

MINUTES

Eugene City Council Virtual Work Session Eugene, Oregon 97401

January 20, 2021
12:00 p.m.

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

Mayor Vinis opened the January 20, 2021, work session of the Eugene City Council.

1. **WORK SESSION: Naming Policy**

Policy Systems Analyst Jason Dedrick provided a brief overview of the City of Eugene Naming Policy.

Council Discussion:

- Councilor Syrett – thanked staff for the overview; stated she thinks the overall process for naming can be improved and crafted to incorporate an equity and inclusion lens in a deliberate way; asked staff to look into the naming policies of other cities; suggested creating a system where an advocate can raise a suggestion, the community can be called upon to make additional suggestions, and a committee can be formed to vet the ideas and make a recommendation.
- Councilor Yeh – stated she is very interested in placemaking and the concept that public places can be used to foster equity and social inclusion in creative ways, just in how they are named; stated she is currently in the process of renaming a park in North Eugene using a similar process to the one used to name the streets in the Riverfront area, and has had to eliminate some suggestions of people because they don't have a connection to Eugene; stated the current policy has good intentions of finding local people with local connections but leaves out people that have a significant legacy and are important to groups within the community.
- Councilor Groves – thanked staff for the presentation; stated he also wonders what other jurisdictions are doing; challenged staff to streamline and simplify whenever reviewing policies.
- Councilor Keating – stated he is curious what the process has been for partnering with neighboring organizations and agencies; asked what the process is for Council to designate a bridge, walkway or a park in honor of a long-standing, local, living individual, such as his predecessor Betty Taylor.
- Councilor Clark – expressed appreciation for the conversation; stated it is important to him there is a forward-looking view in the City's naming policy rather than a historical view; asked staff about the geographical considerations for naming; stated there are differences of labor in the community and regional preferences that he hopes will be taken into consideration as well; expressed hope that the City will honor its commitments and naming rights.
- Councilor Evans – provided a recap of the City/Lane Transit District naming collaboration which renamed the downtown bus station after Rosa Parks, and also a recap of the process for renaming Centennial Boulevard to Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard; stated he thinks the naming process has been broken for a long time and a process is needed where everyone knows what the rules are for forwarding names.
- Councilor Zelenka – stated he thinks this is a timely conversation but not without controversy; inquired of staff the criteria which the Human Rights Commission will use in its process; stated that having buy-in of the criteria will be a critical part of that process; stated he agrees with the comments made by Councilors Syrett and Yeh in general.

- Councilor Yeh – stated when this item comes back to Council she would like to see comments from the Human Rights Commission and Human Rights staff about ways to improve this process; stated this work needs to have an equity lens, and she would like to see a system more proactive than reactive to suggestions; stated in creating the equity lens there needs to be a way for under-represented groups and people of color to plug in in a meaningful way; clarified the direction of the naming resolution guiding the Human Rights Commission’s work is to look for things that are new, and that have been lost to communities that have discontinuous time here or have been intentionally erased.
- Mayor Vinis – encouraged the City to make note of ideas that can be incorporated into future naming processes as it engages in community outreach; stated it is important to build a more predictable and consistent system that is also all-inclusive to ensure place names are meaningful.

2. WORK SESSION: Consideration of Resolution Condemning White Supremacy

Council Discussion:

- Councilor Syrett – introduced the resolution, stating that in the wake of the activities that happened on January 6 in Washington DC, and in anticipation of more violence on Inauguration Day, Councilor Zelenka, Councilor Yeh and she put forth a new resolution affirming this Council’s condemnation of white nationalism, seditious activities and extremist groups; this resolution is based on the resolution passed in 2019.
- Councilor Zelenka – stated he had suggested updating the 2019 resolution because of the events of January 6 where political extremists, white supremacists and domestic terrorists attempted a coup to bring down our democracy; stated a stand needs to be taken against this kind of hatred and urged Council to support this resolution.
- Councilor Clark – stated he will be voting in favor of this resolution and appreciates the work of his colleagues; apologized for not being more careful in the wording of the comments he made in reference to the events of January 6; stated racism offends him to his core.
- Councilor Keating – thanked Councilors Zelenka, Syrett and Yeh for their work on the resolution; suggested as a friendly amendment to change the language to state that “at least five persons” have lost their lives to recognize those still struggling for their lives; thanked community members who submitted a letter in support of Council’s resolution; stated he will be voting to affirm this resolution.
- Councilor Syrett – expressed appreciation for Councilor Clark’s comments; stated she had suggested the removal of reference to alt-right groups from the 2019 resolution because it is her position that those who engage in or carry an ideology of white supremacy are neither right or left and do not adhere to those concepts in the way those serving on this Council would agree; stated she felt it was important to remove that label because it did not apply.
- Councilor Clark – stated that patriotism to him is fidelity to the Constitution and belief that our form of government is the best one; stated people cannot call themselves patriots and carry a Confederate flag inside our Capitol Building because it is anti-American; stated Joe Biden is our legitimate President.
- Councilor Zelenka – acknowledged Councilor Clark for his clarity and comments; stated National Youth Poet Laureate Amanda Gorman’s “The Hill We Climb” was uplifting and inspiring and knowing there are young people of this caliber gives him hope for the future.
- Councilor Clark – stated he was struck by the lack of Washington, DC police and Capitol police to stop the actions on January 6; stated he feels the police response would have been different if it had been a mob of black men; stated the police did not see the potential danger the mob presented on January 6.

- Mayor Vinis – shared her concern and the concern of many others that what we saw was a failure to recognize white protesters as a danger where black protestors would have been seen as a danger, and this glaring inequity in perception is part of the work ahead of this community and country.

MOTION AND VOTE (*with friendly amendment*): Councilor Yeh, seconded by Councilor Syrett, moved to adopt a Resolution Condemning White Nationalism and Seditious Activities and Extremist Groups with an addition in Section I to add “at least five”. **PASSED:** 8:0.

The meeting adjourned at 1:03 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Julie Adams". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Julie Adams
Deputy City Recorder

(Recorded by Jessica Gebb)

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