

MINUTES

Eugene City Council Virtual Work Session Eugene, Oregon 97401

February 14, 2022
5:30 p.m.

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

Mayor Vinis opened the February 14, 2022, work session of the Eugene City Council in virtual format.

1. **WORK SESSION – Budget and Process Update**

City Manager Sarah Medary and Strategic Initiative Project Manager Abby Alway presented information about a change in approach to the City of Eugene’s budget process. A new process will include the Council identifying strategic priorities and the City Manager building a budget that includes programs to support those priorities based on community feedback. This presentation was informational and an opportunity for Council to ask questions and share comments on the process.

Council Discussion:

- Councilor Groves – thanked staff for the presentation; asked staff to elaborate on the ways this approach differs from budgeting for outcomes; stated he did not like the proposal-based parts of the current process and is glad to see that removed in the updated approach; stated support for a biannual budget and the benefits of long-term planning.
- Councilor Syrett – stated she was on the Budget Committee when an updated budget process was previously brought forward but never realized; stated support for this proposed approach and a biannual budget cycle; expressed hope that state budget cuts will not occur; stated she is eager to hear more about the community survey aspect, but remains mindful the results will need to be validated through ongoing conversations with residents.
- Councilor Clark – stated the favored approach to Council operations and budgeting processes is to not let what is urgent crowd out what is important; expressed uncertainty about a biannual budget but said he remains open to the idea so long as the focus is on the important; asked how the City will stay responsive in the face of a biannual budget, particularly during the second year of the biennium; noted the state legislature is moving forward from annual to biannual budgeting and asked how will the City manage the difference in timing between the two legislative bodies.
- Councilor Semple – stated she is intrigued by a biannual budget and the ways with which it could provide more information and greater control; concurred with Councilor Syrett on the need for validating community surveys through additional outreach; expressed appreciation for the ease of use of the dashboard view.

- Mayor Vinis – thanked staff for the presentation and information; agreed this approach adds a lot of clarity; stated that expenses spanning across multiple departments and activities throughout the years can be difficult to understand and track; noted Council has been consistent in asking for greater financial accountability and the highest utilization per dollars spent; asked if this process will allow for a better handle on how success is measured; asked how this updated approach will interface with the City’s online transparency tool; asked how difficult it will be to make this shift in process.
- Councilor Evans – asked about the impact on flexibility of the budgeting process in an annual versus biannual framework; asked staff how the approach to supplemental budgeting differs between annual and biannual processes and if it could improve responsiveness to both internal and community needs.
- Councilor Keating – noted Council has a legislative responsibility for setting goals and adopting policy; asked whether this change in approach would potentially undermine the responsiveness and influence of Councilors, because it cuts in half their opportunities to weigh in on major budget direction; asked what considerations would be in place to ensure the Budget Committee and City Council retain responsibility for which services the City will provide on an annual basis.
- Councilor Zelenka – discussed his familiarity with biannual budgets; noted the majority of budget considerations are fairly fixed and recurring; stated revamping the budget process does not necessarily impact those fixed costs and he does not anticipate many changes to spending and interactions with state legislators; asked how this will be different in practice, as the authority/personnel around City departmental budgets will remain the same; stated he is an advocate of service-based budget models as it aligns with how people think about City systems.
- Councilor Yeh – stated support for an updated process that permits less time on budgeting process and more time focusing on priorities and ensuring funds are directed to important issues; asked if a biannual budget will allow for adjustments mid-biennium; noted her ongoing frustrations with the current budget process and is pleased to see staff considering alternatives.
- Councilor Syrett – expressed excitement about the reworked budget process; responded to concerns about incoming Councilors not having the context or opportunity to contribute to a biannual budget process; stated there will be greater opportunities to impact the budget when aligned with Council goals and policymaking.
- Councilor Evans – asked what kind of relief to staff workloads is afforded by a biannual budget; noted any relieved pressure from staff and committee workloads will likely translate into additional time for responding to community needs and concerns.
- Councilor Keating – expressed appreciation for feedback from staff and Council; proposed the target of this updated process be referred to as the “two-year stability budget”; asked what response, if any, the City’s labor union partners have had to the idea of priority-based budgeting; proposed that acronyms not be used in Council discussion and processes.
- Councilor Evans – noted the City’s priorities generally revolve around public safety, public works and library/recreation services, whose budgets do not change significantly on a regular basis; asked how to address deficiencies in revenue funding for things the City should be doing and how to work more effectively with County partners in addressing human services issues.

- Councilor Syrett – stated Human Services Commission staff have started meeting in advance to ensure they are representing the positions of Council and the City as closely as possible; concurred with limiting the use of acronyms.
- Mayor Vinis – asked about the timing of community surveys and engagement around this process, noting summer can be problematic due to decreased responses.

Mayor Vinis adjourned the meeting at 6:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Brooke Freed
City Recorder AIC

(Recorded by Jay Ferris)

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

