

MINUTES

Eugene City Council and Urban Renewal Agency Virtual Work Session Eugene, Oregon 97401

September 8, 2021
12:00 p.m.

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

Councilors Absent: Randy Groves

Mayor Vinis opened the September 8, 2021, work session of the Eugene Urban Renewal Agency in virtual format.

1. WORK SESSION – Downtown Open Space Improvements

COCommunity Development Director AIC Will Dowdy presented potential Open Space improvements downtown, including the Willamette Connection, a proposed improvement to the public space between the Hult Center and the Graduate Hotel (also known as the Hult Center Plaza). The presentation included information on design, estimated costs, and funding options.

Council Discussion:

- Councilor Semple – expressed excitement about the proposed project moving forward; voiced concern about incorporating 6th and 7th avenues into the downtown design and supported sidewalk improvements and reducing bottlenecks; said aesthetics, useability and safety are key to the project’s success; noted efforts to earmark urban renewal funds for open space improvements.
- Councilor Clark – stated that \$2.5 million is a lot to dedicate to aesthetic improvements for one block; asked about the benefits that will be realized from this tax increment financing and what feedback staff and the council have heard about connectivity problems.
- Councilor Syrett – thanked Councilor Semple for her persistence in setting aside money for open space improvements; expressed appreciation for planned upgrades to the wheelchair ramp and said the sloping sidewalk on 7th Avenue is difficult to navigate; said the memorial garden is a hidden gem marking a historic wrong and plans to make it more visible and accessible are appreciated; supported the plan’s focus on two entrances, noting it will create better connections and lead to enhanced property values.
- Councilor Zelenka – agreed that enhancements to open spaces are important and noted that there are limitations on how urban renewal money can be spent; agreed that plans for the memorial garden are worthy; asked about intentions for the “projection wall” and the public art plinth.
- Councilor Keating – thanked staff for their work; discussed the geographical significance of the memorial garden as the site where internment registration occurred; noted that many areas of the city do not have sidewalks; inquired about plans to replace any trees that are removed for the project; asked about engagement efforts with surrounding businesses and whether any negative impact on the hotel or Hult Center business was anticipated.
- Councilor Yeh – appreciated the detail of the presentation and its consideration of multiple factors; asked whether the advisory committee included representation from the memorial garden and encouraged proactivity in ensuring diversity of perspectives on future projects; thanked Councilor Semple for efforts to keep this project moving forward.

- Councilor Syrett – asked about the status of the Hult Center kiosks at the north and south end of the plaza; supported using any remaining funds for lighting improvements; clarified that urban renewal money can only be used within the district; therefore, it is not depriving other areas of similar improvements.
- Councilor Clark – suggested a rededication ceremony for the memorial garden be planned when the project is completed.
- Councilor Keating – asked about the impacts of the project on the PeaceHealth bike share station and hoped there would be no interruption of availability; asked about using extra funds for transportation improvements.
- Mayor Vinis – agreed that the existing ramp is a “cattle shoot” and appreciated the focus on the memorial garden.

MOTION AND VOTE: Councilor Yeh, seconded by Councilor Syrett, moved to direct the Agency Director to schedule a public hearing to solicit public comment on whether the proposed open space projects should move forward and on the appropriate funding mechanisms for the projects. The Agency Director is further directed to schedule a work session for the Agency Board to deliberate on the projects. **PASSED 7:0.**

Mayor Vinis adjourned the meeting of the Eugene Urban Renewal Agency and convened a meeting of the Eugene City Council.

2. WORK SESSION – Unhoused Response Update

Assistant City Manager Kristie Hammitt and Public Works Director Matt Rodrigues provided an update on temporary urban camps and vehicle camping response and actions related to developing site plans and programming for the establishment of “Safe Parking” and “Safe Tent” sites.

Council Discussion:

- Councilor Clark – thanked staff for the work they are doing to implement Council policy and direction; asked questions about compliance efforts and the data kept in the Homeless By Name count; asked about the policy position on those in unsanctioned camps who violate the law and if individuals who are banned for behavior issues from sanctioned camps have an opportunity to return; supported efforts to protect the community and neighborhoods from criminal activity; inquired whether Unified Command had access to data about criminal activity.
- Councilor Keating – agreed that safe sleep sites must be safe for the users and the community and supported a systems approach that indicates the number of people served of each cohort and the percentage of funds allocated; noted the Governor’s mask mandate omits homeless facilities and suggested that the City consider enacting a policy around masks and vaccinations.
- Councilor Syrett – appreciated the efforts of staff and the resources allocated for this work; reported that her constituents are feeling afraid and fatigued, and the near-constant disruptive activity at Washington Jefferson Park may lead to a breaking point for many; supported keeping the pace of the work going and taking into account the number of tents at each site versus the number of individuals.
- Councilor Semple – agreed that many in the community are losing patience and asked how long it will be until the safe sleep sites are ready; regarding communication efforts, asked where the funding is coming from, if there are enough port-a-potties, and the timeline for occupation.
- Councilor Zelenka – agreed that more is needed faster, noting it is difficult work in a difficult environment; said the work done to-date has been successful and expressed optimism about the additional sites; suggested that vaccination cannot be mandated but can be required for participation in the sites.

- Councilor Clark – reported that he received an average of 55 complaints a day and the community is at a breaking point; said he felt the Council’s policy is insufficient and it needs to address unsanctioned camps and the individuals who won’t utilize sanctioned camps if drugs and alcohol use are not permitted.
- Councilor Semple – inquired about the number of COVID cases reported in camps.
- Mayor Vinis – asked whether vaccination status can be included in data collection.

Mayor Vinis adjourned the meeting at 1:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Beth Forrest
City Recorder

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