

RRCO NEIGHBORHOOD GATHERING

June 2, 2025

(Approved 6/9/2025)

Conversation with the Mayor, Kaarin Knudson

Members Present: 44 community members attended, including 4 board members in-person (Beth Gerot, Clare Strawn, Jan Spencer, Laura Shoe) and 3 board members virtually (Terry Morton, Michele O'Leary, Mike Meyer).

Guest Presenter: Kaarin Knudson, City of Eugene Mayor

Welcome and Introduction: Clare Strawn

Announcements

- Beth Gerot: Discussed the Neighborhood Leaders' Council, which is a venue for all neighborhood associations leaders to come together to share ideas and problem-solve. NLC provided input to the City of Eugene Budget Committee on the value of neighborhood associations to their communities and to the City.
- Clare Strawn: 3rd year of the River Celebration will be September 7. The planning committee is meeting bi-weekly and volunteers are welcome to join.
- Laura Shoe: The River Road and Santa Clara Volunteer Library open house is June 28 from 10 am - 2 pm, with tours, activities for kids, author meet-and-greets, etc.
- Laura Shoe: Local Access Roads: Residents have been advocating for the Lane County Board of Commissioners to accept these roads into the road system, but following the work session, we do not have support from the necessary three commissioners. Commissioners plan to talk with their City counterparts about the City annexing these streets. More community involvement is needed to continue to pressure the County to maintain these streets before the City can take them on, and to work with the City to encourage annexation as is feasible.
- Adrian Orozco: Update on City clean fuels project: City denied permit for regional fuel distribution center. The same company has applied for a bulk plant with a smaller footprint but similar issues. Further appeal of this is not expected to be successful. Neighborhood associations met with Beyond Toxics in May. The City of Eugene is developing public health standards, after surveying the community on this, that can impact whether activities like this can be located near neighborhoods. Attend the June 18 city council meeting on health standards to express support.
- Jan Spencer: Emergency preparedness taken further segues into suburban permaculture. Jan is doing Zoom presentations and site tours - look for the schedule on Jan's website, resilience.org. Also, the filbert grove work party with the City was very successful - major progress was made on cleaning it up.

- Clare Strawn: Beth and Clare went to the board meeting of the River Road Parks and Recreation District. The board and Clare and Beth discussed their joint desire to build a stronger relationship and collaborate, as the two major neighborhood institutions.
- CJ: She and Linda Lovick attended Livable Communities Leadership Academy (AARP), and as their project, they are working to convince LTD to reinstate the 55 Park Ave bus route so that it will stop at Emerald Park.
- Sandi: Requesting signatures for petition for ballot initiative to amend the Oregon constitution to include the right to a livable environment.

Main Program: Eugene Mayor Kaarin Knudsen

The mayor acknowledged that neighborhoods have different circumstances and needs, so she has been seeking to talk with communities in each.

Lyndsie Leech was unable to attend due to a ruptured eardrum.

What has been happening in the mayor's first 5 months:

- The city budget has been a primary area of focus. This is their first bi-annual budget. A two year cycle should allow one year for building the budget, then a year for the typical budget process.
- She'd like to see more general information sessions about the budget before the City gets into the specifics of budgeting - this is a gap today in shared understanding of problems and potential solutions. Example of the gap in understanding: there was an \$11.5 million shortfall in the general fund. Many areas of spending that are not part of the general fund (reserve revenue funds like street bonds, parks levy, library levy) can't be moved to fill the general fund gap - people often don't understand this. Better educated residents will be able to provide more relevant input.
- The City is required to balance their budget - it can't save in good times for spending in bad times (except for their reserve revenue fund for true emergencies).
- Good news: They have landed a budget plan: \$5.8 mil of the gap is now covered; the budget will be cut by the other portion. It preserves core services such as library access, animal services, planning for alternative response (in partnership with Lane County Mobile Crisis Services), library, community center/child care, Amazon pool, neighborhood organizations and OECE.
- This budget conversation with the community will repeat every two years - it is never complete.
- In addition to the focus on the budget, the mayor stressed the importance of safe public spaces, the health of the local economy, housing prices and the need to meet a wide range of housing needs.

- A few community processes are underway. Urban growth strategies staff are implementing new state laws and rules related to planning for housing capacity. The process has changed: from 1972 until 2024, it was focused on long range planning for land supply. Cities needed to assess land capacity - whether they have 20 years worth of needed growth. There was not much assessment of past performance. The big shift now is that the city must be much more data-driven around housing needs, looking at not only population change, but also unhoused population, underproduction of targets (land, housing). Encourages follow up with the Urban Growth Strategies team, bringing to the table strategies, tools to meet. There is a need to steer towards a regulatory structure that allows for more affordable, diverse, equitable housing. The city doesn't build housing - incentivizes nonprofit and for-profit housing development. The mayor is focused on innovative ways to meet the needs of communities.

