

MINUTES

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

February 17, 2010
Noon

COUNCILORS PRESENT: Mike Clark, Andrea Ortiz, Jennifer Solomon, Chris Pryor, George Brown, Betty Taylor. Alan Zelenka participated by telephone.

COUNCILORS ABSENT: George Poling.

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

City Manager Jon Ruiz asked City Attorney Emily Jerome to speak about an item that had come up during the previous evening's meeting regarding Civic Stadium.

Ms. Jerome stated that at present there was no plan for Civic Stadium that would bring an action before the City Council. She said it was possible that eventually the council could be asked to consider a change in designation for the property. Since no action was imminent, the councilors did not need to worry about *ex parte* contacts. She advised them to consider whether the actions they would take or things they would say could cause people to believe they were biased and that it would be difficult for them to entertain other ideas. She stressed that as long as they could remain open-minded and as long as opinions expressed at a public hearing did not "pin [them] in a corner" in that way, they would be legally able to testify.

Ms. Ortiz had understood the Mayor's comments to be around whether or not the councilors wanted to participate in the conversation about Civic Stadium and whether the City would be involved in the process or not. She did not want to give direction to the 4J School Board.

Ms. Jerome said this was appropriate, adding that councilors could express opinions as long as they could maintain an open mind.

Mayor Piercy recalled that the discussion was on whether the council should take up Civic Stadium as a topic in a meeting and also whether a councilor would want to testify at the school board meeting scheduled for that evening.

Ms. Taylor asked what would happen if one did put oneself in a corner. Ms. Jerome replied that a councilor that did so should ask to be recused from a future decision-making process. She said the time to do so would be when asked to disclose *ex parte* contacts and conflicts of interest, and should one not be forthcoming about this, and should a challenge to a decision later be raised, this could compromise the decision and cause it to be thrown out.

In response to a question from Mr. Clark, Ms. Jerome said it was possible to indicate that though a person had expressed opinions in the past, he or she felt they could still remain open-minded in the decision-making process.

Mayor Piercy noted that Mr. Poling and Mr. Zelenka were not present, but could be joining the meeting by telephone.

A. WORK SESSION:
Downtown Projects – Parking

Director of the Planning and Development Department (PDD) Susan Muir thanked Mr. Clark, Ms. Ortiz, Ms. Taylor, and Mr. Pryor for serving on a subcommittee to work on the parking issue. She acknowledged that the council had heard a lot about the downtown strategies and what they were trying to do to foster a vibrant downtown and to boost the local economy. She listed the four strategies: attraction amenities, parking, safety, and job redevelopment. She said this was the opportunity to gain feedback on parking. She asked Parking Services Manager Jeff Petry to speak about the item.

Mr. Zelenka joined the meeting by telephone.

Mr. Petry reviewed the issue of parking with PowerPoint, hard copies of which were provided to everyone present. He discussed the four free-parking options and the costs associated with them. He highlighted ways that free parking could be paid for. He noted that providing a credit card payment option for parking meters made them more convenient and people tended to stay in the metered parking longer. He said the City of Boulder, Colorado, had a pay by cell phone feature. Regarding the rebranding of parking, he stated that Portland had done so with success, having created a Smart Park logo that gave a clear indication of where to park conveniently. He thought Eugene could do a similar rebranding and provided a suggested example, called Epark. He related that another concept was to just spread the word about the existing parking program. He said many people did not know about it.

Mr. Clark appreciated all of the work that had gone into this. He felt they had a lot of good decision points on the table. He had been working on this issue for a while. He thought that to be able to say that they had some meter-free parking downtown would be an integral part of revitalizing the downtown core. He declared that this would indicate to people that the downtown area was open for business. He had originally proposed the idea of having just the downtown safety zone as a free-parking area, which was the second of the four free-parking options. He said he would be amenable to doing only this or even a smaller area; he just wanted to try this for a year or two to determine what kind of effect it would have. He was generally not in support of first hour and weekend free-parking options for the downtown parking garages as a way to fund free parking. He felt free parking in the garages was an integral part of some of the success they had experienced, especially with the Saturday Market and the Farmers' Market. He would absolutely be willing to look at either limiting the area or increasing the number of meters around the University. His reason for the latter was that the meters were always full in the campus area. He also would be in favor of lessening the amount that was transferred from the parking fund to the General Fund, because he thought the investment was worth it to make downtown more inviting.

