

MINUTES FOR STUDY SESSION
ASHLAND PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
October 4, 2023
Electronic Meeting – 6 P.M.

Present: Commissioners Landt (Chair), Bachman (Vice Chair) Adams, Lewis; Seffinger; Interim Director Eldridge, Deputy Director Dials, Senior Service Superintendent Glatt, Analyst Kiewel, Senior Services Coordinator Mettler

I. CALL TO ORDER

Landt called the meeting to order at 6 p.m. Landt welcomed new Commissioner, Stef Seffinger, and noted her previous service with the Commission.

II. PUBLIC FORUM

Rebeca Kay President of the Southern Oregon Aquatic Community gave public testimony regarding the potential reallocation of CIP funds. Requested that APRC keep the 2 million dollars that was designated for the Daniel Meyer pool rebuild. Kay outlined some history and rationale for keeping the budget item.

- Built in 1983, the pool is 40 years old with a 40-year-old pump and electrical system. The liner replacement is underway, but the other systems are aging.
- When discussion of a new pool becomes appropriate, the 2 million dollars will be instrumental as seed money to help secure a bond for financing.
- Other pools, such as the YMCA or Rogue Aquatic Center are not good solutions for Ashland’s swimming needs (e.g., H.S. water sports).
- A year-round pool will serve all Ashland residents, providing health benefits, community participation, and will contribute greatly towards keeping Ashland a great place to live and raise a family.

III. PARK HOURS DISCUSSION

Eldridge presented information and shared slides as per the packet of a proposed amendment to the Ashland Municipal Code (AMC) establishing park hours in all City parks. The main reasons for implementing park hours are:

- Increased vandalism over the past 5-10 years
- Increased damage to public property (e.g., bathrooms and playground equipment).
- Public safety concerns

Many of these incidents occur during nighttime hours. Instituting an ordinance that establishes park hours will allow the Ashland Police Department (APD) to help decrease the incidents of vandalism and damage, increase public safety, and potentially reduce the associated financial and maintenance burdens.

- An existing ordinance, AMC 10.68.380, applies a “Curfew” only to Lithia Park from 11:30 p.m. to 5:30 a.m.
- Staff is proposing to amend AMC10.68.380 to establish Hours of Parks Closure in all City parks from 12:00 a.m. to 5:00 a.m.
- Proposed ordinance language replacement would read: “No person shall remain in any City Park, as defined in AMC 10.68.010, between the hours 12:00 AM (midnight) and 5:00 AM, except authorized city personnel or as authorized by the Ashland Parks and Recreation Director or designee consistent with established parks rules and regulations.”
- Suggested language has been reviewed by the City’s Legal Department several times. Eldridge further clarified that the word “remain” was designed to ensure that people transiting through the park or moving through the park at night—not remaining there for long periods of time—are permitted within the bounds of the ordinance. The language surrounding the word “authorized” allows room for events or activities that might be authorized by APRC staff.
- If the Commissioners approve this language at the Regular Business Meeting on October 11, 2023, then this language will be publicly noticed and published as a change to the Ashland Municipal Code. The ordinance would go for a first and second reading by City Council, and subsequent approval by City Council.

Seffinger asked what will happen with the public bathrooms. When will they be closed and when will they open? Eldridge explained that the bathrooms are not connected to this ordinance or amendment. However, deadbolts are being installed in all park bathrooms. In addition, a security company is currently locking and unlocking the Japanese Garden and the bathrooms at Garfield Park. Staff is considering options to ensure enough staff and capacity are available to lock and clean bathrooms at night, and then reopen them again in the morning. This would likely be closing them at dusk (or later, in the summer) and opening them at 7 or 8 a.m. Landt clarified that the bathroom closure schedule was separate from the proposed park closure hours. Dials confirmed that malfunctioning bathroom auto-locks are all being switched to deadbolts, and presently, bathrooms are opened in the morning and closed between 6-9 p.m.

Landt asked for clarification of the language in AMC 10.68.010, whether the ordinance shall apply to developed City parks, or if applies to *all* open space and park land. Eldridge noted that the intent is for it to apply to developed parks—to City parks—not to open space or to all park lands. Per Landt's request, Eldridge will contact the Legal department and ask specifically about the definition of a City Park as defined in that section.

