

MINUTES FOR REGULAR BUSINESS MEETING
ASHLAND PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION

March 13, 2024

Council Chambers – 6:00 PM

1175 E Main St

Present: Commissioners Bachman, Landt, Seffinger, Lewis, Adams, Interim Director Eldridge, Deputy Director Dials, Parks Superintendent Caldwell, Senior Services Superintendent Mettler, Recreation Manager Flora, Executive Assistant Mero

Absent: None

I. CALL TO ORDER

Bachman called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM. Noted the Executive Session to deliberate with persons designated by the governing body to negotiate personnel matters just finished. No action taken.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

None

III. ADDITIONS OR DELETIONS TO THE AGENDA

IV. PUBLIC FORUM

No general forum. Three speakers would like to speak on the Tennis agenda item.

V. CONSENT AGENDA

None

VI. DIRECTOR'S REPORT Interim Director Eldridge

1. Citywide efforts:

- City and APRC undergoing a Citywide facilities conditions assessment. All buildings are being inspected by consultants. They will provide in-depth details on conditions and evaluate future facilities' needs. Superintendent Caldwell is working with Public Works to facilitate the assessment of Parks' facilities.
- The Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) assessment is complete, final report due at end of March. Commissioners are invited to a joint session with City Council (CC) at their April 1 meeting to receive the results of the DEI assessment.

2. Hiring news:

- Office Asst. II position for the Recreation Division was posted and has just closed. Staff is reviewing applications and hope to interview in the coming weeks.
- Offered Sr. Admin Analyst position to first-choice applicant and he accepted. Will start Monday March 25.

3. Parks, Trails, and Open Space Map was unanimously approved by CC. Will be adopted into the Ashland Comprehensive Plan.

4. March 5 Senate Bill 1576 passed the House. The bill gives the legislature time to draft long-term changes that will help protect public and private landowners from lawsuits over Recreational Immunity. Eldridge is working with the City legal team on potential adds to the City Municipal Code that would give further protection from claims of injury on Parks/City land.

Bachman added: Bill 1576 also passed the Senate and is sitting on the Governor's desk.

5. Ashland Rotary Centennial Ice Rink (Rink) is closed for the season. Cover has been taken down. Rec Manager Flora provided some preliminary expense/revenue numbers. Flora will give a more in-depth presentation on the Rink at a future meeting.
6. Summer Playguide is out and will be mailed to households by the end of March.
7. Senior Services Division
 - New classes: Healthy Brain and Aging and Write Your Memoir. Classes are consistently full with waiting lists.
 - Senior Services Superintendent Mettler has been voted in as a member of the Ashland Community Food Bank Board.
 - Chairs placed in Lithia Park as part of the Conversation Clusters program have been removed. Some chairs were damaged and others were even found in Lithia Creek.
8. Daniel Meyer Pool Update: Commissioners had asked staff to explore making the pool a year-round facility by adding a cover and to get an updated cost estimate. Staff recently met with consultants Robertson Sherwood to compile a list of items needing to be addressed. Contract with Robertson Sherwood has expired. Needs to be renewed or a search for a new contractor begun.
9. East Main Park Update: Working on behind-the-scenes issues including: a plot line adjustment with Jackson County; close on purchase of 1 acre addition; and application made for annexation into the City of Ashland.
10. Oak Knoll Golf Course (GC):
 - Much staff time has been spent on negotiating a contract with Golf Automation (GA) to have them manage the GC. Ultimately it was concluded that the parties were too far apart and that APRC's financial concerns were not being adequately addressed. In collaboration with City Finance, Manager, and Legal, the GC contract negotiations were terminated.
 - Parks staff are working with Public Works on the installation of a large flow water meter and a new connection to the potable water system at the GC. This allows bypassing the retention pond and getting accurate meter readings of potable water use.
11. Trail Day on Mimsy: This past Sunday, Open Space and Forestry supervisor Minica secured the use of a soil compactor to assist Rogue Valley Mountain Bike Association volunteers with trail work on Mimsy trail. Parks' Tech Skates was on hand to run the compactor.

Questions/Discussion

Adams: For the Rink, how did 2023/24 revenues and expenditures compare to budgeted?

