

MINUTES

Eugene City Council
McNutt Room—City Hall
777 Pearl Street—Eugene, Oregon

June 13, 2011
5:30 p.m.

COUNCILORS PRESENT: Betty Taylor, George Brown, Andrea Ortiz, George Poling, Mike Clark, Chris Pryor, Alan Zelenka, Pat Farr.

Her Honor Mayor Kitty Piercy called the June 13, 2011, work session of the Eugene City Council to order.

A. WORK SESSION: Eugene Counts Dashboard

Service Improvement Manager Terrie Monroe and Jeff Ozvold and Scott Christian of the Information Services Division demonstrated the online “Dashboard” developed for the council’s “Eugene Counts” goal-setting framework. The dashboard provided the community with easily accessible information about the City’s progress and performance in meeting the council’s goals.

Councilors asked questions clarifying the information presented and commended the work that had gone into the dashboard.

Mr. Zelenka arrived during the demonstration.

B. WORK SESSION: Homeless Car Camping

Police Chief Pete Kerns reported that the Homeless Car Camping Program had been operating smoothly for many years and for the most part functioned well. A recent increase in the number of complaints the department had received about homeless camping led to the work session. Chief Kerns introduced Michael Wisth of the Planning and Community Development Department, Sergeant Carl Stubbs of the Eugene Police Department, and William Wise, director of St. Vincent de Paul’s First Place Family Center. Mr. Wisth and Sergeant Stubbs provided an update on the Homeless Car Camping Program.

Mr. Wisth first noted that Eugene Code Sections 4.816 and 4.816 governed camping in Eugene. Section 4.816 allowed for car camping in public and private parking lots in Eugene if certain criteria were met. The City established the Homeless Car Camping Program to oversee the ordinance. He provided a brief description of the program and the City’s management approach to homeless car camping and emphasized the coordination that occurred between the City and St. Vincent de Paul.

Mr. Wisth shared pictures of some managed homeless camping sites, mostly located on public parking lots as well as on private parking lots owned by businesses and churches, and noted the screening process for applicants. He reported there were currently 31 managed sites serving 63 people, with 83 people on a

waiting list. Mr. Wisth reported a committee that included representatives of St. Vincent de Paul and the departments of Planning and Development, Public Works, Police, and Central Services was charged with program oversight and met frequently to discuss strategies to address “hot spot” complaint areas and coordinate signage and enforcement requests.

Mr. Wisth briefly reviewed the elements of Section 4.815, which prohibited camping in the city outside the parameters of the Homeless Camping Program.

Sergeant Stubbs discussed the City’s enforcement approach to violations of the camping ordinance. He reviewed the dispatch protocol for complaints about violations, reporting that initially, St. Vincent de Paul staff responded to such complaints and provided campers in violation with the opportunity to move. Those who failed to move were placed on a local violators list and referred to a team of officers who cited violators and arranged for vehicle tows. Sergeant Stubbs shared statistics demonstrating calls for service about illegal camping that illustrated the increase in complaints over the last few years.

Sergeant Stubbs shared a map showing where enforcement of the homeless camping ordinance had occurred within the community. He also shared data regarding the number of citations issued by the Eugene Police Department for illegal on-street camping.

Mr. Wisth concluded the presentation by highlighting some next steps, which included modifications to enforcement procedures, enhanced coordination, and police dispatch training on the code governing car camping. He provided contact information for himself and EPD staff, and solicited council questions.

Mayor Piercy determined from Mr. Wise that car campers in managed parking spaces were limited to three months in the space although there were exceptions, such as had been recently made for an individual with a chronic and probably fatal illness. Mr. Wise reported that when he assumed responsibility for the program in 2001 he had found there were people who had occupied the same spot for two or three years and considered it their permanent home. He learned that without a deadline to move, such individuals often failed to make efforts to improve their situation.

Continuing, Mr. Wise emphasized the importance of the “cite and tow” aspect of the program. If people were not towed when they behaved poorly other campers emulated their behavior. He acknowledged the process was time-consuming for officers, and estimated that St. Vincent de Paul staff called the police two or three times weekly for enforcement.

Mr. Poling expressed concern about long-term camping that occurred on private property. He cited as an example a noisy camp site located along a fence line in a residential area. Noise and activity from the camp site disturbed the adjacent neighbors. He asked what recourse residents experiencing such problems had. Mr. Wisth believed the City’s nuisance code addressed such situations but the homeless camping ordinance did not speak to them. Sergeant Stubbs said residents could complain about prohibited noise and report suspected crimes.

Mr. Farr observed that homeless people wanted to camp legally in a safe spot without fear of harassment. He suggested the council’s discussion was the start of a longer conversation about how to make more legal and safe camping opportunities available to such individuals so they could avoid citations for illegal camping.

Referring to the map showing the locations where the camping ordinance had been enforced, Ms. Ortiz pointed out that much of the enforcement occurred in the industrial area of west Eugene, which was in her ward. She expressed sympathy for homeless campers but she also sympathized with business owners and

residents adversely affected by homeless camping. Ms. Ortiz wondered if the City had turned away any opportunities for additional camping sites due to a lack of funds. Mr. Wise said there were some additional sites currently under consideration. He noted that each site, some of which could accommodate multiple campers, cost approximately \$1,000 annually; that did not include staff time or the costs of towing.

