

Northeast Neighbors(NeN), General Meeting Minutes

May 30, 2023

Call to Order: 7:03 pm

Meeting attendance: 74

- 50 in-person: 4 board (Kevin, John, Charlotte, Rick); 4 elected officials (Vinis, Clark, Yeh, Brown); 1 other presenter (Andrade)
- 24 unique viewers on Zoom: board (Kirstin, Brian, Anne); 2 presenters (Nathanson, Davis)

3/21/23 General Meeting Minutes: Approved unanimously.

John Brown, EWEB Board of Directors: We haven't raised rates in 5 years, except for last year. This year they're going to go up for both water and electricity. We buy 65 of our electricity from Bonneville. They're raising their rates, and we have to pass that through. Over the next 10 years, rates projected go up about 35%, and that's without a \$250-270 million expenditure on the McKenzie. We are the largest city in the West without a second source. If we lose the McKenzie, we have maybe a 2 day supply, and that's it. So we're going to build a redundant system, but that's going to raise your rates.

Nancy Nathanson, our State representative: Reported many pieces of housing legislation that were stalled due to the walkout in the Oregon Senate.

Mayor Vinis' opening comments and answers to questions:

There's good news and there's bad news right? As we look at city policies, we're talking about housing supply and affordability, homelessness, public safety, climate change, and economic development. Those are the Big Five.

The City Council has made very significant investments and progress. But this work is incremental.

In the past year, Council approved code changes on middle housing that will help us add to the supply at several different affordability levels. Council also adopted a housing implementation pipeline to look at the whole range of housing needs.

For public safety, we have a very innovative police department and chief, willing to think outside the box. And agile in respecting the will of the taxpayers on how to use the community safety payroll tax funds, not just in hiring officers, but also in addressing homelessness among youth and in bolstering our community court system.

We're also doing a lot of work on climate change. We are finding ways that we can over time reduce our greenhouse gas emissions, reduce our carbon footprint.

And then, finally, economic development. It hasn't been a headliner in the planning work that the City Council has done. We realize that we need to come back to it.

What's your vision for where the City will be in five years, and what are the barriers to getting there?

This is a fun question to think through. First of all, we're going to be a bigger city in five years. We're feeling all those growing pains. But we are attracting people who are moving here.

We're planning to have a more dense urban core with more housing downtown. We are required by state law to have climate friendly and equitable communities where there's more compact housing and it's more walkable. So that's coming.

I think that we will be a more electric city. We'll have more electric cars, and we'll have more electric charging stations.

Five years from now we're going to have more trees because we're investing in our tree canopy, especially in our 'heat deserts'.

Our economy will grow. We are attracting a lot of new businesses. There are a number that are moving particularly into West Eugene. They're bringing a lot of jobs. They're clean industries.

I'm optimistic that our investments in public safety are going to bear fruit over the next five years. Our control over our public spaces is going to improve.

And finally, we'll have a City Hall in five years. In fact, even sooner than that.

So that's on the plus side.

For the hard part, we will still have a homelessness crisis. Five years from now we will still have a challenge with housing affordability and availability because we just can't solve it that fast. It takes a long time to build housing. It takes a long time to build the support systems to overcome the impact of homelessness. Five years from now we will be dealing with the costs. The cost of construction, the cost of labor, the limited land supply.

And we'll still be in a climate crisis that's not going to go away. We will be figuring out how we as a community think about our landscape. How do we think about our buildings? How do we think about our transportation systems? Both to mitigate our impact on climate and to adapt to it.

Many cities have phased out gas powered mowers and leaf blowers to reduce air and noise pollution. Do you support that idea? How can we move it forward?

I think it makes a lot of sense. The first step is for the City itself to model this, and we are doing that. As our parks and maintenance equipment ages, we are changing it for battery powered or electric equipment. It's more feasible in some areas than others, like our downtown crews. Sometimes when there is a distance to travel there's a capacity issue. But the City is walking the talk in this.

I believe that this transition for homeowners and for landscape companies will be very market driven. There will be opportunities for the market to make new products that are more affordable and have a longer lasting charge. That is probably going to be more successful than a regulatory approach.

I don't think the City is going to need to regulate this. I think the market will take care of it, and we all, as consumers, can help prompt that.

Do you support the construction of an arterial bridge from Green Acres to Santa Clara to give us an alternative to the Beltline for connecting our neighborhoods?

