



## Committee got an earful at second meeting

By Tran Nguyen Ashland Daily Tidings

Posted at 8:24 PM

Updated at 8:24 PM

Ashland senior residents told the ad hoc Senior Program Advisory Committee they don't know what the committee's mission is.

The committee, made up of two parks commissioners, a city councilor, two related field experts from Ashland at Home and Rogue Valley Council of Governments and five community members, met for the second time on Monday, Nov. 13. The meeting was facilitated by facilitator John Lange.

The committee, established in October, was tasked to "lead the visioning of an expanded and improved Senior Program" after the commissioners took the plunge adopting a controversial plan amid public outcry from residents. Its deadline to make a recommendation is in February.

While the committee said its mission is stated in the Senior Center information binder, seven residents who spoke at the meeting said they were still unclear what the committee is trying to achieve.

"This is simple — or maybe it's simply that I don't understand it. But there's a lot of discussion around town about problems, and I understand some of them, but I don't see anywhere of a list of mission and goals for this committee," resident Susan Russ said at the meeting. "It would be nice if you're going to develop a list of recommendations to have a strategic plan based on problems going forward. I don't see that, and I'd like to."

"While the idea that the senior program needs expansion was (Ashland Parks and Recreation Commission's) idea, it has no statistical or actual support that generated that need," resident Heidi Gottlieb said at the meeting. "Again the problem is something they created — responsible public

servants should proceed by first identifying the problem underneath, then design the goals of specific objectives that follow by creation of a plan ... to solve the problem. They didn't do any of that. They still don't have clear goals and objectives and never could find the problem."

Monday's second meeting, with three issues listed on the agenda among other updates, spent half the time on public meetings nuances: revisiting ground rules and purpose, running through expectation clarification and discussing logistics, such as internal email communication, meeting dates, accessibility to the meeting and amount of public input time.

"I know the saying, 'rather go slow and first than go fast,'" Lange said after committee members grew impatient of logistic talk. "We need to have a solid process so we can move forward efficiently."

After also allowing public comment to go over the allotted 15 minutes to 21 minutes, the two-hour meeting was left with merely over half an hour to discuss issues at hand and current updates.

The most well-received item all night was when Black said APR will seek a new senior center manager and Bachman urged the department to focus on training staff about outreach.

"That is one of the biggest input I have received from the community — when the experienced staff is no longer there, you lose the contact and the outreach and the ability to really check in on fragile senior," Bachman said, "They don't speak up, you have to go out to them. ... This is a real missing link out there, and I can't stress that enough."

The senior center has been providing services as "a safety net" for many seniors in the city. In 2015, the partnerships between the center and Food and Friends program served over 15,593 meals, 63 percent of which were delivered to folks at their homes, according to a Food and Friends Program report to APRC in January 2016.

The committee also agreed to have a subcommittee brainstorming on potential partnerships for the center and the logistic for the committee to meet twice a month. The committee will start planning to host an open house to promote the program and collect public input in December.

Other proposals at the meeting included having committee members hold office hours at the Senior Center and finding new outlets to receive public input, which were left undecided at the end of the meeting.

The committee's next two meetings are scheduled for Dec. 11 and Jan. 8.

— *Reach Ashland Daily Tidings reporter Tran Nguyen at 541-776-4485 or*