

MINUTES

**Eugene City Council
Hult Center for the Performing Arts
1 Eugene Center
Eugene, Oregon 97401**

**January 12, 2026
5:30 p.m.**

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

1. ENTERTAINMENT

James Manuele performed “Flamenco Medley” – featuring “Tango” composed by George Ecommeidias.

2. LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Mayor Kaarin Knudson read a statement acknowledging the ceremony was being held on Kalapuya llihi, the traditional indigenous homeland of the Kalapuya people.

3. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Council President Greg Evans provided opening remarks.

4. VIDEO PRESENTATION

A video of the 2025 City of Eugene Highlights was shown.

5. RETHINK COLLABORATION RECOGNITION

Mayor Knudson recognized BRING’s ReThink Business Program and spoke about changes to the state’s recycling program.

6. MAYOR’S ART SHOW WINNERS

Mayor Knudson announced the winners of the 2026 Mayor’s Art Show.

7. COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARDS

Mayor Knudson presented the 2025 Community Service Awards to DeLeesa Meashintubby, Armando Morales, and Rusty Rexus.

8. 2026 STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS

Mayor Knudson delivered her 2026 State of the City Address:

“Last night, I was running in the dark. I was thinking about this time we would have together, and about the inexpressible contents of the past year.

Around mile 2, I was also thinking about that quote, “Imagination is more important than knowledge,” and it struck me that Einstein was telling us to put our attention on the future. That the world we can imagine is more powerful than what we have seen— that our focus must be front of us, among us, expansive. I was thinking about how Toni

Morrison spoke about living, and grief—about how she said that, sometimes, we don't get through it whole. We only survive in part. We are forever changed by experience, often not by choice. And that, still, we must be fearless, as beautifully as possible, under completely impossible circumstances. I was thinking about how Octavio Paz asked about listening and the unhurried lightning, and about how Mary Oliver reminded us that we do not need to walk on our knees.

I thought about the landslide of rhetoric and policy we have faced this year, and about how many people have been made to feel afraid. I thought about how much energy has been spent on confusion and distraction.

At this event last January, I'd been your mayor for seven days. In the 364 days since, we have traveled 540 million miles around the sun—indeed, some days felt a million and a half miles long. The past year has been described as “unprecedented” so many times, but that's not the only way I would describe it—

At times, it has been surreal, and sometimes heartbreaking. Unjust, and inexplicably unmoored. And, closer to home: I would also say resourceful, courageous, invested, and extraordinary—determined and resolute.

In the face of chaos, we have been steady.
In the face of dehumanization, we celebrate our diversity.
In the face of disorientation, we have held focus.
And in darkness, we have chosen to stand together — “to give light and find the way.”
We choose hope, and we choose to share it.

In the face disconnection and demoralization, Eugene remains connected. And we have continued—as a city, day in and day out—to work for the betterment of our community. We have done so with openness, integrity, ingenuity, and determination. I want to thank our entire City Council, especially Council President Greg Evans and Council Vice President Lyndsie Leech for their service as Council Leadership in 2025. And I want to again thank the city teams that are in this room and beyond—our staff in Central Services, Fire & EMS, Public Works, Library, Recreation and Cultural Services, Police, and Planning and Development—for all of their professionalism and care. 2025 asked us to dig deep, and we did.

Tonight, we'll report on the past year, but hold our attention on the future.

Looking back and looking ahead, you will see your city working for stability and innovation through partnership. Partnership with our institutions and universities, with our business community and housing developers, with our transportation advocates, youth advisors, and social service agencies.

When I stepped into office, our city was facing an \$11 million budget gap. Over that first six months in office, we worked intensively to negotiate a balanced budget that maintained access to core community services, reduced our costs, and created the time we need to engage more partners with the challenge of long-term budget stability. It is

always my expectation that we will find smart solutions whenever we take time to build shared understanding of a problem.

I know this is a cross-cutting concept right now—we hear continuously that it is not possible to do anything; it is not possible to believe in anything or anyone. My expectation is the opposite—my expectation is that we will rise to every occasion and face the challenges of 2026 and the 21st century together.

In 2026, City Council has made the development of a forward-looking, sustainable budget a focus of our work. To support that effort, this fall, a group of technical advisors with expertise in finance and economic development volunteered their insight. Their phase 1 report will be delivered to Council later this month, and I hope we will have their continued engagement with our work ahead. I know the City Council cares deeply about our service continuity, costs, and the sustainability of our community. As your mayor, I will champion our shared success in this collaborative work.