Eldridge: Clarified what Adams was asking. Doesn't have the numbers in her head. Will address later during Financial Update.

Adams: "Pool cover" makes him think of a cover that rolls across the pool. Suggests using "pool housing" instead.

Dials: Can get the numbers for Adam's first question about the Rink from Flora's upcoming presentation.

VII. BUSINESS

a. Ashland Forestlands Climate Adaptation Project Final Update (Information) Forestry Officer Chris Chambers

Climate change is drastically changing our forests. Our practices also have to change. Drought, extreme temperatures resulting in disease and death, fires, and the Bark Beetle are killing trees. Well over 30% or 300 trees in Siskiyou Mountain Park (SMP) are showing signs of dying or are dead. Projection shows that Douglas Fir will not be able to survive. (Currently the dominant tree in SMP)

Questions/Discussion

Adams: What are reasonable expectations for the duration of trail closures outside of SMP?

Chambers: Best case scenario for busiest trails in that area is two to three weeks. They have taken steps to work as quickly as possible in that area.

Adams: Is there a plan or line item in the budget to mitigate impacts on trails of damage from felled trees?

Chambers: He has \$50,000 in the budget for that on the watershed side. Lomakatski has \$100,000 in their budget on the SMP side. Every trail will need to be walked out and assessed for hanging branches, hazards, etc. Will lean some on Rogue Valley Trails Association and other groups to look for issues. Will also work with supervisor Minica and the Parks open space/forest staff. Asking tree fallers to cut trees so they fall away from the trails.

Adams: People are asking him, why March 26 and not November 1?

Chambers: Helicopter companies are scarce in the Pacific Northwest. Timberline Helicopters happens to be working in the Applegate until the end of March and they have time. Also, the felled lumber is worth more now than it will be later. Want to be fiscally responsible. Could recoup \$500,000 to \$600,000 by picking up and selling the lumber now.

Lewis: Commissioners received several letters from concerned citizens on the habitat issue. Glad Chambers touched on that. If the work is done soon will there still be some market for the felled lumber?

Chambers: Waiting on a bid from a mill. If no mills bid, will have to delay the project, start over.

Lewis: Will reductions have to be done again?

Chambers: Likely yes. Will have to make assessments following Phase I. Have to develop a planting and revegetation plan. They will try new species of trees, reassess, work with experts, etc. Maybe try prescribed burning. Pretty much guaranteed there will be future conversations.

Seffinger: People are concerned about nesting. You are saying this work has to be now?

Chambers: Ideally, we wouldn't do this type of work now, but we are forced into a corner. Must do it before fire season/summer. Wildfire safety was the citizens' top priority for the current Biennium. Helped to drive the decision of the timing for this project. Can try to fell trees away from other trees that have nests in them. Once the helicopters begin work nesting disruption is unavoidable. Regrettably.

Seffinger: Will planting for diversity start sooner rather than later? Are you looking at trees that don't need as much water like Madrone?

Chambers: Have been working at decreasing the density in SMP by using prescribed fire and light thinning of trees. For replanting, looking mostly at pines and planting them farther apart.

Landt: Question about point #2 in the Memo regarding holding field trips with APRC staff and Southern Oregon Land Conservancy (SOLC) for feedback. "No significant changes were made." What does that mean?

Chambers: Sample marking of trees had been done. When looked at, there was no decision to cut more or less than what was proposed.

Landt: Did you get feedback from staff or SOLC regarding their concerns for wildlife?

Chambers: Yes. SOLC sent the publication on Fisher population. Information being integrated into the project. Will leave behind good habitat. Will incorporate additional input where possible.

Landt: Has SOLC given written approval for this plan?

Chambers: As far as I know. MOU needs to be updated. I don't know if it's required.

Landt: Not referring to an MOU, referring to the conservation easement. SOLC approval is required. Needs to be done in writing.

Chambers: Will make sure to get it done.

Landt: Some ecological issues are taking a backseat to human needs, and I find that regrettable.

