

MINUTES

Eugene City Council Virtual Work Session Eugene, Oregon 97401

December 13, 2021
5:30 p.m.

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

Mayor Vinis opened the December 13, 2021, work session of the Eugene City Council in virtual format.

1. **WORK SESSION: Funding for Climate Change and Homelessness Initiatives**

City Manager Sarah Medary introduced and gave background on the topic. Finance Director Twylla Miller gave a presentation on the topic.

Council Discussion:

- Councilor Zelenka - shared his thoughts on the series of decision-making points for climate and homelessness funding and how to proceed; shared ideas about and the need for more resources to complete and develop an analysis.
- Councilor Clark - shared his interest in hearing the reasoning behind the proposed funding for the biggest issue of homelessness; expressed concern about enabling people to stay stuck in homelessness and stated he would like to know the community's sentiments about the appropriate funding levels to effectively address homelessness; said that allocating more money is not the place to start; shared that a former Police Auditor asked how much money the community spends on homelessness and, including the county and state budgets, the budget for all services providers was estimated to be \$125 million a year.
- Mayor Vinis - agreed that it is an interesting question about whether more money is needed, noting that the work done on implementing the TAC report and the one-time pandemic resources were required to make some headway for the unsheltered population; proposed looking forward to identify the vision for addressing this issue because the money spent was one-time funding; shared that creating a system of policies with the County enables people to have more stable lives.
- Councilor Yeh - shared she was unsure it is the City's role to fund drug addiction and mental health services and likes the idea of an adult crisis center; shared that there is a need for more affordable housing for when people transition out of homelessness; commented that she feels the climate issues are easier to address because staff have done a tremendous amount of work and Council knows what work needs to be done; commented that Council is being asked to provide a list of core things to be done as step one and then will move onto to step two in terms of how to fund these appropriately.
- Councilor Groves - agreed Council should be cautious about funding something that should be done at other levels of government and gave an example of work being done by partner jurisdictions; acknowledged the need to define and refine what the need is and how the money could do the most good.

- Councilor Syrett - shared she is not for or against the idea of funding these items together or apart; shared her thoughts on climate recovery work and noted there may be other funding opportunities available; shared the idea and need for a fund for low-income and marginalized community members to transition from fossil fuels; said there is a gap in the ability to move people from the streets into housing and this issue is not necessarily the City's to resolve.
- Councilor Keating - commented that a ballot measure to renew the street bond could be edited to rededicate funds for e-bikes, bike, or pedestrian improvements from this stream of revenue; shared an idea for implementing an increase in the gas tax; stated he has not seen polling that voters are ready to support funding for unhoused and climate change initiatives at the same time through their property taxes.
- Councilor Semple - commented that she served on the revenue committee for the payroll tax and it is difficult to find revenue sources that are not regressive; noted that the City asks for a lot of bond and levy renewals and property owners are often targeted; stated that Council needs to determine what are the most urgent and effective things to tackle and then figure out how much it will cost and where to get the money; asked how Council can help get more affordable housing.
- Councilor Evans – supported taking a step back to identify the most urgent priorities for the homeless shelter and emergency crisis situations; shared that community members feel taxed-fatigued and will be less likely to support any type of new revenue measure on the ballot; said Council should follow the same strategies as it did for the road fund bond measures so voters can see what they will get for their money in terms of improvements.
- Councilor Zelenka - stated Council should be looking at how to spend the dollars better; said affordable housing, lack of mental health services, and lack of substance abuse services create the symptom of homelessness; noted that most of the item in CAP2.0 were funded; said an important part of this process is the development of a list based on community input; asked staff to figure out the details of the list of programs and projects Council will want to take.
- Councilor Clark – said he would like to separate these two issues, noting homelessness, housing and public safety are the three biggest issues in the community; asked how the City gets policies in alignment these priorities; asked to have a discussion whether it is the government's job to provide people with housing; stated that bonds and levies increase the cost of housing.
- Councilor Syrett - asked if a gas tax would contribute to the compression rate; asked what the City is limited to in terms of how gas tax revenue can be used and whether a local gas tax could be used for permanent supportive housing; shared she would support a conversation on an increase in the gas tax and how the money could be used; said residents do not feel that the City has done an effective job of mitigating the effects of homelessness and would not support paying more taxes for this work; said Council needs to build up some credibility on that front before asking voters for funding; voiced concerns about the City being the provider for homelessness and mental health services; noted she would support engaging in a partnership with Lane County Public Health to help their efforts.
- Councilor Keating - commented that County and City are working together to fund the TAC recommendations; asked to have a joint retreat focusing on TAC 2.0 recommendations and implementing strategies that come out of this work session.