Because Eugene is a special place—and it didn't become this way by accident. We continuously reinvest. We are home to Oregon's flagship research institution, we draw from the excellence of smaller universities and community colleges. We are a city of unique neighborhoods and loved parks, in a region that holds a wide diversity of jobs, industries. We sit along meandering wild rivers and at the foot of ridgeline recreation. We have a larger labor force than ever—90,000 people strong—but our region faces lagging indicators in incomes, business formation, and innovation jobs. This is an opportunity we have to address.

A few weeks ago, I joined our university presidents and statewide business leaders to discuss a partnership called the Southern Willamette Valley Innovation Corridor. This work aligns with and amplifies the economic sustainability goals set out in our strategic plan. Described as a corridor because it connects Oregon's research institutions—UO and OSU—with the workforce, amenities, and opportunities of Eugene-Springfield and Corvallis. Through this framework, we're working toward a future in which new jobs, advanced manufacturing, and local business expansion are part of what our community routinely plans for, and where the startups spinning out of the University of Oregon and Knight Campus have a place to land. This work can support better connections between Downtown and the university; it's also important to supporting our workforce with higher-wage jobs.

This focus on partnership and collaboration was a defining choice in 2025. One of the things that I've heard repeatedly this year is that we're doing things differently—and I understand why this resonates, because Eugene loves to do things differently, and better. I want to thank OSU president Murthy but especially UO President Karl Scholz for their partnership—we have different roles and responsibilities, but this alignment of effort to expand opportunities and build a better future in the Southern Willamette Valley is powerful. It is a piece of the puzzle that's been missing, and I'll testify about how our work connects with the Governor's Economic Prosperity Roadmap tomorrow.

Some of Eugene's work is transformational, and some of it is follow-through. As scheduled, we completed \$10 million in street improvements in 2025, improving

transportation options, pedestrian infrastructure, traffic flow and surface conditions throughout Eugene. We also fought to keep, and won, our Airport expansion funding and the FEMA grant to complete the Amazon Creek Restoration. Indeed: we opened three new and renovated public parks—the 25-acre Willow Bend Park in Northeast Eugene, the renovated Martin Luther King Jr. Park in West Eugene, and the new Downtown Riverfront playground and plaza, which brings a whole new toddling demographic to the center of our city. The all-ages “bike parade” that we held in September, to celebrate the completed riverfront playground and the long-awaited High Street, linking our Ridgeline and Riverbank trails, was a highlight of 2025. High Street is also an example of the importance of protected, separated pathways for people walking and biking.

We permitted 413 units of new affordable housing — 293 of which had support from Eugene’s Affordable Housing Trust Fund. We also invested \$7.5 million in the creation of 75 new units of affordable housing at 4th and Mill, a project that will be completed in partnership with Homes for Good. We opened 130 new units of housing at red-brick Portal building along the riverfront, and supported a future 393 riverfront homes using our MUPTE program. On the day the Portal building opened, a group of six friends waited to tell me how lucky they felt to have found this chapter of their life in Downtown Eugene. And after we said goodbye, a young professional working in science communications wanted to share how wonderful it felt to live in a home that reflect their values through a low-carbon, car-free lifestyle. All in the same building.

Joining that ribbon cutting reminded me of the many ways Eugene nurtures villages in community—from the Nightingale shelter to SquareOne’s Peace Village to intentional ecovillages and neighborhood cul de sacs. The forms are different, but the importance of feeling at home is familiar.

Last year, I talked about the importance of a renewed focus on downtown housing and we’ve built momentum through the Downtown Core Housing Initiative, which already includes three new programs—Downtown Fee Assistance, the Accelerated MUPTE, and Property Acquisition and Disposition. To further expand our capacity in this work, last winter, I applied for Eugene to be among the 47 international cities welcomed into the City Leadership Initiative supported by Harvard University and Bloomberg Philanthropies. This year, we’ll be focused on how cross-sector collaboration can drive new approaches to downtown housing and revitalization, and you’ll hear more about the recommendations from this work in the fall.

In related work on Downtown safety, we’ve launched new programs and seen a reinvigorated commitment to partnership. Overall calls for police service are down. And in every area of violent crime, our numbers have improved by double digits, from 10-54%. Calls related to quality of life are down between 25-52%. At the same time, our Rapid Response Clean Team saw a massive surge in use as we expanded the boundaries of its service area and increased operations to 7 days per week. None of this progress would be possible without strong partnerships between the City, downtown partners, Eugene police, and the community.

