



APRC and a member of ad hoc committee face new claim

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Posted at 7:15 PM

Updated at 7:15 PM

Claims against the Ashland Parks & Recreation Commission, the parks director and a member of the ad hoc Senior Center committee have been filed with different state departments, according to records obtained by the Tidings.

The commission and Parks Director Michael Black now face an allegation of age discrimination, according to a complaint filed with the Bureau of Labor and Industries (BOLI). The allegation, obtained by the Tidings through a public records request to the bureau, has also been forwarded to Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

The Oregon Ethics Commission also confirmed to the Tidings that a ethics complaint has been filed against Senior Center ad hoc committee member Laura O'Bryon. The ethics commission representative declined to release further information about the case, saying the documents are confidential during the preliminary investigation process.

Filing of the charges come as the Parks Commission is in the midst of reorganizing its Senior Program, an effort that has been criticized by many community members and Senior Center patrons since the center's manager, Chris Dodson, was notified in August she should not return to work and her position would be terminated Oct. 1. A group called Ashland Support Our Seniors has since launched a recall effort of three commissioners. Dodson sent a tort claim notice to the city in January alleging wrongful dismissal.

In the BOLI complaint, a former Senior Center part-time employee, Dorothy Parsons, alleged she was discriminated based on her age and ultimately laid off after working at the Senior Center for 15 years. She cited in the complaint that Black said he wanted "new blood" in the center.

“On or about August 30, 2017, Respondent began laying off everyone in my department,” all of whom were over 40, reads Parsons’ claim, which was received by BOLI on Dec. 22, 2017.

All information on the case, with the exception of the initial claim, is confidential until the investigation is completed, the bureau’s spokesman, Charlie Burr, said.

Black denied any wrongdoing regarding Parsons’ claim in a phone interview Thursday.

“I didn’t lay off (Parsons),” Black said. “In fact, she resigned, effective Aug. 31.”

In a letter published in the Tidings on Dec. 22, Black stated that the four part-time employees alerted Human Resources Department of their intent to resign on Aug. 30 and “walked off the job” the next day without notifying him.

“I did not fire anyone at the Senior Center,” Black wrote. “There were plans to ask a few of those who quit to stick around during the transition.”

Parsons, along with the other three former part time staff, responded to Black’s statement in a letter published in the Tidings on Dec. 24.

The letter states Black didn’t fire them, but noted that a notice sent to Dodson on Aug. 23 said “all paid program staff will be laid off effective October 1, 2017.”

“He might have preferred if we had stuck around to help him dismantle this program until his arbitrarily selected date of Oct. 1, but what reasonable person would wish to do that?” the letter from the former staff members reads. “We felt that his ‘recommendations’ were in opposition to the mission statement of the Senior Program and we did not intend to be used during his ‘reorganization’ period and then be canned by him on Oct. 1.”

The letter also reads that the former part-time staff “resigned en masse in support of our program director.”

Regarding the ethics claim, O’Byron said on Wednesday that she hasn’t received any complaint. Attempts to reach her Thursday were unsuccessful.

Ashland City Attorney David Lohman declined to comment Wednesday on Parsons' claim because of the pending investigation and said the city did not receive any ethics complaint or inquiry regarding an ethics complaint.

Lohman also said the city hasn't received anything else regards a lawsuit since Dodson sent the tort notice.

The Senior Program reorganization continues to move forward as the Parks and Recreation Commission on Monday approved putting the Senior Program in its own division within Parks & Recreation, established a new program description and adopted a conceptual job description for a new manager.

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