Chambers: Indeed, it is. Received letters of concern over fire safety from two neighborhoods near SMP. Chose to prioritize fire safety, though not to the exclusion of habitat.

b. Q2 FY24 Financial Update (Information) Interim Director Eldridge

Second quarter of fiscal year 2024 runs from 10/1/2023 to 12/31/2023. Seasonality affects spending levels. Coming out of winter, a slower season, so lower spending is expected. APRC spending is on target for the fiscal year at 44.1%. All of our cost savings have been derived from staffing vacancies. Currently hiring many new staff. Have filled 29 out of 34 FTE positions so personnel expenses will be going up.

Material and Services budget is extremely tight. APRC is or appears to be underfunded in:

- Vandalism/theft repairs/replacements to facilities: Have had some costly repairs due to vandalism.
- Seed and fertilizer: Cost of these materials has skyrocketed.
- Professional services: HR now requires temps to be hired through Express. 40% more expensive than hiring through HR.
- Open space forestry and weed abatement: A constant challenge as trails need to be cleared of fallen trees and noxious weeds take hold. Having to hire contractors for large projects such as removing dead trees from the Liberty Street property.
- Staff training: Very low budget for staff development and training.
- Marketing and promotion: Parks used to have a position specifically for marketing and promotion. Loss of that position has affected revenues.

Revenues: Revenues remain low in most areas due to lack of marketing/promotional staff and highly subsidized fee structures. Superintendent Mettler is heading up the miscellaneous fees update for this spring. Each year City Council reviews the fee book - essentially how much people are willing to pay for facility rentals, etc. Mettler will work with Parks staff to determine if we can reach cost recovery on some of the incredibly low fees. Perhaps a tiered non-profit fee rate. We continue to work with Finance on these issues. City has hired a limited duration Economic Development Advisor who might offer ideas with potential for increasing revenues. Also, City Finance Director Berry is leading a citywide revenue study that may inform APRC practices and goals.

Capital Improvement Program (CIP): As of 12/31/23, Parks CIP Fund had ~\$3.6M. Roughly \$730 K spent in FY24 to date primarily on Daniel Meyer Pool liner replacement, system-wide irrigation improvement, East Main Park planning, and real estate transactions and expenses.

Eldridge displayed graphics for Expenditures and Revenues

Bachman: Clarified that the numbers on the revenues graph are only half of the total projected revenues as there are still six months to go.

Questions/Discussion

Bachman: If we underbudgeted for temps because we didn't know we were going to be using Express at an increased cost, that was a budgeting problem, not a spending problem.

Eldridge: The decision to use Express happened after the BN budget was made.

Bachman: This will be corrected in the next budget cycle.

Eldridge: Correct.

Bachman: As FTE positions are filled, will fewer temps be needed?

Eldridge: Hiring the OAll position will eliminate two part time temp positions. Talked with City Manager and HR. Except for ice rink and pool all temps will be hired internally through HR. Some savings there.

Eldridge: Revenues down in part because we no longer have a marketing/promotional staff member.

Landt: Parks Maintenance Agreements. Why so low?

Eldridge: With all the staff turnover they were missed. Working on making sure they are received.

- c. **Draft Resolution Authorizing APRC to Apply for a Local Government Grant from the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD) for Rehabilitation of Hunter Park Tennis Courts (Action) Interim Director Eldridge**

Public Comment:

Bachman called speakers to the podium two at a time, asked them to state their name, place of residence, and to limit their comments to two minutes.