Ms. Taylor considered free parking to be the best investment. She said business people she had talked to thought the City should try it. She asked what savings the City would net from the removal of meters. Mr. Petry responded that if they eliminated the meters it would not create a large positive impact, because there would still be many meters in the University area. He explained that the meter maintenance program was one person, the program cost \$100,000 annually and the meter collection was through a contract that cost \$36,000. He surmised that approximately half would no longer be used if the meters were eliminated completely from the downtown area. He said the parking enforcement program cost \$740,000 for enforcement and \$410,000 for adjudication, but he would estimate that 75 percent of the tickets were written on campus.

In response to a question from Ms. Taylor, Mr. Petry stated that the meters had been taken out in 1971 or 1972 and had been restored in 1991. Ms. Taylor recalled how welcome she had felt when she had seen the signs that said "Welcome to Downtown, Park Free." She felt that some people in the downtown area worried that the Fifth Street Market could compete better because it had three-hour free parking. She thought downtown would benefit from having free three-hour parking.

Mayor Piercy requested a more complete matrix of the savings and losses associated with a reduction in meters and an increase in free parking. She noted that if the parking was changed to a time limit, there would still be a need for parking enforcement.

Ms. Ortiz was not completely convinced that parking was something that needed to change in the downtown area. She had spoken with downtown business owners and they indicated support for looking into parking for a window of time. She remarked that they were talking about a lot of revenue that would be a challenge to replace. She said with all of the building they would hopefully be bringing on-line, she would want parking to turn over. She did not think she could support a broad brush permanent change, but she would consider looking at it for a short period, perhaps two years. She added that she would not want to change the first-hour free/weekends free parking rules for the parking garages. As for increasing the metered parking in the University area, she indicated that she would not want people who owned their houses to have to pay to park in front of them.

Mr. Pryor commented that the best possible outcome would be a revitalized, improved, growing downtown area. He did not think this was the primary way to get there, but he felt it was a step in the right direction. He said all of the elements of the downtown situation were interrelated. He observed that the consequence for taking paid parking out of the downtown area was budgetary and they would have to determine where to get the money they would lose. He asked what they would do to replace the lost money; would they have been able to pay for additional police patrols in the downtown area and might not be able to now. He wanted to figure out a way to pursue this strategy without having unintended consequences.

Mr. Zelenka asked what the results had been of the pilot program for free parking in the downtown area. Mr. Petry responded that the pilot, conducted in the summer, had put more cars on the street. He said he had observed that some employee-owned cars were in the free-parking spaces.

Mr. Zelenka commented that it seemed to him to be a free-parking program for employees downtown. He said the situation downtown was complex and parking was just a small part of it. He favored doing the development and safety items first. He averred that paid parking was not the cause of the decline of the downtown area and the free parking program would not have much impact on the downtown area. He referred to the PowerPoint slide *How Could We Pay for It*, and asked for further explanation of three of the bullet points. Mr. Petry said the campus parking district was defined as Mill Street and east of there. He stated that there were places that meters had not been installed that were within a few blocks of the campus area because they were in front of multi-family housing. He related that they were looking at the possibility of adding more meters on the west side of campus and there were locations on the east side as well, associated with the arena parking district which would come into play on September 1. He added that the revenue in the campus area largely came out of the nine-month school year.

Mr. Zelenka did not think it made sense to hurt the campus commercial area to pay for downtown parking. He hoped the council would hear input from the campus businesses on what they thought about this

proposal, should it gain traction. He asked what the impacts of this change would be. Mr. Petry replied that they had not looked into this yet.

Mr. Zelenka said students were on tight budgets and charging them more would push more cars out into the neighborhoods, which was something they were trying to avoid in that neighborhood. He felt that they should call this the “park cost-shifting program.” He took issue with all seven of the bullet points on that slide, commenting that he did not think any of them were good ideas. He liked the concept of branding, noting that he looked for the Smart Park logos when he went to Portland.

