

Nov. 1, 2017

Guest Opinion: Setting the record straight

A citizens' rebuttal to the Oct. 25 Daily Tidings column, "Message from Ashland Parks & Recreation Commissioners":

"APRC unanimously voted at our Aug. 9 meeting to retain all vital programs for low-income seniors."

Not true. The Ashland Parks and Recreation Commission actually voted to lay off all Senior Center staff and to replace with untrained general recreation staff, which is why all vital programs have not been retained. (e.g. in-home outreach, information and referral, etc.) There was no justified rationale for causing disruption of vital services by laying off all Senior Center staff.

APRC has "responded to public feedback by ensuring no disruption of vital services, by creating an ad hoc committee that provides public participation ..."

Not true. APCR appointed a committee that is not allowing public input at every meeting. Discussion at the first meeting included how to limit public participation to "informed input" only. The meeting was held at The Grove, inaccessible to many seniors, not at the Senior Center.

The Senior Program is "one of the most expensive recreation programs in our system."

Not true. At \$175,000 per year and 2 percent of the APCR's total budget, the Senior Program is actually the least expensive program in APCR. It is less expensive than the golf course, which projects a \$297,000 subsidy, or the Nature Center, which projects a \$278,000 subsidy. The balance of the recreation budget includes the swimming pool, skating rink, operation of The Grove, and recreation administration and is not transparent enough to analyze precisely, but it clearly receives a larger subsidy than other APCR programs.

"... there had been minimal movement towards ... creative ways to increase revenues"

Not true. The Senior Program manager submitted her own recommendations to the parks director, but they were not considered or even presented to the subcommittee.

"The Senior Program had an advisory board that was not responsible to APCR."

The Senior Program manager and the recreation superintendent worked together in 2007 to create and define the Senior Program Advisory Board. Through the years meetings were

attended by both a parks commissioner and a City Council liaison, as well as the recreation superintendent, and on occasion the parks director.

“Identifying revenue positive programs ... was ... unevaluated”

Huh? The Senior Program staff processed the more than 400 Ashland Low Income Energy Assistance Program, heat assistance and senior utility discount applications that the city received each year. The city did not recognize those services rendered on behalf of the electric funds in their cost accounting. If it did, those Senior Program staff services would be revenue positive. Nevertheless, the Senior Program staff processed those applications without reimbursement because it was an avenue of identifying citizens in need of other information and referrals, which supports the Senior Program mission.

Why would the APRC continually spin the facts and dodge responsibility for our older citizens' needs? It is time for them to restore the proven and robust Senior Program, and bring back the trained, experienced staff.

These five elected commissioners are called to serve the community, not manipulate the decision-making process. They have shown a blatant disregard for public welfare and an appalling condescension toward public input. In fact, the initial decision to approve these recommendations was so egregious that it warrants recall. They have broken the public trust.

For more information go to www.AshlandSOS.com.

*The above figures are based on cost recovery rates provided by Mike Gardiner to Sneak Preview in its October 2017 edition and the city of Ashland's final budget documents for fiscal year 2018.

— *This opinion was signed by Ashland residents Claudia Ballard, Rebecca Cross, Heidi Gottlieb, Theresa Greer and Sue Wilson on behalf of Ashland Support Our Seniors (SOS), a broad-based group of citizens that came together after the APRC vote on Aug. 9.*