

MINUTES

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

October 20, 2010
Noon

COUNCILORS PRESENT: Mike Clark, Betty Taylor, Andrea Ortiz, Chris Pryor, George Brown.

COUNCILORS ABSENT: George Poling, Jennifer Solomon, Alan Zelenka.

In the absence of Her Honor Mayor Kitty Piercy, Council President Mike Clark called the October 20, 2010, work session of the Eugene City Council to order.

A. WORK SESSION: Boards and Commissions

Central Services Department Director Kristi Hammitt was present on behalf of City Manager Jon Ruiz. She introduced the topic, reporting that staff was seeking guidance about membership, communication, training and development, and work plans. City Manager's Office Division Manager Keli Osborn and Mayor and Council Support Manager Beth Forrest of the City Manager's Office were also present for the item.

Ms. Osborn reminded the council that some issues in the past gave rise to questions about how boards and commission members were appointed, how they were removed, and how vacancies were filled. She called attention to a matrix in the council meeting packet that provided information on the current processes for each of the different boards, committees, and commissions. Staff had also provided a matrix regarding the demographic composition of City boards and committees. Ms. Osborn noted that a corrected matrix separating the Fairmount and Far West neighborhood associations had been distributed to councilors at their places.

Ms. Osborn indicated that no action was requested of the council but she invited suggestions for code revisions or other feedback. She reminded the council it had revised the Eugene Code in 2009 to change the start date for terms for boards and commissions from November 1 to July 1, and anticipated that recruitment would begin shortly after January 1, 2011.

Ms. Forrest updated the council on the recruitment schedule and staff's efforts to recruit a diverse applicant pool.

Mr. Clark solicited council questions and comments.

Ms. Taylor commended the materials prepared for the agenda item and determined from Ms. Osborn that information about the recruitment process would be distributed to the neighborhood groups and published in neighborhood newsletters.

Responding to a question from Ms. Taylor about how long it had been since individual councilors appointed individual Budget Committee members and how difficult it would be to restart that system, Ms. Osborn indicated staff would follow-up with information on past practice.

Mr. Clark commended staff's work on the issue. He reported the Police Commission had recently completed a brochure about its work and suggested it could be used in the recruitment process.

Mr. Clark emphasized the importance of demographic diversity on boards and commissions but pointed out that 75 percent of all members of City boards and commissions were from four wards, and 58 percent were from wards 1, 2, and 3. He did not find that representative of the community. He pointed to the Budget Committee's composition as further evidence of his concerns, pointing out that five of eight Budget Committee members were from wards 2 and 3 and no members were from wards 4, 5, or 6. Mr. Clark thought that was inappropriate and could be attributed to past council decisions. He hoped for a proactive recruitment process focused on underrepresented wards.

Mr. Clark agreed with Ms. Taylor about changes to the Budget Committee appointment process. He suggested that the current distribution pattern "inevitably" led to decisions and recommendations to the council that were less than complete. He pointed out the council continually discussed the need for diversity in recruiting and he would like to see the City actively recruit in under-represented wards.

Speaking to Mr. Clark's comments, Ms. Taylor indicated her emphasis was on shared philosophies rather than geographic diversity. She suggested there were just some parts of the community where people wanted to be more involved and thought that, as long as they were informed, those people should be given preference in boards and commissions appointments. She did not think where one lived had anything to do with it.

Mr. Brown said he did not look at where applicants came from when he reviewed applications because he did not want that to affect his thinking during interviews. He said there were applicants from his ward he had not supported in the past with the thought that others were more qualified. Mr. Brown was looking both for experience and for those who were willing to study and learn.

Mr. Brown asked if the higher participation figures cited by Mr. Clark could be attributed to a ward's proximity to the University of Oregon or to better economic status. He found the figures striking but did not know what to do about it. Mr. Brown suggested that the City distribute the committee demographics at all public meetings no matter the subject when the City was in the recruitment process.

Ms. Ortiz thanked staff for its work on the issue. She had heard anecdotally that the council process made it hard for residents to participate. When she considered candidates for boards and commissions she did not look for people who were well-versed, better educated, or familiar with government language. She encouraged people to be involved in government, and that participation was important to her.

Ms. Ortiz pointed out the community's demographics were changing and the community needed new leaders. The City needed to encourage residents to step up even if they had several children and multiple jobs. She recalled that she had undergone three interviews to join the City's Human Rights Commission. She wanted to find a different way to make appointments as she believed the current process put off otherwise qualified people. She expressed curiosity about the large number of applicants who did not indicate their ethnicity. She thought the City's boards and commissions lacked representation from the communities of color and wondered how those groups' demographics compared against the county's demographics.

