



MINUTES FOR STUDY SESSION

PARK COMMISSION

February 5, 2025

Electronic via Zoom – 6:00 PM

Commissioners Present: Adams, Bachman (Chair), Gardiner, Landt (Vice Chair), Weiner

Staff Present: Director Houston, Deputy Director Dials, Senior Services Division

Superintendent Mettler, Executive Assistant Mero

Absent: None

- I. **CALL TO ORDER** – Bachman called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM
- II. **ROLL CALL** – Bachman reported the attendance of all five Commissioners
- III. **PUBLIC FORUM** – None (Written testimony included at end of minutes.)
- IV. **DEPARTMENT POLICY FORMAT** – Director Houston

BACKGROUND In reviewing Department records, it appears that three (3) methods have been or are being used to track and manage policies and procedures. This has led to inconsistencies, an inability to find specific policies or procedures, and no consistent review of policies and procedures to ensure they are compliant with Oregon Law and City Code.

To ensure that the public and staff have access to and can review the Department's policies and procedures, a system needs to be implemented.

ASSESSMENT The Department needs three (3) types of policies and procedures: a policy that is approved by the Commission, a policy that is approved by the Director, and procedures to implement all policies. Staff have reviewed several other jurisdiction policies and developed the following categories to address the business need:

- **Policy** – a policy that impacts the Department as a whole and/or impacts the public's engagement with the Department's programs. This policy would require Commission approval. Examples include a policy on park hours, a policy on park planning requirements, etc.

- **Protocol** – a policy that impacts Department staff and/or has an operational impact. This policy would require Director approval. Examples include a policy on refunds for park programs, a policy on vacation requests, etc.
- **Procedure** – an outline of the process staff follows to accomplish a policy or protocol. Procedures would require the Director’s approval, as they are operational. Examples include a procedure on how to complete a refund, a procedure on how to clean a restroom, etc.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS OR SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS Staff have provided examples of what the forms would look like for policies, protocols, and procedures. In addition, staff have provided a list of the identified existing policies, categories, or chapters in which the new policies, protocols, and procedures would be organized and new policies, protocols, and procedures that are needed.

Staff is seeking input from the Commission to assist in implementing the new policies, protocols, and procedures. Key questions are:

- Do the chapters/categories reflect the work we do?
- Are there additional policies, protocols, or procedures that are needed?
- Are there any policies, protocols, or procedures that are of higher priority?

Staff will use the input from Commission to begin developing new policies for review by the Commission. A policy on policies, protocols, and procedures is the first policy proposed for adoption.

POLICIES, PLANS & GOALS SUPPORTED This would align with the FY23-25 APRC Goal #1 – Employ best management practices.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS This will not create an additional cost to the Department. It will be a part of the existing administrative duties. Workloads will be managed based on department priorities.

Discussion:

It was suggested that a date line be added adjacent to the signature line on each document. Noted that there are some policies missing from the list Director Houston shared with the Commissioners.

V. **PICKLEBALL DISCUSSION** – Director Houston

SITUATION

Pickleball Users have requested to use Hunter Park tennis courts for a fundraising tournament and would like additional pickleball courts.

BACKGROUND Pickleball has been available at multiple non-city managed sites, but over the past decade several of those sites have eliminated that use for a variety of reasons. In parks managed sites, pickleball has only been permitted at Lithia Park. As I understand it, initially there was co-mingled tennis and pickleball on the Lithia Park courts. This led to conflicts among the users and a request for more dedicated pickleball courts.

To address the need and reduce user conflicts, the Commission made a policy decision to re-develop the Lithia Park courts to be used for pickleball only and the Hunter Courts to be used only for tennis. Staff have interpreted the policy decision to mean that even with a special use permit no pickleball is allowed at the Hunter Park courts.

ASSESSMENT Pickleball has been a growing sport since its inception in the mid-1980s on Whidbey Island, WA. A key demographic for users is that they are over the age of 50. While younger age groups are growing, the key demographic remains over the age of 50. The City of Ashland has 28.6% of the population over the age of 65. This is compared to the state average of 19.6%. The Ashland Oregon Pickleball Club (AOPC) has reported having over 300 members.