IV. ALCOHOL USE IN PARKS DISCUSSION

Dials presented staff's proposed language and policies to support focused and limited use of alcohol in parks for permitted events. This presentation is for Commissioner's review, with a possible vote at the Regular Business Meeting October 11, 2023. All language and documents are included in the packet. Dials showed a slide outlining why APRC should consider allowing the focused and limited sale/service of alcohol within parks in conjunction with an APRC Special Event permit, an OLCC permit and an APRC Alcohol Use in Parks Permit:

- Supports Biennium Goal #6 by encouraging event organizers to choose Ashland parks for their events, encouraging more events and more activity within Ashland parks.
- Enables revenue generation that makes holding these events economically feasible to organizers. Potential alcohol sales bring in more revenue for sponsorships and bands and entertainment to come to our parks.
- During the Business Economic Development roundtables that were held hosted by City Council, APRC received feedback from small business owners, the public, and event organizers that alcohol service in parks is desired.

Currently, AMC 10.68.090 does not allow any person to take any alcohol into any portion of a public park of Ashland, with a few exceptions, such as the Calle Guanajuato and the Oak Knoll Golf Course. Staff is proposing to change the language of the ordinance to read:

"It is unlawful for any person to take any intoxicating liquor or beverage into any portion of the public parks of the City, except as authorized by the Ashland Parks and Recreation Director or designee, consistent with established parks rules and regulations. Any violation of this section is a Class II violation subject to the penalties and procedures in AMC 1.08.030."

Dials further clarified that the proposed ordinance:

- Would allow for only permitted events that physically separate alcohol service and sales to individuals that are 21 and over, such as a beer or wine garden or holding an event in a space in a park where the entrance and exit can be controlled, such as the Japanese Garden.
- Events such as weddings or parties of mixed ages are NOT supported at this time by the proposed structure presented today. Per OLCC, licensed service is not a requirement for weddings, and would require increased management complexity and more staff time to coordinate.
- However, staff have crafted broad ordinance language to allow for changes in APRC rules and policies into the future.

Dials added that there are 3 items included in the packet that staff prepared for Commissioners' review:

- The proposed ordinance change
- A policy guidance paper with rules for alcohol use in parks that can be changed at any time

- A supplementary alcohol-use application for any event where alcohol would be served or sold in a cordoned-off area, such as a beer garden, etc. that is in addition to the existing Special Events permit and OLCC permit.

Dials added that OLCC is behind in their permitting process, so applicants will be encouraged to apply for an OLCC permit as quickly as possible at the start of the planning of an event to ensure that they get everything they need in advance.

Draft APRC Rules for Alcohol Use in Parks from the packet were included with adjustments based on comments and feedback from the Commission that were received from past APRC meetings. In particular:

- Line item #11 now states that a permit will not be issued for event hours prior to 7 a.m. or later than 10 p.m., in conjunction with established noise ordinance AMC 9.08.170. Does the Commission want to further scale back those hours?
- Line item #15 adds a checklist that ensures that the event organizer has been approved for everything, including the Special Event application and the OLCC permit.

Staff is seeking feedback on any final changes to the language in the hopes that this could be brought back for a vote at the Regular Business Meeting October 11, 2023. The Alcohol Use in Parks Ordinance will be publicly noticed and go through City Council with a first and second reading.

Seffinger asked for clarification about whether children wouldn't be allowed in the area where alcohol is served, and if only beer and wine would be served or mixed drinks/hard alcohol?

Dials clarified that it is written into the plan to only allow service of beer, wine, and hard cider. The alcohol service area would have to be cordoned off and restricted to 21 and over, with monitors checking I.D. Staff would work with event organizers to plan an area for alcohol service.

Adams wanted to know more about confining alcohol service to a particular area.

Dials clarified that the decision to cordon off an alcohol-use area was based on OLCC rules and regulations, and with the limited number of staff APRC has right now. This can be re-evaluated in the future but is similar to how other parks in Oregon allow alcohol use.

Bachman asked who would be responsible for the controlled areas?

Dials stated that it's all part of the OLCC application and would be required to be set before an event could take place. Eldridge added that the supplementary application specifically calls for the applicant to provide their security plan in detail and provide the name of any private security company and detail their services. Further, the policy states that required security will be determined at the discretion of the director or director's designee.

Lewis asked about an exception to the rule for the Community Center.

Dials noted that when the Community Center is open again, that would be revisited. Dials pointed out that when alcohol was served at the Community Center in the past, organizers were required to have liability insurance for the venue, and to keep alcohol use inside the venue. This is the ideal situation, but APRC staff does not currently have the personnel, etc. to assure this within parks.

Landt did not feel comfortable with the permitted hours, though they conform to the noise ordinance. 7 a.m. is too early for alcohol sales.

Commissioners and staff discussed several options for permitted hours with consensus being 11 a.m. to 9 or 10 p.m.

