

City staff lays out potential funding levels, service improvements

By ERIC A. HOWALD
Of the Keizertimes

Members of the Keizer Parks and Recreation Advisory Board got a better look at what different fee levels would provide as far as benefits at a meeting Tuesday, Aug. 9.

The parks board is in the process of composing a survey to ask residents about their support for a fee added to utility bills resulting in the creation of a dedicated parks fund. Current funding levels allow for minimal improvements and maintenance.

Which options should be included in the survey remain a topic of heated debate among the members of the board, but it was the first time staff presented a detailed look at what the possibilities were.

Here is what the board is considering:

- Option 1 is doing nothing. Without an fee, parks staff will need to reduce weekly watering and trash removal schedules, remove some play structures as they reach the end of their lifecycle, and close off some courts and park areas that will become hazards due to unsafe conditions.

- Option 2 a \$2.36 fee per bill (every two months) would result in an additional \$202,000 per year. It would add a third, full-time parks

employee and an additional seasonal worker as well as a new vehicle and mower with trailer. It would allow the staff to replace or repair some play structures and resurface old sports courts and asphalt paths sooner than they can currently.

- A fee of \$5.32 per bill (\$456,000 per year) would include everything under the Option 2, plus a fast-tracking of several projects in the Keizer Parks Master Plan and improving maintenance in parks that border the Willamette River. The budget for maintenance would grow to \$104,000 per year and \$150,000 would be set aside for improvements.

- Option 4 is \$11.66 per bill (about \$1.04 million per year). In addition to everything in the first two fee options, the rate would allow the city to work toward completing all elements in the Master Plan within the next decade. Three additional full-time employees would be hired, three vehicles and mowers would be purchased and a new parks shop would be built, most likely, in Keizer Rapids Park.

Any fee will likely include an escalator clause allowing the city to keep pace with inflation.

Parks Board member Matt Lawyer presented the rest of the board with a draft of a

key points

- Board to put \$2-\$8 options on survey
- Survey verbiage still a work-in-progress

potential survey and it kicked off discussions that lasted most of the meeting.

Richard Walsh said he'd passed along the survey to several acquaintances and got mixed feedback.

"Almost everyone was confused," Walsh said. "They don't know about the master plan or what FTE is and they said they wouldn't fill it out because they didn't understand it."

Walsh presented the board with a revised take on the survey that included different wording. He also expressed concern over an explanatory statement.

"We can't lead anyone to believe that the crisis is because of the extra acreage at Keizer Rapids Park. If they think we dug ourselves a hole and made foolish decisions then we'll never convince anyone," Walsh said. He added that the "300-pound gorilla in the room" was the increasing amounts the city must pay into the Public Employees Retirement System, which

eats up much of any surplus the city can plan on in any given year.

Board member JT Hager grew heated when discussing which options should be put forth on the survey.

"I don't see options 1 through 3 taking care of our problems, and I would take those off. For too long we've been too timid in what we're asking for. We're operating substandard and way below where we should. I'm not on this board to have inadequate, inferior parks," Hager said.

Board member Jim Taylor said he liked including exact figures, but worried about what would happen when costs rise down the stretch.

By the end of discussions, board members opted to present options of \$2, \$4, \$6 and \$8 per month on the survey.

The board was hoping to present the Keizer City Council with a draft survey at its meeting Monday, Aug. 15, but decided to postpone action while more details were hammered out. Whatever form the survey takes, it will be bundled with questions about support for another fee to support increased police services. There is no proposed deadline for when the surveys will be sent out.

"The status quo is clearly not where we want to go, but that is what we are up against," Lawyer said. "My kids matter, the parks matter, the police matter and what the city wants matters."

KT on vacation



Submitted photo

Diane and David Streen took their Keizertimes to an air show in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. They are standing in front of a replica of the Wright Brothers' plane. You too can have your photo in the Keizertimes. Simply take the paper to your destination, snap a picture with you and your group holding it, and send the photo along with everyone's first and last names to kt@keizertimes.com.

Waste rates will climb 5 percent in October

By ERIC A. HOWALD
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Waste removal rates will increase by 5 percent for residential customers in October.

The Keizer City Council unanimously supported a fee increase that will add a \$1.05 to the average customer with a 35-gallon solid waste container and 95-gallon containers for mixed recyclables and organics.

The council's unanimous selection was the middle ground between levying the increase solely on the residential customers and one that focused on commercial users.

"In the past, commercial rates have subsidized the residential rates, and that's why we give these three options," said John Sullivan, general manager of Lorens Sanitation and Recycling Services.

The most a residential customer will see under the increase is \$1.47 for those using the largest solid waste containers. For a commercial customer with a 95-gallon, roll cart for solid waste, rates will increase from \$30.30 to \$31.82. Businesses with a three-yard, front load container prices will increase from \$176.61 to \$185.44.

"I would like to work toward a non-subsidized rate," said Councilor Mark Cailier in support of the middle-ground option.

In addition to the increases, the city council directed the local franchise operators, which includes Valley Recy-

cling and Disposal, to come back with a plan for the next increase that includes options for paying per volume for residential customers.

The idea was presented to the council by Keizer resident Pat Fisher who felt that residents doing more to recycle and compost waste should be rewarded for those efforts.

"My issue is not so much the percentage issue, but the relative container sizes between the residential options," Fisher said. "The current rates are unfair to those of us the put an emphasis on recycling. It seems that I pay more than twice as much per volume."

Fisher presented a potential revamp of fees that would include a flat fee for all residential customers alongside a per gallon rate for each container size. Fisher urged the city leaders to move in that direction.

While council members generally expressed support for the idea, there was concern about the timeline the waste removal businesses are trying to meet. In October, Lorens and Valley Recycling will be hit with a more than 30 percent increase in tipping fees, the fees charged by the area's disposal sites for dropping off a load of trash. The rate hikes are intended to help them offset the increases.

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