

To Set the THE LONG ROAD TO RECALL STRAIGHT!

Additional, Vital Information re: Tidings Article 2/25/2018 provided in BOLD CAPS.

November 2016: Then-Senior Center Manager Christine Dodson and the advisory board discussed the possibility of transferring the Senior Center out of the Parks and Recreation Department, according to Senior Center subcommittee meeting minutes.

ON DECEMBER 23RD 2016, THE SENIOR PROGRAM ADVISORY BOARD DISCUSSED THIS ISSUE. BOTH CITY COUNCILOR STEFANI SEFFINGER AND JACKIE BACHMAN, MEMBERS OF THE ADVISORY BOARD, WERE PRESENT AT THE MEETING AND PARTICIPATED IN THE DISCUSSION. JACKIE BACHMAN, CURRENT CHAIR OF THE AD HOC SENIOR ADVISORY COMMITTEE, WAS THE OFFICIAL NOTE TAKER. MINUTES OF THE MEETING WERE DULY ENTERED INTO THE SENIOR CENTER INFORMATIONAL QUALITY REVIEW BINDER, WHICH CHRIS DODSON TURNED INTO DIRECTOR BLACK'S OFFICE ON JANUARY 13, 2017.

Jan. 24, 2017: Commissioners Gardiner and Lewis and Parks and Recreation Director Michael Black expressed dismay when they learned of the transfer discussion, according to the meeting minutes.

DESPITE HAVING THE INFORMATIONAL BINDER BETWEEN JANUARY 13 AND JANUARY 24, 2017, NEITHER THE DIRECTOR NOR THE COMMISSIONERS ASKED ANY QUESTIONS OR RAISED ANY CONCERNS WITH DODSON UNTIL THAT UNDER-PUBLICIZED JANUARY 24TH SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING . DODSON AND OTHER ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERS TESTIFIED THAT THEY NEVER ACTED ON THE DISCUSSION. THE ADVISORY BOARD DID NOT RECOMMEND MOVING THE SENIOR CENTER, THEY

WERE JUST ASKING THE QUESTION ABOUT WHAT WAS A BETTER FIT GIVEN THE PROGRAM'S MISSION.

February through May: The subcommittee met four times to reevaluate the Senior Center's structure. Dodson was asked to provide information to aid the effort.

CHRISTINE DODSON WAS OUTSTANDING IN HER RESPONSE TO EVERY REQUEST MADE OF HER. ALSO VERY LITTLE PUBLIC INPUT WAS GIVEN SINCE THE PUBLIC DID NOT KNOW THE DRASTIC ACTIONS THE SUB-COMMITTEE WAS READY TO MAKE.

Aug. 8: The subcommittee unanimously agreed to recommend the reorganization.

THEIR RECOMMENDATIONS WERE MADE PUBLIC LESS THAN 24 HOURS BEFORE THE MEETING. THE SUBCOMMITTEE COMPRISING ONLY OF TWO COMMISSIONERS, GARDINER AND LEWIS, APPROVED DIRECTOR BLACK'S RECOMMENDATIONS IN SPITE OF THE ROOM OVERFLOWING WITH PUBLIC WHO UNANIMOUSLY PROTESTED THE RECOMMENDATIONS. COMMISSIONER GARDINER STATED THAT HE HAD ALREADY MADE UP HIS MIND TO VOTE FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS BEFORE THE MEETING AND ITS PUBLIC INPUT. GARDINER ALSO HAS INCORRECTLY STATED IN PUBLIC THERE WERE 5 PEOPLE ON THE SUBCOMMITTEE (SNEAK PREVIEW SEPT 1ST AND 29TH, 2017).

THERE WERE ONLY TWO MEMBERS ON THE SUBCOMMITTEE, AND THOSE ARE THE TWO MEMBERS WHO VOTED. MR. GARDINER ALSO STATED THAT THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS (5) WERE WELL ATTENDED AND THE PUBLIC WAS LISTENED TO. IN FACT JIM BACHMAN WROTE IN THE TIDINGS ON AUGUST 30, THAT AT MEETINGS 2 THROUGH 5 JACKIE BACHMAN WAS ONE OF

THE FEW, IF ANY, PUBLIC ATTENDEES AT THOSE MEETINGS. AND THERE WAS "NO EVIDENCE THAT THE SUBCOMMITTEE CONSIDERED ANY OF THE PUBLIC TESTIMONY RECEIVED AT THOSE MEETINGS". MR. BACHMAN ALSO STATED THAT NO PUBLIC MEMBERS WERE ASKED TO JOIN THE SUBCOMMITTEE AND THERE WAS NO GOOD FAITH EFFORT TO "SEEK ADVOCATES OF THE SENIOR PROGRAM".

Aug. 9: Ashland Parks and Recreation Commission (APRC) unanimously voted to adopt the recommendation, which included the dismissal of Dodson.

SUBCOMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS WERE MODIFIED AND APPROVED IN SPITE OF THE OVER 100 SENIORS WHO UNANIMOUSLY PROTESTED THE RECOMMENDATIONS.

IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT LEWIS AND GARDINER WERE INVITED REPEATEDLY BUT DID NOT VISIT THE SENIOR CENTER OR ITS PROGRAM SENIORS EXCEPT FOR THE OCCASIONAL MEETING AFTER HOURS HELD AT THE CENTER. THEY DID NOT CONDUCT DUE DILIGENCE IN ASSESSING HOW THEIR DECISION WOULD AFFECT THE PEOPLE AT THE CENTER.

Aug. 23: Black sent a layoff notice to Dodson, effective October 1st.

THE LAYOFF NOTICE INCLUDED TWO STATEMENTS BY BLACK INDICATING HIS INTENTION TO LAY OFF THE REST OF THE SENIOR PROGRAM STAFF.

AUG. 30: FOUR SENIOR CENTER PART-TIME EMPLOYEES RESIGNED IN SUPPORT OF DODSON, ACCORDING TO A LETTER TO THE EDITOR SENT BY THE EMPLOYEES IN DECEMBER. ..UNABLE TO OPERATE EFFECTIVELY WITHOUT A LEADER AND KNOWING THAT THEY WERE SCHEDULED

FOR LAY OFF ON OR BEFORE OCT. 1ST. AT THE SAME TIME, THEIR RESIGNATION WAS BEING DELIVERED TO CITY HALL, BLACK CAME TO THE SENIOR CENTER TO BEGIN THE LAYOFF PROCESS BY COLLECTING THE ATTENDING EMPLOYEE'S KEYS AND ESCORTING HER TO THE DOOR.

Oct. 10: Ashland Senior Program Advisory Committee met for the first time. The committee includes program participants, related-field experts from Ashland at Home and Rogue Valley Council of Governments, two parks commissioners and a city councilor. The committee has been meeting monthly to draft new recommendations by March 2018.

ALL HANDPICKED BY APRC AND AGREED TO ACCEPT APRC'S INITIAL RECOMMENDATIONS TO LAY OFF STAFF AND NOT RESTORE THE PRIOR PROGRAM.

Nov. 8 and 9: A campaign to recall commissioners Landt, Lewis and Gardiner was launched. The campaign, filed by Mary Sundberg, Mary Canfield and Avram Chetron, was supported by a group called Support Our Seniors. The petitions claim the commissioners mismanaged the parks department's \$9 million annual budget, resulting in a projected \$5.9 million deficit by 2021-23, mismanaged personnel, repeatedly failed to follow Oregon Public Meetings Law, approved spending \$230,000 on a consultant to develop a Lithia Park master plan and ignored two specific recommendations from a 2016 audit regarding making changes within the department. The bulk of the projected deficit was later attributed to a finance department error that affected the entire city budget.

THE FINANCE DEPT ONLY GAVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBLE ERROR AFTER THE RECALL ELECTION WAS SET. FINAL RESULTS OF THEIR INVESTIGATION IS SCHEDULED FOR AFTER THE RECALL ELECTION.

Dec. 20: APRC signed a \$15,000, six-month contract with Rogue Valley Council Of Government to bring in a weekly referral specialist to the senior center, Black announced.

A ONE-DAY A WEEK REGIONAL SPECIALIST WAS HIRED. SHE DOES NOT PERFORM OUTREACH SERVICES TO REACH VULNERABLE SENIORS IN THEIR HOMES.

WITH A COMBINED TOTAL OF 72 YEARS OF LOCAL, PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE PRIOR STAFF ENABLED SENIORS TO REMAIN LIVING IN THEIR HOMES. ALL WERE LONG TERM ASHLAND RESIDENTS; THEY LIVED IN TOWN FOR A COMBINED TOTAL OF 130 YEARS! IN ADDITION TO WORKING, THEY ALL VOLUNTEERED IN THE COMMUNITY IN MANY ORGANIZATIONS, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO: SOROPTIMIST, ACH AUXILIARY, CHURCHES, SHAKESPEARE, ASHLAND SCHOOL SYSTEM, OLLI PROGRAM AND FOOD AND FRIENDS LUNCH PROGRAM. THIS STAFF HAD AN UNMATCHED AND IRREPLACEABLE KNOWLEDGE OF THIS TOWN.

Dec. 22: Dorothy Parsons, one of four former Senior Center part-time employees, filed an age discrimination claim with the Bureau of Labor and Industries, according to a document obtained by the Tidings. A BOLI spokesperson confirmed a pending investigation.

Jan. 5, 2018: Dodson filed a tort claim notice with the city of Ashland, alleging she was wrongfully dismissed, documents obtained by the Tidings revealed.

Jan. 22: APRC unanimously approved the recommendations from an ad-hoc committee for a separate Senior Center division, new program description and a conceptual job description for a new manager.

HOWEVER FINAL IMPLEMENTATION WILL NOT BE DECIDED UNTIL AFTER THE AD HOC COMMITTEE IS DISBANDED AND THE RECALL ELECTION IS PAST. THE AD HOC ADVISORY COMMITTEE HAS NO DECISION-MAKING

AUTHORITY ... ONLY THE COMMISSIONERS DO. THESE CHANGES THEY HAVE RECOMMENDED ARE PROJECTED TO INCREASE PERSONNEL EXPENSES BY APPROXIMATELY \$100,000.

