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JOBS

Laborers Local 483 fights to stop cuts to Portland Parks and Rec

Laborers Local 483 is in an all-out fight against proposed service level cuts that would result in layoffs and closures of community recreation centers in Portland. Local 483 represents about 1,000 City of Portland workers in bureaus that maintain roads, sewer, and parks.

Under Mayor Ted Wheeler's current proposed budget for the fiscal year that begins July 1, the Parks and Recreation Department would get \$3.8 million less than it needs to maintain current staff levels. The mayor proposes to shut down the Sellwood Community Center and Columbia Pool, outsource the management and staffing of the Community Music Center, Laurelhurst Dance Center, Multnomah Arts Center and the Fulton and Hillside community centers; and lay off about 50 front line recreation center staff, including lifeguards and swimming instructors.

An earlier version of the proposed budget had a \$6.3 million shortfall, but the mayor moved funds around after fierce push-back by community members who use the recreation centers.

Local 483 hired economist Peter Donohue to look at the city's finances. A longtime skeptic

of the city's budget process, Donohue concluded that the city has the money if it repurposes unspent funds and dips into reserve funds slated for internal services like fleet and facility maintenance.

Local 483 members and staff also spent three days phone banking members of the public who use the community centers to let them know about the cuts, encouraging them to turn out for a May 9 public budget hearing.

Portland City Commissioner Joanne Hardesty is pushing a set of budget amendments to prevent the layoffs and closures, but at press time, no other commissioners had come out in support of her amendments. Hardesty proposes to repurpose \$1.5 million in funds that the current budget allocates to police positions that have been vacant for some time. She also proposes to put some new spending on hold, including funds for a police body camera pilot project, historic preservation at Mt. Tabor, a water taxi feasibility study, and planning for a proposed James Beard public market.

In dollar terms, the Parks budget is actually rising: The mayor's proposal raises bureau



Recreation center users of all ages turned up at a May 9 budget hearing at the World Forestry Center to oppose service cuts.

budgets for inflation and then asks them to make a 1 percent cut. But that formula has a bigger impact at Parks, because the city agreed two years ago to recognize a union for seasonal and casual workers, and transition for them to regular, fully benefited positions at wages of \$15 an hour. Given that context, the budget proposal amounts to cutting staff in order to pay for

those raises.

Portland City Council will vote May 22 on the final budget.

STOP THE CUTS

Local 483 is asking supporters to appeal to Nick Fish, the commissioner in charge of Parks and Rec, to halt the cuts: 503-823-4682 or nick@portlandoregon.gov

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