I think it's really going to have a positive impact. It has been a long time in the planning. It was included in our transportation system plan that we adopted in 2017. This local arterial is an excellent idea for enabling local traffic to stay off the Beltline and just to get from neighborhood to neighborhood. As will pedestrians, bikes, and buses for that matter.

It continues to be a top City priority. Nothing happens as quickly or as easily or as cheaply as we hope. But it's a high priority for us.

Where is affordable housing going to get built in the City?

I want to be really clear about this. There's affordable housing, capital A, which is income-qualified subsidized housing. That's the kind of housing we build with public funds from federal housing and urban development dollars. We have been building a lot of it downtown.

We also need affordable housing, small a, affordable workforce housing. That's housing that is moderate in price. It is the hardest to build because construction is expensive. Builders need to have a profit margin, and it's hard to do so.

Passing the middle housing code is a piece of the answer. It allows for duplexes and triplexes to be built on any land that is currently zoned for a single family residence. That reduces the cost per unit because land is expensive. If you can build four units on a piece of land instead of one unit, you can begin to pencil it out. And they're smaller, so they don't have to be so expensive. It'll be interesting to see five years from now how much of that has happened and where it's happened in the city.

And our City Council just sent to the legislature a request for funding to help install the wastewater infrastructure out at Crow Road, because a thousand new units could be built out there. But it's stalled right now in the legislature.

We also want to build workforce housing using MUPTE, the multi-unit property tax exemption. There is a ten year property tax exemption if the property fills a wide variety of requirements. One of them is that they either dedicate a percent of units to workforce housing or they need to pay into our trust fund account.

And one other piece, a favorite of your councilor, Mike Clark, is looking at the urban reserves. As we find ourselves too land constrained, we can bump out the urban growth boundary to allow more housing development.

We're moving as many pieces as we can. but it's hard for the City to intervene in a market, and the cost of construction is high.

Lots of cities, including Eugene, buy carbon credits to meet their climate goals. Why can't individuals who want a gas stove in their new home do the same?

We committed to be carbon neutral by 2020, and we couldn't do it completely within city operations. So we did buy carbon offsets. It's a fairly complex process. The thought of doing it for individual homeowners is a little bit heart-stopping. What would it take to administer and manage that?

I think we're more likely to go the incentives route. I said before that I think the market is going to drive a lot of electrification. Over the next five years you're going to find more and more appealing and affordable electric options, and consumers are gradually going to go in that direction.

Is banning gas in new construction just the first phase of a long-term plan to get rid of gas usage entirely? If that's the case, will people get compensated for making the switch?

Yes and no. Yes, in that it is part of our climate action plan to gradually decarbonize buildings. So in the in the largest sense. Absolutely. This is one piece of that puzzle.

There are several pieces on the table right now. One is to look at our building stock, particularly our commercial industrial buildings, and understand the best pathway for the kinds of buildings we have.

We already have a report looking at residential housing. One of the interesting things that we found was that in terms of equity and helping people live in better housing, we should focus initially on mobile home parks because they tend to be leaky. Low income people live in them, and they're spending a lot on their bills, so that if we can weatherize and provide them with higher functioning heat pump systems, we're both decarbonizing and improving the quality of life.

But again I will say that particularly for existing housing, this transition is going to be driven by the market. All of you who own houses are going to be replacing your furnace sometime in the next 20 years, and when that time comes you will consider whether to put in a heat pump. Some of you will make that choice because it works for your house and your bills are going to go down, and some of you won't.

The reason that I thought that Council was right to pass the ban on new construction is that it is so much cheaper to build it with the right energy system to begin with than it is to retrofit.

Why doesn't the City put a higher priority on disaster preparedness to be ready for a wildfire or earthquake?

We are by no means unprepared. In 2019, before the pandemic. I convened a summit of all of the local leadership because I was worried about a major Cascadia event or a wildfire, and I didn't want someone in Cottage Grove, for instance, to look at Lane County and say, 'I thought you are going to do that part.'

That work has continued and we're coordinating our work.

For wildfires we have a really significant fuels reduction program that's happening in South Eugene. In those wooded hillsides, our fire department has worked with the Northwest Youth Core, and with neighborhood associations, Southeast Neighbors and others, to thin out those areas that need thinning to reduce the potential for a wildfire just ripping through there.

