

MINUTES

Eugene City Council Virtual Work Session Eugene, Oregon 97401

October 20, 2021
12:30 p.m.

Councilors Present: Emily Semple, Matt Keating, Jennifer Yeh, Randy Groves, Alan Zelenka

Absent: Mike Clark, Greg Evans and Claire Syrett

Mayor Vinis opened the October 20, 2021, work session of the Eugene City Council in virtual format.

1. **WORK SESSION: 1059 Willamette Proposed Terms**

City Manager Sarah Medary introduced the topic. Business Development Analyst Amanda D'Souza gave a presentation on the topic.

Council Discussion:

- Councilor Semple - shared her support for the proposed plans; said she is interested in seeing how the mixed-income aspect of the development will work out; asked if there be building restrictions on adjacent development to not block the windows at 1059 Willamette; requested additional information on zoning and building code for this area.
- Councilor Groves - shared his concerns about the proximity of future buildings; asked if there will be periodic income checks to ensure tenants still meet income requirements; said he thinks it's also important to create market-rate housing downtown to help support local downtown businesses and improve the health of the local economy; expressed interest in how this experiment with mixed-income housing will work.
- Councilor Zelenka - noted several aspects of the project he supports and several that he finds challenging, such as uninspiring architecture; stated that although he is not a supporter of the MUPTE program in general, this project gives the City the affordable housing units the program strives for; stated the housing tools and strategies initiative the Council has been working on is problematic in that the only affordable housing units the City is getting are ones that Council subsidizes because private builders are not building affordable housing; voiced frustration that there is no data to track; said he is not in favor of the fair market rate because he is not willing to increase the spending limit and prefers to use urban renewal dollars for other projects, noting there is already a good plan for the use of CET funds.
- Councilor Keating - discussed the 35-year affordability rate and noted Council will be doing a disservice to tenants in the long-term; asked if the 35-year threshold is a legal limit and if there are other tools that can help the minimum 35-year affordability period; said that considering this is an experiment, he would like to see how future projects like this could have a longer affordability life.
- Mayor Vinis - asked if the Low-Income Rental Housing Property Tax Exemption program comes back to Council for renewal; asked if a different mechanism was being used for this project.
- Councilor Semple - agreed with the sentiment that the building could be more beautiful since it will still be standing in 35 years; encouraged subtle redesign of exterior aesthetics.
- Councilor Keating - stated he likes the modern and welcoming design; commented on the inspiring shot of one of the photographs that shows the where the project will be located, noting it fits well within the downtown landscape.
- Mayor Vinis - commented that the yellow brick façade is reminiscent of the 5th Street Market expansion; said the designers are aiming for an aesthetic that recalls an earlier history.

MOTION AND VOTE: Councilor Yeh, seconded by Councilor Zelenka, moved to approve the terms in Attachment A and to authorize the City Manager to enter into a real property transfer agreement consistent with the terms included in Attachment A. **PASSED: 5:0**

2. WORK SESSION: Downtown Open Space Improvements

City Manager Sarah Medary introduced and gave background on the topic. Community Development Director Will Downy gave a presentation on the topic.

Council Discussion:

- Councilor Semple - shared her excitement about the new downtown public restroom; commented that the open space project is vital to a thriving downtown; shared her concern about access from downtown to the expansion of 5th Street and the riverfront; said the proposal stimulates and energizes the space, is in line with urban renewal goals, will bring in new businesses, and will be safer.
- Councilor Keating - appreciated the work to increase public restroom space around the park blocks; asked what the other open space improvements were considered; asked if the safety and beautification of Broadway and/or Kesey Square were considered; asked about engagement efforts with local businesses in the area and the community regarding what they want to see improved downtown, specifically related to the use of urban renewal funds for the space between the Graduate Hotel and the Hult Center.
- Councilor Zelenka - asked what urban renewal dollars can be spent on, noting this long-standing target area for improvement; said he likes the flexibility in moving forward and the connection to downtown and 5th Street Market developments; said the improvements enhance safety, showcase the Japanese interment memorial, and create a more inviting and beautiful city.
- Councilor Groves - asked what other projects are in the queue or foreseeable future that would be in competition for urban renewal funding; asked how much goes into the urban renewal account each year; asked if the current urban renewal district is the right shape and size; commented that adding some nice areas close to downtown such as the Riverfront/5th Street area will benefit all of downtown; said he is hopeful there will be more information and discussion about the continued evolution of the urban renewal district to be responsive to the continued growth of the downtown area and community.
- Councilor Yeh - appreciated the aerial views to see the exciting progress of the project, noting her support for the new downtown restroom; supported the focus on fixing the accessibility ramp and asked how much the full project is expected to cost.
- Mayor Vinis - commented that the bathrooms will open on World Kindness Day; commented that the connection across Willamette Street was poorly designed yet gets quite a bit of use any time there is a concert or event at the Hult Center or The Graduate Hotel, noting it is a major thoroughfare that is slippery, hazardous, and very dark; said she believes using urban renewal funds to improve pedestrian safety and beautify the area is appropriate; agreed the northern end of the plaza deserves more attention if the funds are tight because it is in worse condition.

MOTION AND VOTE: Councilor Yeh, seconded by Councilor Zelenka, moved to approve the use of \$400,000 of Downtown Urban Renewal tax increment funds for the Willamette Connection project and other downtown Open Space improvements. **PASSED: 4-1**, Councilor Keating opposed.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:02 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Brooke Freed
City Recorder, AIC

(Recorded by Niyah Ross)

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

