

A work session of the Astoria Common Council was held at the above place at the hour of 6:00 pm.

Councilors Present: Herzig, Warr, Price, Mayor LaMear

Councilors Excused: Nemlowill

Staff Present: City Manager Estes, Police Chief Johnston, Community Development Director Cronin, Planner Ferber, Parks and Recreation Director Cosby, Finance Director Brooks, Fire Chief Ames, Library Director Tucker, Public Works Director Cook, and City Attorney Henningsgaard. The meeting is recorded and will be transcribed by ABC Transcription Services, Inc.

PARKS MASTER PLAN

Ian Sisson, Parks and Recreation Planner, RARE AmeriCorps, 1555 West Marine Drive, Astoria, explained that development of a Parks Master Plan was adopted as a City Council goal for 2015-2016. He discussed his duties as project manager for the Plan, the master planning process and timeline, elements of the Plan document, and next steps. The Plan will be adopted as a reference document to the Comprehensive Plan, which already contains policies consistent with findings in the Parks Master Plan. He reviewed the draft Master Plan, recommendations, feedback from the public and City committees on the recommendations, and historic financial data on the Parks Department. He asked Council to state whether they agreed or disagreed with the recommendations and feedback and provide direction on implementation and a funding strategy.

Mayor LaMear said when she first moved to Astoria, Parks services were listed on two sheets of paper and the improvements have been remarkable. After reading through the draft Plan, she believed the citizens of Astoria wanted everything, but did not want to pay for anything. Council must figure out the priorities and decide how to pay for them.

Councilor Price thanked Staff and the citizens who worked on the Plan. She appreciated the last italicized quote in the public feedback section of the Plan and said the document needs to be adopted, valued, and implemented. She believed all of the recommendations would take a minimum of two years to be implemented, but most of them would take five to ten years and money would need to be put aside. The Plan indicates the community values all of the facilities and parks. However, the weighted averages meant to prioritize the community's values were only separated by hundredths of a percent in some cases, which makes decision making difficult. Facilities or expectations will need to be reduced. In Europe, mowing is reduced by building concrete plazas. She believed it was important to separate the cemetery from the parks because it does not make sense to judge the cemetery as a park. Usage at the cemetery will be low compared to park usage, which makes it difficult to prioritize the cemetery the way it should be. She believed it was possible to reduce people's expectations of what a cemetery should be. The cemetery is in sand, so it will look like a sandy cemetery. However, the cemetery should be mowed for Mother's Day and other special occasions, so adjustments will be necessary. She agreed with Staff's assessments and the priorities of the community. Most people have no idea of what is available and want better communication and more maps. She believed the Parks Department was improving at communication. People want good maintenance, lighting, bathrooms, trails, indoor facilities, mountain biking, and a dog park. The City needs to have a larger discussion about the Promote Astoria Fund, the cemetery, and other funds before the budget is approved.

Councilor Warr said he was disturbed by some elements of the Plan that seemed to question City Council's level of support for the Parks Department. The Plan states that since 2010, the services required by the Parks Department have increased by almost 50 percent and by 2020, minimum wage will be up by almost 30 percent, yet the funding to the Parks Department has been decreasing since 2010. Additionally, the Needs Assessment indicates other communities about the same size as Astoria that have an aquatic center also have significantly fewer acres of parklands and trails and/or a significantly higher budget. This suggests City Council does not value parks as much other communities in the state. He believed Council needed to decide what Astoria's parks and the cemetery should look like and consider what will be necessary to fund the department. This is about priorities, not money, and Council needs to discuss their priorities before moving forward.

Councilor Herzig believed the City is in this situation now because there was no master plan. The Parks Department cannot fund itself, so City Council and the Budget Committee must decide how to allocate funds. The recommendations looked great, but he was concerned about who would implement them because Staff does not have the time. Director Cosby said the currently proposed budget for FY2016-2017 included \$155,000 from the Capital Improvement Fund designated for implementing the Parks and Recreation Master Plan. Staff did not identify which of the recommendations the funds would be spent on because the priorities are not listed yet. However, in July, Staff will be able to request that the funds be used on the high priority action items. Also, Staff has applied for a State grant of \$40,000 to develop site plans for McClure and Shively Parks. City Manager Estes added that the proposed budget line item also includes funding for additional staff or a consultant to help manage the Plan and planned maintenance projects. Staff is already looking at ways to implement the Plan, beginning in the next fiscal year.

Councilor Herzig said McClure Park did not rate highly and he wanted to know why Staff was already planning to move forward with site plans. Director Cosby explained that as Staff has been talking with the Citizens Advisory Committee and Parks and Recreation Advisory Board, a few of the priorities have shifted. McClure Park has a very active volunteer group that has already started moving forward with plans. Mr. Sisson added that during community input sessions, participants indicated the top three parks that needed individual master plans were Shively, Astor, and McClure Parks. The Friends of the Astoria Column will create the master plan for Astor Park.

Councilor Herzig said he agreed with the italicized statement in the Plan and understood that City Council must be very responsible about what goes into the Plan. The City does not want to be trapped in unmanageable or unfeasible projects. The first part of the Plan is close to being finished, but as the process moves forward, City Council must analyze every single piece of the Plan to make sure it can be passed on to the next Council and the next generation.

