

MINUTES

Eugene City Council Virtual Meeting Eugene, Oregon 97401

February 8, 2021
7:30 p.m.

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

Mayor Vinis opened the February 8, 2021, meeting of the Eugene City Council in a virtual format.

1. COMMITTEE REPORTS AND ITEMS OF INTEREST

Council Discussion

- Councilor Syrett – highlighted the Martin Luther King Jr. Commons project of permanent low-barrier housing for the chronically homeless and the City’s substantial contribution to it; expressed appreciation that the project has come to fruition and will be housing people soon, and is a partnership with Lane County to find upstream solutions to homelessness.
- Councilor Keating – expressed optimism that the country and community are on the back end of COVID; encouraged everyone to get vaccinated and noted that preregistration is available on the County website; information about risk levels is available on the State of Oregon’s webpage.

2. CONSENT CALENDAR 1

- A. Approval of City Council Minutes
- B. Approval of City Council Tentative Agenda

MOTION AND VOTE: Councilor Yeh, seconded by Councilor Syrett, moved to approve the items on the Consent Calendar 1. **PASSED 8:0.**

3. PUBLIC FORUM

1. Tex – spoke against the sweeps and asked the City to address the needs of people in the community.
2. Russ Benton – concerned about the negative impacts of disinvestment in natural gas infrastructure.
3. Charles Areford – said methane is a devastating greenhouse gas that increases with natural gas use.
4. Jeff McGillivray – asked Council not to take action on NW Natural agreement until more public input.
5. Karyn Morrison – stated banning gas in the community will limit jobs; NW Natural will cooperate.
6. Catherine Williams – said NW Natural has carbon neutral goal; residents want energy choices.
7. Kathy Walker – encouraged City staff to collaborate on which camps need help with trash.
8. Sarah Lamog – urged Councilor Clark to resign, for perceived sympathy for white supremacy.
9. Amy Raven – voiced concern about sweeps and asked for more services and housing.
10. Avery Musdee – asked Council to identify with those who have no place to stay at night or bathroom.
11. Tomoko Sekiguchi – predicted a climate catastrophe; wildfires and worsening air quality.
12. Lydia Valentine – stated the climate crisis is worsening; make transition to renewable energies.
13. Deb McGee – spoke against natural gas, warned of its dangers; said renewable gas is a deflection.
14. Markus Koeneke – said NW Natural can’t be allowed to control how the City addresses its climate goals.
15. Harvey Gail – opposed the gas ban; said Council needs to hear from home heating experts.
16. Matthew Jensen – asked Council to solicit more input from community members on natural gas.
17. William Temple – spoke to evidence of harm from 5G, and possible actions on local level.
18. Avery Temple – demanded regulations on NW Natural to mitigate worst impacts of climate crisis.

19. Peter & Martha Dragovich – said housing is the most cost-effective way to help the homeless.
20. Laurie Powell – encouraged Council to require concessions from NW Natural or walk away.
21. Ben Christensen – said Councilor Clark used language similar to what was used to incite insurrection.
22. Scott Strickland – said decisions on infrastructure impact future generations; Council needs to wait.
23. Sahara Valentine – stated water levels changed drastically; invest in building climate resiliency.
24. Selena Blick – said NW Natural should not hold the City hostage any longer, need to meet CRO goals.
25. Shae Harper – testified on behalf of Fossil Fuel Free Coalition for transition to renewable energy.
26. Kate – supported decarbonization of city; spoke to impacts of pollution and gas leaks from home use.
27. Dylan Plummer – said NW Natural acted in bad faith in negotiations, unwilling to regulate emissions.
28. Karen Austin – encouraged financial support to help low-income people move to renewable energy.
29. Barb Prentice – supported CDC guidelines and creation of shelter options, opposed moving camps.
30. Leah Jo Carnine – stated lack of secure housing is one the most negative forces in patients' lives.
31. Nicholas Tippins – said City can lead on climate; NW Natural represents corporate profit.
32. Nate Stokes – said all renewable energy options are needed for a carbon free future; keep the franchise.
33. Lonnie Douglas – said Eugene has the highest rate of homelessness in the country, take this seriously.
34. Madeline – advocated transition to renewable energy; equitably move the city into a new decade.
35. Joshua McClurry – said more information is needed before a decision on the NW Natural franchise.
36. David Piccioni – said trees should not be assigned a value; climbing trees is wonderful.
37. Brooklyn – demanded end to the expansion of gas; don't race to reopen schools in pandemic.
38. Larry Mozer – stated natural gas provides good jobs, wages, and is a clean, natural field.
39. Doyle Canning – said other cities are moving to renewable energy; NW Natural using delay tactics.
40. Nick Caleb – hydrogen is from fracked methane, used in disingenuous way to prolong use of methane.

