and review, explore options to increase revenue to offset some of the costs associated with the expense of running the Senior Program.

PUBLIC INPUT

Jackie Bachman of 943 B. Street in Ashland was called forward.

Bachman talked about her experience with the Senior Center as it is today. She detailed the programs currently offered to seniors and expressed concern about the proposed move to The Grove. In addition, Bachman voiced concerned about increased fees and additional financial obligations such as requirements for teachers at the center to meet the City's insurance requirements.

Bachman characterized the current status of the center as warm and inclusive, invigorated and caring.

Bachman stated that her biggest concern was the process of approval for the recommendations, indicating that public input was insufficient and the Senior Program had not been adequately represented. Bachman asked that a vote to approve APRC recommendations be postponed pending additional public participation and input.

Anne Bellegia of 472 Thimbleberry Lane in Ashland was called forward

Bellegia stated that her views stemmed from active participation with groups that serve seniors, including the Rogue Valley Senior Council. While noting that she was not representing the organizations mentioned, she stated that her opinions were formed by those experiences.

Bellegia relayed that seniors are a large segment of the population in Ashland and she was appreciative of the APRC goal to expand programs for seniors with the caveat that there were additional points to consider when contemplating changes that would affect seniors and the programs designed for them.

Bellegia questioned the expectations for increased revenue through a cost-recovery program. She referred to the lifelong learning programs sponsored by OLLI (Osher Lifelong Learning Institute) at SOU, sharing financial data that indicated that the price points for seniors in the Valley were significantly different from APRC expectations.

Bellegia commented that in her opinion, considering senior programs as recreational offerings overlooked the need for place that the Senior Center provides. She stated that social isolation is a significant factor in the rates of morbidity and mortality for seniors. Studies show that social isolation is twice as detrimental to healthy

outcomes as alcoholism, smoking and obesity. The establishment of a place that is comfortable for seniors is an important factor in reducing the impacts of social isolation.

Bellegia highlighted the costs of long-term health care, intimating that independent living saves taxpayer and family assets and promotes well-being for loved ones and their communities.

Claudia Ballard of 170 Reiten Drive in Ashland was called forward.

Ballard asked that the Commissioners table the vote to give the Ashland community more time to review the proposed recommendations for Ashland's Senior Center. She stated that a review of the results of the Performance Audit would be helpful as well as other documentation to understand the rationale for the changes proposed. Ballard reported that the Senior Center recommendations had become available to the public at 4:00 p.m. Monday, August 7, 2017 – too quickly for a measured response.

Ballard stated that the portion of the APRC budget dedicated to the Senior Center and its programs was approximately one-sixth of the APRC budget as a whole: \$175,000 of \$11,000,000. She proposed returning oversight of the Center and its programs to Ashland's City Council, stating that the Council's goals were in better alignment with provisions for senior care.

Patricia Greenough of 70 Garfield St. in Ashland was called forward.

Greenough noted the lag time between the Performance Audit and the subsequent reorganization of the Senior Center. She stated that during that time, grants could have been sought to support the Center.

Greenough shared her personal story, and the impact that sudden change has on the aging. She stated that it takes time for the elderly to adjust to change. She correlated the Center to a home for seniors – a place where people can meet for quiet conversations – stimulating the mind and creating a sense of connectivity.

Greenough talked about the loss of current Senior Center staff and the proposed relocation of the Center. She commented that seniors needed a place to go that was less stressful, where seniors could be themselves and interact with their peers.

Sandra Sawyer of 585 Thorton Way in Ashland was called forward.

Sawyer asked that the Commissioners table the vote, indicating that the changes to the Senior Center were unknown to those most concerned until recently. She asked for additional time for research, discussion and negotiation, stating that there were alternatives to the proposed recommendations that should be taken into consideration.

Gwen Davies of 860 Harmony Ln. in Ashland was called forward.

Davies highlighted 40 years of residency in Ashland as well as her work as a medical social worker specializing in assisting the disabled and the elderly.

Davies commented that the public should have been more intimately involved in the process. She contrasted the lack of information and last-minute involvement to similar processes in years past when multiple public meetings were held, collaboration was valued and public outreach was paramount.

Davies advocated against a vote on the recommendations and institution of a process that would allow proper commentary from those affected by the Commissioners' decisions. She stated that seniors were taxpayers and as such were within their rights to request additional hearings.

David Hill of 236 Terrace St. in Ashland was called forward.

Hill commended the Commissioners on their stewardship of Ashland's parks and open spaces. He suggested that entertainment and recreational services should remain separate from the more serious need for senior services. Hill stated that APRC was known for the services they provide for the community as a whole – services that are very different from meeting the needs of seniors. He advocated for a return of Senior Program oversight to the City of Ashland.

Ann Magill of 1022 Eureka St. in Ashland was called forward.

