

A work session of the Astoria Common Council was held at the above place at the hour of 1:00 pm.

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

Councilors Excused: None

Staff Present: City Manager Estes, Finance Director Brooks, Fire Chief Crutchfield, Police Chief Spalding, Deputy Chief Halverson, Sergeant Randall, Public Works Director Harrington. The meeting is recorded and will be transcribed by ABC Transcription Services, LLC.

REGULAR AGENDA ITEMS

Item 3(a): Forest Management Strategies, Annual Operating Plan Review, and Update from City Forester

The City Forester, Ben Hayes, will be presenting our watershed forest management strategy for the upcoming fiscal year along with remaining work for the current fiscal year. Planning for our annual timber harvest project will be starting soon with a request for approval from City Council for the timber sale at the March 21st City Council meeting. The work session presentation will include what is referred to as an annual work plan. This plan includes all work proposed for the watershed forest to comply with the recently completed Forest Resources Stewardship Plan and other regulatory requirements. In the past, projects and timber sales were only presented on an individual basis. The updated Forest Resources Stewardship Plan identified a change in practice with the introduction of the annual work plan that will be presented each year prior to initiating the annual timber sale followed up with the City Purchasing Code required Council Approvals for sales and expenditures. The presentation will also help staff in preparing the upcoming fiscal year budget which includes both estimated revenue from the timber sale and expenditures for the proposed stewardship activities. Stewardship activities include a pre-commercial thinning project, roadway maintenance activities and required forest replanting efforts.

Director Harrington stated that the Forest Resources Stewardship Plan now required forest resource management projects to be incorporated into the Capital Improvement Plan budget, while other projects like road maintenance could be implemented upon budget approval. He noted that this year's Operating Plan required some serious road improvement projects to be paid for with carbon credit reserve funds.

City Forester Hayes gave a PowerPoint presentation that included an update on the 2021 summer timber sale, recent tree plantings, regular road maintenance, the 2022 timber sale and an update on the carbon project. He noted that the City would need to decide whether to sell carbon credits in 2025.

Mayor Jones said the City was fortunate to have such outstanding forest stewardship and is blessed that this land was acquired many decades ago. The harvests bring in needed revenue in a sustainable way and maintain local jobs.

Councilor Herman thanked City Forester Hays for always giving clear presentations. She also appreciated his stewardship of the City's resource. She hoped future City Councils would continue to maintain clean drinking water for the community. Director Harrington credited Sarah Hammond, Public Works Administrative Assistant, for doing the bulk of the work, dealing directly with the timber companies and tracking the harvests.

Councilor Brownson said he appreciated the City's watershed because it continues to generate revenue. Not many municipalities own their own watershed.

Councilor Rocka stated he was glad the predecessors had the foresight to realize Astoria needed its own watershed.

Councilor Hilton thanked Staff for their dedication to the community and the preservation of resources.

City Manager Estes noted that authorization of the 2022 timber harvest sale would be considered by the Council at their March 21st meeting.

Item 3(b): Discussions on Elements of an Unlawful Camping Ordinance and Continued Conversation on Derelict Vehicles

This meeting is a follow up from the February 16, 2022 City Council work session. One item, an ordinance addressing shopping carts, has been brought before the City Council for consideration. Astoria Police Department staff have been working on developing a derelict vehicle ordinance and an update will be provided on that language. Additionally, as noted at the prior work session, staff needs direction from City Council on how to address development of an unlawful camping ordinance and that discussion will occur at this work session.

Mayor Jones said that at several recent public meetings, the City had been discussing community livability issues caused by the behaviors of a few homeless people, the legal issues around dealing with these behaviors, and potential solutions. Illegal camping has been of great concern to residents and businesses for a long time, but State law does not allow municipalities to prohibit camping on public land unless an alternate site is provided. The City has not provided an alternative site due to concerns that it would attract more homeless people to the area. Any site proposed would generate opposition among the community. Chief Spalding has been leading the Oregon Association Chiefs of Police's efforts to draft ordinances that help communities improve livability.

Chief Spalding stated all areas dealing with these issues were struggling to find clarity about court decisions, legislation, and how to apply local ordinances consistently and equitably. He emphasized that the Police Department was trying to address bad behaviors and this was not an attack on the status of any individual. He, Deputy Chief Halverson and Sergeant Randall gave a PowerPoint presentation on attempts to address the complaints the Police Departments receives on a daily basis, an ordinance to address recreational and derelict vehicles, an ordinance to address illegal camping, increased garbage in the community, and Staff's work to address the issues. During the presentation, he answered clarifying questions from Councilors about the definition of abandoned and recent changes to State Statutes.