Mayor LaMear believed the City would have to sell some park properties or return them to a natural state. Compared to other cities, Astoria has a lot more park properties to take care of. Community comments suggested the City needs to prioritize and make the most important parks the highest quality parks. If Astoria is going to maintain its parks the way the community wants them maintained, the City will have to make some difficult decisions.

Mr. Sisson displayed a slide showing a map of park locations, residential zones, and the service area of each park. Service areas are the areas within a five to ten minute walk of a park. There are gaps in park distribution, but Astoria has much more park land than the State recommends. He noted that the Peer Community Analysis includes communities that have less park land than the State recommends.

Councilor Herzig wanted to make sure the economically disadvantaged areas, like Emerald Heights in east Astoria, were not being deprived of the same amenities that people who can afford to live downtown are getting. All parts of the population need to be served because recreation is a fundamental right and this is a Council decision, not a Parks Department decision.

Councilor Warr noted that he had spent more time going over this Plan than he had on most others and he appreciated all of Staff's work on the document.

Councilor Price said she would send Mr. Sisson her list of questions.

Mayor LaMear asked if Staff wanted Council to discuss their own priorities. City Manager Estes said Staff wanted a consensus from Council about how to move forward and he believed Staff understood Council's direction clearly.

Councilor Warr believed the new point of sale system would result in big changes. However, because of the way the City accounts for things, it is not possible to predict profits and losses. The Recreation Center is great, but it is probably costing a lot of money. Port of Play's costs are known, but the City has no idea how much revenue is coming in. This is not allowed in the private sector and he believed it was important to move towards an accounting system that allows the City to judge each department that has an income on its own merit.

City Manager Estes confirmed the new software program would be live by July 1, 2017 and it would help the City track finances. Once the Master Plan is adopted, Staff can consider the finances in several ways when setting priorities. The new software will provide financial data, but Staff will also need to consider the market rates of Parks services, like Port of Play. Assistance from an economist might be helpful.

Councilor Warr agreed and said the more information the City has the better job it can do. He recently used the automated cemetery map system, which worked great. However, it takes five or six steps to access the maps on the City's website and he believed this made it impossible for the average person to use the maps. He believed the cemetery maps should have a portal on the front page. City Manager Estes said that would be easy to fix.

Mayor LaMear noted that throughout the citizen comments, there were many that said Astoria's fees are higher than Seaside's. She asked how Astoria compared to Seaside. Director Cosby explained that the Sunset Empire Parks and Recreation District is a special taxing district that extends beyond the city limits of Seaside. The district has resident and non-resident user fees. Astoria's fees are much higher than the district's resident user fees, but only slightly above the district's non-resident user fees. Staff considered the district's non-resident fees in December when comparing rates prior to Astoria's rate increases.

Mayor LaMear asked how the temperature of Astoria's pool compared to Seaside's, noting this was also mentioned in many citizen comments. Director Cosby confirmed Seaside's pool is warmer. Sunset Empire Parks and Recreation District is a good comparison for Astoria when considering services provided and the communities. The district has almost the same budget as Astoria, but they do not care for park lands. Astoria and Sunset Empire offer the same recreational services, but Astoria's aquatic center and child care programs are larger. Increasing the temperature in the pool is very costly and Astoria cannot afford to make the pool warmer.

Mayor LaMear said the comments indicated many people believed it would be beneficial to have all of the facilities at one place, the Aquatic Center. This would allow parents to leave their children in child care while they swim or workout in the weight room. Director Cosby said not only do the citizens want combined facilities for convenience, but also the Citizen's Advisory Committee has agreed that combining facilities will save on staffing costs. It is much easier for Staff to help fill roles when one is out on vacation if they are all in one facility. She believed expanding the Aquatic Center could provide room for a gym and fitness studio. Mr. Sisson added that Newport is adding a pool facility to their recreation center, so Newport could be a good resource.

Mayor LaMear asked if the City owned the parking area. Director Cosby said the parking area was split between the City and the movie theatre, but there is sufficient parking for a larger facility. City Manager Estes explained the City had a cross parking agreement with the theater because the City's highest use of the Aquatic Center and the highest crowds for movies occur at different times. Mayor LaMear clarified that she wanted to know if a building expansion could extend beyond the grassy area or in a different direction. Director Cosby suggested the current parking arrangement remain. City Manager Estes added that the parking area to the west of the grassy area is owned by the movie theatre.

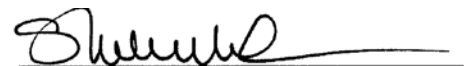
Councilor Herzig confirmed the Sunset Empire Recreation District was separate from the City of Seaside, which means the district makes all of its own budgeting decisions. Their only task is to provide recreation for the district. The taxing district will be expanded to include two parts of Cannon Beach. City Manager Estes believed the boundary could be fluid, depending on the community. Councilor Herzig said the district has a lot more flexibility when choosing how to allocate their finances. Director Cosby added that the district must report to a recreation advisory commission.

Mayor LaMear asked where the Parks maintenance shop would be located in the future. Director Cosby said Staff would have to get creative when looking for solutions. Mayor LaMear said if the City sold the Yacht Club or Recreation Center, the funds could go toward a consolidated facility.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 6:55 pm to convene the Astoria City Council meeting.

ATTEST:



Secretary

APPROVED



City Manager