

MINUTES

Eugene City Council Work Session Eugene, Oregon 97401

January 15, 2025
12:00 p.m.

Councilors Present: Eliza Kashinsky, Matt Keating, Alan Zelenka, Jennifer Yeh, Mike Clark, Greg Evans, Lyndsie Leech, and Randy Groves

Mayor Knudson opened the January 15, 2025, Eugene City Council Work Session in a virtual format.

1. **WORK SESSION: Council Budget Priorities Workshop (Part 1)**

City Manager, Sarah Medary, introduced Chief Financial Officer, Twylla Miller, and provided information on the City's budget development, programs, and financial policies to begin a discussion on budget priorities to inform the development of the 2025-2027 Proposed Budget.

Councilor Discussion:

- Councilor Clark – noted interest in ensuring full Council participation in major priority-setting decisions; noted support to align budget decisions with community survey results to prioritize core services first; thinks core services are police and fire, followed by public works; noted opposition for across-the-board cuts that would affect emergency services.
- Councilor Yeh – noted support for ensuring full Council participation in major priority-setting decisions; asked for the next steps if Council's choose the \$11.5 million budget cut option; noted support for initially keeping all budget items on the table; noted support for reserving specific police and Planning and Development Department (PDD) mandate funds for their intended purposes.
- Councilor Kashinsky – asked if discussions were focused on choosing between \$11.5 million and \$9 million in budget cuts; clarified the budget figures represent annual costs, not biennial; noted support for reviewing a proposal for the \$11.5 million to increase transparency and understand impacts of potential cuts.
- Councilor Groves – noted support for reviewing a proposal for the \$11.5 million in budget cuts; noted opposition to cuts in police and fire departments, especially considering the impacts of the fires occurring in Los Angeles; noted Fire has not grown as a department despite increased demands; noted the importance of other services, such as Neighborhood Services Officers; noted support for asset preservation and to avoid the City overextending its responsibilities.
- Councilor Evans – noted support for a strategic approach to budget cuts as opposed to across-the-board cuts; noted support for prioritizing core services such as police,

fire, and public works followed by PDD; noted support for reviewing a proposal for the \$11.5 million in budget cuts.

- Councilor Leech – noted support for reviewing a proposal for the \$11.5 million in budget cuts; noted support for a strategic approach to budget cuts as opposed to across-the-board cuts; noted support for maintaining prevention programs as reducing them would lead to higher long-term costs; noted interest in reviewing proposed budget cuts before making final decisions.
- Councilor Keating – noted support for reviewing a proposal for the \$11.5 million in budget cuts; asked if animal services and code enforcement are police programs; noted human services, emergency shelters, animal services, and behavioral health stabilization services fall under public safety; noted opposition for cuts to police, fire, Emergency Medical Services, and public works; noted commitment to the library but interest in reviewing programs that could be supported by other organizations; noted support for a strategic approach to budget cuts.
- Councilor Zelenka – noted support for reviewing a proposal for the \$11.5 million in budget cuts; noted the City has made \$67 million in cuts over the past decade; noted further reductions would eliminate services that are important to community members; noted opposition to cutting libraries, parks, recreation, and human services; noted a surgical approach to the budget cuts will be cumbersome; noted support for passing a fire fee and considering a bond measure for fire infrastructure.
- Councilor Clark – acknowledged the value of libraries and recreational programs but noted emergency services must take precedence; noted interest in evaluating programs that have grown over time while core services have remained stagnant; noted support for a strategic approach to budget cuts.
- Councilor Evans – noted concern with cutting the fire department’s budget and then not having the foundational infrastructure to respond to a major disaster; noted support for maintaining and growing foundational infrastructure; noted recent fires and earthquakes support investing in emergency response capacity.
- Councilor Groves – noted the importance of all City services but stressed the need to prioritize foundational services in the general fund; noted additional services could be funded through a levy; noted concern with the community not fully understanding the City's financial challenges, driven by State taxation policies.
- Councilor Kashinsky – noted Council previously directed the City Manager to explore new revenue options instead of making drastic cuts, and the fire fee proposal is the result of that directive; noted cuts to valued community programs would be felt throughout the City; noted if Council proceeds with cuts, there will be no ability to restore services; noted support for pursuing the fire fee to preserve services; noted the City will continue to have to make cuts due to structural tax issues at the State level.

MOTION: Councilor Keating, seconded by Councilor Groves, moved to direct the City Manager to bring back \$11.5 million in potential budget reduction strategies to address the General Fund gap.

