

## MINUTES

### Eugene City Council Work Session Eugene, Oregon 97401

November 20, 2024  
12:00 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 November 20, 2024, Eugene City Council Work Session in a virtual format.

#### 1. **WORK SESSION: Fire Service Fee**

City Manager, Sarah Medary, introduced Chief Financial Officer, Twylla Miller, and provided the opportunity for Council to discuss public feedback received from the November 18, 2024 Public Hearing on the Fire Service Fee and consider next steps.

##### Councilor Discussion:

- Councilor Clark – noted the fire department has not received additional funds and that it needs additional resources; noted concern with the proposed fee's transparency; stated the fee might mislead residents into thinking it funds additional fire services rather than sustaining current ones; noted concern with impacting public trust and potentially affecting the Community Safety Payroll Tax (CSPT) in the future; noted interest in a long-term solution to avoid repeated short-term fixes.
- Mayor Vinis – asked for a clarification on the fee's structure and if the funds would be dedicated to fire services and aimed at providing long-term sustainable funding.
- Councilor Semple – asked how the fee fits in with the fire department merger with Springfield; asked if the fee will need to be reevaluated as the cost of living increases; noted support for the stability the fee would provide; noted the need for pragmatic decisions despite initial resistance to taxing for essential services; noted support for the fee, as it is the least regressive option; noted the importance of maintaining fire services and passing the fee.
- Councilor Evans – shared constituent concerns regarding the unified fire service with Springfield and the perception of unequal financial contributions; noted the need to address structural issues with the merger and communicate the fee's purpose clearly to the public.
- Councilor Zelenka – stated that without additional funding the City must make cuts due to the gap in the general fund; noted police and fire services account for 60 percent of the general fund; noted the City is now at the lowest general operating budget per capita in the last eighteen years; noted all departments have made

budget cuts; noted the fee is a necessary step to prevent deep cuts to critical services rather than a means to increase them.

- Councilor Keating – noted concern with the fee being proposed as a "fire service fee;" noted support for exploring alternative revenue sources such as a 911 over-user fee, sugary beverage tax, and enforcement of the fireworks ban; asked why the fee does not incorporate charges to owners of vacant homes; noted support for a comprehensive approach combining smaller revenue-generating measures to address the budget shortfall.
- Councilor Groves – asked for clarification on the percentage breakdown of the 60 percent of the general fund allocated to public safety, specifically the portions for fire and police; acknowledged the general fund's structural issues, magnified by Oregon's tax system, which doesn't keep pace with inflation; noted the need for improved communication with the public about the fee; noted support for a motion for a work session to prioritize services; asked how many firefighters per one thousand Eugene residents there are.
- Councilor Yeh – noted support for the benefits of the fee as a pragmatic revenue solution; noted the inefficiency of managing multiple small taxes and supported the simplicity of a single, dedicated fee; acknowledged public confusion of the proposal but emphasized the importance of avoiding severe service cuts; noted support to move the proposal forward or consider additional budget prioritization discussions.
- Councilor Leech – noted the need to avoid devastating cuts to essential services; noted support for further community engagement and prioritization of the budget to help the public understand the tradeoffs involved; noted the inefficiencies and complications of alternative revenue options; noted the fire service fee is a recommended solution that is being implemented across the State in other cities.
- Councilor Clark – asked for the general fund outlay for the current fiscal year; noted support for prioritizing the budget before implementing a new fee; noted concern with the allocation of the proposed \$10 million fire service fee as \$8 million of current general fund money would be redirected to other uses; noted concern with impacting public trust and jeopardizing the CSPT.
- Councilor Zelenka – noted opposition to priority-based budgeting as it could lead to significant cuts in essential services like libraries, recreation, and cultural programs; noted the inefficiency and high administrative costs of managing multiple small taxes; noted support for the proposed fee as an efficient and scalable solution.
- Councilor Keating – noted the proposed service fee is not optional and is tied to property size; noted more affluent community members can downsize and the average resident would be paying \$120 for the same fire services; noted support for exploring alternative revenue sources, such as a surcharge on ticket sales, to support emergency services; noted concern for impacting public trust and the CSPT; noted concern with the fire department not receiving the resources they need with the fee.
- Councilor Groves – noted the need to prioritize essential services within the budget; noted concern with impacting public trust and the CSPT.