Jan. 25: The Tidings learned of an ethics complaint against advisory committee member Laura O'Bryon, who also works for RVCOG. Oregon Ethics Commission confirmed of a preliminary investigation of 30 days.

Recall petitioners submitted signatures from Ashland voters to the city of Ashland recorder's office to initiate the recall.

TEN DAYS BEFORE THE DUE DATE.

Jan. 26: City recorder forwarded the petition to Jackson County Clerk's office for signature verification.

Feb.1: Black said Dodson was dismissed after the parks commission found the center's staff operated with little oversight and resisted change when the center was performing at below-satisfactory levels, the Tidings reported.

THE TIDINGS REPORTED BUT DID NOT VERIFY THE ACCURACY OF THESE STATEMENTS. ALL PAST SURVEYS INDICATED OUTSTANDING SATISFACTION LEVELS BY SENIOR PARTICIPANTS. ALSO, DIRECTOR BLACK WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR OVERSIGHT THAT WAS SUPPOSEDLY LACKING. DODSON GAVE CONTINUOUS EXPERT OVERSIGHT OVER THE SENIOR CENTER PERSONNEL AND OPERATIONS.

Feb. 2: The Jackson County Clerk's Office confirmed the petitioners had collected the required number of signatures — at least 15 percent of Ashland's registered

voters, or 1,566 signatures — to initiate a recall vote against each commissioner. The election date was set for March 13 and will cost the city an estimated \$25,000 to \$30,000.

THE PETITIONERS COLLECTED AN AVERAGE PER COMMISSIONER OF 1,800 SIGNATURES (OVER 5,400 SIGNATURES), 10 DAYS PRIOR TO DEADLINE. THE COST IS PADDED SO THAT ACTUAL COST WILL BE BELOW EXPECTATIONS. IT IS WELL-WORTH IT TO STOP THE MONETARY BLEEDING BY THE APRC.

Feb. 7: The three commissioners decline to resign, submitting their letters of justification to the County Clerk's office.

Lewis filed a complaint against the claims used in the recall petition to the Oregon Elections Division, saying the claims are baseless.

Feb. 9: The Bureau of Labor and Industry issued a note to dismiss Parsons' age discrimination claim due to lack of substantial evidence, according to documents obtained by the Tidings.

INVESTIGATION WAS DROPPED WHEN THE CITY RESPONDED THAT SHE WAS NOT LAID OFF AND HAD INSTEAD QUIT. NO WITNESSES IDENTIFIED BY PARSONS WERE CONTACTED FOR INPUT AND/OR CONSIDERATION.

Feb. 12: Ad-hoc committee agreed to recommend the parks commission hire a Senior Center superintendent and increase personnel by one full-time position at the center, which would lead to cuts in other programs in the Parks and Recreation Department. It also recommended creation of an advisory board to include a parks commissioner, a city councilor and five citizen members.

THESE RECOMMENDATIONS ALMOST DOUBLE THE \$175,000 BUDGET THAT DODSON OPERATED UNDER. YET NONE OF THESE RECOMMENDATIONS WILL BE ACTED

UPON UNTIL AFTER THE RECALL ELECTION. THE AD HOC ADVISORY COMMITTEE CAN ONLY RECOMMEND; THEY DO NOT HAVE POLICY- MAKING AUTHORITY.

Feb. 13: City Finance Director Mark Welch said the city's budget was approved with incorrect projections and that the city was working to amend its budget after the petitioners cited a projected Parks and Recreation Department deficit in the recall campaign. He said a revised projection reduces the parks' 2021-23 estimated deficit by nearly 90 percent, from \$5.9 million to \$600,000.

THE OFFICIAL REPORT WILL NOT BE REVEALED UNTIL AFTER THE RECALL ELECTION. ALSO IT IS NOT CLEAR IF THE CITIZENS ON THE BUDGET COMMITTEE WILL BE GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO WEIGH IN. IF NOT FOR THE RECALL, THE \$5.9 MILLION BUDGET ERROR MAY NOT HAVE COME TO LIGHT.

Feb. 23: The Jackson County Clerk's office mailed out ballots for the special election

March 1: Citizens' Budget Committee will hold an informational meeting in the wake of the Tidings report on the incorrect projections. Members said they asked about the projected deficits during the budget process, but their questions were not answered.

March 12: The Senior Center ad hoc committee will finalize its full list of recommendations before presenting them to the Parks and Recreation Commission for approval.

AD HOC ADVISORY COMMITTEE HAS NO DECISION-MAKING AUTHORITY. APRC SCHEDULED IMPLEMENTATION DATES ARE FOR WELL AFTER THE AD HOC COMMITTEE IS DISSOLVED AND AFTER THE RECALL ELECTION.

March 13: Polls will close at 8 p.m. and results will be tallied on the three recalls. If Ashland voters vote the commissioners out, the City Council will appoint new commissioners to fill the vacant spots until the next election.