The National Recreation and Parks Performance Review identified that 42% of park and recreation agencies have pickleball courts. For all agencies, the average is one pickleball court for 12,597 residents. In comparable sized communities, the average is one pickleball court for 7,737 residents. Ashland has one pickleball court for every 2,670 residents. Ashland has 290% more pickleball courts than comparable communities in America.

Staff identified 10 communities in southern Oregon and key communities in western and central Oregon. A review of all public and private courts was made. An analysis of the number of public pickleball courts was conducted utilizing a level of service model where the population was divided by number of courts and assessed at a per 1,000 level of residents. The analysis identified that the community of Ashland ranked #5 in number of courts per 1,000 residents. When school courts were removed from the analysis, since they are not open to the general public a majority of the year, Ashland rose to the #3 spot. Comparable to key communities in Oregon, Ashland is providing a level of service higher than many communities.

On March 14, 2024, John and Rebecca Lane, of the AOPC, did an analysis of nine (9) potential pickleball court locations in Ashland. The Department received a copy of this evaluation on January 10, 2025. Nine (9) sites were reviewed. Two of the sites were not managed by the City. Of the seven (7) remaining sites, only two sites are consistent with potential future park capital development plans. Those parks are East Main Community

Park and Hunter Community Park. The other five (5) sites have significant impacts with existing uses, size of the park or parking limitations.

Pickleball is a destination activity. This means that the park must be able to accommodate vehicles and have restroom facilities for those users coming to use the facilities. The Lane's evaluation identified a rough cost of \$50,000 per pickleball site to develop the courts. This number is not consistent with our project cost estimate for Hunter Park. For each court, typically they are constructed in 2's or 4's, the cost would be \$50,000 to \$150,000. Parking, restrooms, etc. are additional considerations that would increase the cost per court.

The Department completed a survey in the fall of 2024 that reviewed the recreational experience for pickleball users. There were 112 respondents. A majority of respondents (56%) play in the morning. The majority (79.46%) have to wait less than 30 minutes for a pickleball court. 63.4% are unlikely to pay for reserved court space. This survey suggests that there is sufficient supply of pickleball courts to meet the demand. The introduction of a reservation fee for a couple of courts could address the concern over waiting less than 30 minutes to get on a court.

Staff's assessment is that the Department is meeting the recreational needs of pickleball users. Statistically, we are providing a higher level of service than comparable communities. Ashland has a higher population of people over 65 than comparable communities. Further investigation of the community's recreational needs is recommended as part of the Parks, Recreation, Open space, and Senior services (PROS) strategic plan. This will be occurring during 2025.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS OR SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS Staff is asking for Commission input on one critical question to address the event planning needs for the pickleball community:

- When the Commission stated no pickleball at Hunter Park Tennis Courts, did that include special events?
 - Typically, special event permitting processes are designed to allow non-conforming or not allowed activities for a specific event or date.

The pickleball community has requested that a portion of the Hunter Park tennis courts be striped to permit pickleball use. The addition of pickleball lines and portable nets is a lower cost item and not critical to the capital project delivery currently planned. They can be added at any time in the future when and if the Commission makes a policy decision.

Staff recommends no policy decision be considered until the completion of the PROS Plan. During the planning process, staff will be engaging with many groups and

collecting more data on what the community, as a whole, has prioritized for all recreational amenities within our parks. Staff is concerned that if a decision is made now, future information may contradict the service level need and have unforeseen impacts in meeting those recreational needs. Staff is seeking direction regarding the following question:

- Would the Commission like to have pickleball included in the PROS plan analysis or make a policy decision prior to the completion of the PROS plan?

POLICIES, PLANS & GOALS SUPPORTED This aligns with the draft FY 26-27 department work plan to complete the PROS plan and to complete the Hunter Park tennis court rehabilitation capital project.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS There is no action requested, hence no financial consideration impact. However, if a change in use requires capital improvements, that would have a fiscal impact. In addition, if the level of service recommends more pickleball courts, each court would require capital funds.

ATTACHMENTS Lane Evaluation, Pickleball Survey, Pickleball Level of Service comparison (see meeting packet)

Discussion:

The Hunter Park tennis courts may be used for a pickleball tournament with a special use permit. Any policy decisions on pickleball courts will be deferred until completion of the PROS plan.