- Dave Ferguson: Moved to Ashland 8 years ago in part because of Hunter Tennis Courts. Welcomed by the tennis community. In addition to health and fitness Hunter Park tennis courts offer community. Members of this community, some in their 80's, braved the heat and volunteered to plaster cracks in the courts. Didn't last long, had to be resurfaced. This was not the correct maintenance of the asset – cracks appeared right away. Recommends choosing the rehabilitation plan that will last longer.
- Jen Sturges: Lived in Ashland since 1976. Plays with the Senior group. Used to play for SOU and played in several Big Al's tournaments. Strongly advocates for long-term resurfacing of the courts. Embarrassing when tournaments are played at Hunter and someone's toe gets caught in the cracks. Dandelions are growing in the cracks, too. Hunter courts are all that are left. Talent courts closed, Helman school courts closed, Lithia Park courts were converted to pickleball courts, SOU courts are gone, and machinery is being parked on the old SOU courts. Tennis is still very popular. People are coming from Jacksonville to play Hunter courts. Tournaments and Jacksonville folk coming to Ashland to play Hunter courts can bring in revenue.
- Martin Stadtmueller: Lived in Ashland for 12 years or so. Coaches Ashland High School tennis teams. The Grizzlies hold all their practices and tournaments at Hunter Park. Concerned that we used to have 24 courts and are down to 7 or 8 depending on your definition of that last court. Those courts are not just not fun to play on, they are dangerous. You all know that facilities drive participation. At a certain point the courts get so frustrating to play on people just find something else to do. Tennis is an amazing sport – my mom played until she was 90. Still had no backhand. A recent study in Copenhagen compared tennis to other sports like swimming, golf, running, etc. and found that tennis added 10 years to a person's life. Far more than any other sport. There's a lot going on, there's a lot of mental calculations, moving time and space, the social connections that you don't get in other sports. I raised my kids to play tennis, they've got to have a place to play. Right now, we're lucky to have the Ashland Tennis & Fitness Club, but that doesn't work for people who can't afford it. The Hunter courts used to be the most beautiful courts in the state of Oregon and the fact that they have fallen into disrepair the way they are is tragic. I just hope that we can find a way to put the effort in and raise the money to redo these courts properly.
- Luther Lyman: I first came to Ashland to play in Big Al's 45 years ago. At that time, there were 8 courts where the dormitories are, there were 8 courts right at the college, Hunter Park and Lithia and Helman. So, we had plenty, and it's dwindled down to what's left at Hunter. The poor condition of the courts has already been addressed. I had a good experience the other day. I've been going through a lot of medical situations that have made it difficult for me to play regularly due to vision issues, etc., and I'm going to be 85 next month, but I got a ball machine and trying to get them up and down the stairs into the court is difficult. But if I come in the side gate where they would drive a truck in or do repairs, etc., it's easy. Well, they were locked. I happened to run into one of the Parks employees and he very generously opened the gate – he couldn't see why there was a padlock on it - I mean nobody uses that and he opened it for me, and it's been great because I can just roll - it's on little wheels - and I can roll it in and set it up and play and I hope I can get back and play again with the rest of these people. So again, I think as an ex-high school tennis coach in Mt. Shasta, I know what it's like when your courts go down, you're lost, and you'd start digging around. I happened to go up and look at the ones in Talent and they're not even going to try to repair them. They say they're going to go ahead and build new ones, so I don't know.

Eldridge: Hunter Park Tennis Courts Rehabilitation

OPRD has a Local Government Grant Program (LGGP) with \$30M available in funding. In consultation with Evans Brooks Associates, APRC identified two candidates for \$1M dollar grants, one of which is for the rehabilitation of the Hunter Tennis Courts. Requires 40% matching funds. Staff recommend replacing the current courts with post-tensioned concrete overlay construction predicted to last 80 to 100 years. To apply for this type of grant, a

Commission-approved resolution must be submitted with the application. It is a time-sensitive issue. The grant application is due April 1, 2024.

Bachman: Does this also have to be approved by the Council?

Eldridge: No. Staff has reached out to the tennis community. There is a lot of enthusiasm, willingness, and commitment from the community and the Ashland Tennis & Fitness Club to do fundraising to help defray the cost of the matching funds.

Bachman: It's your opinion that with community support and perhaps reallocation of CIP funds we can meet the match?

Eldridge: Yes.

Bachman: To clarify, on this particular grant, we aren't voting on the method of rehabilitation (asphalt or post tensioned concrete).

Eldridge: Correct. We could ask for less money in the grant if the Commissioners select the asphalt method. Staff recommends choosing the post-tensioned concrete.

Landt: We don't have current/precise bids for either construction methods outlined in the packet. Do we have to commit to a construction method in the grant application?

Eldridge: Pursuing \$1M in grant money is in essence stating that we are going for the post-tensioned concrete option. If we were going for the asphalt method, we would ask for less money.

