Council Study Session Meeting Agenda

ASHLAND CITY COUNCIL
STUDY SESSION AGENDA

Monday, September 14, 2026
Council Chambers, 1175 E Main Street

Live stream via RVTV Prime at rvtv.sou.edu or broadcast on Spectrum 180.

Public comment is welcome on agenda items.
To **speak electronically** during the meeting or to submit **written comments** in advance, please complete the online Public Comment Form by 10 a.m. the day of the meeting.

5:30 p.m. Study Session

I. CALL TO ORDER

II. REPORTS AND PRESENTATIONS

a. Staff Presentation on the impact of the Parks Fee and Preliminary Budget Outlook

b. Public Input and Council Discussion on Parks Fee Renewal

III. ADJOURNMENT

If you need special assistance to participate in this meeting, please contact Alissa Kolodzinski at recorder@ashlandoregon.gov or 541.488.5307 (TTY phone number 1.800.735.2900). Notification at least three business days before the meeting will enable the City to make reasonable arrangements to ensure accessibility to the meeting in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

***Agendas and minutes for City of Ashland Council, Commission and Committee meetings may be found at the City website, ashlandoregon.gov,

Council Study Session

Date: September 14, 2026

Agenda Item	Staff Presentation on the impact of the Parks Fee and Preliminary Budget Outlook
Department	City Manager's Office
From	Jordan Rooklyn

TIME ESTIMATE
10 minutes

CATEGORY
Informational - this is to inform the body on a particular topic. No motion or direction needed.

SUMMARY
Staff will provide a presentation on the role of the Parks Fee in the larger context of the City's preliminary budget outlook.

POLICIES, PLANS & GOALS SUPPORTED
Council Priority, Livability: The Parks Fee supports our parks' system, which is one of the key attributes supporting our distinct community character and community amenities.

BACKGROUND AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION
In May 2025, City Council established a Parks Fee on residents' utilities bill to maintain services within our Parks & Recreation Department (Resolution 2025-13). The Parks Fee is $5.15 per month per household and is scheduled to automatically sunset June 2027, unless renewed by City Council.

This conversation is occurring in the larger context of how the City will increase revenues or reduce spending across all our General Fund departments in the coming budget process. To keep our expenses in line with our revenues, the City needs to reduce our spending on Fire & Rescue, Police, Parks, Building & Planning, and Administration — services paid for by our General Fund — by roughly $2 million a year. When the Parks Fee sunsets, that amount will likely increase to roughly $2.5-$2.75 million a year in necessary cuts organization wide.

Why it Matters
A strong Parks & Recreation Department supports the quality of life that underpins Ashland's economic vibrancy. The $5.15 fee has helped preserve Parks, Recreation, and Senior Services operations, even as the Department has pursued cost savings within the current biennium budget. Examples presented at the June 3, 2026, joint meeting include staff reorganization, a project manager position shared with Public Works, adjusted park restroom hours, reduced irrigation in parks and contracted concessions at the Golf Course. The reorganization has saved the department roughly $300,000 (roughly $200,000 in savings for the City as a whole).

Without the continuation of the Parks Fee, staff estimate that an additional $400,000 to $500,000 in ongoing annual expenses would need to be cut from the Parks Department, or backfilled from cuts in other departments, *in addition to* the cuts that will need to occur citywide regardless of the continuation of the fee, the 2027-2029 Biennium Budget.

Renewal Consideration Process
Council has requested that staff conduct a robust community engagement process to aid the City Council in determining whether to renew the Parks Fee. The steps below outline the full consideration process.

- August 3rd, Joint Study Session, City Council and Park Commission discuss renewal of the Parks Fee
- August 18th, Business Meeting, Council directs staff to move forward with the process of renewing the Parks Fee

- August 19th, City website page and community survey on Park Fee Renewal goes live
- August 20th - September 14th, City promotes Park Fee Renewal survey and scheduled public hearing through social media, news posts, e-newsletter, and Ashland.news City Corner article
- September 14, Study Session, City Council receives community survey results and hosts a public hearing
- October 6, Business Meeting, City Council votes on whether to renew the Parks Fee

FISCAL IMPACTS

The Parks Fee provides roughly $750,000 per fiscal year, all of which go directly to the Parks Department. This revenue covers the cost of approximately 10% of the Parks Department operating budget. If the Parks Fee is not renewed, City Council will need to determine if the Parks Department will bear the full impact of that revenue reduction, or if they will backfill the lost revenue via cuts to other departments.