Ms. Solomon asked what happened to the concept of changing to angled parking. Mr. Petry responded that the challenge of angled parking in that area was that with the number of curb cuts and driveway cutouts not much would be gained in parking spaces.

Ms. Solomon supported giving the free-parking program a try. She remarked that it was compelling that a lot of things had happened in the downtown area since the advent of paid parking. To her it did seem like it had contributed to the downturn in that area. She was willing to support a two-year pilot program.

Mayor Piercy commented that the perception of friendliness was important during this time that they were trying to improve the downtown area. She considered it to be one element among several, including public safety and increased business activity. She said they needed to consider budgetary implications but they also needed to make an investment in the downtown area. She supported rebranding parking with a vivid and easily identifiable logo. She also supported investing in the meters with more convenient payment methods available. She agreed that the City needed to make people more aware of the parking offers that were available. She added that she did not know what they could do to make the parking garages more visible and more “fun” but she felt there was power in making something appear more inviting.

Mr. Clark agreed that free parking would not be a “silver bullet,” but he felt it was an important part of the solution. He predicted that if free parking proved effective, it would help to increase public safety by increasing the number of people downtown and this could, in turn, increase business, which could increase property values in the downtown area, which could resolve revenue issues caused by free parking. He underscored that the basis of the pilot, like the use of tax increment financing, was to try to invest in what they wanted to occur.

Mr. Clark asked how many employees parked in metered parking spaces before the summer pilot had been put in place. Mr. Petry replied that they had not tracked this.

Mr. Clark observed that an increase in employees using the free parking had been included in the report and asked how they would know this if they did not know how many parked there in the first place. Mr. Petry explained that parking enforcement officers had observed City parking permits in some cars parked there. Mr. Clark did not think it was effective or accurate to say that there was an increase in employee parking there when this had not been tracked previously. He said having time-limited parking would have the same effect that meters would have on how long employees would be able to park in a parking spot.

Ms. Taylor attributed the business level of the Fifth Street Market to the free parking that was available there. While she knew that free parking would not fix the downtown problems, it seemed to her that places with free parking did well. She related that there were meters on 16th Avenue south of 11th Avenue. She averred that they were “always empty” and if the meters were removed, people could park there and walk downtown. She opined that the more people that were downtown, the safer it would be, and free

parking would bring more people downtown. She also wondered if they could consider narrowing 6th and 7th Avenues in the downtown area in order to add parking spaces.

Mr. Zelenka believed that if there was free parking in the downtown area, employees would park free. He had not seen any evidence that indicated that free parking would help the downtown area. He remarked that if he was going to spend \$650,000 downtown, it would be related to helping increase development and improving downtown safety. He added that he liked the concepts Mr. Petry had highlighted on the slide *Other Parking Improvements*.

Mr. Zelenka signed off at 12:49 p.m.

In response to a question from Mr. Clark, Mr. Ruiz said staff would bring back options for the council to consider relating to the downtown area and consideration of the financial implications would be part of the budget process.

B. WORK SESSION:

Lane Transit District Service Reductions

Mayor Piercy considered a reduction of Lane Transit District (LTD) services to be “extraordinarily vexing.” She felt that reducing services was the wrong direction for the community to be moving.

LTD Board Chair Mike Eyster thanked the council for the opportunity to address this item with them. He noted the presence of LTD staff member Andy Vobora, LTD General Manager Mark Pangborn, and LTD Board Vice President Greg Evans. He recalled that one year earlier, LTD had been facing service cuts but had received one-time funding through the Stimulus Bill which had provided a one-year reprieve.

Mr. Vobora provided an overview of the reasons for the proposed cuts. He said the challenge in their budget had come from the transit payroll tax, which had deteriorated to a negative 12 percent growth rate. He stated that LTD had experienced a 20-point shift in payroll tax revenue which had created a budget shift that was hard to absorb. He related that as they looked at solutions on the revenue side, they could control fares and had been more aggressive with that in more recent years. He showed a chart that delineated the costs of LTD fares among its peer groups, which indicated that LTD was in the middle. He said increases in fares were hard for people to absorb and they wanted to be sensitive to this, though the business community wanted people to pay their fair share. He observed that LTD could resolve its budget issue by doubling fares, but most likely it would lose a great deal of its ridership, which would be counterproductive.

