



MINUTES FOR REGULAR BUSINESS MEETING

PARK COMMISSION

April 9, 2025

Council Chamber, 1175 E Main – 6:00 PM

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

Staff Present: City Manager Cotta, Attorney Zahran, Director Houston, Deputy Director

Dials, Parks Superintendent Caldwell, Senior Services Superintendent Mettler, Senior

Administrative Analyst Terry, Executive Assistant Mero

Absent: None

I. **CALL TO ORDER** – Chair Bachman called the meeting to order at 6:01 PM

II. **ROLL CALL**

Commissioners Gardiner, Weiner, Bachman, Adams, Landt all present

III. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

1. Park Commission Study Session March 5, 2025

Chair Bachman moved for unanimous consent. Unanimous consent given. Minutes approved.

IV. **ADDITIONS OR DELETIONS TO THE AGENDA** – None

V. **PUBLIC FORUM** – All to speak to business item VIII2

VI. **CONSENT AGENDA** – None

VII. **DIRECTORS REPORT** – Director Houston [presentation](#)

Questions/Discussion:

- Clarification on PROS Plan Neighborhood Meetings – for the specific neighborhood(s)? Yes, based on fire evacuation zones. Okay to attend meetings in a different meeting from where you live.

VIII. **BUSINESS**

1. **Q2 FY25 Financial Update** – Sr. Administrative Analyst Terry

BACKGROUND – The Finance Department provides a quarterly review of financial statements. On March 18, 2025, Finance Director Mariane Berry presented to City Council the statements ending in Quarter 2 (Q2) of FY25. The Parks and Recreation Department now presents specific Department details for the same period.

ASSESSMENT – The second quarter of FY25 ended on December 31, 2024. Of the \$8,443,046 allocated in General Funds (GF) for FY25, \$3,579,483 or 42.40% of the total has been expended. An additional \$206,008 is encumbered.

The Parks Capital Improvement (CIP) Fund had a balance of \$3,973,971 at the beginning of the current biennium. At the end of Q2 FY25, the balance was \$3,811,988 with \$395,976 encumbered.

The Parks System Development Charges (SDC) Fund ended FY24 with a balance of \$417,860. As of the end of Q2 2025, the fund stands at \$444,799.

POLICIES, PLANS & GOALS SUPPORTED – Goal #1 Best Management Practices

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS – Staff continue to collaborate on Departmental priorities and project goals to best execute the appropriated funds.

ATTACHMENTS – Q2 2025 GF Operations Expenses/Balances Table (see packet)

Questions/Discussion:

- Interest we are being paid is because the food and beverage tax fund earns interest? Yes.
- Nature Center hasn't spent much, why? Second FTE just came on in December. Only one FTE in all of the first half of the biennium so money was rolled over.
- What are encumbrances? Fuel reduction contracts and other service contracts that aren't yet completed. The funds are committed, however.

Public Forum to speak to Agenda item VIII2.

Carolyn Reed: Volunteer at North Mountain Park. Upset by the termination of Nature Center Coordinator Jen Aguayo. Not prepared for cutbacks at the Nature Center. Park very busy – many users.

Chris Benoit, Ashland: Spoke to the potential for devastation of the community by the budget cuts, thinks they could be avoided. Spoke to the importance of passing the proposed Parks fee, retaining Jen's job.

Pete Baughman, Ashland: Please consider the impact of layoffs on people affected, directly and cumulatively, consider cutting other places, consider making retirement offer(s).

Jen Aguayo, Ashland: Spoke to her experience working at North Mountain Park, importance of volunteers (who worked through the Pandemic), parks as necessities, not luxuries. Doesn't think the people of Ashland want the Nature Center/Environmental Education program closed/terminated.

Ron Palmquist, Ashland: Teamsters Union rep spoke to the importance of keeping front line employees, specifically Jen Aguayo. Cited laying off front line staff disproportionately as a false budget choice. Also cited the proposed fee combined with cuts to community valued services as a pressure tactic.