As to a Cascadia event, I think we have a lot of vulnerable people. I'm particularly worried about tenants in apartment buildings who can't keep two weeks of water and everything else. We still have a lot of work to do.

In a very positive step, the new schools that have been built lately all have water supply and their own power generation. So they are emergency response centers. And everybody's got a school that's within pretty reasonable reach. EWEB is supporting all of these wells that are being activated on school campuses. That's our network.

Why is it so hard to get dangerous streets made safer? Neighbors on Holly Ave have complained for ten years. Speed tests have been done; the City agrees that it is unsafe. But nothing gets done. Same story on other streets here. And drivers often get belligerent when you tell them to slow down.

Yes, we know that it's dangerous. I think Holly in particular is probably eligible for some traffic calming. The 2023 Road Bond will be spent to promote walking, biking, and safer streets. But there's never enough money to do everything and it's never fast enough. I hear that frustration.

We do have radar trailers that we can put on the streets that tell you your speed.

When people get aggressive with neighbors trying to tell them to slow down, try not to engage them, but get their license plate and then report it to EPD. They can go contact them later.

I do not understand why the City of Eugene cannot prepare an annual budget that estimates the money needed to cover necessary services and costs, but instead requires levies constantly that increase our taxes.

Why can't the City stick with a budget just like we homeowners must do?

We do stick with the budget. We are required to balance the money coming in and the money going out.

But as you all know, we do not have a well-functioning tax system in this state. Prior to Measure 5, we had a much more robust general fund, and in a better world the City of Eugene would have a general fund that would enable us to pay for the services that the community expects and needs.

Instead, we have essentially turned you all into a Budget Committee because we have to come to you for a library levy, a roads levy, a levy for parks and rec. We come to you because we don't have the funds in our general fund, and we know that as a community you want those services.

So it is a broken system. I totally share your frustration. I wish we didn't do it this way. But until we change how we collect taxes as a state, it's going to be very hard for the City to dig out of that hole.

What are you doing to finally solve the homeless situation. I'm angry and I'm tired of seeing it.

Well, we're all angry. Nobody wants to see people living under blue tarps on sidewalks. If there were a simple solution for which we had all the money, we would fix it.

We all experience the emergency that's on our streets, and that emergency has been decades in the making.

We are not alone. There are cities up and down the east coast and the west coast in particular facing it.

Partly because of the cost of housing and because in this state we have lost our supply of housing. And we are very under-invested in mental health and in addiction services.

Governor Kotek in her emergency response to homelessness has really focused on the counties, telling them to step up. And last year the Legislature gave us an additional \$5 million to help support the safe sleep sites that we had set up. The city has added about a thousand shelter sites. We have a thousand beds, but we have over 3,000 people who are unsheltered.

We should all be incredibly grateful for the nonprofit organizations. I mean Community Supported Shelters and Carry It Forward and Square One Villages and Everyone Village and St. Vincent de Paul. They're all just pitching in and providing services.

It takes investment to get people back on their feet, and we have a lot of them. We're doing a huge amount, more than we have ever done. But more people keep falling into homelessness.

The City Council has worked on this with renters. Protection is incredibly important because we have people losing their housing, and there's no place for them.

It's not for lack of trying. It's a big problem, and five years from now we're still going to be in it.

Peace Health is running is going to close down their pediatric cardiology unit and the waiting times in the ER are ten hours sometimes. I am attributing a lot of that to a small group of the homeless that needs constant service. Does the City have funding to go to the hospital? Or is that something the County will do?

The City has no authority over Peace Health, but they are a critical partner, and they have been, as you say, often the last recourse. If there's no place else for someone to go, they show up at the emergency room.

That is the reason that we collaborated with the County to build the Navigation Center. The county has built a series of health clinics and is now looking to create a Crisis Stabilization Center. So actually, there's a lot of County investment.

Finally, I think there's a lot more going on in hospital costs than what's happening in the emergency room. A number of staff are traumatized from dealing with Covid for several years and that has made the staffing situation challenging.

What does it mean that we are a Sanctuary City? Is that for people coming in over the border? Do we play a role in checking people's documents?

People move here. They get jobs. They send their kids to school. It's not a City role to check people's documents. So we don't do that. That's what we meant when we said, 'we're a Sanctuary City.'

We don't collect that information. If someone wants to use the Public Library, we want them to use the Public Library.

What is the timeline for getting into the new City Hall?

