

Parks: Council expects to vote on the fee at June 19 meeting

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suggestion, Price also proposed adding a sunset clause to the parks fee. After three years, it would go away, she told the rest of the council. The parks fee would not be charged to low-income residents in the city's utility-assistance program, she said. It would also not be charged to businesses. Price said she wanted to avoid charging people twice; many small business owners also live in town.

The city is considering a number of options to raise money for the parks department, but with these plans — including a proposed increase in the lodging tax — it would be some time before the money began to roll in.

The proposed parks fee is a temporary solution, Price said. She was looking for something simple and relatively inexpensive that would allow staff to "address some urgent issues right here in the summertime."

City Councilor Zetty Nemlowill disagreed, saying she didn't see how a water meter fee matched up with parks. She, Jones and Councilor Tom Brownson had voted in favor of garbage service fee increases earlier Monday that added curbside glass and yard debris pickup. But that was a fee, Nemlowill argued, that added services.

"I just don't think this is the right way to raise money for parks and rec," she said about the water meter fee.

Mayor Arline LaMear said she would go along with Price's proposal so long as no one on the utility-assistance program was charged.



Cindy Price

She also asked that instead of a three-year sunset period, the fee would go away once the city found another program to raise money for parks.

City Attorney Blair Henningsgaard said the fee would be reviewed annually, like other fees the city imposes on residents.

The City Council expects to vote on whether or not to implement the fee at its next meeting on June 19. Nemlowill remained the only councilor against the proposed \$3 fee Monday night.

In other park-related business:

- City councilors also approved a 20 percent bulk-buy discount to monthly Aquatic Center and Recreation Center and Land and Water passes when sold in a quantity of 20 or more per transaction.

The discount provides an incentive city staff believes could "attract new customers, increase revenue and support organizations and businesses (to) increase employees' health, wellness and productivity," according to a memo from City Manager Estes.

Though she voted to approve the discount, Nemlowill pointed out that the council recently, after much discussion and vocal reluctance, voted to begin charging a local youth swim club lane use fees in an effort to raise more revenue for the Aquatic Center. The North Coast Swim Club told councilors young swimmers and their families might not be able to afford the \$1 per lane per hour fee.

The proposed discount, Nemlowill said Monday, could now allow the swim club to save money on swim passes, negating the hardship caused by the lane fee charges, as well as taking away any revenue the department expected to see from the lane fee charges.

"I feel we put the swim club through the wringer for no reason," Nemlowill said after the meeting.

- The council accepted site plans for McClure Park and Shivley Park. Work on these parks is unlikely to begin anytime soon, said Parks and Recreation Director Angela Cosby. Improvements to Shivley Park are expected to cost \$1.6 million while improvements to McClure are estimated at around \$640,000.

Cosby said the department must wait until it is in a more sustainable place before it moves forward at Shivley. Some work is planned for McClure, however. Friends of McClure Park plans to install a new slide.

The site plans give the department a road map about how to accept donations and have conversations with people interested in improving the parks, Cosby said.



Dwight Caswell/For The Daily Astorian

The entrance arch was all that remained of the Weinhard Astoria Hotel after the 1922 downtown Astoria fire. The arch was relocated to Shivley Park and still stands. The Astoria City Council is looking at a \$3 per meter water fee for residential users to help fund the city's parks department, which is cash-strapped and low-staffed.

Bills: Legislators consulted with unions in developing second proposal

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It's estimated that, upon full implementation, the measure could save about \$691 million in the 2019-21 biennium.

Some provisions in the legislation haven't been quantified, such as changing the state's debt collection and contracting practices.

PERS

The second proposal, SB 1068, has to do with public employee pension benefits. The bill would require a percentage of current public employees' annual contributions to an individual account to go instead to a risk-sharing account that can be used by the Public Employee Retirement System's Board to pay benefits accrued after July 1, 2018.

Legislators consulted with unions in developing that proposal.

According to the Senate President's Office, the non-partisan Legislative Fiscal



Portland Tribune/File Photo

Oregon House Speaker Tina Kotek said the proposals represent a "serious attempt to do cost containment."

office says the PERS measure could save employers — such as school districts and counties — about \$106.7 million in the upcoming two-year budget, and \$434 million in the 2019-21 cycle, although that

includes all funds, not just the general and lottery funds.

The risk-sharing account could only address costs of the system going forward, and not the unfunded liability of the system, which corresponds to

the amount the state owes that has already been accrued by public employees and is estimated to be at least \$21 billion. Legally, the state cannot reduce benefits employees have already accrued.

Speaker of the House Tina Kotek, D-Portland, said Monday that the proposals represented a "serious attempt to do cost containment." Business groups, such as the Brighter Oregon coalition, have repeatedly called for reductions to the cost of the public pension system and other costs before they'll get on board with changes to the state's tax structure.

Business taxes

With about a month to go before the Legislature adjourns, unions and other advocates are still jostling for increased business taxes.

While lawmakers consider

switching from a corporate income tax to a tax on gross business sales, the Oregon Education Association filed a ballot measure Friday that would create a gross receipts tax on businesses with annual sales of at least \$5 million.

Another OEA proposed measure would allow the Legislature to raise business taxes by simple majority vote if certain school funding levels aren't met.

Senate Minority Leader Ted Ferrioli, R-John Day, said the PERS proposal unveiled Monday was insufficient. He argued for "robust restructuring" of the system.

Earlier legislative proposals on PERS, such as one that would have placed a \$100,000 limit on the final average salary used in an employee's benefits calculation, appear unlikely to move forward.

Rebecca Tweed, a coor-

dinator for Brighter Oregon, said that both proposals represented a step in the right direction, but were not enough to right the state's finances. While calling the cost-sharing provisions "important," Tweed said that the proposal "would do little to slow the runaway increases schools and state agencies must pay into PERS."

Meanwhile, Steve Demarest, president of SEIU 503, was critical of the risk-sharing proposal, and argued for increased business taxes.

"While we can't support this plan, we are willing to engage with the Legislature around cost containment so long as it is connected to real revenue reform," Demarest said in a statement, "paid by corporations, that allows Oregon to invest in better schools, greater access to healthcare, and improved services for all Oregonians."

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