2. **Department Budget Process Update** – Director Houston/City Manager Cotta

SUMMARY – The Park Commission recommended moving forward to finance the following budget:

Budget Category	FY 26-27 Proposed
Parks Operations Budget*	\$15,795,925
Parks Capital Program Budget	\$6,228,000
Total Parks Department Budget	\$22,023,925

The review of the Parks and Recreation Department's (Department), proposed budget with Finance and the City Manager has identified that general fund departments will need to make cuts to ensure that reserve mandates are met. This is based on revenue increases being estimated at 1-3% and City operational costs rising to about 15-17%.

The Department has a required 5% reduction and an additional 5% reduction if the City Council does not approve a resolution to establish a \$5 per month park fee on all utility bills. The City Council is set to review this resolution on April 15th, 2025.

There will be reductions in programs, services, and maintenance with either the 5% or 10% budget reductions. Staff will review the proposed reductions at the 5% and 10% levels during the meeting.

POLICIES, PLANS & GOALS SUPPORTED – The Department budget follows the City Charter and State of Oregon budget rules.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS – The Park Operations Budget would be *estimated* at the following levels:

Park Operations Budget Outcomes	Amount
Park Commission Recommendation	\$15,795,925
5% Reduction	\$15,200,000
10% Reduction	\$14,450,000

PROPOSED ACTIONS OR MOTIONS – N/A

ATTACHMENTS – N/A

Questions/Discussion:

- Cuts will be devastating for community and staff. Commission is 100% behind the Department staff/parks fee.
- Some Commissioners will be talking to Mayor and Council in favor of fees.
- Concern about keeping Golf facilities over the pool: Golf brings in more users, more revenue.
- Numbers of FTE now and with cuts? 37 current, 37 with 5% cut and fee, 34 with 10% and no fee.
- What is being done with the surplus money in the current biennium? As a general fund Department, any Park's surplus in the current biennium goes back into the general fund. Some Park's surplus is currently being used to catch up on deferred maintenance/equipment.
- Concern around the process of which items were selected for cuts. Consider committing to not laying anyone off. Get creative. The City is staff heavy due to providing a lot of services. Personnel costs including the rising cost of healthcare makes up 60-63% of the budget.
- Concern over the effect of Park's cuts on children and seniors specifically and the community in general. Will affect the ability to draw young families to town.
- Would a \$10 fee cover the reductions? Roughly.
- Concern over the cuts in services that will affect children heavily combined with asking young families to pay the fee.
- How does the Commission get a request for a higher fee to the Council? Advocate for that with a motion for a resolution. The CM will bring the recommendation to the Council.
- Utility fees are not ideal.

Motion: I move to recommend to the City Council to approve a \$9.00 a month park fee for the following biennium.

Discussion:

- Assistant City Attorney Zahran clarified that the \$5.00 per month park fee the City Council is considering is to be increased by CIP level. It would be a permanent fee.
- There are several fees before the Council that will create hardships on some of the community.

Commissioner Landt withdrew his original motion.

Motion: I move to recommend the Commission vote to encourage the City Council to adopt a \$9.00 per month park fee with regular CPI increases.

Motion: Landt

Second: Adams

Discussion:

Clarifying question, does the CPI go up annually? Historically, yes, but it doesn't have to.

Vote:

<u>Gardiner</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>Weiner</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>Bachman</u>	<u>Yes</u>
<u>Adams</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>Landt</u>	<u>Yes</u>		

Motion: I move that the Park Commission urge the City Council to find an alternative less regressive revenue source to replace the utility park fee, for example, like a five-year levy.

Discussion:

Zahrn noted that while the first part of the motion was fine, suggesting a levy was outside of what was noticed.

Landt withdrew his motion to make a new motion.

Motion: I move to urge the City Council to find a less regressive revenue source to replace the utility park fee.

No second. Zahrn commented that the second motion was in conflict with the first motion. Landt withdrew his motion.

