

**MINUTES
Eugene City Council
State of the City
Virtual Meeting
Eugene, Oregon 97401**

**January 5, 2022
5:30 p.m.**

Councilors Present: Emily Semple, Matt Keating, Jennifer Yeh, Mike Clark, Randy Groves, Greg Evans, Alan Zelenka

Absent: Claire Syrett

1. ENTERTAINMENT

Michael Moloi and company performed “Peace.”

2. LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Mayor Vinis read a statement acknowledging that the State of the City was being held on Kalapuya Ilihi, the traditional indigenous homeland of the Kalapuya people.

3. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

City Council President Jennifer Yeh provided opening remarks.

4. VIDEO PRESENTATION

A video was shown titled “Looking Back & Looking Forward,” highlighting what City Councilors’ are looking forward to in 2022.

5. BOLD STEPS AWARD

Mayor Vinis announced Summit Bank as the 2021 Bold Steps Award winner, and recognized PakTech and Arcimoto as finalists.

7. COMMUNITY AWARDS PRESENTATION

Mayor Vinis presented the 2021 Community Awards to the St. Vincent DePaul Homeless and Emergency Services team, Alex Reyna, and Pastor Gabe Piechowicz.

8. VIDEO PRESENTATION

A video of 2021 City of Eugene highlights was shown.

9. STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS

Mayor Vinis delivered her 2022 State of the City address:

Here we are—together again in this all-too-familiar virtual space, embarking on an annual ritual, once again altered by COVID. Thank you for joining me tonight, and thanks to all of you—City staff, elected officials, and all Eugeneans—who showed up every day—often in new ways—to bring us to this moment.

While we have been reassured by the partial return of what was once normal, this new spike in COVID compels us to recognize that in the new normal, nothing is the same as it

was. Our perspectives, our lives, and our City have been transformed by the experiences of the past two years.

Tonight, I want to talk with you about some of those transformations— - what we've seen already and what is to come.

As Mayor, I have a ringside seat to witness not only the struggles, but also the humanity, the effort, and the effectiveness of the work that happens every day. People in this community step up where and when they are needed. While most Eugeneans don't join in policy discussions, they do keep this community functioning every day. They work in our schools, our nonprofits, our businesses large and small, our hospitals and factories, and for our City, State, and County. They work at home, on job sites, and out of delivery vehicles. And their concerns—about educating their children, finding opportunities to grow and prosper, and living in safety and with respect—are at the center of the work we do in this city every day. These Eugeneans - who have shown up despite all the challenges of the last two years - are the backbone and the heart of this city. Thank you, again, for all of your perseverance and your many contributions.

As we begin to round the corner of this second year of COVID, we can recognize the powerful lessons of this time. I was once given critical advice: "don't make a long-term decision based on a short-term crisis." Initially, we approached the pandemic as a short-term crisis, employing specific and necessary actions - masks, vaccines, and physical distancing. These actions have been effective. But now, two years in, what we see emerging from the pandemic experience is an altered trajectory across the board. This shift from a short-term crisis into a long-term transformation resonates through all of our responses.

It is hard to appreciate the impact of incremental progress when you are down in the trenches—working your way, one day at a time, through enormous challenges. We don't see the transformation coming. As with our new Riverfront Park - that you will all be able to enjoy very soon -- the transformation from a narrow, fenced bike path to a graceful, arching greenway along the river will be startling because most of us weren't looking and didn't see the progress along the way.

Where and how are the incremental changes of the past year transforming our community? What does transformation mean on the local level, and how is that transformation reflected in our ongoing work to address homelessness, climate change, and equity? I want to talk with you tonight about what the City is doing about each of these public concerns as we move from what we see now to what we envision for the future.

Homelessness: Homelessness remains a critical issue for our city. As big as this concern felt to us a few years ago, it is now even bigger. And it is definitely not a short-term crisis.

