

MINUTES

Eugene City Council Virtual Work Session Eugene, Oregon 97401

October 28, 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 October 28, 2020, work session of the Eugene City Council.

Mayor Vinis gave a statement regarding the defacement of a newly painted mural on a wall off Park Street between 7th and 8th Avenues.

1. **WORK SESSION: Police Chief Update on Election Preparations**

Chief of Police Chris Skinner gave an update on preparations for possible protests and demonstrations during the upcoming election.

Council Discussion:

- Councilor Evans – thanked Chief Skinner for the report; inquired about security for ballot drop boxes; asked what is in place for coordinated responses from social services agencies, non-profits and the City for dealing with trauma, both pre- and post-election.
- Councilor Zelenka – asked if ballot drop boxes are under surveillance; stated that vote-by-mail in Oregon is safe and works extremely well, noting that voters can track their ballot and remedy any problems.
- Councilor Semple – stated Lane County has made some alterations outside the Elections Office.
- Councilor Syrett – thanked Chief Skinner for the thoughtful election preparations especially around how the department will provide visible security to assure the public that its right to vote is being protected; appreciated the leadership the Chief is providing to the department.

2. **WORK SESSION: City Council Process Session**

Mayor and Council Support Manager Beth Forrest gave an update on several piloted changes made to City Council processes and policies in January 2020.

Council Discussion:

- Councilor Taylor – stated three-minute testimony is better than two minutes; supported not limiting testimony time once the public arrives at the meeting; said she does not approve of limiting the overall time of the public forum or randomizing the speakers' queue; thought it was better when Items of Interest occurred at the 5:30 pm work session.
- Councilor Yeh – said she feels randomization of speakers is unnecessary; said she is not set on two or three minutes but doesn't think testimony time should be changed once a person arrives to the meeting; said she does not feel there should be a time limit on public forums and, when meetings are held again in-person, she would like to consider having testimony via phone or Zoom.
- Councilor Evans – asked staff if a survey of the public has been conducted regarding these changes; said he thinks it would be good to assess the public's response to provide clarity for moving forward with these changes in a permanent way.

- Councilor Semple – stated if land use items are separated from the consent calendar, the council should consider scheduling all consent calendar items after the public forum; said she thinks Items of Interest is placed better at the 7:30 pm meeting; proposed a compromise of 2.5 minutes for testimony; said she feels 90 minutes is reasonable for the public forum but may need more time when big issues emerge; supported the option to allow video testimony; said she likes the idea of allowing the public to participate via Zoom when in-person meetings resume.
- Councilor Pryor – said that 90 minutes provides certainty that Council can hear testimony and take care of action items after; said he does not feel there has been a fair test of the new procedures since council had to change to a remote meeting format only two months after the changes were implemented; recommended holding off on a decision until in-person meetings resume and the changes can be properly assessed; said he would like to have video testimony in current Zoom format.
- Councilor Syrett – agreed with Councilor Pryor that changes to the public forum were not adequately tested and would like to see the test continue when meetings resume in-person; supported Councilor Semple’s idea of 2.5-minute testimony; said she feels 90 minutes for the public forum is adequate and the Mayor or Council President has the discretion to extend if warranted; supported randomization as important from an equity standpoint and to prevent gaming of the system; said she feels some of the proposed changes to the Council Operating Agreements can be adopted today but would like to hold off on permanent adoption of changes made to the public forum.
- Councilor Zelenka – agreed that changes to the public forum were made for certainty; said the two-minute limit on testimony and 90-minute total forum time is working so far; stated changes can be made at any time so there is no need to continue with a pilot and Council can extend length of the public forum at will; agreed that gaming of the system was occurring; supported allowing video testimony offered in Zoom and would like to allow testimony via Zoom and phone post-COVID restrictions.
- Mayor Vinis – stated these are unusual times and changes can be re-evaluated after COVID; said she feels two minutes for testimony seems short and can easily be extended to 2.5 minutes since public forums are not lengthy at this time.
- Councilor Clark – supported two-minute testimony and 60 minutes for the length of the public forum; said he feels certainty about the time frame is important; stated Council made these changes to fix problems and is not sure yet if the problems are fixed; agreed the public should be able to participate remotely, post-COVID.
- Councilor Evans – stated he is concerned about access issues for the public and wants to see if staff can explore ways to provide greater access for people to connect to Council meetings.
- Councilor Yeh – suggested staff can help Council with increasing access to Council meetings now and post-COVID; said she likes the idea of evaluating for an additional three months after in-person meetings resume; supported changing testimony time to 2.5 minutes and allowing video testimony; said she wants to revisit changes.
- Councilor Taylor – said she feels certainty is important and people should know ahead of time what the time allotment will be; opposed randomization as unfair for the person who arrives early and is not guaranteed time to speak; said she feels groups should get more time, with each person in the group allotted time.
- Councilor Semple – stated the public can still game the system; agreed with Councilor Taylor’s points; shared her preference to continue the pilot with 2.5-minute testimony time.
- Councilor Zelenka – suggested the council move forward with the package of changes, and councilors bring it up any specific changes as a motion.

MOTION and VOTE: Councilor Semple, seconded by Councilor Yeh, moved that the speaking time be changed to 2.5 minutes. **PASSED:** 6:2, Councilors Zelenka and Clark opposed.

Councilor Evans left the meeting at 1:07 p.m.

MOTION: Councilor Semple, seconded by Councilor Yeh, moved to continue the pilot with the 2.5-minute change until Council has been meeting in-person for three months, at which time Council will review it again.

MOTION TO AMEND and VOTE: Councilor Taylor, seconded by Councilor Semple, moved to eliminate randomization of speakers. **FAILED:** 3:4, Councilors Syrett, Pryor, Clark and Zelenka opposed.

VOTE on ORIGINAL MOTION: PASSED: 6:1, Councilor Zelenka opposed.

MOTION and VOTE: Councilor Semple, seconded by Councilor Yeh, moved to direct staff to return to Council with a resolution updating the City Council Operating Agreements with the changes approved by Council at its January 22, 2020, work session, shown in green font in Attachment A. **PASSED:** 7:0.

The meeting adjourned at 1:13 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Julie Adams
Deputy City Recorder

(Recorded by Jessica Gebb)

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