Councilors commented on the proposed vehicle ordinance. Mayor Jones stated he wanted the vehicle ordinance to be as strict as possible because the problem vehicles have caused so much concern and the people who live in them leave trash outside of the vehicles. Several people have repeatedly left vehicles and trash in highly visible areas that are popular with tourists. Councilor Herman said she supported the proposed ordinance even though the Council would be criticized as being uncompassionate. She believed people should be held to a basic standard of decency and the City should do whatever it can to get rid of the disrespectful and unlawful behavior. Councilor Hilton believed the City should not be supplementing a person's right to park their recreational vehicle on City streets because those vehicles could be parked at a campground or RV park and it is not fair to the residents who must follow rules in order to park their recreational vehicles in front of their homes.

Staff continued their presentation, focusing on illegal camping, potential alternative camping locations, difficulties resulting from vague legislation and court decisions, and Staff's efforts to deal with the issues. Staff understood that each jurisdiction in Clatsop County would need to provide their own site because a shared location that served the entire county would not be in line with case law.

During the presentation, Councilors discussed illegal camping issues and Staff responded to Councilors questions and comments as follows:

- There is no good solution, so community input will be necessary. The public needs to understand that the only two choices are to allow illegal camping or designate a camping area. No one will like the camps regardless of where they are located. The illegal camping is currently disbursed throughout the community but designating a camp will result in a large number of people camping in one location.
 - Staff should gather as much public input on this as possible and contact churches and private property owners to see if any of them were interested in allowing camping on their properties.
- On some properties, the City could impose occupancy limits and require sites to provide restrooms, water and trash pickup. However, if sites are too comfortable, they would attract more people to the community.

Clatsop County already has the highest number of homeless people in the state and Astoria has the highest number of homeless people in the county.

- The Astoria Warming Center is allowed by the State Fire Marshall to operate for 90 days each year as an emergency shelter without having to comply with building codes. The warming center is located in a church, which does not comply with the buildings codes for sleeping areas. If the church invested in the upgrades necessary to comply with the building codes, the warming center could operate for more than 90 days. Recent changes in State legislation now allow the City to implement zoning laws that restrict the location of emergency shelters.
- The City could specify that camping is allowed at specific distances from schools, utilities, and other sites. Several Councilors indicated they believed the Pacific Power site would be ideal because it was large. However, the site is contaminated and contains infrastructure facilities.
- Several Councilors stated they preferred the City designate a camping site. Having a designated site allows the City to do some things that are not possible when sites are scattered. A designated site could be staffed, have security, restroom facilities, and trash pickup. However, this would cost the City a significant amount, but social service agencies could provide assistance. Additionally, State law would require the City to provide adequate shelter facilities to every homeless person in the jurisdiction. At last count, Astoria had 700 homeless people and it would be unreasonable to expect the City to accommodate that many people.
- Staff had been working with Clatsop County to identify potential camping sites. The county was dealing with camping around the courthouse, which impacts court proceedings. All county owned property inside Astoria city limits contains government buildings or equipment.
- There are only a few repeat offenders causing a majority of the problems, which gives the entire homeless community a bad name. The repeat offenders do get arrested and taken to jail. However, there are capacity issues at the jail and people are still required to quarantine for five days upon being admitted to the jail. People currently housing in the jail are either sentenced or are awaiting trial for significant crimes. The chronic offender program directs people towards resources, but people are not always willing to engage in services. Many of the offenses that are problematic to the community are lower level offenses that people are not taken into custody for, even if they've been arrested multiple times.
 - The new jail will open in October and will give the Police Department more capacity. However, Senate Bill 48 will limit who can be held until arraignment. The bill goes into effect July 1, 2022. Local judges could decide that someone should be held in custody to ensure court appearance or community safety.
 - The courts have also deprioritized low level offenses due to their own capacity issues.

Mayor Jones called for public comments.

Nate Pinkstaff asked if the County and City had discussed ways to work together to help the Astoria Warming Center or provide the funds to upgrade the church so that more people could be housed.

City Manager Estes responded that he would prefer a representative from the warming center answer the question. However, no one from the warming center was present at the meeting.

Councilor Brownson clarified that compliance with building codes would allow the warming center to operate for more than 90 days each year but might not necessarily increase occupancy limits.

Mayor Jones stated he would be speaking with County Commission Chair Kujala tomorrow. He would like the warming center to operate for longer.

City Manager Estes noted that the abandoned vehicle ordinance and the community resource officer job description would be presented at the next City Council meeting or the first meeting in April. Staff would also work out the best ways to collect community input on potential designated camping sites.

ADJOURNMENT

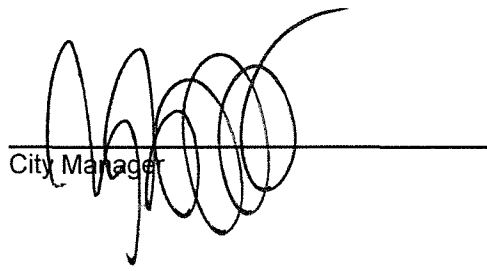
There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 3:19 pm.

ATTEST:

APPROVED:



Finance Director



City Manager