The pandemic increased the numbers, visibility, and impact of people who are unsheltered; but more importantly it exposed the long-term challenge.

Poverty is broad and deep in this community. It is not an aberration; it is a condition of half of our population, many of whom have either fallen into or are at risk of

homelessness. The impact of homelessness is compounded by a serious meth epidemic and untreated mental illness that afflict many of the unsheltered people in our community who need long-term interventions. We see the terrible impacts on people who are unhoused, and we also see the troubling impacts on our business community, our downtown, our parks, and our sense of personal safety.

The city has been bold, brave, and determined in implementing immediate solutions, most notably the creation of safe sleeping sites. I liken the City to an emergency room. We respond to the homelessness emergency that is in our midst. But the long-term solution does not rest in sleep sites—in the emergency response—it rests in a much larger hospital of services that support recovery.

In this light, our work is just beginning. We began with ten recommendations adopted by Council in 2019 that aim to provide more beds, better outreach, more accurate data collection, and greater success in helping people move into stable lives. While the number of unsheltered people is now much greater than our data suggested a few years ago, the recommendations are still sound.

The City's emergency response continues to build safer places for people to rest. And the people who take advantage of our rest stops, microsites, and safe sleeping areas are transforming their lives.

Take, for example, Samuel, who moved into a rest stop managed by Community Supported Shelters after 10 years of living on the streets. His untreated bipolar disorder made it hard to hold down a job and pay his rent. The rest stop offered stability and gave him an address that in turn enabled him to collect two years of back disability payments and obtain his birth certificate and an Oregon ID. He is now looking for housing and looking forward to returning to college at LCC.

People who are impoverished and troubled need the stability of a safe place to sleep, hope and encouragement to begin their recovery. I am committed to three actions in the coming year:

First, to continue to support and advocate for our critical nonprofit providers, like Community Supported Shelters, to enable them to pay adequate wages and train and supervise their teams. The City does not provide these direct services to assist people on our streets, but we can help make sure that our nonprofit community is able to invest in the people with the skills and expertise to assist our unsheltered folks in transitioning from the streets to stable housing and thriving lives.

Secondly, I will continue to push hard for greater investment in mental health. The City relies on our partners—including the State of Oregon, Lane County, and nonprofits like CAHOOTS, and Whitebird—for this essential component of recovery. As part of our long-term response to homelessness, we joined with Lane County to invest in a permanent shelter, provide navigation services, and improve outreach to serve people where they are.

Mental health is often connected to substance abuse. Addiction to meth, in particular, prevents people from stabilizing their lives and precipitates behavior that negatively impacts the safety and quality of life in some of our neighborhoods. In the past year,

aggressive behavior by some people living in vehicles, particularly in West Eugene, have frightened and angered neighborhood businesses and residents.

As my third commitment, I will make sure that we do not ignore these public safety impacts. Councilors and members of the public demand accountability—both from the people who benefit from our services and from the police. Council has invested in both pathways through our increasing commitment to shelter and housing, and to public safety to enable police to respond in a timely way to calls for help. We are grateful for the business, faith, and neighborhood groups who shoulder the day-to-day impacts and provide the insight and willingness to create a more effective, safe, and humane response. I will make sure that our responses to homelessness include both compassion for the unhoused and respect for the impacts on all our community members.

Climate: Climate change is happening before our eyes ---the raging fires and unprecedented heat waves we saw this year are likely our new norm, not an exception. More and more of us understand that we urgently need to reduce emissions and adapt to a new reality. Again, we need to do more than address crises; we need to transform how we live and do business. The dual challenges of climate change and population growth present great opportunities to walk that talk.

What are the ways that a local government like the City of Eugene can address climate change, and have the greatest impact on slowing it down? Two of the key areas are housing -- increasing both its density and energy efficiency; and energy policy-- moving away from high-impact to more sustainable sources.