VI. FY 26 – 27 DEPARTMENT WORK PLAN – Director Houston

SITUATION The Commission adopts Department goals or a work plan on a biennial basis. Staff needs feedback on the draft FY26-27 Department Work Plan

BACKGROUND Historically, the Commission approves APRC goals to assist in providing strategic direction to the operations of the Department. These goals are transitioning to a department work plan. The change is due to the future strategic plan, which will identify long-range goals.

At the January 17, 2025, Park Commission Work Plan Retreat, the Commission reviewed the FY 23 – 25 Commission biennial goals. The prior goals were a combination of short-term and long-term goals. The review of the goals is attached.

At the retreat, staff presented a list of work plan items. The Commissioners discussed the items and prioritization of the items.

ASSESSMENT The proposed FY26–27 Department Work Plan, prioritized, is as follows:

1. Complete projects identified in the adopted Capital Improvement Plan for FY26–27
2. Complete the Parks, Recreation, Open space, & Senior services strategic plan (PROS)
3. Establish a policy on department policies, protocols, and procedures
4. Update employee onboarding, training, and safety program
5. Complete work plan items identified for FY26–27 to implement the Lithia Park Master Plan
6. Develop funding strategy for capital projects, specifically:
 - Pool replacement project
 - East Main future development phase(s)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS OR SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS Staff is seeking Commission input on the Work Plan to assist in its development to be considered for adoption at the February 12, 2025, Business Meeting.

POLICIES, PLANS, & GOALS SUPPORTED This aligns with the draft Department Work Plan adoption.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

There is no financial impact to this agenda item or direction from the Commission.

ATTACHMENTS FY23–25 APRC Goals Review (see meeting packet)

VII. PARK CLASSIFICATIONS – Director Houston

SITUATION The Parks, Recreation, Open space, and Senior services (PROS) strategic plan includes development of a level of service model for park acreage by park type. In order to do this, the Commission needs to confirm the park types to be used, and the parks associated with each park type.

BACKGROUND Historically, the Department has used two measurements for the level of service of parks. The 2005 City Comprehensive Plan identified there were parks and open spaces. Each type identified an acreage per 1,000 residents. In addition, a goal of having a park within walking distance (generally quantified as 0.75 mile) was identified.

Information on this was presented by staff at the September 4, 2024, Study Session.

ASSESSMENT Several years ago, the Oregon State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) developed a model park planning resource entitled *A Guide to Community Park and Recreation Planning for Oregon Communities*. That document identified several park

classifications, with a working definition, typical park amenities, and example parks. The document also developed a model level of service (acres per 1,000 residents) and through their inventory identified the current average for the state of Oregon for each park classification.

The City of Ashland does not have all of the park classifications, nor is that necessary. The following park classifications were identified to address current and future parks in Ashland:

- **Regional Park** – Provide a unique natural or cultural feature and regional-scale recreation facilities. Typically, 100 acres or more in size, a regional park serves areas within 45 minutes driving time. Regional parks can be large natural reserves or developed for large group activities. They can support large events, festivals, and other revenue-generating events to enhance the City's economic vitality and identity. Recreational amenities vary widely, but off-street parking, restrooms, reservable shelters, amphitheaters, etc. are typically available.
- **Community Park** – Provide a destination experience with a service area of 3 miles. The parks are generally larger (10 to 100 acres) and provide active and passive recreation opportunities. They generally have restrooms and off-street parking to accommodate larger numbers of people. Recreational amenities include sport courts, organized sport fields, playgrounds, reservable shelters, swimming pools and splash pads, community gardens, and extensive trail systems.
- **Neighborhood Park** – Provide close-to-home recreation opportunities with a service area of 0.25 to 0.5 miles. Generally, 2 to 20 acres in size they provide playgrounds, non-organized sport fields, picnic tables, non-reservable shelters, open spaces, and trails. They generally do not have restrooms or off-street parking, except for ADA parking stalls.
- **Pocket Park** – Smallest park classification, providing basic recreation opportunities on less than 2 acres. Provide limited recreation amenities, such as benches, picnic tables, and playgrounds. Generally, they do not have restrooms or off-street parking.
- **Nature Park** – Land set aside for preservation of significant natural resources, remnant landscapes, open space, and visual aesthetics/buffering. They may preserve or protect environmentally sensitive areas, such as wildlife habitats, riparian corridors, or unique and/or endangered species. They vary in size from less than 10 acres to more than 200 acres. Development is limited to passive recreation and amenities to support the passive recreation. These could include trailheads (pedestrian and vehicular), trails, interpretive displays, benches, and structures that support the preservation of the site.
- **Trails** – Trails can include natural surface (soft) and improved (hard) surface trails. They can be referred to as pathways, bikeways, or active transportation routes. They can accommodate a variety of uses including walking, running, biking,

dog walking, roller blading, skateboarding, and horseback riding. Trails can be located within parks, along road rights-of-way or on public easements. Trails are generally linear in nature and provide wayfinding signs, benches, drinking fountains, lighting, informational kiosks and interpretive signs.

