

MINUTES

Eugene City Council Virtual Workshop Eugene, Oregon 97401

September 26, 2020
9:00 a.m.

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

Councilors-Elect Present: Randy Groves, Matt Keating

Executive Staff Present: Sarah Medary, Kristie Hammitt, Kathryn Brotherton, Mia Cariaga, Fire Chief Chris Heppel, Chief Chris Skinner, Renee Grube, Denny Braud, Matt Rodrigues

Mayor Vinis opened the September 26, 2020, workshop of the Eugene City Council.

1. Introduction and Context

City Manager Sarah Medary welcomed the Mayor and councilors, reviewed the agenda and set context for the day. She seeded the discussion by asking them to respond to the following questions:

- What are you hearing from constituents?
- What's "in the rapids" and what are you afraid of losing sight of "in the tunnel?"

Discussion

- Councilor Semple – noted that it was challenging to consider long-term issues when her status on the council was still undetermined and she was still recovering from a serious injury; reported that homelessness was the single most important issue raised by her constituents; encouraged optimism and recognition that Eugene is a wonderful community.
- Councilor Pryor – encouraged council to be clear in context with its goals and policies and committed to action to achieve the goals; said responsiveness of the City to community issues is a high priority; expressed concern about losing sight of the inter-connectedness of many city issues and only addressing discrete problems.
- Councilor Taylor – identified transient behavior and reallocation of police resources to more pressing public safety issues as the top constituent concerns; supported reinstating a public service officer to communicate with community members and the council; said traffic is also an area of constituent complaints; suggested establishing a committee to study issues and make recommendations.
- Councilor Syrett – reported that her constituents are concerned about the impacts of the COVID-induced recession and meeting the City's climate goals; expressed concern that budget issues will cause the council to lose sight of the enormous creative capacity and resilience of the community to work together to solve problems; expressed hope that the current crises don't delay or overshadow work on racial justice issues; identified the recession and the demands of helping people meet their basic human needs as the overriding "rapids" issue.
- Councilor Zelenka – acknowledged the turmoil that the council and the community is dealing with; shared frustration of constituents about the current chaos and the issues of homelessness, COVID, racism, climate change, and vagrant behavior; identified the economy and the overwhelming volume of email as issues needing constant attention; noted the

frustration of people when their problem isn't solved by council when a majority-held position prevails or is too large for council's authority.

- Councilor Evans – shared that he hears a lot of concern from constituents about job losses, cutbacks, business closures, homelessness and economic hardships; acknowledged the unique circumstances of the community facing multiple crises at the same time and how challenging that can be; encouraged everyone to not lose sight of and be grateful for what the community has rather than focus entirely on what was lost; voiced concern that impacts from current crises will turn into chronic conditions.
- Councilor Yeh – expressed appreciation for colleagues and friends who can help support each other to work through these challenging times; said it is a privilege to serve on the council and have some ability to try to make things better; reported that the volume of email received is overwhelming and noted the majority of contacts are about the impacts of homelessness; supported taking adequate time to address issue and maintain relationships and partnerships; said it's difficult to see coworkers struggle with economic challenges and pressures; appreciated looking at the bigger picture.
- Councilor Clark – said the watchword for 2020 is “anxiety” and everyone is affected to some degree; predicted the challenges will last well into 2021; identified the top three issues from his constituents as vagrancy/public camping, housing availability and affordability, and economic development; supported maintaining existing goals around job creation and median income; encouraged council to take smaller, achievable steps rather than trying to do too much at one time.
- Mayor Vinis – expressed appreciation for being able to work with all of the councilors; shared feeling of deep apprehension interspersed with optimism and energy; said the current circumstances warrant a different type of leadership and shifting of priorities; shared constituents' concerns that progress isn't being made at the speed desired; said that a big challenge for the City is how it communicates with the community about what is being done and how it connects to longer-term vision and goals.

Each executive manager shared their thoughts on how they and the City are doing, what they hope to learn from the crises they face, and what opportunities exist for making the organization and community better through policy and service changes. They acknowledged the impacts reprioritization of resources has had on other services and community expectations.

2. Organizational Focus

Central Services Director Mia Cariaga presented information about the City's financial condition and adjustments to budget forecasts, relating this work to the City's values. Planning and Development Director Denny Braud presented information about the status of the City Parking Fund and the proposed recovery plan. Library Recreation and Cultural Services Director Renee Grube gave an overview of Cultural Services, the impacts of COVID-19 on programming and facilities, and resiliency plans.

- Councilor Syrett – appreciated the direction staff is taking in response to current conditions; asked about the possibility of providing more parking enforcement in neighborhoods that don't typically get regular patrols and what additional revenue that might generate; voiced concern and frustration about the impacts of COVID on the performing arts industry; said she felt certain community members will continue to strongly support culture and arts venues after the pandemic is over and noted the new opportunities that exist through virtual technology.
- Councilor Zelenka – agreed with Councilor Syrett's comments and complimented staff for their agility in responding to the new COVID environment.
- Councilor Semple – agreed with all previous comments and encouraged people to look for the silver lining and new opportunities to provide services differently and better;

appreciated the goals presented by staff and noted how they will help council deal with all changes; discussed current conditions related to the parking permit program and enforcement.

