

MINUTES

Eugene City Council Virtual Work Session Eugene, Oregon 97401

June 10, 2020
12:00 p.m.

Councilors Present: Emily Semple, Betty Taylor, Alan Zelenka, Jennifer Yeh, Mike Clark, Greg Evans, Claire Syrett and Chris Pryor

Mayor Vinis opened the June 10, 2020, work session of the Eugene City Council.

1. WORK SESSION: STAR Voting

Brooke Freed gave a presentation outlining the STAR (Score Then Automatic Runoff) voting system for local single-seat elections, including the potential to eliminate the primary election for city elective offices.

Council Discussion:

- Councilor Taylor – stated people want the right to vote on this topic and Council should give them the opportunity.
- Councilor Clark – expressed concerns regarding costs and how the new system would affect voter participation; stated the Independent Party of Oregon used a similar system recently and experienced a large decrease in voter participation; said if the cost is high, a change is not affordable at this time.
- Councilor Zelenka – stated any problems with an initiative petition process should be taken up with Lane County or the State, not the City; stated he does not think our current process is broken, and asked what problem this proposal attempts to fix; expressed concern that STAR voting is complicated, could have unintended consequences, and could be expensive; stated Council has higher priorities at this time.
- Councilor Yeh – stated if Council decides to send it to the voters, whether intentional or not, Council is supporting it; expressed concern over the cost; supported no action at this time.
- Councilor Syrett – agreed with Council Yeh’s comments and stated there are challenges in terms of practical application; noted the Democratic Party used the STAR voting system recently and voters experienced confusion using the system; said if Council does refer this to voters, it must include realistic estimates of the cost to implement the system.
- Councilor Pryor – stated he has similar concerns as Councilor Zelenka and wondered what is broken in the current system that needs to be fixed, particularly if it will cost a significant amount; stated STAR voting is not impervious to manipulation.
- Councilor Clark – said he feels the STAR voting system will result in the most negative campaigning ever heard of, as the only effective means of campaigning will be to get voters to score one’s opponents lower.
- Councilor Taylor – stated what is broken about the current system is that campaigning takes almost a full year and that is too much; stated the current system is not infallible; said Eugene voters are exceptionally well-educated and able to understand a system like STAR voting, so let the voters decide.
- Councilor Zelenka – stated for Council to put this on the ballot, it needs to determine the current process is flawed and he doesn’t believe that; said implementing this system is not the City’s purview, it is Lane County’s; it is not a neutral position for Council to put this on the ballot; reiterated he is in favor of no action at this time.

- Councilor Syrett – asked if Council would have the option to eliminate the primary and just have a single round of voting for Mayor and City Council seats; stated if campaigning season is too long other means can be employed besides adopting an entirely new voting system; agreed that having an executive session on the lawsuit as the City Attorney suggested would be helpful.
- Councilor Evans – stated the voters need to decide and the real work should come into play after the measure passes.
- Councilor Semple – expressed interest in not having a run-off scenario but is concerned about the costs if they are real; voiced concern about split votes and said STAR voting is fairer; stated she doesn't have a problem referring it to voters.
- Mayor Vinis – asked about the implications for Lane County if the STAR voting measure passes; asked if proponents are also petitioning Lane County; stated if the City and Lane County are doing this together it feels to her that is a more straightforward process and could possibly reduce the cost for both; stated if Lane County gets onboard then the City can work with the County on this option.
- Councilor Evans – asked if it would be a one-time cost for the City, or if costs would be ongoing; stated this system would provide a more representative way of reflecting the will of the voters, gives more choice and allows voters to support the candidates they would like to see in elected office.
- Councilor Zelenka – asked if the City will bear ongoing costs if the City and Lane County have different systems.
- Councilor Taylor – stated Council is not here today to decide whether there should be STAR voting and if Council is for or against it; supported letting the voters decide and then finding a way to abide by what the public says.

MOTION: Councilor Semple, seconded by Councilor Taylor, moved to direct the City Manager to return on July 13, 2020, with a resolution calling a City election on November 3, 2020, for the purpose of referring to the legal electors of Eugene a Charter amendment that elects the mayor and councilors using the Score Then Automatic Runoff (STAR) voting method.

- Councilor Syrett – offered a friendly amendment to include the addition of cost estimates for implementation, including one-time costs, ongoing costs, and cost savings.

RESTATED MOTION AND VOTE (with friendly amendment): Councilor Semple, seconded by Councilor Taylor, moved to direct the City Manager to return on July 13, 2020, with a resolution calling a City election on November 3, 2020, for the purpose of referring to the legal electors of Eugene a Charter amendment that elects the mayor and councilors using the Score Then Automatic Runoff (STAR) voting method, and to include the addition of cost estimates for implementation: one-time costs, ongoing costs, as well as cost savings.

PASSED 6:2, Councilors Yeh and Zelenka opposed.

2. WORK SESSION: Library Local Option Levy

Library Services Director Will O'Hearn gave a presentation to outline options for the renewal of the library local option levy.

Council Discussion:

- Councilor Syrett – asked why the option to expand to the 4th floor was not included in Option 2.
- Councilor Clark – stated the library levy was originally established as a means to provide extra library services and since then, a Parks and Recreation levy and a payroll tax, which is essentially a police levy, have been put forward; stated core service levels are being funded by levies instead of the concerted effort of 8-9 years ago to keep everything on-budget, balanced and within means;

stated with difficult economic times ahead it is uncertain whether extra services can be afforded and Council should be having this discussion in context with other service provisions needed in the total budget.

- Mayor Vinis – recognized how fundamental the library and the services it provides are to helping individuals, families and the community sustain and recover in this time; stated these are essential services, not extras, and it is unfortunate they fall outside of general fund resources.
- Councilor Semple – stated she was opposed to the levy four years ago because library services are essential and should be funded by the general fund; stated she is concerned about finances and the recovery that is coming; suggested forgoing a levy for a year.
- Councilor Pryor – stated council needs to address that it cannot link the money it has to spend with priorities it has set; Council is reluctant as a body to set priorities, so consequently everything is a priority even though it can't afford it; stated good business is linking money spent to the priorities established and Council has a hard time doing that; suggested Council schedule a planning session to determine priorities.
- Councilor Clark – stated his agreement with Councilor Pryor; stated he believes library services are critical, however, the levy was brought forward to fund extra services that might not be affordable compared with with other priorities the City has.
- Councilor Syrett – stated it is frustrating not to be able to fund what feel like basic services from the general fund; stated she would like to see branch library hours funded as the branches are not extra but part of the main system; stated Option 1 makes the most sense and a process session is not needed before considering that question.
- Councilor Yeh – stated her preference would be to go with Option 1, and with economic uncertainties ahead does not feel that anything more is appropriate; stated she also sees the branch libraries as part of the library system and not separate.
- Councilor Zelenka – stated he was leaning toward Option 2 but could also support Option 1.
- Councilor Taylor – stated she was in favor of Option 1 and that for a time in the past the Library was fully funded by the general fund; stated she would like to see branch libraries in more parts of the City; asked when the Library would re-open.
- Councilor Clark – stated Council needs to have a more robust conversation before agreeing to put something on the November ballot.
- Mayor Vinis – stated there is a team in the City looking at economic recovery overall and library services are presumably part of that; suggested it might help Council to have a sense of that recovery framework and how library services fits into it.

The meeting adjourned at 1:39 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Beth Forrest
City Recorder

(Recorded by Jessica Gebb)

Link to the webcast of this City Council meeting [here](#).