VOTE: 8:0 PASSED

IN FAVOR: Kashinsky, Keating, Zelenka, Yeh, Clark, Evans, Leech and Groves

OPPOSED: None

Councilor Discussion:

- Councilor Zelenka – noted the proposed budget decisions will not directly impact fire prevention; noted climate change is the primary cause of the Los Angeles fire, not a lack of fire response; noted support for a bond for fire equipment and stations, increasing fire funds via the fire fee, and implementing a \$5 million fire levy; noted opposition for line-item percentage cuts; noted support for the City Manager to present a proposal with targeted service reductions.
- Councilor Leech – asked for clarification on cost recovery figures in the budget and how they impact funding decisions; noted some programs generate revenue beyond their expenses, making across-the-board cuts inefficient; asked why \$240,000 from the General Fund is being designated to Stormwater; noted support for a proportional approach to budget reduction.
- Councilor Evans – noted interest in consolidating service delivery as a cost-saving measure; asked for the status of the proposed fire merger with Springfield; noted the need for a future discussion on the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) budget.
- Councilor Clark – noted concern that implementing the fire fee alongside expected increased utility costs could lead to public backlash and a potential referendum; noted opposition for across-the-board cuts as it could lead to fire station closures and increased risks to public safety.
- Councilor Groves – noted while fire departments cannot prevent fires from starting, their role is to quickly respond and contain them before they become unmanageable; noted the Los Angeles fire response challenges were increased by budget cuts and reductions in state fire mitigation funding.
- Councilor Yeh – noted prioritizing budget cuts is Council’s responsibility, not the City Manager’s; noted support for starting with proportional budget reductions.
- Councilor Zelenka – noted interest in having the City Manager present three budget options: proportional cuts, no cuts to the police and fire department, and a strategic approach deemed appropriate by staff.
- Councilor Yeh – asked for the feasibility of bringing back three full budget proposals due to the significant staff time required.
- Councilor Kashinsky – clarified the vote being taken will not finalize cuts but rather direct staff to bring back data for further discussion on budget reductions.
- Councilor Keating – asked if the City Manager would then be tasked with identifying \$1.5 million in additional reductions to meet the \$11.5 million target if the fire fee is passed; asked if proposed reductions would be presented from the \$1.5 million or \$11.5 million in budget cuts.

MOTION: Councilor Clark, seconded by Councilor Keating, moved to extend the meeting by 15 minutes.

VOTE: 8:0 PASSED

IN FAVOR: Kashinsky, Keating, Zelenka Yeh, Clark, Evans, Leech and Groves

OPPOSED: None

Councilor Discussion:

- Councilor Zelenka – noted decisions cannot be made without a clear understanding of the impact of cuts; noted opposition to moving forward without the three different options; noted interest in giving additional time for the staff to develop the options.

MOTION: Councilor Clark, seconded by Councilor Groves, moved to not make a decision on prioritization without a full complement of Councilors at the table.

Councilor Discussion:

- Councilor Keating –noted support for intent behind the motion; stated concern about the wording, as requiring a full complement of Councilors could allow any single member’s absence to prevent the Council from moving forward; asked staff to clarify the process around motions and operating agreements.

MOTION RESTATED: Councilor Clark, seconded by Councilor Groves, moved to not make a decision on priorities next week.

Councilor Discussion:

- Councilor Kashinsky – asked for clarification on the scheduling of future meetings if a decision could not be made at the next session; noted the need for a clear date to make final budget decisions as discussion could continue indefinitely.

VOTE: 7:1 PASSED

IN FAVOR: Kashinsky, Keating, Zelenka Yeh, Clark, Evans, and Groves

OPPOSED: Leech

Councilor Discussion:

- Mayor Knudson – asked for input from the City Manager on how to capture the feedback provided and incorporate it into future discussions.

MOTION: Councilor Keating, seconded by Councilor Groves, moved to direct the City Manager to bring back two options for Council discussion: 1) allocating the \$11.5 million across City departments and services based on the current proportional share of the General Fund of each department; and 2) allocating the \$11.5 million across City departments and services in a manner that preserves core public safety services.

Councilor Discussion:

- Councilor Zelenka – noted the term "core services" could be interpreted differently; asked for a friendly amendment to add the targeted cuts option to the decision-making process (*friendly rejected*).
- Councilor Keating – asked for a clarification on the meeting procedures.
- Councilor Evans – clarified the total budget cuts being discussed over the biennium would amount to \$23 million.

MOTION: Councilor Zelenka, seconded by Councilor Keating, moved to add a third option and date allocating the 11.5 million in a surgical manner as proposed by the City Manager.

VOTE: 2:6 FAILED

IN FAVOR: Keating and Zelenka

OPPOSED: Kashinsky, Yeh, Clark, Evans, Leech and Groves

VOTE ON MAIN MOTION: 8:0 PASSED

IN FAVOR: Kashinsky, Keating, Zelenka, Yeh, Clark, Evans, Leech and Groves

OPPOSED: None

Mayor Knudson adjourned the meeting at 1:49 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Katie LaSala
City Recorder

(Recorded by Natalie Venhuda)

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