Council Discussion

- Councilor Syrett – thanked all who provided public comment; wants to address that “ban natural gas” is confusing people and believes NW Natural is contributing to the confusion; clarified Council is not discussing a ban on current users of natural gas and it is not part of the Sustainability Commission’s recommendations; transitioning to clean energy will mean jobs to maintain alternative infrastructure, and the community can work together to find a path to benefit all; stated it is not the role of Council to determine if a councilor is fit to serve, and there is no mechanism to do so, as each Councilor was elected by constituents of that ward.
- Councilor Yeh – thanked those that spoke about homeless services and stated Council has an upcoming meeting with Lane County Commissioners on the subject; stated many folks spoke about NW Natural Gas, and to make her position clear, she was supportive initially of the NW Natural agreement but dragging out the unsuccessful negotiations does not benefit anyone, and it is time to look for different ways to achieve climate recovery goals; stated Eugene can make real change, and that is what climate recovery efforts are about.
- Councilor Semple – thanked everyone that testified; stated she agrees with the comments made by Councilors Syrett and Yeh about climate action and that we need to stand up for the Climate Recovery Ordinance; stated the unhoused can’t be asked to move without having a place to move to, and she is encouraged by new guidelines and the work to figure out compliance with these guidelines.
- Councilor Keating – thanked those who gave testimony; expressed appreciation to those calling for increased restrooms and receptacles for refuse; read a quote by President Biden regarding climate change and stated this dialogue is critically important.
- Councilor Groves – thanked those that provided testimony; stated he looks forward to engaging the entire community in the climate action discussion; thanked Councilor Syrett for her comment regarding Council action against councilors.
- Councilor Zelenka – thanked speakers for their testimony; stated we all have the same goal of meeting Climate Recovery Ordinance (CRO) goals, combatting climate change and reducing fossil fuel use; expressed disappointment that some people are demonizing others for not sharing the same opinion and this should stop because it is inappropriate, creates division and makes it harder to get things

done; stated he hopes people will keep that in mind as they testify and as we move forward in the climate action process.

- Councilor Clark – stated he agrees with the comments made by Councilor Zelenka regarding climate action; stated he values the process and the right of others to speak their opinions, but accusations have been made against him that aren't true; stated he is a Republican and conservative whose intention is to facilitate better understanding between people of different opinions, so that we can work towards a more just community.
- Councilor Evans – thanked those that testified, and stated Council listens and tries to respond in a way that is productive for the entire City; stated he is hopeful that an agreement with NW Natural can be reached, and wants to see something significant and valuable that NW Natural is prepared to negotiate to reduce the carbon footprint and ease the burden on low-income residents.
- Mayor Vinis – thanked everyone for their comments; stated the City is protecting our publicly-funded and owned right of way and the right to negotiate a fair fee and attach values about our climate recovery; thanked those speaking on behalf of people that are homeless, and recognized the City is dependent on community providers, volunteers and neighborhoods to find locations where people can sleep in their cars and tents; stated any homeowner can host car camping on their property as long as sanitation is provided, and encouraged community members to consider doing this to reduce the number of unhoused individuals on the streets; reminded all that city councilors are elected by constituents.