Adams: Any grant application requires an estimated budget. A contractor's estimate is likely more robust than making one up ourselves. The real work with spending grant money is to demonstrate that you materially spent the money in the way that you said you would. You don't go to bid until you have the money to pay for it. You go to budget.

Dials: When awarded a grant it is possible they will ask if you can do with less. So having the two differently-priced options of construction may help.

Motion: Adams: I move to adopt the Resolution Authorizing APRC to Apply for a Local Government Grant from the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD) for Rehabilitation of the Tennis Court Facility at Hunter Park and Delegate Authority to the APRC Director to Sign the Application. Landt seconded.

Adams: Thanked the community members who showed up to the meeting and sent emails supporting both grant applications.

Landt: Also thanked the community members who sent emails of support. There is a precedent for community members helping to financially support undertakings of this sort. It has happened in the past, i.e. the lights at North Mountain Park sports fields. He is encouraged that there is a commitment to help financially, verbally and in writing.

Seffinger: Important that the Commissioners hear what the people want. The community support makes her feel good about the community.

Vote: All yes.

- d. Draft Resolution Authorizing APRC to Apply for a Local Government Grant from the (OPRD) for Development of the East Main Park Pump Track and Skills Park (Action) Interim Director Eldridge.**

Public Comment:

- Joe Keto: Lived in Ashland since 2012. My son was just 1 when we moved here. He is sitting behind me. We're a family of avid cyclists. He's tried other sports and found that cycling is the one he's really taken to. There's a really great nonprofit here called Ashland DEVO that is holding programs that give kids instruction on cycling. I believe they have over 100 kids who go through those courses every season. It's raising a community of kids and families that find cycling to be a very important, if not the most important recreational activity for their family. My daughter is 6 and she's also going to be going through these DEVO programs. She's not advanced enough to ride the trails here in town. When we travel for my son's bike races, we always stop in Redmond and ride the pump track there, which was made by the same contractor I think we are proposing to use, and it is accessible to her. I think that's one of the most important things about this

track, it's accessible to novices while advanced riders can also enjoy it. It's very good exercise and they can develop skills. Such access is lacking in Ashland because the trails are so advanced and the hills so steep.

- Ryan Hawk: I'm the president of Rogue Valley Mountain Bike Association and a resident here in Ashland. Thank you for allowing us to speak and to voice our support for this project. It's something that's very popular in the Ashland community especially among mountain bikers, but really anybody with kids who are trying to get their kids away from an X-Box and out trying things outdoors, getting some exercise. We get a lot of questions, when is this coming, there's a lot of excitement around it. So, I'm here today to voice the commitment of RVMBA once again to this project and to being a partner with APRC and to recommit to our goal of raising approximately \$150,000.00 toward this project. Having a major grant like this will make a significant momentum shift in that fundraising effort. Businesses are interested, I've spoken to them in the past and they are onboard, but I think they want to know if this is really happening. It just looks like a field to me. Thanks again.
- Loren Brown: What up Commissioners, my name is Loren Brown and I am a DEVO rider. Today was a beautiful day but you know what would have made it even more beautiful. Having a pump track with my bros after school. Having a space that encourages kids to get outside and build skills is crucial. Mountain biking is a huge part of this community and I think a pump track could give us a chance to ride our bikes when the trails are in bad condition or closed like last spring. Also, it would be a great after school activity for kids like me who don't play any traditional sports. A legit pump track would not only benefit local riders but would also draw in tourists as well. Having more options for getting outside is better than not having options, right? Boredom and lack of options could lead us kids down a dark path of doing graffiti, smoking cigarettes, or toilet papering houses. Is that what we want for us kids? That's not exactly something that I would want for my future. That's why I think we should build this pump track.
- Chamise Kramer: I am here as both a parent of a DEVO rider and as a member of the Board. I have lived in Ashland off and on for four decades. I was very late to coming into mountain biking and cycling in general as an adult, but it's important. Participation in the DEVO program for the last five years has been instrumental to my son not only growing his biking skills, but also to learning valuable things like fostering a growth mindset, community involvement, the camaraderie that comes with spending time outdoors with friends, and patience, both with ourselves and with others. We've seen the value of getting kids on bikes, not just in our child but those he rides with both locally and across the state. If COVID has taught us anything as parents, it's the importance of kids being outdoors. Not just for their physical health but their mental health as well. We are facing a growing national mental health crisis in our kids, especially in our teenagers and middle schoolers. We are facing fewer opportunities in some places for them to be outdoors, but the more opportunities they have to be outside with friends, connecting with each other, nature, and themselves, the better. A new study looked at the effects of a six to eight week cycling class that taught bike skills like those you would see at the pump track and skills park in schools across the country and the results were clear. The benefits of riding a bike extend beyond the health benefits that are physically visible. Cycling engages other parts of brain function including sensory perception and because it's often done with someone else it's also enhancing the positive effects of being in the community of their peers and not toilet papering houses. Here in Ashland, there are certainly trails and outdoor opportunities in the watershed, but we are lacking are safe places to learn those bike skills so that kids can get into the watershed safely and responsibly. Skills park would provide a place to safely build self-confidence and camaraderie, create a sense of belonging and ownership for our local kids looking for a safe place to recreate and spend time outdoors, and would meet the growing demand for a place to grow the skills needed to safely and responsibly ride in the watershed. Ashland DEVO serves more than 100 Rogue Valley youth each semester teaching skills, trail etiquette, and the importance of volunteering in their communities. The sixth to twelfth grade team rides more than 200 hours annually of community service, helping to maintain the local trails including those on City land, and they plan to dedicate volunteer time to maintain the track in the future. Ashland DEVO supports RVMBA, Ashland Parks and Recreation, and the community in pursuing the completion of this project. Thank you.