Magill affirmed the ways in which seniors in Ashland display fiduciary responsibility – citing support for education as an example. She relayed her experience as a volunteer for Food & Friends, stating that the communal meal served at the Center was important to many seniors. Magill questioned whether The Grove would be able to provide a similar service – noting that to her knowledge there was no kitchen at the facility.

Magill stated that she too supported oversight by the City of Ashland. She highlighted the expertise of current staff, objecting to the recommendation to remove them, and suggested that the Commissioners take time to see how the current senior staff interacts with seniors and administers to their needs.

Diane Cooper of 183 E. Hersey St. in Ashland was called forward.

Cooper stated that while she was a newcomer to Ashland, her perspective regarding the Senior Center was formed over thirty years of working as a licensed clinical social worker. She urged the Commissioners to refrain from disrupting the seniors by moving the Center as proposed and recommended that the Commissioners arrange for oversight that included experts in geriatrics as well as staffers who have geriatric expertise. She suggested that there be continued discussion pertaining to the proposed closing of the Senior Center.

Wes Brain of 298 Garfield St. in Ashland was called forward.

After asking a question about the occupancy of the room, Brain explained that he had lived in Ashland since 1956. He stated that he was appreciative of the services provided for Ashland's seniors. He expressed concern about the gentrification of Ashland, noting that many young people and seniors could not afford to live in Ashland.

Brain asked that the vote be tabled pending a more democratic process.

Will Churchill at 642 Sutton Place in Ashland was called forward.

Churchill referenced APRC's recommendations, noting that there seemed to be an issue with the manager of the Senior Center, Chris Dodson. He stated that it was apparent to him that Chris always busy assisting seniors, handling paperwork and answering the phone. He stated that in his opinion, Chris performed her duties and interacted with seniors with care and compassion.

Churchill expressed concern about conducting the Special Meeting when Chris was out of town on vacation, indicating that the managerial issues stated in the report were nebulous and reflected a disconnect between APRC and the Senior Program Manager.

Jean Maxwell of 950 Harmony Ln. in Ashland was called forward.

Maxwell detailed her experience as a teacher at SOU who supervised practicum students whose practicum experiences included working at the Senior Center. She stated that students who interacted with the Senior Center were uniformly impressed with its management. The importance of the Center as a culturally rooted place was apparent as was the care, support and advocacy of the former and current managers.

Maxwell talked about her experience as a member of the Senior Council, stating that the professionalism of staff was intrinsic and appreciated.

Brenda Gould of 298 Garfield St. in Ashland was called forward.

Gould recounted that she and others have had positive experiences at the Center – a perspective that is different from the information provided in the recommendations. She stated that she would like to see the Commissioners accommodate the senior community by holding additional meetings regarding the issues surrounding the Senior Center. Gould noted that Ashlanders valued transparency and for her and her husband as well as other seniors, a larger discussion should take place.

Susanne Severeid of in Ashland was called forward.

Severeid expressed the hope that the Commissioners who were not at the meeting on August 8, 2017, had reviewed the public comments received. She stated that it was clear that the citizens of Ashland had much to say, noting that the senior programs in Ashland were much more than line items on a financial statement.

Severeid highlighted two of the Senior Center's volunteers – Mildred who is in her 80's and Verne who is 96. The two volunteers serve meals for Ashland's Meals on Wheels program, receiving awards for outstanding volunteerism from President Obama. The awards represented 4000 hours of unpaid volunteer work.

Severeid referred to the meeting held the previous day, highlighting commentary from Director Black that indicated that one way to cut costs would be to ask the volunteers to clean the restrooms. Severeid asked the Commissioners to evaluate their position on this issue in terms of respect for the elderly. She stated that recommendations to dismantle the Senior Center and its programs were detrimental to the most vulnerable seniors in Ashland.

David Savage of 328 Wimer St. in Ashland was called forward.

Savage stated that he was most concerned about the treatment of Senior Center staff. He referenced a portion of the memo written by Director Black dated August 9, 2017. Objecting to the characterization of manager Chris Dodson, Savage stated that Senior Center staff and volunteers meet the needs of vulnerable seniors.

Amy Cuddy of 1782 Homes Ave. in Ashland was called forward.

Cuddy talked about the difference between recreational activities and senior care. She relayed that the Senior Center functions as a resource for the community – specializing in senior care. Cuddy expressed her gratitude

for Chris Dodson who advised her personally when Cuddy had questions about how to best care for her aging mother.

Cuddy shared her level of expertise with charitable organizations. She noted that public service organizations seldom receive grants for operations that are the responsibility of municipalities. She cautioned APRC against looking to those types of organizations to assist with senior care in Ashland.

Cuddy advocated for additional discussion to include a wider variety of perspectives. She highlighted the incongruity of the APRC's all-male decision-makers that were acting on behalf of Ashland's seniors, most of whom are women.