Mayor's Responses to Audience Questions:

- *Housing:* Many different strategies will be needed for different subpopulations. For 75% of older Americans, their owned residence is their primary asset - but you can't buy groceries with that asset. Advocacy of ADUs by AARP and others is because that very small increment in development can accomplish (1) a unit of housing added into environment, (2) that new unit can be very energy efficient and accessible (at low expense), and (3) financial stability for the homeowner, who can earn rental income on ADU and then at some point move into the accessible ADU and rent out the main house for more income.
- *Local access roads:* "What a curious designation." The mayor stated that the City must head into conversations with County partners to gather information and to prioritize. The City won't be able to move the issue along without that partnership.
- *What is the City doing to control light pollution? Can the city become a part of Dark Skies?* All City's new lighting installations are shielded downlighting, LEDs, and in some cases are independent units so they have no copper wiring that can be stolen - so the City is very forward-thinking about light pollution. The challenge is the existing lighting. She doesn't believe there is a mechanism to observe residential or commercial owner's lighting that was to code when installed and require they change it. Mindy (resident): wants the city to include lighting requirements as part of the permitting process. Mayor: also, the City doesn't own everything - for example, no control over ODOT lighting.
- *Why are we facing a budget shortfall? Why doesn't increased population density increase revenue?* About 80% of revenue is out of property taxes and a small contribution of EWEB taxes - the City has zero control over these. Cities don't have the authority to raise property taxes. So the City has control over only 20%. The City has fewer full-time employees per thousand residents than in at least 20 years, which means reduced capacity to provide services. Property taxes in Oregon increase a little over 3% per year. Any time inflation is over 3%, it puts the City under tremendous pressure, since labor and materials increase and revenue doesn't keep up - that is most of the reason for the shortfall. All cities have had a deficit as high as or higher than Eugene's, per capita.
- *Is the City planning to encourage private property annexation by waiving filing fees?* No movement on this. Need community engagement to do so. There is discussion around this when it comes to new development.

- *Local access roads*, in response to a comment that the County wants the City to take on this issue: That's a hard ask of a city to take on a liability in these times, taking on roads that haven't been maintained and funded, when the City is already putting bonds to the community for funding for streets. Homeowner comment: she would be more likely to agree to private property annexation if the City also took on streets. Mayor: One challenge is, how does the City legitimize the cost of taking on deficient streets, where there aren't many City residents and there's no intensification of use? Needs discussion and prioritization.
- *Update on Chambers connector*: under a stop-work order until contractor gets authorization from the railroad to perform work in the railroad right-of-way - later in summer? Residents expressed how dangerous the area is right now.
- Mayor: Everyone slowing down everywhere in the City would be helpful. There's too much fast, distracted, dangerous driving. Resident: Why is there no enforcement? Answer: Motorcycle police are ticketing every day. (The Mayor will check on where.)
- *Can the City liaison with the River Road Park District about recreational activities?* Agreed that more coordination and sharing of information would be useful.
- *How can the City support community projects without a financial investment?* It wasn't clear what was being asked. The mayor brought up grant programs that may be accessible, and also suggested checking outside the community and to consider local nonprofits.
- Is there any plan to regulate short term rentals (Airbnb) so they are available as long-term rentals for residents? The city has a registration process and a fee that is used to fund housing programs. Challenge: Airbnb units are sometimes not equipped to be long term rentals (e.g. no kitchen). The city will continue to look at all strategies available to ensure we have more housing available. Some laws tie the City's hands. It probably wouldn't work for Eugene to say "no Airbnbs". The latest Portland State study shows that these short term rentals are a very small segment of housing stock.
- *How green are investments that City funds are in?* Will find out and report back.
- Resident comments about local access roads (LARs): City development on and around LARs impacts LARs as it creates more through traffic - the City should annex these. Also asks that the City think outside the box - for example, annexing streets without improving them right away, and require that the County agree to maintain LARs until the City can annex them. Mayor: We really need our County partners in this conversation. The mayor sees parallels with sidewalk funding conversation. (Homeowners must maintain, can't necessarily afford, and it affects the City's goal of walkability.)
- *What is the book the mayor wrote?* The Sustainable Urban Design Handbook

Meeting adjourned: 8:39 PM

Laura Shoe
Board member at large