

ASHLAND DAILY TIDINGS

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/ Ashland Parks & Recreation Commission**

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We want to start by stating that we, as commissioners of Ashland Parks and Recreation Commission (APRC), unanimously voted at our Aug. 9 meeting to retain all vital programs for low-income seniors. That is our direction to staff and it is our pledge to the community.

We, along with APRC staff, understand that the evaluation and restructuring of the Ashland Senior Program has not been an easy process for Ashland seniors or senior advocates. But, nonetheless, we, as elected commissioners, steadfastly believe that our efforts to introduce change within the Ashland Senior Program is both necessary and important for the long-term future of this vital program.

Communication regarding change can be stressful and we understand that this process has led to some stressful feelings within the senior community. We accept responsibility for not being as clear in our communications as hindsight would show we could have been. Nevertheless, we believe that it is important to acknowledge that we commissioners, along with staff, have responded to public feedback by ensuring no disruption in vital services, by

creating an ad hoc committee that provides public participation in the guidance of the program's future direction and by keeping senior services at the current location at 1699 Homes Ave.

What has added to senior distress has been the plethora of made and repeated false claims, and repeating of information that was initially true but due to feedback to APRC, has been rectified and is no longer true.

The argument has been made that there was no reason to make any changes. On the contrary, due to budget constraints and calls for additional services, all APRC programs require periodic review. As one of the most expensive recreation programs in our system, the Senior Program is receiving its periodic review now. The review was also needed because there had been minimal movement towards commissioners' requests that the Senior Program seek creative ways to increase revenues via grants, partnerships and other creative means. Further, the Senior Program had an advisory board that was not responsible to APRC, a situation that had to be corrected. Identifying revenue positive programs for the growing overall senior population was also noted as currently unevaluated.

This review process will continue over the next few months. The driver of the process is the Senior Program Ad Hoc Advisory Committee, primarily made up of program

participants and experts in senior service related disciplines. The first meeting of a series of meetings was held Oct. 10. The second meeting is scheduled for early to mid-November. All meetings will be open to the public and publicized. The results of these meetings will be reported to us at a public meeting. We will rely on the committee's recommendations as we move forward.

There have been calls for the city to take over senior services from APRC. This would make sense in many ways and in fact, the city did, until 2007, administer the senior program. Then, when the city was threatened by a budget deficit, APRC agreed to take it over due to more budget flexibility at that time. APRC no longer has the budget flexibility due to changes in state law and increases in parkland requirements that are mandated in the city's Comprehensive Plan. The essential senior programs are social services, logically a responsibility of the city, and not specifically part of APRC's mission. We have and will continue to honor this responsibility unless the city relieves us. We have seen no indication that the city desires to take back these duties.

We have an opportunity to strengthen our senior services and thus strengthen our community. We ask for your patience and support as we await the results of the ad hoc committee's efforts.

—Rick Landt, Matt Miller, Joel Heller, Jim Lewis & Mike Gardiner are Ashland Parks & Recreation commissioners. Park Views appears monthly.