- Councilor Evans - stated the larger issue is poverty and Council needs to figure out ways to address this problem; expressed concern that there is an unstable framework in the City and County and some areas are failing.
- Mayor Vinis - shared there is a nexus between homelessness and climate change and that it is an environmental justice issue, noting there is a connection between how to support people in poverty and address the housing shortage.
- Councilor Zelenka - shared staff direction is important on this issue and said he would like clear direction from Council to direct the City Manager to act.
- Councilor Syrett – voiced concern about the discussion around the publicly subsidized housing and discussed the amount and quality of the housing that has already been built.
- Councilor Clark - recognized the urgency of the issue.

2. **WORK SESSION: Housing Implementation Pipeline - Downtown Housing**

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

Council Discussion:

- Councilor Clark – stated the downtown includes the riverfront and Council needs to think about downtown and transportation corridors differently; supported adding the incentives that were mentioned and stopping restrictions on what the market can build; suggested incentivizing 6th and 7th avenues for multi-purpose housing to help bring affordable housing into the market.
- Councilor Syrett - supported the motion to come back with more specifics, clarifying that analysis of 6th and 7th would be in addition to and not instead of the work proposed in the packet; asked how the 50 percent figure was selected and whether it is practical; asked if a forecast or analysis has been done to see if there is enough vacant land, underutilized land or potentially redeveloped land for housing.
- Councilor Zelenka - stated he is in favor of exploring more opportunities for incentives for downtown housing; asked how many of the 2,500 units were provided by the market versus incentives and subsidies; stated affordable housing is the biggest housing problem because there is not enough of it.
- Councilor Groves - asked if market housing downtown needs financial assistance in order to be feasible and what other funding mechanisms are available to encourage housing development downtown; said he would like to learn more about the urban development and renewal districts; asked about the cap for the urban renewal district.
- Councilor Evans - stated the nature of retail is changing and noted some of the office and retail spaces could be converted to apartments and condos. Asked what the prospects are for working with the private sector on this issue; asked about the plan for downtown.
- Councilor Keating - asked whether it is part of the vision to have both renters and homeowners downtown; asked how Council goes about establishing a transportation corridor renewal zone specifically around 6th and 7th, west 11th, Highway 99 and River Road.

MOTION AND VOTE: Councilor Evans, seconded by Councilor Syrett, made a motion to extend to 7:15 p.m. **PASSED 7:1**, Councilor Semple opposed.

- Councilor Yeh - supported the motion and researching incentives for housing; questioned the 50 percent increase, noting it felt arbitrary and she wants to be fairly aggressive with the intersection of public housing and transportation.
- Councilor Clark - stated the time is right to have a work session about creating an urban renewal district on 6th and 7th avenues; stated that financing condominiums is easier than it used to be and the mix of ownership opportunities downtown is critically important.
- Councilor Evans - commented about the progress of the MovingAhead initiative and some of the ideas that are coming from LTD, noting that housing and businesses are what is needed on that corridor; said he would like to see an urban renewal district that begins at Four Corners and ends at Beltline to help restore this area along Highway 99 and have more flexibility to be able to do this; said the City needs to be creative in finding new tools to incentivize both housing and business development along that corridor.

MOTION AND VOTE: Councilor Yeh, seconded by Councilor Syrett, move to direct the City Manager to return with information about opportunities to provide further incentives for the development of downtown housing.

PASSED 8:0

The meeting was adjourned at 7:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Brooke Freed
AIC City Recorder

(Recorded by Niyah Ross)

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