Ms. Ortiz supported additional funding to support more camping sites. She asked how residents could secure signs prohibiting overnight camping on their streets. Sergeant Stubbs reported that Public Works considered the placement of such signs on a case-by-case basis. City Manager Ruiz invited Ms. Ortiz to send staff suggestions for sign locations. Ms. Ortiz suggested staff develop a matrix that residents could review to determine if their street was suitable for such a sign. She cited location on a dead end street leading to a park as an example criterion for such a sign.

Responding to a question from Mr. Pryor about the proportion of car campers who were situationally homeless as opposed to being chronically homeless, Mr. Wise said almost all the families in the Family Program were situationally homeless and because of that received more intensive assistance and case management. The majority of single campers were chronically homeless, some with mental illness or other disabilities. The majority of those on the street or at the Service Station would never be self-supporting unless there was a major shift in how the country addressed such problems.

Mr. Pryor suggested the chronically homeless required a different and more structural solution. Mr. Wise believed how the problem was managed was a key factor in the program's success. It was not possible to have sufficient legal camping spaces to address all the demand, but the structure of the program fostered cooperation on the part of campers and helped to meet the need. Mr. Wise suggested that overall, the program worked amazingly well, and noted that jurisdictions such as Santa Barbara and Shasta County had adopted elements of Eugene's program and Seattle was considering adoption of a similar model.

Responding to a question from Mr. Pryor about the potential of more consistent enforcement that did not depend on officers having free time, Sergeant Stubbs said that enforcement had been added to the call screen and all patrol officers would address such calls, leading to a more expedited response.

Mr. Clark believed that homeless camping was growing into a more significant problem that required a better response from the City. He suggested that the City could do more to work with private property owners who wished to make their property available for camping. Mr. Clark determined from Sergeant Stubbs that enforcement of illegal camping in the parks was largely complaint-driven, although officers did some proactive enforcement as time allowed. Mr. Clark determined from Mr. Wise that the "safe parks" concept was never funded or implemented.

Mayor Piercy recommended that the council hold another session on related homeless camping issues. She suggested that staff consider changes to the code that might help improve conditions for residents, such as a good neighbor policy that prohibited the behavior mentioned by Mr. Poling. She also suggested that the City actively advertise the need for more camping spots and publicize its assistance with sanitation. Speaking to the potential of more prohibited camping signs, Mayor Piercy suggested that such signs merely pushed the problem to the next block and represented a limited solution. She asked what role mediation played in disputes between campers and neighbors.

Mayor Piercy noted that Corvallis had recently received a donated house for "wet beds" and suggested that Eugene might learn from that experience and attempt something similar, as that approach was more cost-effective than allowing homeless individuals to end up in the emergency room.

Mr. Farr recalled the establishment of the homeless camping program, saying it felt like a quantum leap at the time. He suggested that the City needed to highlight the program to let residents know it existed. He agreed with Mr. Clark that more outreach might produce more camping spots. He was personally aware of a church with interest in providing a camping spot. He asked how the City could facilitate the establishment of more such spaces. He suggested that south Eugene could accommodate some spaces. Mr. Farr believed the City's investment in camping spaces produced a positive return.

Ms. Ortiz said that residents in her ward called 9-1-1 about problems with homeless camping but did not feel they received a response. She asked if they should contact Public Works instead. City Manager Ruiz suggested that residents' concerns be referred to the staff committee.

Ms. Ortiz asked why the City prohibited camping in parks such as Trainsong Park. She suggested a homeless camper could deter graffiti and vandalism in the park. Mr. Wisth said that some City parks do accommodate homeless camping. Staff had discussed expanding that element of the program and was working with the community to find a balanced and workable solution. Ms. Ortiz suggested that there was a different level of tolerance for homelessness in certain parts of the community. She perceived a greater level of tolerance for homeless camping in her ward from both the community and law enforcement.

Speaking to Ms. Ortiz's remarks, Mayor Piercy observed that the City's affordable housing was deliberately disbursed throughout the community and suggested it would require a similar approach to distribute homeless camping more evenly across the community.

Referring to Ms. Ortiz's remarks about the deterrent effect of campers in the parks, Mayor Piercy suggested that a homeless camper in the parking lot at Tiny's Tavern could have a similar deterrent effect on negative behaviors in Scobert Park.

Ms. Taylor suggested that the community actually needed State-supported shelters for the homeless rather than camping spaces.

Responding to a question from Ms. Taylor, Sergeant Stubbs confirmed that homeless campers had to pay a fine to get their impounded vehicle back. Ms. Taylor found that horrible. She said that such fines compounded homeless campers' already existing problems.

At the request of Mayor Piercy, Chief Kerns shared the story of a chronically homeless individual the department assisted with temporary housing who was ultimately able to become sober and secure gainful employment.

Mayor Piercy adjourned the meeting at 7:06 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Beth Forrest
City Recorder

(Recorded by Kimberly Young)