

A work session of the Astoria Common Council was held at the above place at the hour of 9:05 am.

Councilors Present: Brownson, Herman, Rocka, Hilton, and Mayor Jones.

Councilors Excused: None

Staff Present: City Manager Estes. The meeting is recorded and will be transcribed by ABC Transcription Services, Inc.

GOAL SETTING

Mayor Jones explained that this goal setting session was meant to give Staff clarity on the Council's priorities. The day to day operations and management of the City takes a lot of time and resources without any new initiatives. When Councilors come up with new initiatives, it is important to establish priorities so that Staff knows what to spend time and money on. A few years ago, the Council decided to have two-year goals instead of annual goals because the goals needed more time to complete. He wanted to review the vision statement and decide if that vision still resonates with the Councilors. Every goal should be linked to the vision statement in some way.

City Manager Estes noted that each Councilor had been emailed a summary of the goals.

Wes Hare Facilitator, understood the Council wanted to develop a list of priorities for the next two years. He encouraged Councilors to refrain from focusing too much on the exact wording of each goal because the words will not be etched in stone and circumstances will arise that can change those goals. He described his approach to facilitating the goal setting discussion, noting that he would use the City's list of summarized goals.

Councilor Rocka suggested the Council set one or two top priorities and tier their goals the way the County does. The rest of the Council briefly discussed and agreed to structure the goals in tiers. Tiers would help keep the goals realistic and relay the priorities to Staff.

The Councilors and Staff discussed priorities and goals with the following key comments:

Housing

- It would be very important to support efforts to increase the housing supply. However, it was also necessary to understand that the Community Development Department currently had no capacity to increase workload unless more Staff was hired.
- A focus on workforce housing would prevent Astoria from becoming a resort community. So, the City should selectively advocate for certain projects by expressing support for developers grant applications.
 - Developing Heritage Square with workforce housing was recommended as a goal.
 - A work session would be scheduled with the Astoria Development Commission to discuss recommendations made in the County's housing Study. Councilor also expressed interest in having a work session with developers.
 - The urban growth boundaries (UGB) could provide opportunities for workforce housing. However, Astoria's UGBs had some unique aspects and expansion of the boundaries would have to be within the City limits. Additionally, amendments would be a lengthy and expensive process.
- Staff provided a detailed review of recent efforts to proactively address housing issues.
- The homeless population also needed housing. Other area organizations had projects to address this, but those projects would be difficult to complete due to costs and the inability to find a developer willing to take on such a project in the area. The City could look for grants and find ways to incentivize developers. Additionally, the City should focus on Heritage Square.
- Most buildable lands in Astoria are privately owned. Staff described the history of development issues on the Central School site and the Blue Ridge site, which have prevented both properties from being developed for housing.

- Councilors agreed the goal should be to increase the housing supply with an emphasis on workforce housing citywide and develop Heritage Square.

Disaster Resilience

- The Council discussed designating a staging area with tools, food, generators, a heliport, and other items necessary for the community to survive any disaster. This would be a resource intensive endeavor as it was not realistic for the City to keep on hand enough food and water for 10,000 people. Food would need to be rotated, the site would need to be staffed, and such a site would require funds that could support disaster resilience in other ways.
- It was important to promote public education campaign. Public events were being poorly attended, but the City should encourage personal responsibility.
- The Continuity of Operations Plan should be reviewed and updated annually. There was also a County Resilience Plan, required by FEMA to get reimbursements after a disaster.
- Staff provided details about the City's disaster resilience efforts to date and described the City's current capacity and level of readiness. The biggest concern in a disaster would be infrastructure, particularly the water and sewer lines if the earth moved.
- All disaster response coordination must go through the County, which is responsible for emergency management. However, the Council should discuss plans, protocols, and procedures to address any issues.
- The consensus was to add language regarding public awareness to the existing goal.

Mr. Hare called for a recess at 10:30 am. The work session reconvened at 10:40 am.

Homelessness

- The City should support the County's efforts to address homelessness. The County has created a homelessness liaison position and their new strategic plan recommends a drop-in center with services and resources for the homeless.
- The City should also encourage and provide support to Clatsop Community Action to provide housing to homeless people before offering other resources.
 - If housing were provided as a first step, agencies would be able to provide other services more effectively. However, even if Astoria found grants to fund housing projects, ongoing funding would be necessary to sustain those projects. Additionally, if the City provided any type of financial support for a specific project, funds would have to be taken away from another program.
- While the City could not provide financial assistance to organizations, the City could address land use issues and assist through zoning regulations by allowing housing and drop-in centers even when neighbors object.
- Recent inventories of the homeless population in the area were briefly discussed.
- Mayor Jones shared the plans and efforts of the Homelessness Solutions Taskforce (HOST) and noted it was an advisory committee.
- The consensus was that the goal would be to support the work and recommendations of HOST and explore partnerships for housing first and a community drop-in center, as well as other county wide community efforts to address homelessness.

Economic Development and Post-pandemic Recovery

- Staff updated the Council on the implementation of Advance Astoria, the 5-year economic development plan adopted four years ago. The plan could be refined and updated as it was sunsetting.
 - Redevelopment of the west end mooring basin could provide opportunities for urban renewal funding and the involvement of Business Oregon and Columbia Pacific Economic Development (Col-Pac). Details of this project would be presented to the Development Commission and Port Commission soon.
 - Economic development opportunities also existed at the Port of Astoria and Tongue Point.
 - Advance Astoria focused on traded sector products and businesses, and did not include tourism, restaurants, or retail.
- Mayor Jones provided details about the efforts of the Chamber of Commerce, Small Business Development Center (SBDC) and Clatsop Economic Development Resources (CEDR) to support small businesses through pandemic recovery. He had written a letter of support for funding to the SBDC.
- It was agreed that the goal would be to coordinate with CEDR, the SBDC, the Chamber of Commerce, the Regional Solutions Team, and other organizations to facilitate economic recovery.

