

## GUEST OPINION

# Another view of the facts

By Jim Bachman

A few days ago, the Ashland Daily Tidings published a Park Views column by Parks & Recreation Commission Chairman Mike Gardiner titled "Facts on Ashland Senior Program." I feel compelled to take issue with a number of his assertions in that article.

He began by describing the Ashland Parks & Recreation Commission's formation of the Senior Program Subcommittee, writing that the "subcommittee was composed of two commissioners, the Senior Center Program manager and two senior APRC members," implying that there were five people in the group. In fact, the minutes from the Oct. 24, 2016 APRC regular meeting clearly state that only Gardiner and Commissioner Jim Lewis were appointed. The three staff members Gardiner listed attended the meetings, but were not voting members. No public members were invited to join the subcommittee, a major flaw in any public process.

Gardiner reviewed the subcommittee's goals. The fourth one included "seek advocates of the senior program ..." He also stated that "members of the public attended these meetings and each agenda provided time for either general public input or input on a specific agenda item." Those of us following the subcommittee's work — I was present

at the first and last meetings, my wife, Jackie Bachman, attended five of the six Gardiner discussed — and those looking back over the public record since Aug. 8 and 9 find little to support that the subcommittee made a good-faith effort to achieve the goal of seeking senior program advocates or seriously considering public input. In fact, our perception of the process is exactly the opposite:

1. The agenda for the Jan. 24 meeting was not available until the meeting day, violating anyone's interpretation of public meeting laws requiring adequate public notification.

2. The first and last meetings were well attended only because seniors networked to make that happen. My wife was one of the few, if any, public attendees at meetings 2 through 5.

3. There is no evidence that the subcommittee considered any of the public testimony received at these meetings. In fact, Commissioner Lewis announced at the final subcommittee meeting on Aug. 8 that his mind was made up *before* public testimony was heard.

4. Minutes from the many meetings were not posted on the city website in a timely manner, making it difficult if not impossible for those not attending meetings to follow the decision-making process. In fact, many of them were not posted until *after* the Aug. 9 APRC meeting at which Parks & Recreation Director Michael Black's

recommendations were accepted.

Gardiner wrote that the "APRC will form an ad hoc Senior Advisory Committee made up of program participants, related professional field experts, APRC staff and commissioners." But consider how this ad hoc committee idea came into being:

1. After the Aug. 8 subcommittee meeting at which Black's recommendations were accepted by a vote of 2-0 in favor, Black revised his recommendations in preparation for the Aug. 9 APRC regular meeting.

2. It was clear to those of us attending the Aug. 9 meeting that the commissioners were prepared to vote to accept the revised recommendations *without having read them*.

3. Only after a member of the public stood up to raise a "point of order" that the commissioners actually read the newly revised recommendations before voting to accept them was there a discussion of the changes.

4. It was only then that Commissioner Landt proposed creating the ad hoc committee.

In closing, if Gardiner's goal was to seek advocacy for senior programs in Ashland, he has succeeded. Organizing the seniors of Ashland to advocate for senior issues affecting them is well under way. We have found our voice!

— Jim Bachman is co-founder of United Seniors of Ashland.