- Councilor Yeh – supported the values presented by staff and said they were a good way to reflect on the City’s progress; asked how many Neighborhood Services Officer positions were created; empathized with cultural organizations’ budget situations and appreciated the creativity shown by staff to persevere through the pandemic; asked about the status of Lane Arts Council grants.
- Councilor Taylor – expressed concern that the recovery period for arts and cultural services could extend into 2023; appreciated that parking program employees were still working and asked about the employment status of Hult Center employees; said she hoped Eugene would not lose its reputation as a great city for the arts; supported eliminating parking fee for Hult events as a way to improve accessibility for all income levels.
- Councilor Pryor – thanked staff for managing a very difficult situation with an eye toward resilience and sustainability and with great compassion; appreciated work of staff to make arts and culture more accessible in accordance with long-standing council goals.
- Councilor Clark – expressed support for the values presented and the focus on innovation; voice concern about the status of the Ambulance Transport Fund and requested further discussion of that issue.
- Councilor Evans – thanked staff for their flexibility, innovation, and ability to re-imagine workplans and services; noted the reliance of community members on cultural and recreational opportunities to maintain good mental health; asked about coordinating with PeaceHealth or other public health organizations to support mental health initiatives.
- Mayor Vinis – stated that arts and culture are essential to how the community envisions its future; agreed with Councilor Evans’ comments about the important of literature and arts on mental health and said they are also critical in addressing racial justice issues and in maintaining the health of the local economy; appreciated the work of PDD staff to re-imagine the parking program structure and related it to efforts to create the kind of community desired for the future.

3. Community Focus

Planning and Development Director Denny Braud gave a Community Update presentation, including information about the impacts of COVID on employments rates and trends, housing development and affordability, and business.

- Councilor Syrett – noted the challenges and gravity of the situation the community faces; said role of council is to tackle near-term challenges while working toward long-term goals; expressed optimism that staff, council, and community partners will work together well to address issues; pleased to see progress of affordable housing projects; asked what role the council can play in creating more living wage jobs in new economy, and how the City can help businesses re-invent themselves to become more sustainable, particularly as it pertains to needed infrastructure; encouraged creative solutions to child care issues.
- Council Pryor – thanked staff for maintaining a steady hand on the wheel during this period of crisis; encouraged councilors to keep their focus on incentives and investments for job creation and raising wages, which affect all other areas of community livability.
- Councilor Clark – said the conversation confirmed his commitment to the three goals he identified earlier, noting specifically the need to incentivize economic development and provide high-speed internet service citywide; recalled the Envision Eugene targets for building housing to meet growing population needs and expressed frustration that the City is falling short of this goal which dramatically affects rents; said housing and economic development are the most critical upstream issues and council’s attention should primarily be focused on them.

- Councilor Yeh – encouraged that staff and council are on the same page in terms of priorities and focus which allows more progress; appreciated the emphasis on how interconnected the issues are and how that will help council make better long-term decisions.
- Councilor Taylor – agreed that focusing on the creation of living wages jobs to the extent the council has any authority should be a top priority; advocated for reinstating the position of Public Service Officer; suggested creating a one-stop resource community members can contact with questions about rent and utility assistance, housing issues, business loans, etc.
- Councilor Evans - said the day’s presentation and discussion underscored for him that there are still great challenges ahead, particularly for minority, economically vulnerable and other underserved communities and for social service budgets; noted the role of advancements in technology in eliminating many jobs; said small businesses have been more adversely affected by the crises than large corporations and the wealth gap is widening; acknowledged the enormous amount of work to be done but is hopeful that the community will rebound to a new normal.
- Councilor Semple – acknowledged the scale and seriousness of the current situation; said a second wave of COVID will exacerbate already difficult conditions; supported work to raise wages and create living wage jobs but felt challenged by the council’s limitations on those issues; voiced frustration about how little progress is being made on the homeless issue while other development advances; said providing shelter for unhoused community members to sleep is the most important goal; looked forward to working cooperatively with colleagues on council and partners to build the community back even better.
- Councilor Zelenka – thanks staff for their innovation, flexibility and energy; agreed that the impacts of COVID will remain indefinitely because many still aren’t adhering to health guidelines and orders; said the economy should be the council’s primary focus, including work on City loan programs, childcare initiatives and removing systemic barriers that create unequal access to services; said City construction projects will help economy by creating jobs; suggested creating metric for measuring how many affordable housing units are available or being built.

Each executive manager shared their thoughts on what they learned from the council through the day’s discussions. The commented on and appreciated the positivity of the thoughts expressed and voiced optimism about the direction of the organization.

- Mayor Vinis – said it is important to acknowledge both grief and gratitude and thanked the council and staff for reinforcing the need for that balance; felt council is aligned with staff on critical issues of housing and employment; encouraged looking more closely at “magnifiers” and levers and determining what the positive or negative impacts of pulling particular levers would be; said the community has the potential to create a jobs and wage pipeline and build capacity across many sectors, noting successful past efforts in the food and travel industries, and the many resources, partnerships and programs from which to draw; thanked everyone for their participation.

The meeting adjourned at 2:04 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Julie Adams
Deputy City Recorder

(Recorded by Beth Forrest)

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