SUGGESTED ACTIONS, AND/OR OPTIONS

Informational Only

REFERENCES & ATTACHMENTS

1. Presentation for Park Fee Renewal Discussion

Parks Fee Impact

City Council Study Session | Sept 14, 2026 | Deputy CM Jordan Rooklyn

Executive Summary

Fees on Utility Bills help fund city services.

The City recently made changes to several fees.

The City has also made cuts to offset costs.

While this has reduced our structural deficit, more action needs to occur.

The loss of the Park Fee will necessitate deeper cuts.

Where those cuts occur will be the decision of the City Council for the city at large, and the Parks Commission specific to the Parks Department.

What the Community has shared via the Parks Fee Community Survey.

Potential fee structures to reduce the cost burden on low-income households.

Public Hearing

Better Together

SECTION 1

Why fees on utility bills?

How City services are funded

Utility bill fees fund City services.

- **Historically, funding looked different.** Prior to major changes to our statewide tax system, city services like Parks, Fire, and Police were primarily funded through property taxes.
- **In the 1990's, Measure 5 & 50 capped property tax growth.** Property taxes are capped at 3% growth each year, and any new construction is brought into the tax rolls at a fraction of its real market value. Under this tax structure, the only way to significantly grow property tax revenue is to grow as a City. Ashland's population – and, thus, our property tax revenue – has stayed relatively the same for the last 15 years.
- **At the same time, costs keep going up.** Besides inflation, cities are also coping with significant increases to the cost of the State's retirement system, health care benefits, and insurance costs. The cost of providing services is outstripping city revenue.
- **To adjust for this, cities have diversified revenue streams.** Jurisdictions, including City of Ashland, have used other tools such as utility bill fees, franchise fees, and the food & beverage tax to augment property tax revenues and keep up with the costs for service.

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The City made recent changes to several fees.

Wildfire Risk Reduction Fee

Jul 2015 - $1.39 per month

Jul 2019 - $3.00 per month

Jul 2025 - $7.00 per month

Pays for 100% of the Wildfire Division, plus sets aside additional funds for major wildfire-related projects.

Public Safety Fee

Jul 2017 - $1.50 per month

Jul 2025 - $5.00 per month

Pays for roughly 3% of Fire & Rescue operating budget.

Pays for roughly 4% of Police operating budget.

Parks Fee

Jul 2025 - $5.00 per month
*sunsets June 30, 2027

Pays for roughly 10% of Parks operating budget.

Sunsets June 30, 2027

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And has taken additional steps to lower costs.

- **Staff reductions.** The City reduced our staffing by 7 positions across IT, Police, Fire, and Parks, and reduced seasonal staff levels.
- **Materials & Services reductions.** The City implemented 3-5% cuts citywide.
- **Investments in technology.** The City is implementing new software (payroll/HR software and utility billing software) that is expected to reduce the amount of ongoing staff time needed moving forward.
- **Adjusting service-specific costs.** The City has updated fees that are related to specific services (such as building permits and facility rentals) to help specific programs rely less on general funding.

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SECTION 2

What is our budget outlook?