Attached is a list of all park parcels and staff's proposed park classification for each. The park classification per parcel/park is needed to complete a comprehensive review of the park system and make recommendations for a level of service for each park classification in the PROS plan.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS OR SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS Staff is seeking Commission input on the identified park classification list and a determination if this input is sufficient to direct staff in completing the PROS plan or if the Commission should take action on this item at a future Commission business meeting.

POLICIES, PLANS & GOALS SUPPORTED This aligns with the draft department workplan item to complete the PROS plan.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS There is no financial impact to this agenda item or direction from the Commission.

ATTACHMENTS SCORP – Park Master Planning; Park Classification List (see meeting packet)

Discussion:

Several Commissioners suggested changing some of the specific Ashland park classifications. Director Houston clarified the park *categories* will be up for adoption at the February 12 Business Meeting. How specific parks are classified will be dynamic. A request was made to add 'Single Use Parks' to the categories.

VIII. BIENNIUM BUDGET

SITUATION The Department is preparing a budget for FY26-27. This item will review the operations budget allocation of \$14,005,502.

BACKGROUND The City engages a biennial budgeting process. The Department is provided with budget instructions from the Finance Department. These instructions are used to create a draft budget for the Department. The draft budget is then recommended by the Park Commission.

The Department forwards the recommended budget to the Finance Department and then the City Manager develops a city budget. This budget is reviewed by the budget committee at three (3) public hearings. In June 2025, the City Council approves the budget for FY 26-27.

The Commission adopted the Capital Improvement Plan in January 2025. It identified a capital budget for FY26-27 of \$6,228,000. This will be the proposed capital budget for the department.

The operations budget is a combination of all park programs personnel, services, and supplies for the Department. In prior years, these were broken down into program budgets. The department is working with the Finance Department to utilize location spending in lieu of program budgeting to provide better reporting on where park funds are spent.

ASSESSMENT In order to meet the operational needs of the department, staff is assessing budget requests from the divisions. These budget requests could result in a budget proposal that would be larger than the operations budget earlier identified. The items include:

- Personnel, materials, and supplies to operate East Main Park in 2027
- Personnel, materials, and supplies to manage the addition of the Community Center, Pioneer Hall, and refill a portion of the COVID-19 maintenance staff reductions
- Equipment repair and replacement funding for new equipment acquired in prior biennium
- Support staff for Senior Services program to replace COVID-19 staff reductions and address increased program utilization
- Recreation Program Coordinator to replace COVID-19 staff reductions and to meet program needs
- Personnel, materials, and supplies to manage landscaping requirements for other city properties

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS OR SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS Staff's presentation may result in questions from Commissioners. The next step is to present a draft department budget for recommendation for action at the February 12, 2025, business meeting.

POLICIES, PLANS & GOALS SUPPORTED This aligns with City budgeting policies.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS This item will establish the financial resources to meet the mission of the department. The level of funding will impact levels of service and programming for the department and for the community.

IX. **LOOKAHEAD REVIEW** – Director Houston reviewed the lookahead.

X. **ADJOURNMENT** – Bachman adjourned the meeting at 7:52 PM

WRITTEN TESTIMONY



Ashland Oregon Pickleball Club

Ashland Oregon Pickleball Club
Ashland, Oregon 97520

February 5, 2025

Ashland Parks and Recreation Commission
1195 East Main Street
Ashland, Oregon 97520

Subject: APRC Study Session - Pickleball Discussion

The Ashland Oregon Pickleball Club actively promotes pickleball in Ashland and looks forward to working with the Ashland Parks and Recreation Commission to understand the current needs of the Ashland pickleball community.

