

MINUTES

Eugene City Council Virtual Work Session Eugene, Oregon 97401

December 16, 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 December 16, 2020, work session of the Eugene City Council.

1. **WORK SESSION: Economic Recovery Strategies – Flexible Emergency Loan Fund for Small Businesses**

Economic Development Planner Anne Fifield summarized economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and provided information about loans and grants implemented to-date, the City's existing loan programs, and the different internal funds that could capitalize an emergency loan fund.

Councilor Evans joined the meeting at 12:20 p.m.

Council Discussion:

- Councilor Clark – expressed interest in knowing the financial differences for fast food and dine-in restaurants; stated restaurants with a drive-thru window are faring better than others and believes restaurants should be a key target for assistance; stated Eugene will see critical changes to its business landscape.
- Councilor Zelenka – stated this economic downturn is a very different circumstance than the one that occurred in 2008; stated it doesn't appear that accelerating construction projects is necessary; stated Council's focus needs to shift away from job creation to COVID relief; would like to see more done for renters protections which is even more important now.
- Councilor Syrett – stated the Paycheck Protection Program was not originally designed to accommodate the particular challenges of operating a restaurant and it is concerning for the small and family-owned business landscape; stated she would like the City to be thinking about all the ways it can support restaurants through the pandemic.
- Councilor Semple – stated the situation downtown is deteriorating as businesses close.
- Councilor Taylor – expressed concern that once the pandemic is over there will be any restaurants still open for business.
- Mayor Vinis – stated there is activity of new business opening during the pandemic; asked staff how adaptable the small retail and restaurant industry is.
- Councilor Clark – stated he would like to see the City “get out of the way” and possibly appeal to Governor Brown to alter her Executive Order to make it more flexible to sector needs; suggested a bond to finance a loan fund for residential mortgage assistance.
- Councilor Zelenka – stated it is not the Governor's fault that COVID infections and hospitalizations are increasing, it is due to some people's behavior; stated businesses need to be kept afloat and employees needed to be helped through this pandemic; stated renter protections need to move forward; stated he would like to know what kinds of loans or grant sources can be accessed to provide funds to keep businesses afloat.
- Mayor Vinis – asked if there is an opportunity to look at a strategy to assist the arts sector; stated she might support asking the Governor's Office to re-evaluate criteria for re-opening by sector.

- Councilor Clark – stated he feels the economic conditions brought on by the pandemic are a larger impact problem than any seen for a while and the solutions need to be more robust than what has been done so far; said he hopes the City can lobby the Governor to consider a more nuanced response rather than a blanket one on how to operate safely in these conditions.

2. **WORK SESSION: Economic Recovery Strategies – Construction Projects as Local Stimulus**

Economic Development Planner Anne Fifield summarized the current and planned construction projects and the resources required to implement those projects, and described other ways that the City’s activities stimulate local economic activity.

Council Discussion:

- Councilor Clark – stated he feels the most intelligent thing the City can do to assist is to build multi-unit housing, market or otherwise; suggested providing incentives for development along 7th and 8th avenues and Hwy 99.
- Councilor Syrett – stated Oregon was fortunate that Governor Brown did not shut down the construction industry allowing housing to continue to be built and skilled construction workers to be retained in the industry; expressed excitement the City is moving forward with a year-round downtown Farmers Market; asked why she did not see the Quiet Zone listed in the projects planned for 2021.
- Councilor Zelenka – commended Public Works staff on the rebuild of the Amazon Trail; stated it does not appear that accelerating construction projects is needed right now; asked about programs for retraining workers who cannot return to their previous jobs.
- Councilor Clark – reported that Lane Workforce Partnership and the Bureau of Labor and Industries (BOLI) have started coordinating work around retraining programs.
- Councilor Zelenka – stated that accelerating affordable housing projects will have multiple co-benefits and he would like to see emphasis placed on those projects.
- Councilor Taylor – stated single-room occupancy is the biggest deficit in Eugene’s housing market and development of these should be encouraged.
- Councilor Clark – asked a clarifying question about skilled worker capacity.
- Mayor Vinis – expressed gratitude to Councilor Taylor and Councilor Pryor for their years of service; wished everyone a safe and happy holiday season.
- Councilor Semple – thanked Councilor Taylor and Councilor Pryor for their service and wished everyone a safe and happy holiday season.
- Councilor Zelenka – thanked Councilor Taylor and Councilor Pryor for their years of service.
- Councilor Clark – expressed appreciation for Councilor Taylor’s and Councilor Pryor’s service.

The meeting adjourned at 1:23 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Julie Adams
Deputy City Recorder

(Recorded by Jessica Gebb)

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