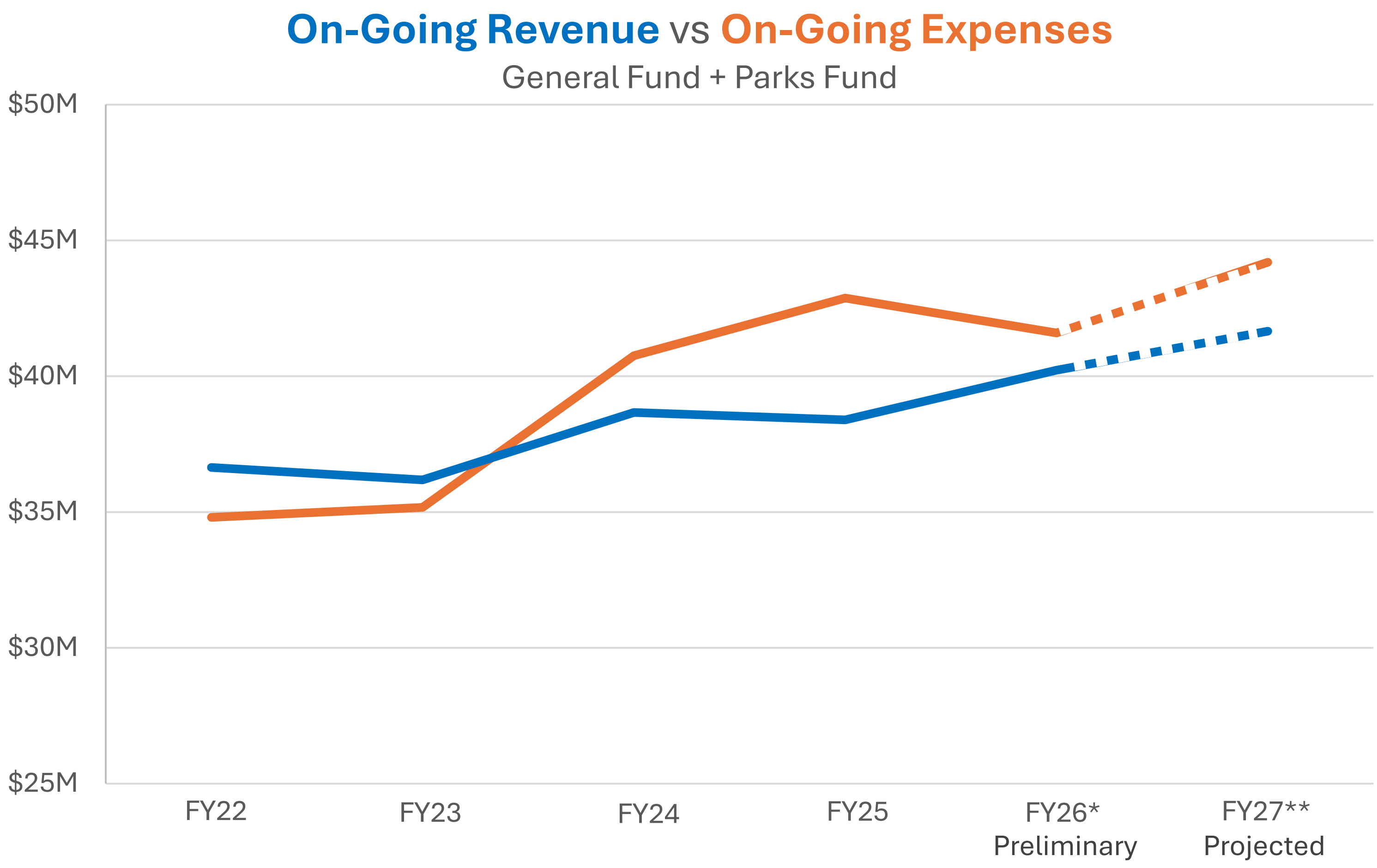
Preliminary!

These steps have decreased our structural deficit.

In BN24/25, we had a structural deficit of $6.6M.

In BN25/27, we project a structural deficit of $3.9M.

This is largely due to fee changes and budget cuts.