Mr. Pryor suggested the key issue was what was really constituted representation. He agreed one had to "show up for the game to play," but on the other hand, if the rules were too difficult and the game hard to get to, one could not show up. He thought the City made it hard for residents to get on boards and commission. He had applied early in his career, had to go through many hoops, and had not been successful.

Mr. Pryor said that people had different definitions of what constituted diversity and representation. He said he did not know the right definition but suggested it was important to find something representative of the community. He said many did not participate because they lost confidence that they would be listened to. He said representation was a key factor but it should be meaningful and accessible and should produce an outcome that people believed in.

Mr. Clark said many of his neighbors and friends, when solicited to become involved in City issues, said "people like me are not listened to." He suggested that divide could be addressed through geographic diversity. He agreed that the City's boards and commissions should be as representative as possible and the council should work hard to accomplish that. However, Mr. Clark pointed to the recent Budget Committee appointment process, where two qualified candidates, one from Ward 8 and one from Ward 4, had been under consideration, and the council chose to appoint the representative from Ward 4.

Mr. Clark was also concerned about non-residents who participated on City boards and commissions. He asked to what degree that was permissible. He asked if Oakridge and Springfield residents should participate in Eugene issues, and called for more discussion on that topic.

Ms. Ortiz determined from Ms. Forrest that the recruitment materials would also be in Spanish.

Speaking to Mr. Pryor's remarks, Ms. Taylor said that an advisory group was just that; the council should consider the advice given, but it did not have to take it. She said the council should be able to articulate why it was not accepting the group's recommendation. Ms. Taylor also believed the council needed to hear minority reports from its advisory groups and suggested that usually the opinions of the minority were often ignored.

Ms. Osborn recalled the three outcomes related to the topic adopted by the council in June 2010. The first called for increased diversity on boards and commissions over time. Staff was responsible for providing that applicant pool. Ms. Osborn invited input on additional outreach approaches. The second outcome was that the recruitment process would be fair, accessible, transparent, and civil, and Ms. Osborn said staff was committed to supporting the council in reaching that outcome. The third outcome regarded commission, committees, and board member development. Ms. Osborn noted the staff efforts to support that outcome, which included the Neighborhood Summit, best practices training, and outreach to potential boards and commissions members.

Ms. Taylor said she did not know the City had nonresidents on its boards and commissions.

Mr. Pryor agreed with Ms. Taylor that the City's committees were advisory in nature, but their input should be taken seriously. Speaking to the issue of representation, Mr. Pryor believed that applicants would always be self-selected and the council needed to keep that in mind when it considered how to maintain diversity on its advisory groups. He said that he would like to see some new participants and hoped that outreach could help with that goal.

Ms. Ortiz referred to the matrix and asked if it could be made more uniform as it regarded the number of allowed absences.

Ms. Ortiz believed there was institutional racism in the City's existing processes. The City expected the community to come to it, which was intimidating for some people. She suggested that the council meet in various wards of the city when doing such interviews. She also asked why the candidates needed to be asked questions when they had already provided written answers to similar questions. She called for a more informal process that allowed the council to get to know candidates as people. She also suggested that all applicants could be asked to appear. Ms. Ortiz posited the idea of doing background checks on candidates.

Mr. Clark supported Ms. Ortiz's suggestion for more a more informal interview process where the council went to the community.

Ms. Taylor did not like Ms. Ortiz's suggestion because she thought it could be confusing to some. She recalled the former Citizen Involvement Committee had members selected randomly from the Voter Pool who had been excited to participate and happy to serve. She suggested a Citizens Academy could be a useful tool in encouraging people to apply. Ms. Taylor suggested the diversity of individual schedules was something for the council to consider.

Mr. Brown thought Ms. Ortiz' idea was interesting and worth a try. He recalled that the Police Commission had held a meeting at Sheldon High School, but not many additional people attended. He believed the current system worked well, although he acknowledged it might intimidate some.

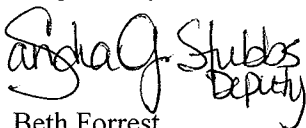
Mr. Pryor liked the idea of more outreach and making the system more accessible. He believed the City could develop a more informal system, and suggested the City identify and list the barriers to citizen participation. The council could review the list and discuss how to overcome the barriers. He wanted to make it easier for people to participate.

Ms. Taylor liked Mr. Brown's suggestion that interested candidates should attend meetings. She said she was not in favor of moving council meetings to different locations, pointing out that City Hall was the recognized seat of City government and she believed that meetings should be held there.

Ms. Hammitt acknowledged it was hard to get residents to come to meetings but she believed that frequently, citizens were simply unaware of the opportunities for input. She noted that the next recruitment effort would begin in January 2010, and anticipated that staff would return to the council soon after that with additional recommendations.

Mr. Clark adjourned the meeting at 12:48 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Beth Forrest" with "Deputy" written below it.

Beth Forrest
City Recorder

(Recorded by Kimberly Young)