4. Continuation of WORK SESSION: Northwest Natural Gas Franchise Agreement

Council Discussion

- Councilor Clark – asked staff what is the legal nexus between energy efficiency and the City's right of way and asked if an economic impact analysis of not renewing the franchise agreement has been done; stated he wonders about the impact to the Riverfront development and the University of Oregon and new housing, and if the affordable housing situation will be exacerbated by not going through with the agreement; stated Council is not ready to make a decision like this, and it would be irresponsible to do so before it understands the potentially massive consequences it would put on our community.
- Councilor Zelenka – stated he does not believe there should be another extension, enough time has been given to reach an agreement; stated an adversarial relationship with NW Natural will result in resistance, lawsuits, further delays, and very little greenhouse gas emission reductions, whereas reaching an agreement with NW Natural will get us closer to our CRO goals faster than if no agreement is in place; stated he thinks the two parties are not that far apart and an agreement can be reached.
- Councilor Keating – asked a point of clarification regarding publicly referencing the proposal.
- Councilor Groves – stated he agrees with much of what Councilor Zelenka said; stated he would like more feedback to figure out where the community actually is on this issue, as Council has been hearing from the same people repeating their positions at Public Forum; stated he appreciated hearing from the labor folks testifying tonight which was a new voice not yet heard; asked if there is any polling data from the community; stated he doesn't believe Council and the City have a good sense on where the community as a whole stands on this issue.
- Councilor Keating – stated it is a matter of good faith and give and take when negotiating; stated he would like to see NW Natural partners give a little more to meet our goals; asked about the February 19th date and how realistic it is for an agreement to be reached by then; asked what happens when the agreement expires in May; expressed desire to hear more from the community; stated that in what should be a give and take, we are not seeing a lot of giving.
- Councilor Yeh – thanked her colleagues and stated she agrees with a lot of what they are saying; stated she is in favor of Plan A as it would be much easier and there is no guarantee with Plan B, but we seem to be at a point where we need to start looking into Plan B since Plan A does not seem to be doing well; stated that cost increases for customers are valid concerns and could be mitigated once those impacts are understood; suggested the Healthy Democracy model could be used to engage the community with climate issues; need to fully understand the impacts of Plan B before taking that route.

- Councilor Syrett – stated she agrees the City would do better with an agreement than without one, but at this time NW Natural is not showing a willingness to negotiate an agreement on terms this council would vote for; stated she does not wish for an adversarial relationship with NW Natural and it is not mandatory for them to have a franchise agreement with the City; stated it will not be the end of their business in this community if the agreement expires, and wishes she could be as hopeful as Councilor Zelenka but is not seeing evidence of that.
- Councilor Evans – stated the problem with the negotiated proposals at this point is the amount of control NW Natural has in this agreement; stated it is irresponsible to not have independent control over the agreement and the fee; stated the City needs to use the leverage that it has, and he would like to continue to work with partners to come to an agreement but there needs to be substantive progress towards our CRO goals.
- Councilor Clark – expressed desire for Eugene accomplish its climate goals in partnership; stated that establishing a hard line with NW Natural will not get us to those goals; expressed concern for rising gas prices; stated he wants to hear more public opinion, to slow down and learn what needs to be learned, as it is the best way to get an agreement and further action on our climate goals.
- Councilor Zelenka – stated that with the structure in the proposals, the City would get \$1.5 million to pursue energy efficiency projects; stated Renewable Natural Gas (RNG) is not the savior of the world, and we need to be looking at multiple ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions; stated if we go with Plan B with a franchise fee, the City only receive \$600,000; disagrees with NW Natural’s suggestion that administrative costs can be pulled out of this and that all should go towards decreasing greenhouse gas emissions; stated we have one of two RNG projects in Oregon coming online this year at the Metropolitan Wastewater Treatment Plant, one of the preeminent RNG plants in the northwest.
- Mayor Vinis - stated we all desire a partnership and it is frustrating that there isn’t a fair negotiation happening that furthers the City’s broader goals; stated we are most likely to see this agreement lapse because we aren’t close enough to reaching an agreement; expressed appreciation for Councilor Yeh’s thoughts on focused public outreach; stated we are not ending anything but not at a point of resolution.

The meeting adjourned at 10:13 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Beth Forrest
City Recorder

(Recorded by Julie Adams)

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