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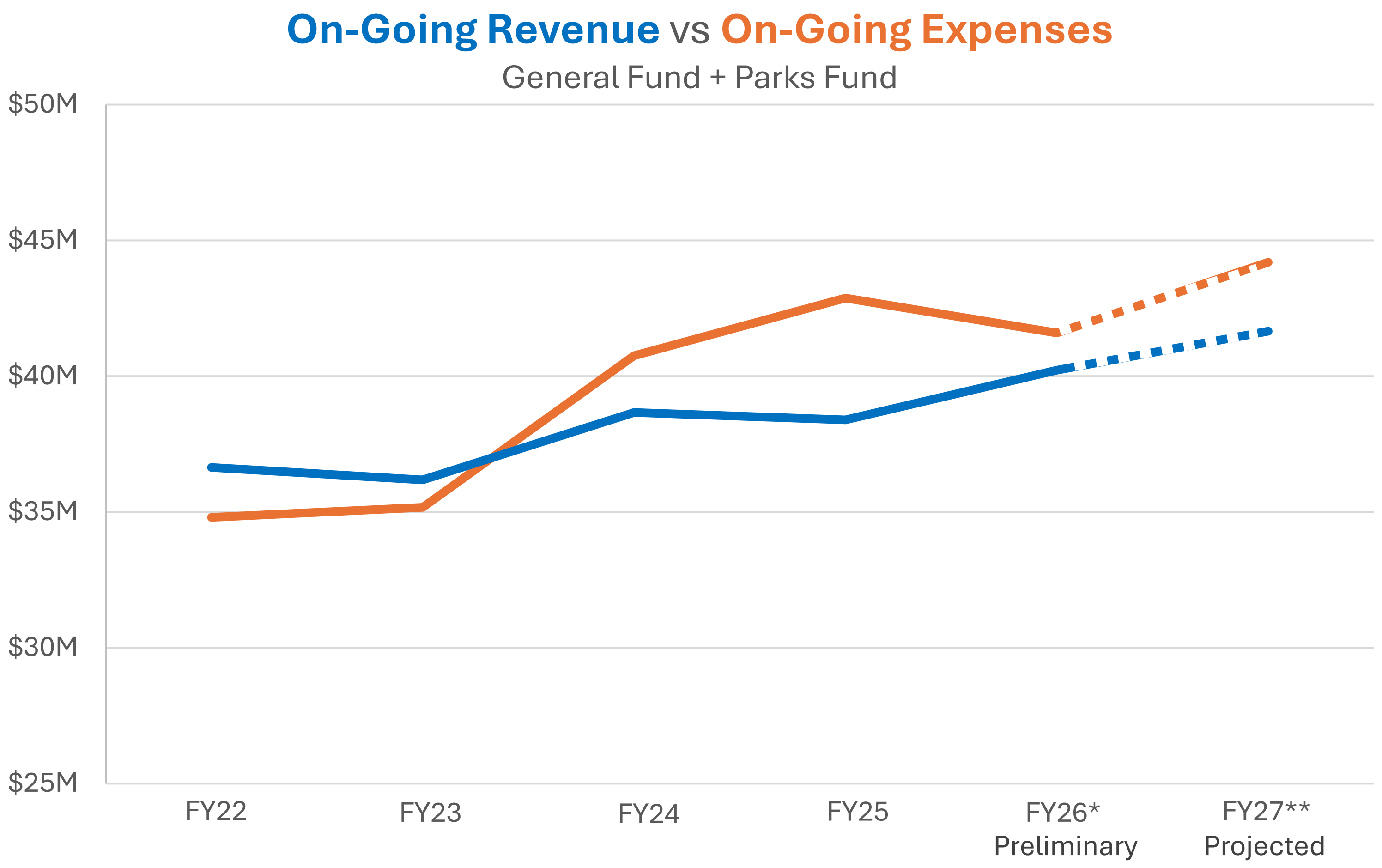
But more work needs to be done.

Next biennium, we need to close the gap by at least $2 million a year.

Without the Parks Fee, that grows to $2.75 million a year.



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SECTION 3

How will the City determine cuts?

City Council will determine where cuts need to be made across the organization, including the level of cuts to the Parks Department.

If the Parks Fee is not renewed, City Council will determine if the Parks Department will bear the full impact of that revenue reduction, or if they will backfill the lost revenue via cuts to other departments.

Park Commission will determine where cuts will be made specific to the Parks Department.

- **Assess what is legally required.** Certain activities, such as playground inspections, wildfire risk remediation, and parks maintenance are required for the City to maintain safe, accessible parks.
- **Look into program changes.** Staff are working with partners and providers to determine if we can change our models to help reduce costs but still provide services.
- **Determine program cuts.** Staff are evaluating which programs provide the most needed services, through an equity, values, and access lens, to help Park Commission determine if there are certain services we should discontinue.

Both will listen closely to the community.

1. **Public Survey**: The survey will be open through Monday, September 14. Results will provide Council a starting point for their discussion on whether to renew the Parks Fee or let it sunset.

2. **In-Person Comments**: The City Council will hold a public forum at the Study Session on September 14, to receive in-person comments and written testimony from the community. After that Study Session, Council will then vote on whether to renew the fee at its Regular Business Meeting on October 6. The public is invited to attend in person or submit a written public comment directly to the City Council.

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SECTION 4

Community Feedback

Survey results to-date

What the community survey results state about the Parks Fee.

Survey results incoming! This slide will be updated with a summary of the survey results on September 14th.

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How this compares to other feedback channels.

Survey results incoming! This slide will be updated with a summary of the survey results on September 14th.

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SECTION 5

Fee Structures

To reduce the disproportionate cost burden on low-income households

A tiered-fee structure based on property type.

The current flat-rate fee places a disproportionate cost burden on low-income households – a household making $30K is paying the same monthly amount as a household making $200K.

A tiered-fee structure is one way to shift cost burdens. Our Street Fee does this based on vehicle trips.