Mr. Vobora said the state did not provide much funding, except for para-transit. At the federal level, the reauthorization of the money had not happened yet, but if it did it would provide one-time money again for an ongoing problem.

Regarding expenses, Mr. Vobora related that LTD had 70 administrative employees and approximately 250 employees who were union members. He noted that the contract would be up for renegotiation and they intended to work with the union representatives to manage personnel costs as best they could. He said some administrative savings were being found through wage freezes, unpaid furloughs, and in leaving vacant positions open. He stated that the materials and services budget was not large and was dominated by fuel costs. On the capital side, they had delayed projects as much as possible.

Mr. Vobora stated that 83 percent of LTD's dollars went to put buses on the streets and LTD could not capture much in the way of savings from the other 17 percent. He said most of the ridership happened along the main corridors and they wanted to maintain that service. He related that they also wanted to maintain an urban route frequency of 60 minutes. He noted that LTD had to meet Title 6 requirements. He provided a map of routes and noted that LTD would still maintain a good level of coverage.

Mr. Vobora said LTD had a goal of saving \$3 million, with \$2.6 million recouped in service cuts. He pointed out that the budget gap was \$6 million and LTD was taking this in "two bites." He stated that core routes would continue to be run seven days a week, from 6:30 a.m. to 10:45 p.m. He noted that some districts were cutting weekend service and shortening hours to meet budget gaps.

Continuing, Mr. Vobora reiterated that service would still be adequate for the corridors, though at current service levels people were sometimes left at stops during the busy travel times. He said they had done their best to attack the lower productivity segments of routes.

Mr. Vobora highlighted the public outreach process in which LTD had engaged, which included public forums and participating in public activities, such as the Spanish mass at a local church.

Mayor Piercy likened losing transit routes at this time to "putting the engine in reverse." People had expressed concern to her about increasing fares. She had also heard people wondering if there was a way for LTD to diversify its funds and whether people were being invoiced for the transit tax.

Mr. Vobora clarified that the Department of Revenue was the taxing authority and passed the revenue along to them. He related that years earlier LTD had an intern who had done some research and tracked down the records of some people who had not paid the tax.

Mayor Piercy said they needed to find a way across jurisdictions to gain unified support to talk to Congress in order to be a stronger voice in letting them know what was missing in funding.

Mr. Eyster remarked that LTD was fortunate that its board vice president, Greg Evans, was very active in the national organization.

Mr. Evans said Mr. Eyster would be going on the United Front lobbying trip. He averred that the more people who spoke up on behalf of LTD, the better. He stated that he would be attending the American Public Transit Association (APTA) legislative conference in Washington, D.C. shortly after the United Front trip. He noted that he served on a couple of committees, the Transit Board Members Committee and as the Region 6 Representative for the United States. He said they would be stressing to legislators that they needed operations relief and some creative ways to encourage local and state governments to make it worthwhile to invest in transit operations. He pointed to the goals of reducing carbon emissions and reducing traffic congestion, but the incentives to do that with public transit were not there. He related that APTA was trying to suggest creative solutions in order to get more people out of cars and onto buses and to increase investment in transit. He felt they were in a unique position at present. He noted that Senator Harry Reid had sought to make cuts in the Surface Transportation legislation. He underscored that whatever support they could get from their jurisdictional partners would help LTD in its lobbying efforts.

Ms. Taylor asked what kinds of transit alternatives were available. Mr. Vobora responded that if someone lived in a neighborhood where a route had been eliminated they might not have an alternative. He said the alternatives included potential carpooling, bicycling to buses and then putting the bicycle on the rack on the bus and, for seniors and people with disabilities, there was the Ride Source service.

Ms. Taylor ascertained that Ride Source was a more expensive service. Mr. Vobora said it was hard to calculate whether Ride Source costs would increase, but if they observed a substantial increase in a certain area they would likely reinstate a bus route there.