Our lease is up on the LCC Building in November. I would expect that shortly after that the first group of us would move. The City Manager's office, the City Council and mayor offices, the legal team. Also our finance folks in the top of the library.

Some renovations are being made, but the good news is, it was an office building, and we needed offices. So yippee, it's basically there.

The north building that has always been a community meeting space will be the site for our new council chambers. I don't think that will be done when the first move happens.

Mayor Wheeler, in Portland, has recommended a series of new ordinances to the Portland City Council that sound truly Draconian. No camping on public property between 8am and 8pm. You can't start a fire after dark if you're camping on public property. It sounds like they're just going to hassle the homeless and I wonder what might happen in Eugene?

Very timely question. The Legislature has responded to a court case in Boise, Idaho, that ruled that you can't criminalize someone for sleeping in open and public space if there's if there's no alternative. The Legislature has required that cities be clear about what their regulations are and how they're in compliance with Boise.

So the Eugene City Council just passed on Wednesday our code revisions to comply. They looked at the code on public property with respect to public health, safety, and access.

For example, they set a 1,000 foot distance from an educational facility that you couldn't camp on. We're talking about camping, not sleeping. You're allowed to sleep in public space. You're not allowed to set up a structure. That's the distinction that was made at the state level that we're now following at the local level.

We decided that camping had to be at least 100 feet from the high bank mark of a waterway to protect the waterway. And on sidewalks and shared use paths, there has to be at least four feet accessible to the general public.

We have to identify what we call willful violators. If someone is camping in an illegal site and has been asked to leave more than once, they would be categorized as a willful violator. We raised the penalty from \$250 to \$500. It's not that we think we're going to get \$500 from people who have nothing. We're actually trying to push them into the municipal court system. Our community court offers ways for them to provide restitution for their offense, but also access to services.

What are you seeing other neighborhoods do and what could we consider as a neighborhood group to help address some of the housing issues and homelessness.

You are all well aware that faith communities have stepped up for a long time in this, initially with car camping programs but now vastly expanded to micro-sites, rest stops, and small housing.

The important part for neighborhoods and for neighborhood associations is to reassure neighbors who might be alarmed at the thought of providing some kind of temporary shelter or assistance about how well they are managed, and what the positive benefit is to the people that you're helping.

It is really up to us as a community to embrace the solutions that we're exploring.

Have they looked at the homeless population to find out where these people are from, how many of them are from Eugene? Are we supporting people from outside the area?

We do a monthly tracking of the people who have sought services. They include a question about their last permanent address, but not how long they lived at that address. We do certainly have people who come here thinking they've got a job or they're going to live with a cousin, but then that falls apart. They may have been here for five years when that happens, or they may have been here six months.

There's no question that there's a huge amount of flux in the system. There are people who are coming to Eugene because they think they can live here, and there are people who leave Eugene to go somewhere else.

The data I saw when I worked at Shelter Care before I was mayor and the data that we have of people that are entering our programs is that over 80% have a last known address in Lane County. So we have a lot of our own poor.

Are we also attracting people from elsewhere? Yes, we are. We know that anecdotally.

The services are here in Eugene, so if someone in Lane County really needs services, they're going to come to Eugene because that's where they are.

You will hear that people are giving bus tickets to people to come to Eugene, and that is probably true.

Tomorrow morning I am going to the US Conference of Mayors, and every other mayor will tell the same story.

It's true for every city because there's movement in the system. People migrate up and down I-5. There's no way that you can contain it. The best thing that could happen would be that we establish such singularly successful systems that all the other cities copy our model, and we all address it collectively.

That, I will tell you, is the constant conversation at the US Conference of Mayors. What is the best standard of service? What are the best practices? How can we get ourselves there?

Fabio Andrade, City Manager of Equity and Community Engagement

For equity and community engagement we realized that it was much better if we could bring a centralized and coordinated approach

We now have something called the equity and community engagement network, a team of staff from all departments and divisions in the city.

When we refer to equity work, we are referring to identifying what it is that may prevent someone from accessing our services. How we can change what we do in a way that every person who comes to the City can find it welcoming and supportive of what they need?

We can make sure that the language of the city using is the same across all departments and programs.

We are now going to use more of our staff, rather than consultants, to do that kind of work. and by doing so we start collecting more information about the communities themselves to understand better how the community wants to engage with us.

Now because we are centralized, all the resources that we have across our 1,600 personnel are available.