Where and how housing is constructed can reduce the climate impact of our growing population; and improving our housing stock will benefit the poorest among us who are the most severely impacted by climate change.

We enter 2022 in the midst of several pivotal housing policy decisions. We are required by House Bill 2001 to allow more “middle” housing in the form of duplexes, triplexes, cottage clusters, and townhomes in our residential neighborhoods. Understandably, there is a lot of energy and tension around the proposed code changes and how existing neighborhoods might be affected. However, we cannot talk about climate change without talking about the housing forms we allow. We cannot talk about equity or address the housing shortage without increasing the quantity and diversity of the housing we have.

The transformation has begun, and there are some wonderful examples. St. Vincent de Paul has completed housing for 53 households on River Road called Iris Place. This is affordable housing on a major corridor with access to buses. The units closest to the road have thicker walls and sound-proofed windows—they are quiet and filled with light. They’re heated with efficient electricity; and open to a central, shared landscape and playground. They form a dense but attractive facade to River Road and complement the single-family lots farther back on the block. The City incentivized this housing—we

provided the land, allocated Federal HOME funds, and forgave Systems Development Charges to reduce the cost.

This housing signals a change to River Road, a neighborhood that prides itself both for its rural quality and its willingness to reimagine itself to allow more housing and a safer, pedestrian and biking environment.

HB 2001 addresses the “where” of housing. Council also faces decisions about “how” housing is built to address climate change. Buildings are the second greatest users of fossil fuels and source of greenhouse gas emissions in the city. The Climate Action Plan 2.0, adopted by Council in 2021, includes 31 actions for addressing this impact.

Energy policy is also an area where the City can have a significant long-term impact on the climate crisis.

Public discussion in 2021 circled around the negotiations with NW Natural. The City Council sought to tie our contractual agreement with the gas company for maintaining gas infrastructure to our policy goal of reducing fossil fuel use and emissions. Climate advocates criticized the negotiations as a waste of time; proponents of natural gas worried that we would literally turn off the gas. Our intention is to find agreement where we can but to push forward with the essential transformations. The gas company’s stated priority to decarbonize is significant, and we expect to see their progress in meeting those goals.

My goal as mayor is to move as deliberately and quickly as we can toward electrification, but to do so realistically and fairly. It is a long-term transformation that arises from and builds on immediate actions.

At the end of 2021, Council made two important decisions: to explore code changes in 2022 that would require electrification of all new construction; and to develop a roadmap for decarbonizing existing buildings. We are fortunate that EWEB is our electric utility and that most of our local electricity comes from hydropower.

While Council considers code changes, we recognize that certain industries—like our breweries, wineries and coffee roasters, for example—depend on natural gas. Not every industry or commercial operation can make this shift. Capacity is also a concern—increasing demand for electricity may result in increasing cost as EWEB navigates the energy market.

In 2021, I convened a Mayor’s Business Advisory Council to inform our thinking about the pressing issues in our community. These business leaders are already offering insights about the scope and impacts of Council’s decisions related to building energy uses and costs.

The Climate Action Plan 2.0 sets our course and requires us to change business as usual. The City prepares the landscape for that transformation with investments in transportation, land use policies, and building codes. We promote community participation in waste prevention, energy efficiency and alternatives to cars. But none of the big changes will come easily.

There's hope in the widespread calls for faster action. Policy changes get more traction when citizens make their voices heard. Americans also love technology. We are early and eager adopters. We're ready to transform our lives when new ideas make life more comfortable and safer. Here in Eugene, we have our own electric vehicle company and now see Arcimotos buzzing around all over town. National and state policies are both pushing us forward and supporting electrification.

In 2021, I was appointed to the EPA's Local Government Advisory Council, expanding our voice in national policy discussions. My focus in that Council is on air quality and climate change. I see it as an opportunity to explore ways in which our City can better address the pollution and climate impacts in our poorer neighborhoods. In particular, Bethel and Trainsong are disproportionately affected by poor air quality, and much of the housing is not adequately heated and cooled. As we consider future climate change actions, this and other parts of town could become a focus for more trees, more control over industrial pollutants, promotion of energy efficiency, conversion to electric, and weatherization.

