

MINUTES

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

December 8, 2021
12:00 p.m.

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

Councilors Absent: Greg Evans

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

Mayor Lucy Vinis opened the December 8, 2021, work session of the Eugene City Council in virtual format.

Lane County Board of Commissioners Chair Joe Berney opened the December 8, 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 and Lane County Human Services Director Steve Manela gave a presentation with updated progress on the implementation of the homeless systems transformation.

Council Discussion:

- Councilor Syrett – thanked staff for the report; noted their excitement about progress with coordinated efforts and the Navigation Center coming online; expressed hope for ongoing expansion of mental health services for the community; stated she believes that engaging landlords is a critical component of this process and is glad to see it moving forward; stated that much hard work remains to address the capacity issue with social service providers.
- Commissioner Bozievich – thanked staff for the presentation; asked staff to clarify the differences between emergency, alternative and drop-in shelters and where the Eugene Mission fits into that picture; highlighted the importance of evidence-based practices and controlled, randomized testing of options to determine their effectiveness, as well as measuring outcomes to determine which shelters are having the greatest impact on connecting residents with permanent housing.
- Councilor Groves – thanked staff for the presentation and their ongoing efforts; concurred with Commissioner Bozievich and emphasized the importance of metrics to guide decision-making and provide the community with a dashboard showing progress; referred to Oregon Measure 110 and the Drug Addiction Treatment and Recovery Act and inquired about the status of State funding for addiction recovery centers and wraparound services managed by the Oregon Health Authority; asked how referrals for services work at the street level.
- Commissioner Farr – stated there is not enough time to talk about all the things that need to be addressed; stated that the greatest drain on the system comes at the intersection of behavioral health and criminal justice and when police jail those experiencing mental health crises they are passed right through the system without receiving assistance; stated that local governments

must work together to build an adult crisis center to relieve these pressures on the jail and that now is the time to make this happen as the State and Governor are attuned to this issue; stated that better options must be created for those experiencing mental health crises, particularly the unhoused or those on the verge of it.

- Councilor Clark – concurred with Commissioner Farr; referenced The Atlantic article on phenylacetone (P2P) methamphetamine use and the growing crisis it represents to its user’s mental health; asked Mr. Manela to talk about the connections between substance abuse and psychosis; stated that existing systems and coordinated efforts are heavily focused towards those who are actively seeking or open to assistance; asked how local joint efforts can systemically address those who do not want to receive services.
- Commissioner Triegeer – stated that in these meetings, which bring together the two largest local government bodies on timely issues, it is important to receive the same information and use shared language; expressed frustration that meetings spend more time on getting the group to a point of mutual understanding and less on taking action; expressed concern about provider system capacity and what is being done to reinforce related processes; stated that this group has a collective opportunity to ease bottlenecks in the system; asked what, as a ‘Built for Zero’ community, should be expected as it relates to shared knowledge and resources.
- Councilor Keating – expressed frustrations around access, branding and coordination; recognized the need for better coordination between city, county and service providers, as it seems service providers are still operating rather independently; asked staff to articulate what effective coordination looks like across those groups; stated there is a lack of information on how to engage with homelessness services on the City and County websites.
- Commissioner Buch – said she was pleased to see progress on implementation of recommendations from the Technical Assistance Collaborative’s (TAC) Shelter Feasibility Study; stated only the surface of potential coordinated efforts has been scratched for the two large policy-making bodies; stated that the issue is far greater than the current conversation; stated that TAC implementation should be flexible in methods for advancing forward; stated that additional funding sources are needed to tackle these issues and do more on the ground; stated that a greater regional approach is needed, one that includes outlying and rural communities.
- Councilor Zelenka – thanked staff for the update on progress; stated that the City is more effective on resolving these issues thanks to its partnership with Lane County; acknowledged the significant accomplishment of adding over 800 permanent beds to shelters; stated that additional permanent supportive housing is needed; stressed the importance of caring for City employees and combatting the strain on their mental health; stated that mental health resources are underfunded within the local system and the establishment of an adult crisis center is long overdue; asked staff for an approximate headcount of chronically homeless individuals in Eugene.
- Commissioner Berney – concurred with Commissioner Farr that the two-minute comment window is not adequate for addressing this topic; thanked staff and those in the community who have given their time and effort to this serious problem; stated that the TAC study and recommendations are outdated and need to be refreshed, favoring a regional approach to this issue that includes the City of Springfield; stated that this issue should be addressed at the intersection of behavioral health and public safety, noting ongoing expansion of Eugene Police staff and concerns that as arrests of the homeless increase, there will not be adequate resources to connect them with services.
- Mayor Vinis – responded to comments on the age of the TAC study and recommendations; reminded City Council and Board of Commissioners that there is established policy on how this group acts upon TAC recommendations and these meetings serve to both confirm things are moving in the appropriate direction and provide a chance for all to weigh in on current state and suggested courses of action.

- Councilor Syrett – responded to Commissioner Trieger’s concern about the lack of policy discussion in these meetings; suggested that joint work sessions could be used to focus on one particular strategy or programmatic need, such as service provider capacity, mental health services and metrics for accountability.
- Commissioner Trieger – Stated that programmatic updates are important, but they are not hearing policy discussion at this meeting of two policy boards; expressed hope the group will move forward with policy-driven solutions.
- Councilor Clark – concurred with Commissioner Trieger on the need to look at new policies that continue the work of others; stated that information from the public indicates a growing perception that things are getting worse; advocated for new solutions around drug abuse in the community.
- Councilor Keating – noted that there is rarely talk about those on the verge of being unhoused; stated there is an opportunity to bring these two governing bodies together for more in-depth work on the TAC study and recommendations in 2022; requested that City Council, the Lane County Board of Commissioners and the City of Springfield come together in 2022 for a joint work session retreat for a deeper conversation on this topic.
- Commissioner Berney – stated that this group and all those dedicating their lives to this issue are working against the market, which is more powerful than anything they can do; provided the example that rising home prices lead to rising conventional loan price limits, which impacts prices and demand for available housing amongst the populations served; noted the challenge of leveraging small amounts of public funding must be faced in order to incentivize the market to start filling this need.
- Mayor Vinis – expressed appreciation for the conversation; stated that follow-up is needed, including a list of possible new policy directions for group discussion; asked councilors to consider forming a list of policy directions to be added for future discussion.

Mayor Vinis adjourned the Eugene City Council meeting at 1:24 p.m.

Commissioner Berney adjourned the Lane County Board of Commissioners meeting at 1:24 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Brooke Freed
City Recorder AIC

(Recorded by Jay Ferris)

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