STREET USER FEE						
SERVICE CODE	DESCRIPTION	COUNT	MULTIPLIER	RATE	MEASUREMENT	MINIMUM
50000	SINGLE FAMILY	8,426		$ 9.56	PER MONTH	$ -
51000	MULTI-FAMILY	2,804		$ 7.28	PER UNIT	$ -
52000	COMM MULTI-FAMILY	398		$ 7.28	PER UNIT	$ -
52100	WAREHOUSE	36	3,073	$ 0.41	PER 100SF	$ 9.56
52200	WHOLESALE USE	22	1,264	$ 0.72	PER 100SF	$ 9.56
52300	OFFICE USE	135	3,668	$ 0.85	PER 100SF	$ 9.56
52400	RETAIL	215	6,779	$ 1.28	PER 100SF	$ 9.56
52500	MEDICAL/DENTAL	51	2,359	$ 1.14	PER 100SF	$ 9.56
52600	SERVICE USE	51	2,040	$ 1.14	PER 100SF	$ 9.56
52700	REST/BAR/LODGING	141	3,224	$ 3.40	PER 100SF	$ 9.56
52800	MANUFACTURE	21	936	$ 0.72	PER 100SF	$ 9.56
53000	ASHLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS	10	326	$ -	PER REQ. PARKING SPACES	$ -
53100	INSTITUTIONAL	21	2,557	$ 3.40	PER REQ. PARKING SPACES	$ -
53200	HOTEL/MOTEL	19	69	$ 3.40	PER GUEST ROOM	$ 9.56
		12,350	**26,295**			

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A tiered-fee structure based on property type.

A fee based on property type may partially alleviate the disproportionate nature of the fee, assuming a low-income household is more likely to live in multi-family housing than single family housing.

That assumption will miss households that are low-income in single family homes, including in ADU's.

However, other options, such as fees based on sq footage, are not possible with our current Utility Billing Software.

A low-income waiver program.

A low-income waiver program, in a flat-fee or tiered-fee structure, is another method to reduce cost burden on low-income households.

The City currently provides 30% bill reduction to households participating in our Utility Assistance program, but that discount does <u>not</u> apply to the Parks Fee, Public Safety Fee, or Wildfire Risk Reduction Fee. In total, those fees cost households approximately $17.50 per month.

A low-income waiver program could reduce or waive those fees for those participating in our Utility Assistance program.

Currently, 495 households participate in our low-income assistance program. Waiving the Park Fee for those households is the equivalent of $30,591 a year.

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SECTION 6

Public Hearing

Council Study Session

Date: September 14, 2026

Agenda Item	Public Input and Council Discussion on Parks Fee Renewal
Department	City Manager's Office
From	Jordan Rooklyn

TIME ESTIMATE
60 minutes

CATEGORY
Staff Direction - provide direction to staff on the body's desired next steps.

SUMMARY
Staff will present the results of the community survey, along with a potential tiered fee structure and low-income fee waiver option that could reduce the regressive nature of the Parks Fee. Council will then host a public hearing to hear in-person and/or written testimony from community members, to aid in their discussion of whether to renew the Parks Fee.

POLICIES, PLANS & GOALS SUPPORTED
Council Priority, Livability: The Parks Fee supports our parks' system, which is one of the key attributes supporting our distinct community character and community amenities.

BACKGROUND AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION
City Council is considering renewing the Parks Fee that currently funds services within the City's Parks & Recreation Department or letting it sunset in June 2027. To aid in their decision-making, Council has requested a public engagement process that includes a community survey and public hearing to receive community feedback.

Renewal Consideration Process
Council has requested that staff conduct a robust community engagement process to aid the City Council in determining whether to renew the Parks Fee. The steps below outline the full consideration process.

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- September 14, Study Session, City Council receives community survey results and hosts a public hearing
- October 6, Business Meeting, City Council votes on whether to renew the Parks Fee

Public Hearing
At this study session, staff will present the results of the community survey, along with a potential tiered fee structure and low-income fee waiver to alleviate the disproportionate cost burden of fees on low-income households. Council will then host a public hearing to hear in-person and/or written testimony from community members.

FISCAL IMPACTS

The Parks Fee provides roughly $750,000 per fiscal year, all of which go directly to the Parks Department. This revenue covers the cost of approximately 10% of the Parks Department operating budget. If the Parks Fee is not renewed, City Council will need to determine if the Parks Department will bear the full impact of that revenue reduction, or if they will backfill the lost revenue via cuts to other departments.

SUGGESTED ACTIONS, AND/OR OPTIONS

- Would Council like to consider a resolution renewing the Parks Fee?
- If so, would you like the resolution to represent a flat per meter fee, or a tiered fee based on property type?
- If so, would you like the resolution to establish a fee waiver or fee reduction program for low-income households?

REFERENCES & ATTACHMENTS

None