For instance, some people in the city only speak Spanish, some Spanish and English. The city has been trying to do a better job in understanding what that community needs, and engaging that population with us.

We are going to have one internal website, where the staff from all departments can see everything that is available to them. And one website for the community where the community can see all the accurate initiatives that the city is doing. On our last count, we had 64.

Part of the equity work we do is supporting people who have been victimized because of their identities, their religion, race and ethnicity, and many other factors. Eugene has been a pioneer in collecting information about what is going on in the community and reporting it.

We have seen an increase in number of cases, mostly not classified as criminal cases, but as bias incidents, like someone using hateful language without a direct threat of violence.

We have seen more cases happening in the schools, but we do not have a jurisdiction unless it's a crime.

Jason Davis, Public Information Officer, Lane County Health and Human Services

The Navigation Center is a hub that is designed to help those who have had trouble in a typical shelter situation.

The way people access the navigation center is through our coordinated entry that is run through Lane County human services.

The Navigation Center has officially been open since September of 2022.

A challenge has been providing mental health support. Securing service providers and mental health professionals is just as difficult as traditional health providers these days.

We've built strong ties with the River Road Community Organization and the Santa Clara Community Organization. There really hasn't been any significant complaints from neighbors or from businesses. Some stats since September: 175 individuals have been served through the Navigation Center. 22% of those folks who have been served out of those 175 have gone on to permanent housing. That 22% is actually really encouraging.

Now for the Stabilization Center.

We're seeing an increase in crisis situations in Lane County, particularly due to addiction. Emergency services are overwhelmed, and we have a severe gap in our mental health care. We just don't have adequate capacity here in Lane County for those folks who need that stabilization sort of service.

The Stabilization Center will reduce incarceration and emergency room visits. It's not just quick stabilization and then back on the street. It's actually looking at the individual where they're at and what they need to take that next step.

There are many nonprofits focused specifically on how to make Lane County a better place to live for everyone. And we can start to be able to realize the potential of all those different service providers through a coordinated system that is looking specifically on mental health.

It is going to be open 7 days a week, 24 hours a day, obviously 365 days a year. Someone will always be there at the front desk to take walk-ins, but then also there will be a separate sally port for those referrals or escorts from law enforcement or mobile crisis.

There'll be immediate triage as soon as someone comes in. What services do we need to afford them? For some people, all they might need is just a place to decompress, to be able to sit in a recliner and not have to worry about all the outward stressors that they're they were experiencing. Other folks may need more intensive behavioral health services.

And then, what happens when people walk out through those doors? Do they just go right back into the neighborhood? Are they going to be camping around the facility? The answer is no. There will be what we call a warm handoff, a connection to the next step.

Citing has been a huge part of our efforts with community engagement. There's all sorts of different things to look at, and then, of course, the needs of the facility itself are so specific. and so demanding. We really did have trouble finding that perfect place.

Thankfully, we have landed at a place that we think will hopefully be a permanent home for the Stabilization Center on our current Lane County behavioral health campus, which is across MLK Blvd from Autzen Stadium. This actually mirrors a best practice where you have what's called a campus of connections, multiple services for the individual available all within reach.

- Close proximity to social service and behavioral health partners including Lane County Developmental Disability Services, Lane County Behavioral Health, Lane County Youth Services, Looking Glass, Emergence, Laurel Hill Center, Hourglass Community Crisis Center, etc.
- Access to bus line, Eugene/Springfield metro areas, and ease of mobile crisis or law enforcement drop offs
- Serene setting with trees and greenery, that is offset from the main road

There will be referrals coming from our hospital partners, from our law enforcement partners, from our behavioral health service providers, and then also, obviously, a walk-in component.

Now seeking funding. Construction hopefully by 2025.

Capacity will 42 individuals in total at any one time. The annual impact is that 8,200 folks will be able to walk in through those doors and receive stabilization, which will take a huge bite out of what we're seeing happen in the community right now.

Right now the thought is that the youth component and the adult component will actually be in two separate facilities likely on the same campus.

We've continued to do community engagement. All of that feedback is considered and rolled into our planning.

There will be a community wide survey that's going to be going out here in about a month.

We do have a number 988, which is effectively a 911 for mental health crisis. It's something that's available to any Lane county resident, any Oregon resident.

One of the best ways that our community can help is to start to spread the concept of the stabilization center as a norm within our community.

Adjourned: 8:59 pm