The pickleball discussion relates to our club's perceived overcrowding of the Lithia Park pickleball courts. While it is important to understand the demographics of the pickleball using community and the per capita number of available pickleball courts, other factors need to be carefully considered.

The first point to note is that pickleball popularity is steadily increasing nationwide and involves the full spectrum of age groups from children to senior citizens.

The second point is that some people who play pickleball in Ashland are not residents of Ashland. During tourist season, it is common to see visitors playing pickleball at Lithia Park.

The third point to note is that APRC has not actually conducted an actual survey of Lithia Park pickleball usage. Court usage varies dramatically during popular seasons, days and times. Actual overcrowding could be witnessed if an actual survey were conducted by APRC.

The Ashland Oregon Pickleball Club has not seen documented evidence that restricts the use of Hunter Park relative to tennis and pickleball other than an article in the Ashland Daily Tidings relating to a two-year moratorium on proposed usage changes for Hunter Park tennis courts.

The Ashland Oregon Pickleball Club appreciates the opportunity to work with the Commission and its staff regarding pickleball venues in the City of Ashland.

Sincerely,

Ronald D. Owen
Club Chairperson

To: Parks and Recreation Commissioners and staff
From: Jane Ferguson, Andy Anderson, Vanston Shaw, Peter Finkle

We would like to introduce the newly formed Hunter Park Tennis Association, with 81 members so far. As you know, Ashland has been a "tennis town" for more than 100 years, all the way back to the two tennis courts that were installed in Lithia Park at the time of its dedication in 1916.

Many people don't know that a few decades ago Ashland had 25 public tennis courts. For the many tennis players in town, going from 25 public tennis courts to the current count of 8 public tennis courts has been a big loss. Please note that the Parks and Recreation Commission already converted one of the eight at Hunter Park to a multi-purpose court, which periodically removes it from being used for tennis. In addition, when the bike polo group has their weekend tournaments, two of the eight courts are removed from tennis use.

The eight courts at Hunter Park are used for tennis by many individuals and groups:

- * Individuals who use Hunter Park courts all year as their primary venue for playing tennis.
- * Individuals who play at the tennis club indoor courts primarily in the winter and play regularly at the Hunter Park courts in spring, summer and fall.
- * Youth tennis tournaments put on by Ashland's active youth tennis program. These tournaments draw players from Southern Oregon and Northern California and normally use at least six of the eight courts.
- * Big Al's tennis tournament, celebrating its 50th year in 2025, draws players to Ashland from Oregon, California and Washington each July. These players stay in town for several days, eat at our restaurants, and often attend plays at Oregon Shakespeare Festival.
- * Ashland High School boys tennis team and girls tennis team, for practice times and for matches against other high school teams.
- * Ashland Parks and Recreation offers youth tennis programs during summer months, which reserve two of the courts when they are in session.

Having permanent pickleball lines painted on up to four of the Hunter Park tennis courts would be a disservice to all of these tennis court users.

- * Based on the experience of people who have played on tennis courts with both sets of lines, it makes it much more difficult to play the game of tennis. When the Lithia Park tennis courts were dual-striped with both tennis and pickleball lines, pickleball players as well as tennis players complained about the confusion caused by dual lines.
- * There would be inevitable competition for court time at Hunter Park between tennis players and pickleball players. We don't want to get into "us versus them" and fights over court time. We want to support pickleball players in having more dedicated pickleball courts to accommodate their needs.
- * Currently there are eight public tennis courts and eight public pickleball courts in the Ashland parks. Expanding the number of pickleball courts should not be done by further reducing the ability of tennis players to access tennis courts. It should be done by finding other sites where pickleball courts can be created.
- * There is also a serious possible future problem if pickleball lines are painted on the Hunter Park tennis courts. The United States Tennis Association (USTA) does not allow nationally sponsored tennis tournaments to take place on courts that are also painted with pickleball lines. So far, the Pacific Northwest section of the USTA has not made a determination one way or the other about playing local USTA tournaments on courts that are painted with pickleball lines. If in the future the Pacific Northwest section decided not to allow that, our 50-year Big Al's tennis tournament and our youth tennis tournaments in Ashland would be jeopardized.

This is a lot to think about. We hope this information is helpful in your understanding of the value of our Hunter Park tennis courts.

Respectfully submitted by Nancy Mero, Executive Assistant