3. **Draft Policy 1.01.001 – Policy Framework** – Director Houston

SITUATION – A draft policy, 1.1.001 – Policy on Policies has been completed. Staff is seeking review of the draft policy and Commission direction to follow the process identified in the draft to adopt the policy.

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. The first step is a policy on policies. This item was mentioned at the January 2025 Park Commission Regular Business Meeting and presented as an informational item at the February 5, 2025, Park Commission Study Session. A draft was reviewed at the March 5, 2025, Park Commission Study Session and the suggested revisions were made.

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's 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 type 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.

This draft policy creates these 3 types of policies and an adoption process that is consistent with City processes for reviewing and adopting different types of policies or ordinances.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS OR SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS – Provide a list of questions to assist staff working through the item.

POLICIES, PLANS & GOALS SUPPORTED – FY 26-27 Department Work Plan (draft)

- #3 – Establish a policy on Department policies, protocols, and procedures

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS – This policy, if adopted, would require additional staff time to complete the process. However, staff are not seeking additional budget limitation to manage this policy or the processes.

Questions/Discussion:

- Draft continues to use the word policy specifically and generally. Use a word other than policy to refer to all three items. Director Houston will find a new word and share it with Commission.

ATTACHMENTS – 1.01.001 – Policy Framework (draft) (see packet)

4. Park Fees – Director Houston

SUMMARY – All Ashland Parks and Recreation Department (APRD) fees for programs and services are itemized in the City's Miscellaneous Fees and Charges document. The approval of miscellaneous fees will come before the City Council for approval on May 20,

2025. Parks Staff have prepared updates to some fees and charges detailed here for Commissioner discussion. Pending Commission direction, staff plan to bring the Fees item to the May 14, 2025, Regular Business meeting for approval.

Proposed Fee Updates:

- Special Event Application Fee
- Site Area Fee for events/special use
- Indoor Facility Fees
- Swim lessons and daily admissions to the Daniel Meyer Pool
- Daily Golf Fees (new fees)
- Credit Card Processing Fee
- Director authority to modify rates for marketing and market conditions.

In most cases, staff have looked at market rates and suggested a gradual increase in fees. Ideally, in two – three years, there will be more data to evaluate the actual costs of the many services that APRD provides to further inform development of a cost recovery policy.

POLICIES, PLANS & GOALS SUPPORTED – City of Ashland Miscellaneous Fees and Charges

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS – Expenses have increased 15-17% and exceed revenues in all areas. These fee increases are proposed to help offset additional budget reductions.

PROPOSED ACTIONS OR MOTIONS – The requested action is to review the proposed rates and have discussion on three (3) core fees:

- Sport field rental fee – The department is significantly below market rate, as compared to other Rogue Valley recreational sport fields. Staff has identified a market rate and an interim step rate for consideration
- Credit card processing fees – The department is currently not recovering the 2-5% fee that credit card companies charge for processing a credit card payment. Should a 3% fee be added to each credit card transaction or should all the rates be raised by 3%?
- Director Authority – The Director is seeking the authority to adjust fees by up to 20% for marketing or market conditions.

ATTACHMENTS – Miscellaneous fees and charges spreadsheet (see packet)

Questions/Discussion:

- Exclusive Use Fee – Should be a specific time range. Staff will work on that and bring it back to Commission.

- Support for credit card fee, soccer user fee, all fees presented as a cap, not to be exceeded
- Increase fee hikes gradually, make it equitable
- Request for information to better evaluate how the fees will impact users, what the different adjustments will look like. Staff will bring
- Recommendation to get closer to cost recovery on field rental, collaborate with School District, YMCA, SOU. A lot of revenue is being lost by Parks as they are currently the only one in Ashland providing fields for youth sports.

5. **Park Map and Naming** – Director Houston

SITUATION – Review of park map and park naming.