Evelyn Kinsella of 2860 State Street in Medford was called forward.

Kinsella noted her role as the manager of the Food & Friends meals program for Rogue Valley Council of Governments (RVCOG). She stated that the program oversees meals for seniors – in homes throughout the Valley as well as in the Centers. She noted that 59% of those served by the meals program were over 80 years of age.

Kinsella addressed the comparatives specified in Director Black's memorandum dated August 9, 2017. She stated that when canvassing the Centers listed in the memo, she found that all of the centers listed were rent-free and the meals provided were sponsored by governmental agencies. The RVCOG agency provides meals in Ashland as well as for others in Jackson County. Kinsella stated that if RVCOG were assessed a fee for their services, the program in Ashland would be impacted. She asked that the Commissioners consider the ramifications should cost recovery goals affect the Food & Friends and Meals on Wheels programs.

Javan Reid of 573 Scenic Dr. in Ashland was called forward.

Reid advocated for additional public hearings due to the number of people who had not been heard. He suggested that there were other avenues to pursue to raise revenue such as a special tax or conducting fundraisers to better support senior programs, volunteering to assist APRC in obtaining the funds needed for the Senior Center. Reid argued against closing the Center and urged consideration of alternative sources of funding.

Candy Barnhill of 947 Cypress Pt. Loop in Ashland was called forward.

Barnhill emphasized the mission of the Ashland Senior Program, underscoring the focus on building a support system for older Ashland residents that enables them to live more independently as contributing members of the community. She talked about the differences between a social services program and programs that are strictly recreational. She noted the founding fathers' original plan was to locate and inform isolated seniors about health and wellness programs designed to help them maintain their independent status.

Barnhill stated that the Ashland Senior Program was currently administered by appropriately trained staff whose challenges included maintaining services under increasing budgetary constraints. She indicated that the Senior Program operated under a donation model, as opposed to a cost-recovery model, intimating that the model was developed early on. Barnhill stated that the donation model was more suited to seniors with limited incomes.

Barnhill described programs with a holistic wellness component, designed to optimize self-sufficiency and provide avenues for greater socialization and connectedness to society. Since its inception in 1973, the Senior Center had become a highly-regarded resource because of that focus.

Barnhill advocated for City of Ashland administration rather than APRC administration. She stated that the program began under the City's aegis with a meals program and was moved to APRC in 2006. Barnhill recommended that the program be administered by the City, utilizing funds from Ashland's unrestricted revenue.

Barnhill noted plans by APRC to reorganize the Senior Program into recreational classes, administered by the Recreation Division. She highlighted the difference between social services with a high community value and recreational classes. She indicated that the recommendations reflected minimal public input, stating that such an important decision should be decided by the citizens of Ashland, with sufficient input from those who use the services regularly.

Barnhill stated that there was \$29,000 of donated funds earmarked for the Senior Program within the Ashland Parks Foundation accounts. She questioned whether that funding would remain dedicated to the Senior Program. Barnhill asked APRC to revise the recommendations to reflect public sentiment and to give the citizens of Ashland an opportunity to vote on the preferred outcome for the Senior Center and its programs.

Art Tetrault of 509 YMCA Way in Ashland was called forward.

Tetrault stated that the Ashland Senior Program provided a way forward for him. He stated that one visit was not sufficient to understand all available offerings. From meals for seniors who could no longer provide for themselves to a venue where people helped one another, the Senior Center was working well. Tetrault noted that the current location of the Senior Center was appropriate and that transferring to The Grove would be a hardship for many seniors.

Tetrault cautioned the Commissioners against reorganizing a program that was working.

Peggy Duvall of 165 Meade St. in Ashland was called forward.

Duvall focused on alternative perspectives – looking at the location and position of the building, for example. She stated that the current Senior Center was close to the street with easy access to the Center. She stated that it was a more manageable site for the elderly who find navigating problematic.

Duvall indicated that seniors would be happy to assist APRC in efforts to raise money. She stated that incomes for many seniors are fixed, limiting the ability to pay, but seniors are also willing to help – providing energy and enthusiasm about fundraising opportunities.

Sue Crader of 2957 Barber Street in Ashland was called forward.

Crader stated that her area of expertise was non-profit management – grant writing, fundraising and staffing. She noted that the operations of the Senior Center with its myriad programs and services was outstanding given the Center's small budget. She talked about the factors that make a Center work when funding is limited, such as dependence upon volunteers.

Crader indicated that her interpretation of the recommendations provided by Director Black was that it was a proposal to cut staff and increase revenue. She commented that in her experience the two were diametrically opposed and that more time was needed to properly implement a fundraising plan. Staffing was needed to implement and manage program changes properly – to move and develop alternative programs. In addition, the well-being and safety of seniors must be attended to concurrently.