We are always working to match the right resources with needs, and many of the challenges we see in our community have to do with vulnerability, not criminality. We saw a major shift in our safety net system last April with White Bird’s closure of mobile crisis services in Eugene. Shortly thereafter, Lane County Mobile Crisis stepped in to meet high acuity needs—with a model of service only possible because CAHOOTS paved the way. Our community creativity is known nationwide, and we are at the beginning of new chapter in the work address gaps between our public safety and health and human services systems. This month, a new Downtown Peer Navigation pilot has already launched, and we are issuing an RFP to provide a higher level of support services and case management—a “2.0” chapter of work to connect people with the appropriate support, which is oftentimes is not a police officer. Both pilot programs are partially funded by the Community Safety Payroll Tax, and demonstrate our commitment to innovation and collaboration. What we learn from them will inform our work in the years ahead.

We bring determination and creativity to the challenges we face—we have to. Along those same lines, I think we need to begin thinking differently about Highway 99—its future is as a safer, greener, multimodal boulevard. This corridor is a gateway into Eugene, but also a community conduit. Our expectations change the moment we stop calling it a “highway” and start treating it as a public realm designed to safely connect community. It needs to be reimagined and—as with so many other examples—we can bring a new spirit of collaboration to this work.

As I said last year, a continuous focus of our work on concentrations of positive energy and lasting improvement. Here are three examples of how that investment can look:

First, we will continue our work on two transformational Downtown redevelopment projects—1059 Willamette and the Butterfly Lot—which will add hundreds of units of mixed-income housing to a Downtown district that has not seen new residential investment in years. I will also work with City Council to support actions specifically designed to catalyze workforce housing—housing that is affordable to our middle incomes and emerging households. We have an opportunity to pilot the State’s new Moderate Income Revolving Loan Fund this year, and to help create new moderate-income, mixed-income, land-trust housing in Eugene.

Then, in May, Eugene will have the opportunity to renew our library levy—investing in five more years of critical stability for a public library system that served 700,000 visitors in Downtown Eugene and 127,000 visitors at the Sheldon and Bethel branches last year. Our library programs served more than 31,000 participants across Eugene, and almost 99,000 people hold library cards—including all students in 4J and Bethel school districts, including all students who live outside City limits, and participating charter schools. Library access and early literacy is a core support to families, kids, and quality of life in Eugene.

And, finally, this year will mark a milestone with Eugene Springfield Fire and a transition in local fire governance. About 15 years ago, the Eugene and Springfield fire departments merged operations, and this functional merger created one of Oregon’s most successful inter-jurisdictional partnerships. But the absence of a unified,

sustainable governance model has hamstrung our ability to effectively plan and invest in the capacity we need to meet community needs. In December, Eugene City Council indicated a preference for the creation of a new Intergovernmental Entity, or IGE, with Springfield—essentially moving to a proportionally representative governance model similar to how we manage the metro area wastewater system. A second option is that our cities return to independent fire services backed by a strong mutual aid agreement. But the status quo is not an option. Moving to a sustainable governance model will stabilize fire services into the future—and that work will happen in 2026.

Our 2026 is a full plate—we face challenges and opportunities in every phase, and major transitions. We welcomed a new independent Police Auditor, Craig Renetzky, in 2025. And today, we have the three finalists for our new City Manager in Eugene—we’ll make one of our most consequential decisions of the year in this coming week. A new administrative leader will join an incredibly strong team, and together we’ll continue be steady, inclusive, hopeful, and focused.

It is a privilege and a responsibility to be Eugene's 40th mayor, and to celebrate community service, the arts, sustainable business, and our shared future on one stage. It is important to me that we see ourselves together, and that every Eugenean see themselves as part of the future we’re building here.

We are all in this together. Through every collective effort, we model our values of strategic responsiveness and belonging, not the patterns of overwhelm and isolation modeled by others. If someone hopes to make you feel afraid, they will first try to make you feel alone. And I promise you that no one is alone in our community. I do not expect us to be perfect, but our consistency of care is defining and how we care for this community can be transformative. With Council, staff and partners, I will do all I can to help us navigate the year ahead—to seize the opportunities and meet the challenges. We will stick together, and I will stand with you and for you in our work.”

9. ENTERTAINMENT

Henry Strid and Joe Suskind performed “Banjo Medley”.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Katie LaSala
City Recorder

(Recorded by Cherish Bradshaw)

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