Equity: That brings me to equity and racial justice. Everyone does not feel safe in this community. That message came through loud and clear in 2020, and in the discussions and final report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Police Policies in 2021. The past year recorded an increase in hate and bias crimes particularly directed at Black and Asian Americans. These are troubling facts which must be addressed.

Community surveys and public testimony have stressed the need for alternatives to armed police officers to avoid triggering trauma among fragile members of our community. National recognition of CAHOOTS reinforced the call for greater mental health awareness and expertise in our public safety teams. We are acting on those requests in budget appropriations this year by exploring alternative responses and committing to a greater number of unarmed community service officers.

At the same time, the increase in hate crimes and crime in general calls on us to invest in a well-trained and well-supported police department. Police officers provide us with an essential and irreplaceable expertise and skill in responding to crime.

We opened tonight with a land acknowledgement in recognition of the City's racist past. We aim to shift that racist trajectory. The Equity Panel formed as part of the Climate Action Plan informs the city about climate and our transportation, housing and land use policies. Council has had the first of two meetings to discuss reparations; passed a resolution condemning anti-Asian speech and acts; and passed an ordinance banning the symbol of a noose as a crime of intimidation. I am working with the City Manager and staff to transform our interactions with Tribal leadership into a formal and respectful government-to-government relationship. 2021 was also the inaugural year for the Mayor's Youth Advisory Council, a diverse, high energy, thoughtful group of high school students who are turning their attention to hate and bias, as well as mental health and homelessness. They will bring those insights to Council.

Although the acronym "BIPOC" has come to be a shorthand for acknowledging the communities that experience inequity in Eugene and elsewhere, the specific stories of

Black American descendants of slavery; Indigenous people who were dispossessed of their land in North America; and immigrants from all parts of the world represented as “People of Color,” each have unique and distinctive stories and losses. Shifting from erasure to truth-telling must respond to all of those different narratives and communities. In the words of Nobel Peace Prize nominee, Sheila Watt-Cloutier who spoke at the UO last spring, “Things will change at the speed of empathy and trust.” Getting there requires us to understand and accept our past. I asked for Michael Moloi to perform tonight because his performance and his life in our community show us the way—through art, music, spoken word, and dance, we see each other with new eyes.

This year will bring the world to Eugene to attend the OR 22 World Athletics Championship in July. Our new riverfront park will host the free fan festival during the 10-day event at Hayward Field. It will be our time, at last, to demonstrate to the world our capacity for facing the transformative challenges of our era – to model solutions to homelessness, to lead in responding to climate change, and to honor and celebrate the many communities within our community.

As we move into 2022, we are not just recovering from a series of crises. Our City is using the tools available to us to find pathways, perspectives, and ideas that will transform us. It’s essential, but not enough, to shelter people from the cold - we must envision and work towards a city where everyone has and can afford a safe place to live. It’s essential, but not nearly enough, to cut back our carbon emissions; we must forge a world in which humanity is truly carbon-neutral and sustainable on our one and only planet. And it’s essential, but not enough, to make sure Black and Brown people are safe on our streets; we must build a community and a world in which diversity is our most valued characteristic. This is never easy, because we are a large and complex society that adapts and changes in small steps; we can be slow to find common ground; transformation is incremental and hard to see. We will get there only by continuing to work together with urgency, compassion, and wisdom - “at the speed of empathy and trust.” I look forward to continuing on this path with all of you.

10. ENTERTAINMENT

Michael Moloi and company performed “Sanibonani.”

The meeting was adjourned at 7:02 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Brooke Freed
AIC City Recorder

(Recorded by Niyah Ross)

Link to recording of State of the City [here](#).