Mr. Eyster stated that for some routes that were cut, LTD was adding service. He asked Mr. Vobora to speak about this. Mr. Vobora said one thing that had received a lot of comment had been the Breeze service, which was slated to be eliminated. He explained that its elimination would provide five percent savings in the budget and it was believed that there was enough capacity using the EmX and adding a little bit of service to other routes.

Ms. Taylor commented that bus service was an important way for some people to get to work. She expressed concern that people would not be able to get to work.

Mr. Pryor thanked the LTD representatives for coming before the council. He remarked that many people did not realize how spoiled the community was by the great transit system Eugene had. He said LTD was reducing service to what a lot of cities would consider good service. He noted that he was serving on the committee that was studying EmX corridors for West Eugene. He related that a part of their discussion had been on the cost of delivering passengers via EmX versus the cost per local route. He asked Mr. Vobora if the cost reductions associated with the EmX, once the infrastructure was in, would help with the dilemma. Mr. Vobora confirmed that it would. He said buses in traffic were slowed down and to maintain service levels meant adding buses, which added cost. He commented that the “back of the napkin” estimate seemed to indicate that a passenger on the EmX, cost approximately half as much as a passenger on a regular route.

Mr. Pryor asked when LTD would be rolling out its service cuts. Mr. Eyster replied that the first round, to be voted upon later that day, was scheduled to be rolled out in June, and the other cuts, which the Board had yet to act on, were tentatively scheduled for the fall and January, 2011.

Ms. Ortiz expressed appreciation for the outreach in which LTD had engaged. She was pleased to see that the Bethel and downtown areas would not incur large cuts to their service. Regarding Ride Source, she asked if there was a reimbursement component for it. Mr. Vobora confirmed that there was some reimbursement from the state through the cigarette tax, but the bulk of the cost came from LTD’s General Fund. He said most of the Medicare-covered trips utilized taxis.

Ms. Ortiz observed that if there was only capacity for two wheelchairs, this could create problems for routes that were near care facilities or places that were foster homes. She asked what would be the answer for those passengers. Mr. Vobora responded that as with any passenger, if the bus was full a person could get passed by. He explained that the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) said the service had to make reasonable accommodations and if a person in a wheelchair was passed a second time, LTD would dispatch a vehicle to pick them up. He noted that they had not had to do that very often. He said the other thing to look to was to increase the capacity of the buses.

Mr. Eyster stated that from a board perspective, this was one of the hardest decisions. He related that he had heard testimony from a woman who had used the bus to go to the hospital when she was having a heart attack. He said they regularly encountered people who accessed their medicine, their employment, and their medical care with transit. He explained that they sometimes had to decide between routes with a smaller number of riders, many of whom were very dependent, versus a route with a lot of riders. He likened it to having to pick between one’s children.

Ms. Ortiz expressed appreciation for the work they were doing and hoped that LTD would be able to add services back. Mr. Eyster said adding services back would be their goal.

Mr. Eyster stated that because federal funds were used in bus purchases, they knew that the federal expectation for life expectancy for a bus was 12 years. He said LTD maintained and ran its buses for 17 years on average.

Mr. Brown asked what criteria were used for cutting routes. Mr. Eyster said he could provide a broad overview answer. He reiterated that what they knew was that they had a \$6 million problem that had to be fixed over the course of two years. He underscored that the goal of LTD was to maintain the long-term viability of the system.

Mr. Vobora highlighted examples of routes and ridership and how they had tried to weigh the needs of riders and bus routes in trying to impact the system the least.

Ms. Ortiz asked how capacity on the bus was determined. Mr. Vobora explained that there was a white line on the bus that could not be crossed for safety reasons and once buses were full to that point, no more riders would be admitted until some debarked.

Ms. Ortiz expressed appreciation for the bus the University had contracted to take young people from the downtown area to King's Row housing late at night. Mr. Vobora affirmed that the funding of the service had just been renewed and he expressed appreciation for these kinds of partnerships.

Mayor Piercy stressed the importance of speaking with a united voice in support of transit.

The meeting adjourned at 1:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jon Ruiz', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Jon Ruiz
City Manager

(Recorded by Ruth Atcherson)