

Lane County Parks Funding Task Force

February 5, 2020
Meeting Summary

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Oregon law.**

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<https://lanecounty.org/cms/One.aspx?portalId=3585881&pageId=16223277>

Members Present: John Clark, Dale Weigandt, Janelle McCoy, Brad van Appel, James Houghton, Randy Dersham, Erika Thessen, Art Farley, Scott Coleman, Andy Vobora, Jim Mayo, Renee Jones, Don Mathes, Bob Warren

Members Absent: Kevin Shanley

Staff Present: Steve Mokrohisky, Dan Hurley, Brett Henry, Devon Ashbridge, Charlie Conrad, Ed Alverson, Michelle Hunt, Cynthia Schlegel

Elected Officials Present: Lane County Board of County Commissioner Chair - Heather Buch

Guests Present: Steve Norris

Bob Keefer called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m.

00:00:06 Introductions – Consultant Bob Keefer introduced himself as well as Task Force members, staff present, and guests.

00:11:30 Public Comment – None

00:11:33 **County Administrator Welcome**

- Steve Mokrohisky thanked the Parks Funding Task Force members for volunteering their time and spoke about the value of citizen engagement. He recalled the different citizen led efforts surrounding Lane County Parks during his time as County Administrator. The Large Events Task Force (LETF) was formed as a result of community concern regarding large events at Howard Buford Recreation Area. This resulted in the Board of County Commissioners adopting recommendations from the LETF regarding the oversight of large events at County parks. Prior to the official adoption of the Parks Master Plan in December of 2018, the Parks Advisory Committee voiced concern over the direction of an earlier iteration of the Master Plan which led to the formation of the Parks Master Plan Task Force. This citizen led group representing different geographic areas of the county was instrumental in assisting an outside consultant in the development of the 20-year planning document for the parks system. The Parks Funding Task Force (PFTF) was one of the initiatives included in the proposed budget for this fiscal year to find the resources to fund the Master Plan goals. Mr. Mokrohisky emphasized the support among county leadership including his staff and the Board of County Commissioners in the PFTF.

00:18:45 County Board of Commissioner Welcome

- Board Chair Heather Buch expressed her appreciation of the Task Force members as well and emphasized the importance of the Task Force to the community in an effort to keep Lane County Parks accessible, friendly and in good shape for the public. She emphasized that the Board of County Commissioners are strong supporters of Lane County Parks and are in support of this effort. She closed by pledging to continue to touch base on the progress of the Task Force as she looks forward to seeing the results of this endeavor.

00:22:35 Current Budget Reality – Lane County Parks

- Parks Division Manager Brett Henry presented an overview of the financial structure for Lane County Parks and why the lack of funding resources has led to the need of long-term sustainable revenue to properly maintain and operate the park system. He began by giving an overview of the history of Lane County Parks dating back to the 1950's through the 1970's when Lane County was able to acquire and develop a significant amount of property. At that time, Parks was funded primarily through timber revenue and the general fund with a small amount of user fees. By the early 1980's, Parks had more facilities than it could afford to adequately maintain and more employees than they could support. By the close of the recession in 1982, without a stable source of revenue to provide necessary maintenance and operation, the parks closed to the public.
- The period between 1983 and 2000 marked the rebirth of Lane County Parks. During this period, Lane County hired a Parks Manager to rebuild the park system. Parks adopted a new funding strategy to operate independently from the general fund by increasing user fees. The County began investing in rebuilding the parks through capital projects and operated a more streamlined parks system with fewer employees. However, there was still no sustainable funding source.
- Currently, Lane County Parks operates and maintains a massive parks system comprised of 69 parks spanning 4,550 acres with 5 campgrounds (227 RV campsites), 3 marinas (400 slips), and 43 boat ramps. Visitation continues to rise as evidenced by the increase in admissions and camping reservations over the past five years.
- Henry highlighted the FY20 revenue sources with the majority of funding generated by user fees. The FY20 total revenue is under \$4.9 Million, with roughly one-third related to camping and additional 11% in admissions. Parks received 17% of its funding from Transient Room Tax and an additional 8% from the Car Rental Tax, both of which are discretionary. Of note, moorage from the County's three marinas only generates approximately 4% of the overall revenue. The FY20 operating budget is just under \$4M and less than \$550K is dedicated to capital expenditures. Parks receives System Development Charges to offset development and has accumulated nearly \$230,000 dedicated towards capital investments.
- In December of 2018, the Board of County Commissioners adopted the Parks Master Plan. The plan guides the planning efforts for County parks over the next 20 years. Goal number four calls for generating economic vitality which is a management approach where opportunities are sought out to generate more revenue to re-invest into the parks system. Specifically, strategy 4.5 suggests developing additional funding resources.
- Henry stated that the number one issue is the backlog of deferred maintenance. The lack of sustainable funding for operating and maintenance has led to an estimate of over \$17 Million in deferred maintenance. With the majority of the facilities constructed over 50 years ago, the infrastructure is beginning to fail as evidenced in the two pictures at Orchard Point Marina.
- Henry closed by asking two questions. (1) What is the optimal budget needed to adequately operate and maintain the parks system? (2) What are the funding priorities to target with the Parks Funding Task Force?