Crader urged the Commissioners to table the recommendations until the changes proposed could be implemented respectfully and funded properly, with the seniors receiving care and adequate support.

Discussion among Commissioners

Lewis noted that he had attended the six Senior Program Subcommittee meetings where an in-depth review was conducted. Recommendations from the Performance Audit were a part of the discussion, about how best to integrate the Senior Center and its programs into the APRC system.

Lewis stated that the recommendations included the following:

- Ensure that throughout the transition, core services are preserved and the Center is open and accessible to seniors for scheduled appointments and classes and for drop-in visits on a slightly more limited basis during the transition period.

Lewis said APRC was asked by Council to take control of Ashland Senior Program operations and programming back in 2006. To integrate the Senior Program properly, APRC had to evaluate all of its policies and programs. The Senior Program was one of many APRC divisions that was reviewed by APRC management. Lewis reflected upon the responsibilities APRC Commissioners addressed as good stewards of the public trust. He noted that as elected officials, Commissioners acted as proxies for the citizens of Ashland. Part of their obligation was to listen to constituents by holding public meetings that allowed for a better understanding of all points of view.

Landt clarified that the Senior Program was managed by the Recreation Division Superintendent until approximately two years prior. He asked about the feasibility of an Ad hoc Senior Advisory Board Committee during the transition period. In response to a question by Black, Landt stated that his vision for the Ad hoc committee would be to engage those seniors who would be interested in assisting with the transition. Black asked whether the ad hoc committee would work with Commissioners to develop job descriptions, create programs and assist with attaining the goals set out in the recommendations. Landt explained that in his opinion, the ad hoc committee would assist APRC during the transition period by providing feedback as the transition unfolded. Black replied that APRC would welcome interested citizens.

In response to a question by Black, Landt clarified that an Advisory Subcommittee would function in an advisory capacity for the short term as new programs evolved.

Gardiner stated that he had originally proposed convening the Senior Center Subcommittee so that APRC could become more familiar with the Center and its workings. He stated that APRC was incorporating many of the Performance Audit recommendations into all APRC divisions. He acknowledged the difficult decisions that the Commissioners must make to improve efficiencies. Gardiner stressed that the Commissioners were

committed to the Senior Program and services and he invited those with an interest to work with them to move the programs forward.

Landt suggested that the recommendations be amended as follows:

1. Form an official Subcommittee of the Ashland Parks and Recreation Commission to provide oversight and guidance to the Senior Program during the transition period.
2. Switch operational oversight and management of the Ashland Senior Program back to the Recreation Division.
3. Move the physical oversight and management of the Senior Program to The Grove, with a goal of creating a “multi-generational” center, keeping a presence at the current Center through scheduled classes and Food & Friends.
4. For a period of three or so months, focus on redesigning the Senior Program to make it more robust and more inclusive:
 - a) Ensure that throughout the transition, core services are preserved and the Center is open and accessible to seniors for scheduled visits and classes and for drop-in visits.
 - b) During the transition period, develop a plan for invigorating and expanding the Senior Program and present it to the Commissioners for review.
 - i. Perform multiple open house events and conduct a survey of the citizens of Ashland covering all aspects of the Senior Program.
 - ii. Create an ad hoc Senior Advisory Committee selected from program participants and related professional field experts.
 - c) To accomplish transition to a new Senior Program, lay off current staff (1.7 FTE) and temporarily reassign duties among other APCR employees to maintain core services.
5. Implement the plan for increasing recreation and other program offerings to better serve the senior population, and revise Senior Center functions, staffing and job descriptions accordingly.
6. Throughout the process of reorganization and review, explore options to increase revenue to offset some of the costs associated with the expense of running the Senior Program.

There followed a brief discussion that involved clarifying the physical oversight. Landt suggested removal of the third recommendation as the move to the Grove was understood.

Further Discussion:

In response to a question by Gardiner, Landt clarified that the ad hoc committee would remain in place until the Senior Program transition was completed.

Miller noted that the testimony had convinced him that the Senior Program was valued by the community. He stated that he would vote in favor of the recommendations because he was convinced that the recommended changes would result in an increase in the number of seniors served, and that the programs offered would be enriched.

Motion: Landt moved to approve the recommendations as presented and amended (removal of Recommendation # 3). Lewis seconded.

The vote was all yes by roll call vote.

ADJOURNMENT INTO EXECUTIVE SESSION

By consensus, Gardiner adjourned into Executive Session at 6:55 p.m.

Executive Session pursuant to ORS 192.660 (2)(h) and ORS 192.660 (2) (e)

ADJOURNMENT OUT OF EXECUTIVE SESSION

By consensus, Gardiner adjourned out of executive session at 7:50 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Betsy Manuel, Minute-Taker
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.