Eldridge: Pump Track and Skills Park

Why build this? It was number three of your goals for the current biennium. Staff is working hard to make it happen. Several years of high level community support, a willingness to raise matching funds, serves all ages, all of these were well covered in public comment. Tentative estimated budget is \$2M for Phase One which includes facilities like rest rooms, and everything to make it a functional park in addition to the pump track and skills park.

Motion: Landt made an amended motion: I move to adopt the Resolution Authorizing APRC to Apply for a Local Government Grant from the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD) for Development of the East Main Park Pump Track, Skills Park and associated park elements and delegate authority to the APRC Director to sign the application.

Adams seconded.

Landt: Read all the over four dozen comments. Great to know people are paying attention and care. Also acknowledge RVMBA for pledging to raise a substantial amount of money. Guessing we will need that. Thanked everyone involved for their efforts in pushing this forward.

Adams: Thanked people for their comments. I can't wait to see this pump track, ride it, and to see toddlers on little, tiny strider bikes rolling through this thing. If you haven't seen it, it's a sight to behold.

Seffinger: Excited to see all the young people here. Learning the skills will help prevent accidents and teach people how to interact with others on the trail and show good citizenship.

Lewis: At first planning meeting charrette at the high school, the Rogue Valley mountain bikers were amazingly organized. They know how government works: you show up, you divide up amongst the groups and everybody lobbies hard for this.

Landt: Understand that this is a grant we are *applying* for, if we don't get the grant we will have to start over. The addition of the pump track and skills park increases the chances of obtaining the grant and altered what would be built in the different phases.

Vote: All yes.

VIII. ITEMS FROM COMMISSIONERS/STAFF

Adams: Would love to see Lithia Park Master Plan somewhere in a Study Session on our calendar.

Eldridge: In general, we ask that there be three Commissioners that are interested in seeing this. Bachman and Seffinger indicated they were also interested.

Landt: Suggest that it be on the June study session.

IX. UPCOMING MEETING DATES

Bachman: Listed the upcoming meeting dates:

- a. Recreation Division Advisory Committee March 21 in person at the Lithia Cabin 4:00 PM
- b. Joint Study Session with City of Ashland Council April 1 in person in Council Chambers 5:30 PM
- c. APRC Study Session April 3 Electronic Meeting 6:00 PM
- d. APRC Business Meeting April 10 in person in Council Chambers 6:00 PM

X. ADJOURNMENT

Bachman adjourned the meeting at 8:09 PM