- Warren asked for clarification about economic vitality. Henry responded by emphasizing that the Master Plan goal was a broad approach to re-invest investments in parks to make them more economically vital. Keefer suggested that investing in parks has a positive economic impact to the surrounding community. Weigandt asked if any amount of general fund was dedicated to parks. Henry responded by indicating that no general fund is currently dedicated to County Parks. Hurley noted that general fund could be allocated to a specific park project through a budget request. Farley asked if any dedicated fees (i.e. storm water fees or tipping fees) are attached to Lane County Parks. Keefer and Hurley noted that the only dedicated fees are the System Development Charges from county building permits and RV registration fees allocated by the state. Mayo asked if the Transient Room Tax includes the University of Oregon renting out dorm rooms for track and field events. Vobora explained the state law associated with Transient Room Tax for destination marketing and/or capital expenses and that all types of lodging and short-term rental should be collecting the tax.

00:36:15 **Task Force Work Plan & Calendar**

- Keefer asked the Task Force to think about what types of funding sources could be made available to Lane County Parks.
- Keefer presented the meeting calendar and agenda going forward with the goal of presenting sustainable funding options to the Board of Commissioners in fourteen months. He explained that in this first meeting the Task Force will begin prioritizing funding categories. The second Task Force meeting will include an update by Henry on the Facilities Condition Assessment which will provide a more accurate estimate on the backlog of deferred maintenance. Keefer will facilitate discussion about the budget needed to adequately maintain parks and the scope of services or programming Parks should strive to provide and prioritize them. He asked the Task Force to think about funding sources and the challenges associated with a culturally and geographically diverse parks system. The third meeting will explore cost recovery of different types of facilities and services and reducing costs through operating efficiencies and maintenance contracts with other recreation providers. Then there will be a brainstorming session on funding avenues to pursue. Mathes asked if we know how much money is spent on each park annually. Conrad responded that County parks currently track this information. By July, Keefer along with Parks staff will present some potential funding sources and ideas for efficiencies in an initial draft. Next fall, after the Courthouse election, a firm hired by the County will disseminate a community survey questionnaire to County residents asking them what they would be willing to fund to reinvigorate Lane County Parks. The goal is to present a funding measure that reflects what the public is willing to fund. A final Action Plan will result from the survey and will be reviewed by Parks staff and the Funding Task Force. The Parks Funding Task Force is set to meet for a total of seven work sessions and conclude with a presentation of an Action Plan that provides recommendations of sustainable funding sources for Lane County Parks to the Parks Advisory Committee and Board of County Commissioners by April of 2020.
- Commissioner Buch asked that the Task Force explore all possible strategies and stated the importance of planning and timing in successful funding measures.
- Keefer met with the County Commissioners who are supportive of the Parks Funding Task Force. They were primarily concerned about the County's natural areas and that all residents have accessibility to Parks that are affordable to use. They also supported a public survey to understand what the public wants to see at the parks.
- Keefer stated the need to begin marketing the parks to educate the public and showcase the recreation opportunities they provide the public.