Landt reiterated that a checklist is a good idea to confirm when all the permits, applications and fees, etc. have been received and stipulations fulfilled and approved by APRC staff within the required time frames. A comprehensive checklist is critical to ensuring good practice.

Eldridge confirmed that Landt wanted the checklist included in the packet for the Regular Business Meeting October 11, 2023. Dials said a checklist based on Landt's suggestions could be added to the rules and guidelines sheet.

V. PARKS, TRAILS, & OPEN SPACE MAP UPDATE

Landt asked for the topic title to be changed from "Parks, Trails & Open Space *Plan* Update" to "Parks, Trails & Open Space *Map* Update."

Eldridge defined the Parks, Trails & Open Space Map as essentially a guide for APRC land acquisition. It provides for a range of uses, including neighborhood parks, potential sports fields, open spaces, trail connectivity and riparian areas, as well as wildlife habitat, and other ecological values. The map was first created in 1991, updated again in 2002, and had a light update in 2012. In May of 2022, the Commission formed a subcommittee to look at the most recent update. as part of the City of Ashland's Comprehensive Plan. The process for approval is that once the Commissioners approve of the updated map and narrative, it will go through the Planning Commission, and then through City Council in order to be updated within the City of Ashland's Comprehensive Plan.

Eldridge summarized the subcommittee's research and recommendations as laid out in "Parks, Trails, and Open Space Map Update Draft #9," and related maps and documents included in the packet.

- In 1991, Ashland had less parkland per capita than Roseburg, Medford, and Klamath Falls, so the original goal was to have a neighborhood park located within a quarter mile of every home within Ashland city limits. In 2023, Ashland is now one of the state's leaders in per capita parkland, so for all intents and purposes, APRC has accomplished that goal.
- The focus and emphasis on this update for the Parks, Trails, and Open Space Map is very different from what it was when it was first created in 1991, when it was looking to establish parcels for complete neighborhood parks.
- Now, with the updated map included in the packet, lands that are identified for future purchase focus on natural areas and ecological values, such as water quality, stream and riparian area protection. It also focuses on trail connectivity, allowing access for the people of Ashland to move by foot or bike through town.
- Trail connectivity can be achieved through outright purchase, donation, grants, or establishing easements on or getting rights to an easement through a property.
- The Subcommittee closely evaluated how to integrate the Trails Master Plan and all the perspectives of the different trail users and different residents.
- The Subcommittee recommends removing roughly 200 acres of property that had been identified for purchase in the previous map. And then, in some cases, identified other places to acquire for trail connectivity or ecological values that had not been on the map previously.

Landt and Eldridge presented a few examples of changes on the proposed map, including areas for possible additions of sports fields/ballfields, riparian areas, and areas for trail connectivity, and removal from the map of outdated areas that are no longer available or ideal for such development.

Eldridge highlighted areas worked on closely with the City's Wildfire Division. Those properties can provide multiple benefits in terms of fuels reduction and managing that area in the wildland urban interface. Other areas through the riparian corridor offer multiple recreational, water quality, and ecological benefits.

Lewis noted that it was important to do timely updates to master plans every 10 years or so and thanked everyone involved with the current update.

Landt noted that the 2012 "light" update was never implemented, and that the 2023 proposed update is the first time that APRC is officially proposing to remove properties—200 acres—from the plan. This is important because the parks and open space situation has changed radically from what it was when some of these properties were first placed on the plan.

Seffinger commented that from a budget perspective, the proposed update focused on properties most valuable to the city and there are some that are being let go because they are not first priorities.

Landt agreed and added that comments from the public and from City Councilors supported this conclusion, and that nothing is being removed from the plan that is critical to a robust, strong park system.

Landt requested staff to change the Billings property from "sports field" to "sports fields and riparian areas."

Eldridge wanted to make sure to recognize and appreciate the time and effort of Leah Light, the GIS specialist who works for the city who has gone through more than nine drafts of the map and gone back and forth with staff to support this process.

VI. LOOKAHEAD REVIEW

- Landt asked to add a discussion on solar at East Main Park to a future meeting

VII. ITEMS FROM COMMISSIONERS/STAFF

Adams recognized Parks employee Jason Minica for extraordinary work in clearing a fallen tree by the Wonder Trail.

Dials announced 2 events scheduled for Friday, October 6, 2023:

1. The Ashland Walk and Bike Breakfast at Railroad Park from 7 a.m. to 9 a.m.
2. Gather Round the Railroad District, presented by Rogue World Music, from 5 to 7 p.m. in the railroad district.

More information is available on the APRC Facebook page.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 7:15 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Judy Plapinger
APRC Temporary Office Assistant