- Councilor Semple – noted support for the fire service fee as it is the least regressive option available; noted the fee’s potential to incentivize smaller homes, aligning with sustainability goals; noted limitations of other revenue options due to administrative and institutional barriers; noted support for moving forward with the fee.
- Mayor Vinis – noted the possibility of potential cuts to the Eugene Police Department if the fee does not pass, which could weaken public safety services and hinder future tax renewal efforts, such as the CSPT; noted the importance of Councilors being advocates for the fee if it passes.

**MOTION:** Councilor Groves, seconded by Councilor Clark, moved to direct the City Manager to return to Council on December 11 for a discussion of the City’s financial condition in preparation for a January Council workshop regarding budgeting priorities.

Councilor Discussion:

- Councilor Yeh – asked if passing the motion would allow for additional information gathering without removing options from consideration.
- Councilor Zelenka – inquired about revisiting the fee on both December 9 and December 11; noted the importance of addressing the issue before Mayor Vinis’ term ends; noted concern with potential budget cuts if action is delayed; noted opposition to the motion if it precludes the ability to act before year-end.
- Councilor Keating – mentioned a similar situation during his tenure on the Lane Community College Board, where prolonged discussions had a negative impact; noted a preference for option one but opposed unnecessary delays.
- Councilor Clark – noted concern with making the decision without a clear community conversation on priorities as it could lead to petitions to reverse the decision; noted support for the presented motion.
- Councilor Groves – asked if the motion was voted on and passed.
- Mayor Vinis – noted the vote was still pending as Council began discussion; noted preference to pass the fee in 2024 but stated her larger goal is for Councilors to feel confident in their support.
- Councilor Evans – noted support for postponing the decision to ensure a unified Council message and stronger community communication; noted concern with the additional tax burden and the implications for future revenue measures, such as the renewal of the Community Safety Initiative (CSI).
- Councilor Clark – asked for the motion to be restated.

**VOTE: 5:3 PASSED**

**IN FAVOR:** Yeh, Clark, Evans, Groves, and Leech

**OPPOSED:** Semple, Keating, and Zelenka

## 2. WORK SESSION: Community Safety System Impact Evaluation

City Manager, Sarah Medary, introduced Community Safety Initiative Manager, Jeremy Cleversey, who provided a Community Safety System impact assessment for services and programs funded by the Community Safety Payroll Tax.

### Councilor Discussion:

- Mayor Vinis – noted the data and progress in youth engagement, homeless services, and the municipal court is encouraging; highlighted the positive changes for program participants and staff efforts to provide responsive and helpful services.
- Councilor Semple – noted she has long supported the program, crediting it with preventing worse outcomes despite ongoing challenges; noted the need for continued City support, especially for police, fire, and homeless resources.
- Councilor Clark – asked for the number of officers the CSPT hoped to create versus net positions added and current staffing levels.
- Mayor Vinis – noted the stabilizing effect of the payroll tax on staffing levels during challenging times; highlighted the progress made in staffing and its positive impact on public safety.
- Councilor Semple – noted the success of the street safety team in addressing significant issues, including drug-related crimes and illegal cash and weapons; noted the importance of publicizing the program's results.
- Councilor Clark – noted concern with the public perception of safety; noted the need to maintain funding to protect community programs supported by the payroll tax.
- Councilor Groves – noted concern with property crimes impacting residents and businesses; noted interest in the program reducing these crimes and support for creative and effective solutions to address these issues.

Mayor Vinis adjourned the meeting at 1:31 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Katie LaSala  
City Recorder

*(Recorded by Natalie Venhuda)*

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