- Keefer asked the Parks Advisory Committee what was important to them and they expressed access to nature and water and a sense of connection with the community.
- Vobora asked about the need for regular check-ins with other communities since parks generate economic vitality through large events. Keefer discussed the involvement of other stakeholders such as the Chamber of Commerce and Travel Oregon along with other municipalities and recreation providers that can assist the Task Force.
- Farley suggested inviting the City of Eugene to a Task Force meeting to explain the process involved with the passage of their bond measures and operating levy. Farley suggested Carolyn Burke as a guest that could accurately explain the process Eugene implemented to achieve these funding measures. Coleman asked about the bond certificate dedicated to Richardson Marina. Weigandt reiterated that anything Parks builds needs to be sustainable to maintain.

01:08:51 Group Exercise

- Keefer asked the Funding Task Force to list one reason why Lane County residents should support their parks system. Jones stated that a great parks system is the foundation of a healthy community. Coleman stated that parks are important because they protect future access to natural areas and waterways. Mayo listed the connection that parks provide people to the outdoors and wildlife. Mathes said that the parks system gives almost unfettered access to the community at large to go to a river, a mountain, or to walk a trail and experience this area. Warren explained that access to outdoor recreation areas is essential for quality of life and helps define who we are as a society. Clark noted that parks bring nature close to home and provides recreation opportunities. Weigandt said that working in a local park district makes the local area more livable. McCoy said that parks offer quality of life and make this area worth living in, retiring in, working in, vacationing in, and raising families in. It is the glue or spaces that connect to the community. Brad van Appel said that parks allow future generations to learn more about nature. Coleman said that we must bridge the gap to the younger generations. Thessen said parks are the single greatest access for natural resources. Houghton said parks allow us to experience nature in our own backyard and provide healthy physical, mental, and therapeutic opportunities for youth and visitors. Dersham said that without the county funding and managing the boat ramps, private property would destroy access to the rivers and that access to river resources is unique within the County. Farley said that parks allow you to have outdoor experiences in another world outside of the home. Vobora said parks provide opportunities for residents and visitors to enjoy nature and outdoor recreation as it continues to grow throughout the United States. Hurley said that parks are vital to our community well-being as they are places where people reconnect with the solace of nature away from the stress of daily life; they are places where families and friends grow closer through play and enjoyment, preserve important ecosystems and are driven by community development. Ashbridge said that great communities don't happen without great parks. Schlegel said that parks create and maintain a sense of community. Alverson said that Lane County should support its park system due to the economic impact of recreation on the county. He said that it is possible to quantify the impact of outdoor recreation to our community.

01:24:45 Categorical Funding Priorities

- Keefer identified the top six categories for funding needs: routine/preventative maintenance, deferred maintenance, capital development, conservation, revenue generation, and cost reduction. Each Task Force member was asked to identify their number one priority, followed by their subsequent top three priorities. Collectively, the Task Force identified routine maintenance as the number one priority, followed by deferred maintenance. No one identified any of the

remaining four categories as a number one priority although conservation and revenue generation were also identified as secondary priorities.

- Vobora stated that Lane County Parks are in the top 10 of sites visited and reinforced the benefit of marketing more through partnerships.
- Mathes stated he believes generating more revenue will help cover the costs of the two top priorities which are regular and deferred maintenance.
- Keefer asked the Task Force if the public realizes that maintenance is the number one issue.
- Warren stated that revenue generation is important for economic development and creates jobs.

01:56:10 Election of Officers

- McCoy volunteered to be the Chair of the Parks Funding Task Force, and Clark volunteered to be Vice Chair. Vobora motioned to accept both positions as volunteered, Warren seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

01:58:25 Meeting Wrap-up/Assignments

- Keefer tasked all members to come up with as many ideas and thoughts on funding options for preparation in brainstorming at the next meeting.
- Henry will post a picture of the white board where the Task Force ranked the funding priorities.
- Henry will provide an update on the facilities condition assessment to determine the cost of deferred maintenance.
- Parks staff will provide a report of how much is spent on each park annually.
- *The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for April 2, 2020 at 6:00pm.*

Adjourn – Meeting ended at 7:32 p.m.