

MINUTES

Eugene City Council and Lane County Board of Commissioners Virtual Joint Work Session Eugene, Oregon 97401

July 28, 2021
12:00 p.m.

Councilors Present: Jennifer Yeh, Claire Syrett, Emily Semple, Matt Keating, Alan Zelenka, Randy Groves, Mike Clark, Greg Evans (arrived at 12:50 p.m.)

Commissioners Present: Joe Berney, Heather Buch, Laurie Trieger, Pat Farr

Commissioners Absent: Jay Bozievich

Mayor Lucy Vinis opened the July 28, 2021, work session of the Eugene City Council in virtual format.

Commissioner Chair Joe Berney opened the July 28, 2021, work session of the Lane County Board of Commissioners in virtual format.

1. **JOINT WORK SESSION – Homeless Systems Transformation**

Joint Shelter and Housing Strategist for the City of Eugene and Lane County Sarai Johnson, Lane County Sr. Program Services Coordinator for Homeless Outreach James Ewell and City of Eugene Homeless Systems Policy Manager Peter Chavannes gave a presentation on the implementation of the homeless systems transformation, including the updated workplan for FY22 and budget considerations for ongoing work.

Council Discussion:

- Councilor Clark – thanked staff for the presentation and noted it was easy to understand; asked where outreach and engagement with the unhoused is conducted and what percentage of encounters are at unsanctioned camping sites; questioned what percentage of those engaged at unsanctioned camping sites expressed weariness about interacting with government officials; expressed concern with having fewer behavioral requirements for those less willing to engage with government officials and services; asked at what point in time should unsanctioned camping in Eugene be ended.
- Commissioner Buch – thanked staff for the presentation and for including a breakdown of budget items; stated she considers the Technical Assistance Collaborative’s Shelter Feasibility Study (TAC report) a stale document that should be updated; stated that further work is needed as 350 permanent supportive housing units will not be enough; expressed the need for a more regional approach with greater collaboration; suggested reactivating focused subcommittees to complete work outside of these joint work sessions.
- Councilor Groves – thanked staff for the presentation; concurred with Commissioner Buch that more interagency collaboration is needed on this and many other issues; shared that he has spent considerable time engaging the community, particularly in Ward 8/West Eugene, speaking to the unhoused, workers, businesses and residents affected by homelessness, and it is clear the impact of this work on the community as a whole must be considered; stated that he is interested in thinking proactively about helping those on the verge of homelessness, particularly in the face of the soon-to-expire federal eviction moratorium; noted that he hopes to receive further recommendations from the City Housing Policy Board; stated it is very

important to have a plan in place to address those who refuse to relocate from unsanctioned camping sites.

- Commissioner Trieger – asked to clarify the total number of diversion specialists and their working locations; stated that the TAC report remains a useful basis for planning but agrees the information is stale; stated that the impact of COVID, displacement from wildfires, and racial injustice on staff mental health and service provider resources cannot be underestimated; stated a glaring omission from the TAC report is recommendations on staffing resources and required capacity to accomplish the work; questioned where those considerations would be included if the TAC report were to be refreshed; advocated for more frequent updates to and policy action from Council and Commissioners.
- Councilor Zelenka – thanked staff for the presentation; stated he has been working on homelessness issues since the 1990s and this is the most coordinated things have ever been, with the best and clearest plan and much work accomplished; agreed that the TAC report is stale but noted it catapulted much of this work forward nonetheless; asked where the City of Springfield fits into the current and future approach and if it is time to formally ask them to join these collaborative efforts.
- Commissioner Farr – stated that the TAC report has some staleness but it must continue to be used to the fullest extent; stated that housing has been underbuilt for decades and questioned how that will be countered; noted the Carry it Forward program and that Camp 99 has evolved into a living space for multiple people well beyond its original intent; asked all to consider how that model can be leveraged to allow partner agencies more effective use of public lands.
- Councilor Keating – concurred that the TAC report needs to be refreshed; stated the need to remove barriers that keep residents in the assistance cycle; stated he is in favor of creating a pooled application process for rental housing that would remove such barriers as requiring comprehensive address history, disclosing prior bankruptcy and other negative remarks; thanked the County partners who helped to stand up cooling centers and other emergency respite during recent heat dome event.
- Commissioner Berney – stated that he does not believe the TAC report is stale; noted his early objections to it due to the lack of data on unhoused students reported by school districts; identified the need to build up people, not more systems, except for those systems that serve to empower people; noted that the City of Springfield has had Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU) for a long time and waivers for systems development charges (SDC); stated that a partnership mentality is needed in this collective approach, to look for and build upon the strengths each entity brings to the table; questioned the long-term effectiveness of intermediary work when there remains a lack of available, safe and secure housing.
- Councilor Syrett – thanked staff for the presentation and collaborative work between City and County staff; noted that the City of Springfield chose to not be part of the TAC study; thanked Sarai Johnson for her contributions and underlined the importance of having a single point of contact with oversight on the various steps and intersections of the larger scope of work; stated that addressing mental health issues is a factor in the ability to reduce homelessness and asked for additional information about the mental health summit noted in the presentation; suggested formally revising goals from the TAC report as the current ones are over a year old.
- Mayor Vinis – expressed appreciation for the detailed presentation and breakdown of budget information; noted that the TAC report was built on old data and current homeless population data is above original projections; added to comments about building staff resources and capacity; commented that there was a joint steering committee previously and said it could be reactivated.
- Councilor Clark – noted he is continually asked when something will be done about homelessness in Eugene; stated there is a disconnect between what the public sees, what they experience, and the very good work being done, which could be attributed to not addressing activity from unsanctioned camps; asked the City Manager if the presence of unsanctioned

camps is acceptable for the foreseeable future; stated he would like to see clarification of work completed around the unhoused in relation to the TAC report recommendations.

- Councilor Groves – agreed there is a lack of communication to the public about the good work being done on this issue; noted that the City of Springfield chose to not participate in TAC study but advocated for inviting them to join the discussion.
- Commissioner Farr – noted that the City of Springfield is represented at the Eugene Human Rights Commission, organized mental health summits and other meetings; agreed that now is the time to bring them together for high-level collaboration.
- Councilor Syrett – asked all to consider how they might put pressure on state and federal decisionmakers to increase funding and reconsider limitations on use of funding so local service providers can increase staff compensation and build a more stable workforce; stated she is in favor of updating benchmarks in the TAC report with refined, more informed numbers.
- Commissioner Berney – stated he is united with others that the City of Springfield and communities across the county be invited to the table to collaborate on this issue.
- Councilor Semple – appreciated the report and cohesive overview it provided; noted that the community is beyond frustrated with this issue, and even though much is being done it is not enough; expressed concerns about mental health care its affect on finding/retaining service providers; urged those who have ideas for equitable solutions to contact their City Councilor.

Mayor Vinis adjourned the Eugene City Council meeting at 1:26 p.m.

Commissioner Berney adjourned the Lane County Board of Commissioners meeting at 1:26 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Brooke Freed
City Recorder AIC

(Recorded by Jay Ferris)

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