Library Renovation

City Manager Estes reviewed the discussion at last week's work session on Staff's recommendation to move forward with renovation efforts in phases. He reminded that there was no budget at this time for the recommended improvements because Staff wanted direction from the Council for this fiscal year.

Mayor Jones recalled the initial fundraising efforts of the Library Foundation and the pandemic's impact on the organization and its goals.

- Staff confirmed that any deferred maintenance would only be done as part of a remodel.
- The City was negotiating with the National Endowment for the Humanities to see if they could still qualify for the grant that was awarded for the renovation. The grant was contingent on renovating the basement and the City raising a match.
- Councilors expressed frustration with the fundraising efforts and interest in setting a goal to have a proposed renovation project by the end of the two-year goal period, and perhaps have a Plan B. However, it would be more feasible to wait until the pandemic was over to make a decision on a renovation project. And in the meantime, the City could explore the smaller rejuvenation project, which could be completed in the short term.
- The consensus was to move forward with Staff's proposed rejuvenation project as a goal. Staff confirmed the City would begin working with an architect, schedule a work session, develop a placeholder goal after the work session, and then refine the goal for what would be done during the next fiscal year.

Mayor Jones called for a recess at 12:05 pm. The work session reconvened at 12:35 pm.

Vision Statement Review

Mayor Jones suggested the Council review the vision statement to make sure it was still applicable. He noted that former Councilor Cindy Price had recommended that language referring to diversity, equity, and inclusion be added. He recommended also adding mutual respect. Councilors Herman, Brownson, and Rocka agreed. Staff confirmed for Councilor Herman that the inclusivity statement would be added to the City's website as well.

Public Safety, Neighborhood Watch Programs, and Citizen Involvement

- The Councilors and Staff briefly discussed increasing community involvement in public safety through the Police and Fire Departments.
- Ongoing awareness of pedestrian safety was important, in part because the City does not have jurisdiction over State highways. Additionally, the Transportation System Plan (TSP) did recommend projects that would increase pedestrian safety, but funding was needed for those projects.
- The consensus was to leave the goal as is and add a statement about enhancing quality of life.

Quality of Life (Clean Water, Clean Streets, Land Use, and Historic Preservation)

Mayor Jones noted that the vision statement refers to preserving the unique character and quality of life for residents, which applies to all new ordinances. The consensus was that no goal on this topic was necessary since the language in the vision statement conveyed the message adequately.

Long-term Infrastructure Sustainability

- There is currently a great deal of urgency to upgrade and maintain infrastructure, which would require huge long-term expenditures and take away from resources for a long time. And infrastructure is necessary whether there is a goal or not. Some upgrades, like the Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) project were mandated by the State and inadequate infrastructure would limit economic development opportunities.
- Staff noted that the City did not currently have a Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). Strategic plans usually result in a CIP. However, a few years ago when the City discussed developing a strategic plan, the decision was to prioritize other things. Currently, the City does not have the capacity to develop a strategic plan.
- The consensus was that the goal should reflect the City's commitment to implementing necessary upgrades, continuing high-quality maintenance of the watershed, infrastructure sustainability, focusing future funding efforts on sanitary systems, sewer, storm, roads, and bridges.

Revenue Generation

Mayor Jones explained this became a goal several years ago at the request of the City Manager. The Council supports efficiency anyway, but the goal encouraged Staff to find new ways to reduce expenses and increase revenue. City Manager Estes responded that efficiency and revenue generation had become part of the Staff

culture. He provided several examples. The Councilors agree that instead of continuing with this goal, it should be incorporated into the vision statement.

Uniontown Renewal

- Uniontown already had a long-range program, but participation was poor and the neighborhood was not ready to move forward with a project. Additionally, the City already did a lot to support the neighborhood with programs like the Façade Improvement Program.
- It was suggested annual seed funding be provided to neighborhoods on the east and west ends of town. However, organizations would need to come to the City with a plan for using the money to improve neighborhoods.
- Councilors briefly discussed their participation in area organizations to support partnerships.
- The Councilors and Staff shared details of other neighborhood organizations in Astoria that started out small and grew over time. Organizations that have received annual City funding must meet certain requirements. Organizations could also apply for Promote Astoria grants.
- The consensus was that no goal on this topic was necessary.

Community Needs (Mental Health Services and Universal Broadband)

Councilor Rocka stated he was not sure that a goal should be developed for mental health services or universal broadband, as both were more of a County issue.

Mr. Hare confirmed the Councilors had no other topics to discuss as potential goals.

City Manager Estes asked the Council to decide whether hiring Staff or taking on a new project should be prioritized. He reviewed last year's priorities to provide some context and reminded that Staff would like to hire a community development professional, a fire marshal, and an emergency management professional.

Councilors agreed that hiring Community Development Staff was necessary so the City could focus on housing and create a development review process.


City Manager Estes answered questions about the fire marshal job and the community development position. He also noted that Staff was aware of how the Council has prioritized the Aquatic Center and childcare services, so they were already working on grants for those. Additionally, he confirmed for the Council that Public Works was working on restructuring their department to streamline operations and Staffing requirements for the long-term budget planning for infrastructure sustainability would part of that.

City Manager Estes noted that the County's work session that evening would include a group discussion of Enterprise Zone applications, which would begin around 5:15 pm.

ADJOURNMENT


There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 2:00 pm.

ATTEST:



Finance Director

APPROVED:



City Manager