

**MINUTES**  
**Eugene City Council**  
**Work Session**  
**Eugene, Oregon 97401**

**April 22, 2024**  
**5:30 p.m.**

**Councilors Present:** Emily Semple, Matt Keating, Alan Zelenka, Jennifer Yeh, Mike Clark, Greg Evans, Lyndsie Leech, and Randy Groves

Mayor Vinis opened the April 22, 2024, work session of the Eugene City Council in a hybrid format at 101 W 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Eugene OR 97401.

**1. Work Session: Finance Update & Revenue Options**

City Manager Medary introduced Twylla Miller, Chief Financial Officer, and Matt Rodrigues, Assistant City Manager who provided an update and discussed potential strategies to address the critical funding gap in the General Fund that begins July 2024.

Councilor Discussion:

- Councilor Clark – noted these potential strategies seem like short-term solutions for a long-term problem; believes the City should focus on long-term solutions; noted while the City is constrained from changing the property tax rate, it could work to increase the taxable value of property or increase the amount of taxable properties in Eugene.
- Councilor Keating – restated his interest in the City exploring a soda tax, a ticket surcharge, or a vacancy tax; stated support for retaining Eugene Water and Electric Board as a billing partner for the proposed parks fee; asked how two million dollars of enhanced services would be used by the Fire Department; asked for the annual return on investment for dues paid to lobbying organizations like the League of Oregon Cities; asked if the proposed fire fee is progressively structured by square footage.
- Councilor Groves – stated he understands the necessity of adding new fees; appreciates the stability the new fire fee would add to the Fire Department; stated awareness that the Fire Department has not increased staff since the 1980’s despite annual increases in call volume; asked if staff have considered polling the community; stated his support for adding the parks fee to the stormwater bill; stated clear communication with the community will be essential to justify the proposed fee increases.
- Councilor Semple – asked if cuts to the library budget are under consideration; stated her support for the parks stormwater fee; stated her support for the proposed fire fee; stated she hopes the fire fee is assessed equitably.
- Councilor Yeh – asked about past hesitation to implement a stormwater fee for parks; asked how the fire fee will work with the future plans to change the governance structure of Eugene Springfield Fire Department; stated her support for moving forward with exploring the proposed strategies; asked how other cities determine their fire fees.
- Councilor Leech – noted her membership on the revenue advisors committee; stated the committee discussed the importance of establishing new fees in an equitable and progressive way; stated her support for the parks stormwater fee.

- Councilor Zelenka – noted 13 of the last 16 budgets have been reduction budgets; noted the general fund operating budget per capita is the lowest it has been in 20 years; noted the citywide full time employee per capita rate has hardly changed over the last 16 years despite a large increase in population; noted the general fund full time employee per capita rate is the lowest it has been in 18 years; stated the City is performing the same amount of services every year with fewer employees; noted the general fund includes police, fire, libraries, recreation, and central services; stated this data indicates the City is well-managed; asked if the parks stormwater fee is a fee increase or a shift in fund allocation.
- Councilor Clark – stated he would rather grow the base of taxpayers than increase the tax rate for the existing base; asked how the fire department would respond to a fire at a county residence surrounded by city residences; asked how many new homes it would take to cover the budget gap; asked if the City’s estimated population growth includes residents in county areas of Santa Clara; asked to explore expanding the tax base through voluntary annexation and building new homes; stated we should focus on long-term plans like increasing the value of lands within the Urban Growth Boundary and adding new taxpayers to the base.
- Councilor Zelenka – noted increasing the tax base is a good long term strategy but it is not a solution for the short term; stated the City would need about 14 Valley River Centers worth of growth in the next two years to close the budget gap; asked if the fire fee will require a vote; stated the additional fees slated for wildfire abatement are crucial as climate change increases the risk of wildfire locally; stated he is looking forward to the next work session on the topic.
- Councilor Groves – stated commercial and industrial growth are essential to growing the tax base and providing jobs; stated the City needs to focus on both short- and long-term growth strategies; noted solar panel manufacturers have considered moving to the area but were unable to find enough buildable land; noted the fire department has been handling a progressively larger call volume without increasing their total employees per capita; noted the City should be in communication with the community about proposed changes.
- Councilor Keating – asked if the fire fee will be paid by the household or the property owner; asked how the fee will be applied to vacant homes; asked if there are fire hardening incentives our intergovernmental relations team could lobby lawmakers to offer to residents; believes simultaneously offering fire hardening incentives while adding the fire fee will make the changes more acceptable to the community.
- Councilor Clark – asked about the taxable value of Valley River Center; stated now is the time to focus on long-term revenue solutions; stated while it may take many residential homes to equal the taxable value of one Valley River Center, it is crucial to focus on residential development because we are in a housing crisis; asked how to move forward an analysis on increasing the tax base through residential development; stated an analysis should be done based on acres or value instead of people; stated there should be a focus on the increased amount rather than the increased rate.
- Mayor Vinis – stated they have been operating under the premise that infrastructure costs are less with denser development; noted the large cost of infrastructure in developing industrial land; stated it would be useful to explore which growth areas are least costly.

- Councilor Zelenka – stated there are costs to serve new developments; noted the State is offering incentives for rebuilding and fire hardening in areas that experienced severe wildfires.
- Mayor Vinis – noted her appreciation for the work of staff and the Revenue Advisors group; noted the proposed strategies will include a modest increase for services everyone is receiving.
- Councilor Groves – noted his support for moving forward with the short-term revenue solutions; asked how the topic of long-term economic development will be addressed.
- Councilor Keating – stated he is advocating for fire-hardening incentives within the Urban Growth Boundary.
- Councilor Semple – asked how much revenue would be brought in by increasing the franchise rate for natural gas; asked how long it would take to implement a franchise tax; stated this option is worth considering.
- Councilor Zelenka – noted he had previously suggested a work session on revenue sources for climate change and housing services; stated it would be worthwhile to pursue those options again.
- Councilor Keating – asked if the million dollars allocated to be spent on a future mutually agreeable project with the University of Oregon as a result of the land swap could be used to fill the funding gap.
- Mayor Vinis – stated the Council is doing work to stabilize the budget gap in the short term but also has other long-term work they would like to accomplish.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:56 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Katie LaSala  
City Recorder

*(Recorded by Cherish Bradshaw)*

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