

# Mail Tribune

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## Guest Opinion: Ashland Senior Center problems are imaginary

By Heidi Gottlieb

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Regarding the Ashland Senior Center controversy:

Over a month ago we asked Commissioner Gardiner: Has there been any attempt by the commission to generate data about the “underserved” senior community? Do you have any data? Answer: No. So the idea that the senior program needs expansion is APRC’s idea and it has no statistical or factual support. It is a generated need.

We’ve heard from the commission in recent meetings that they are listening to the senior community by changing some of the actions that people objected to. However, they are backpedaling, revealing that their recommendations were ill-considered, formulated without context within the community and with seemingly no awareness of the consequences to our vulnerable senior population.

The public should understand that in the name of broader community involvement, APRC created and then artfully emasculated an ad hoc advisory committee. The group comprises five citizen members, the two APRC commissioners who glibly delivered their decision of intent to dismantle the program to the public in early August, a City Council member, and individuals representing OLLI, Rogue Valley Council of Governments (responsible for Food and Friends at the Senior Center), and Ashland at Home. These 11 are overseen by Michael Black and Rachel Dials of APR. The sessions are conducted by a paid facilitator. At the outset APR Director Black announced two salient issues that the advisory committee was forbidden to discuss: 1) restoring laid-off employees and 2) reviewing APRC’s Aug. 9 decisions.

APR admits they made some errors and there was “a little bit of poor communication” involved but they contend plans must go forward with reorganization of the senior program. Yet those very restrictions *are* the issues.

Those actions dismantled the heart of the very successful, state-recognized Ashland Senior Program. If the ad hoc committee cannot and does not address the underlying problem, they are simply part of a drawn-out attempt to normalize serious wrongdoing on the part of APRC. Members of the committee have no decision-making abilities; they will only be able to make recommendations, which APRC will then consider and can override, just as the City Council did with the ad hoc budget committee's recommendations this year. This is yet another example of spending money that could be going to (in this case, senior) program needs. Instead, Black notes the group's facilitator will be paid an estimated \$3,000 to 5,000.00 for his services.

A senior recently asked Ashland SOS "What was the problem in the first place that led APRC to get into this?" It's a great question. Initially APRC said their actions were based on financial concerns; the Senior Program needed to generate more revenue. They also claimed their actions would provide for an underserved population (which they did not identify) and would upgrade a deficient program.

Again, the problem was created by APRC. The program was fine, receiving commendation from the Department of Human Services as a state model. Responsible public servants proceed by first identifying a problem or a need. Then they design goals and specific related objectives. That's followed by the creation of a plan to carry out the objectives to solve the problem. APRC did not do that. They still don't have clear goals and objectives, and they never defined a problem.

This same scenario is again unfolding with Black's plans to replace the Daniel Meyer Pool, proposing a tax bond to help pay for the a \$3.5 million covered competitive pool which will benefit a small percentage of people. The site just happens to be immediately adjacent to the Senior Center in Hunter Park, with the plan to extend pool facilities to 10 feet from the Senior Center building. Currently the Senior Center and Hunter Park are quiet spaces and this plan will shatter the tranquil atmosphere. Many citizens support the idea of a *regional* aquatic center in a more appropriate location that would provide benefit to more people and have a broader base of financial support.

Meanwhile, allocating massive resources for another ill-conceived plan cannot be supported. The same APRC group that feels justified laying off all senior program staff and slashing the senior budget, while declaring that there isn't money for senior programs, is attempting to activate this plan. APRC has no business entertaining such a reckless pool proposal.

— Heidi Gottlieb of Ashland is a registered nurse specializing in senior care.