

Opinion**Guest Opinion: Why recall parks commissioners?****By Sandra Sawyer**

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Ashland Support Our Seniors came about as a result of the Ashland Parks and Recreation Commission's negative focus on the Senior Center, a program that had worked beautifully for over 43 years. SOS started with people who were concerned about the Senior Center and the elderly seniors who use it frequently. As we got together and began to investigate, we found problems that were not transparent or known publicly. The more we researched, the more we learned that APRC has a lot of problems.

The recall listed five of what we consider to be the most egregious. The commissioners retaliated with wild allegations that are not supported by fact. The commissioners' recall campaign flier tries to explain their actions, or lack thereof, with statements not pertinent to the issues raised by the recall.

APRC's projected operating fund balance for 2021-23 shows a \$5.9 million deficiency (page 3-59, 2017-19 budget). The commissioners paid no attention to this high deficit until the recall was initiated, and suddenly it became a huge issue. Now the city has reported that there were "calculation errors" and that the projected deficit may be as "low" as \$600,000. However, the investigation will not be completed until after the recall. A projected deficit of \$600,000 should be considered disgraceful for a biennial budget of \$18 million.

Bev Adams, interim director of administrative services and finance, stated May 17, 2017 to the Ashland Budget Committee, "I'm here to tell you this budget is tight ... I was actually surprised ... that there wasn't more available reserves ... I just expected you to have lots of money ... and I'm here to tell you that you don't."

With projected deficit on the horizon, APRC is spending \$230,000 for a Portland consultant for a grandiose 100-year Lithia Park plan. Experts have told us that there are a number of firms in the Rogue Valley that are quite capable to do this. Why did APRC choose a non-local firm unfamiliar with Ashland and its values?

The APRC senior subcommittee meetings were not in compliance with public meeting laws. Refer to Jim Bachman's guest opinion in the Daily Tidings, Aug. 30, 2017, where he documents a number of meeting law discrepancies and lack of public input.

APRC ignored the 2016 Performance Audit recommendation to first conduct a comprehensive community needs assessment process to verify underserved groups. APRC ignored the audit project team's belief that expansion could be provided with support from existing center staff, and identified the senior center social services as a strength and positive feature. Instead APRC focused on the project team's observation that seniors were underserved based on little data or documentation.

When senior program manager Christine Dodson was laid off by Director Michael Black, working conditions for the remaining staff at the senior center became untenable. Four part-time temporary employees resigned knowing that they were to be laid off by Oct. 1 and that they could not maintain the senior program functioning at an optimum level without Dodson's leadership.

The commissioners' ballot statements and fliers regarding the senior center staff are at best gross misrepresentations of the truth or, at worst, simply lies. The commissioners have provided no evidence of any kind to support their statements. If these "facts" are true, why are they only being brought up now during this recall? There was no mention of irregularities, systemic or otherwise, when the layoffs were disclosed. These false statements are nothing more than extremely damaging accusations and after-the-fact rationalizations for the actions that were taken by Commissioners Lewis, Gardiner and Landt.

Christine Dodson's attorney has presented the city a cease-and-desist letter, demanding that the APR commissioners stop the false statements they have made and issue a letter of correction.

Early on, attempts were made to negotiate resolution with the commissioners regarding their drastic actions affecting the Senior Program. I was told, "There is nothing to negotiate." When I pursued the subject, I was told that if the commissioners were to change anything, "It would make them look foolish."

The commissioners are not facing recall because of past accomplishments, but rather because their recent decisions have been deplorable. Some people may object to the recall concept, but even an experienced quarterback making bad calls must be replaced before doing irreparable harm.

Vote yes on the recall: **www.AshlandRecall.com**.

— *Sandra Sawyer lives in Ashland.*



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