BACKGROUND – The current park map has identified 42 “Parks”. Several of these parcels have not been officially named. The Department has used the prior owner and/or location as a temporary identifier. As part of the PROS Plan planning process, a review of the current parks and classifications has led to a review of the park map and park naming.

ASSESSMENT – The review of the parks was completed with consideration of proximity of parcels to each other and/or existing parks, with the intent of the purchase, character of the parcel, and long-term planning. The attached map identifies 23 proposed parks based on the current property portfolio and park classifications.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS OR SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS – Staff is seeking Commission input on the park map and naming list and a determination if this input is sufficient for the Commission to act on this item at a future Commission business meeting.

POLICIES, PLANS & GOALS SUPPORTED – This aligns with the Draft Department Work Plan item to complete the PROS Plan.

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

ATTACHMENTS – Proposed Parks Map (see packet)

Questions/Discussion:

- Naming convention for NMP when Bear Creek Greenway is extended? TBD.
- Concern over public reaction to calling inaccessible areas in the Ashland Creek Park area part of the park.

6. **Park Specific Classifications** – Director Houston

SITUATION – Specific parks need to be identified by the park classification system.

BACKGROUND – In February 2025 the Park Commission established a park classification system to assist in developing levels of service for parks by classification. Each classification has unique recreational development and experiences for the community. The adopted City Comprehensive Plan identified community parks, neighborhood parks, and open spaces. However, the parks and open spaces are typically only identified by the department.

ASSESSMENT – In reviewing the current properties, the following recommendations are proposed:

Park Classification	Park(s)
Regional Park	Lithia (all parcels approx. 100 acres)
Community Park	Ashland Creek (including Skatepark, parcels downstream to Nevada St including Keener.) Bear Creek Greenway (includes Ashland Ponds, BMX area, Dog Park, Riverwalk, Kestrel, Greenway OS, Michelle Ave WL, and other parcels along Bear Creek) Garfield Hunter North Mountain (includes Lord property) Oak Knoll East Main (undeveloped)
Neighborhood Park	Briscoe Clay Creek Garden Way Glenwood Railroad Scenic Chitwood (undeveloped)
Pocket Park	Bluebird Calle Guanajuato Evergreen Sherwood Triangle
Natural Area	Acid Castle (includes all parcels Granite Street OS, Burnson OS, Lawrence OS) Hald Strawberry (includes Piedmont, South Laurel St Access) Siskiyou Mountain (including Alice in Wonderland OS, Liberty Street OS, Terrace Pines OS, Cottle-Phillips OS)
Special Use	

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS OR SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS – Staff is seeking Commission input on the park specific classification list and a determination if this input is sufficient for the Commission to act on this item at a future Commission business meeting.

POLICIES, PLANS & GOALS SUPPORTED – This aligns with the draft Department Work Plan item to complete the PROS Plan.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS – None

ATTACHMENTS – SCORP – Park Master Planning Appendix A (see packet)

Questions/Discussion:

- Prefer Oak Knoll in Special Use Classification

IX. ITEMS FROM COMMISSIONERS/STAFF

a. Liaison Report

1. PAAC – Gardiner:
 - Anxious to get more art in medians
 - Presentation from a local artist on a large owl sculpture. Would like Lithia park for location
 - Proposal of another playwright medallion in Railroad Park that would somehow honor the intention 'Say Their Names' t-shirt display

X. UPCOMING MEETING DATES

1. Trails Advisory Committee Kickoff Meeting April 14, Lithia Park Cabin, 5:00 PM
2. Park Commission Study Session May 7, Council Chamber, 6:00 PM
3. Ashland Senior Advisory Committee May 12, Senior Center, 3:30 PM
4. Park Commission Regular Business Meeting May 14, Council Chamber, 6:00 PM
5. Recreation Division Advisory Committee May 15, Lithia Park Cabin, 4:00 PM

XI. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Bachman adjourned the meeting at 8:56 PM

Respectfully submitted by Nancy Mero, Executive Assistant