

CITY OF ASTORIA

Judge Guy Boyington Building
April 25, 2019

CITY COUNCIL JOURNAL OF PROCEEDINGS

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, West, and Mayor Jones.

Councilors Excused: None

Staff Present: City Manager Estes, Parks and Recreation Director Williams, Fire Chief Crutchfield, Police Chief Spalding, Deputy Chief Halverson, Public Works Director Harrington, Library Director Pearson. The meeting is recorded and will be transcribed by ABC Transcription Services, Inc.

COUNCIL GOAL UPDATE

Mayor Jones read aloud the newly adopted City Council Vision Statement and Goals for FYE 2019-2021, which was also displayed on the screen.

City Manager Estes said that Staff intended to provide the Council with data and ideas, and they hoped for dialogue that would provide Staff with direction on how to move forward implementing the goals. He noted that the discussion on livability could lead to Code amendments and a follow up work session might be necessary.

Item 3(a): Homelessness Solutions Task Force (HOST) Update

Chief Spalding gave a PowerPoint presentation on the efforts of HOST to address issues resulting from homelessness; guiding principles; resources and programs available to homeless; and some potential solutions.

Staff provided details about the impact of homelessness on City departments, as follows:

- Fire Department – Chief Crutchfield said his department has experienced increased call volumes for medical emergencies, camping, unattended fires, and people occupying abandoned buildings. About five percent of all calls involve a homeless or transient person. These calls can include dangers like intoxicated individuals, weapons, bodily fluids, out of control fires, and unsafe abandoned buildings. He explained how these dangerous situations require more City resources. He also noted that Coos Bay, where he recently lived, was experiencing a similar situation. He confirmed for Mayor Jones that the Fire Department and ambulances carry naloxone for treating opioid overdoses. He was not aware of any instances in Astoria that required the use of naloxone.
- Public Works – Director Harrington explained the Public Works Department was responsible for cleaning up camps and securing certain areas of town. Clean up can be dangerous for Staff in bad weather, on steep hills, and when needles and human waste are present. The City spends thousands of dollars each year repairing or replacing vandalized fencing and gates meant to prevent access to utility vaults, which can contain dangerous levels of accumulated gasses. He confirmed for Councilor Herman that he would coordinate with the contractor working along the river to provide safety since there had been some recent break-ins to the construction site.
- Parks and Recreation – Director Williams said his Staff is exposed to a lot of the same risks as the Public Works Staff because most of their encounters on the Riverwalk, parks, and other outside facilities. Parks Maintenance works closely with the Police Department to clean up the camps, most of which are near Pier 39. The biggest issue is trash left by those who live in their cars and campers, most of whom stay overnight in the Aquatic Center parking lot and along Exchange Street. Aquatic Center users and Staff must deal with loitering, people sleeping in the locker rooms, intoxicated individuals, and occasional violence. The Aquatic Center is an attraction because of the restroom and shower facilities. He confirmed for Councilor West that better lighting along trails would deter homeless camps. Mayor Jones added that several private properties along the water have become overgrown, making those areas a haven for camping. City Manager Estes said the City has requested the properties be cleaned up.
- Library – Director Pearson noted the library is a block and a half from the warming center. The building provides three covered alcoves where people congregate after leaving the warming center. Staff and library users must deal with exposure to human waste, people smoking marijuana, loitering, loud music, cat-calling, and begging for money. The library, along with the hospital, has become the community's day center for

homeless, and parents do not want to bring their children to the library because of the perception this causes. The library's user conduct policy was recently updated, so Staff will be a little bit better equipped to deal with dangerous or disruptive behaviors.

Chief Spalding said HOST was preparing a set of recommendations to present to City Council.

Item 3(b): Livability – Misconduct Trends

Chief Spalding gave a Power Point presentation, which included statistics on Police calls over the last year, which have recently increased significantly, crimes that go unreported, impacts on the court and jail, the City's limited ability to enforce camping laws, limited resources, and recommended solutions. Most existing tools are just a revolving door, but new ordinances could address some issues. He described several ordinances that have been successful in other jurisdictions, noting that some of them require significant resources.

City Manager Estes described Staff's efforts to deal with crimes and address behavior issues through maintenance of City property and the Property Watch program.

Chief Spalding said he received a letter from Tongue Point Job Corps that stated the students did not feel safe getting off the bus at 16th and Duane because people frequently sleep at the bus stop. He planned to work with Tongue Point, as well as with many other business owners in the community, to help alleviate the issues caused by homelessness and homeless individuals. He shared details about the City's concerns with homeless camps and efforts to address public safety, crimes, and human waste. The camps require a lot of City resources and money.

The Council briefly discussed the issues and recommendations presented by Staff. The overall community effort needs to be to assist homeless individuals. However, the perception is that Astoria has ignored those who exhibit illegal and disruptive behaviors. The City needs to find a balance between directing homeless individuals to the resources available to them while also ensuring a quality of life for Astorians. The problems have consumed a lot of the City's resources, which are limited and many of the tools in place are just temporary solutions. The City should support the organizations that already provide resources to homeless. Councilors suggested the City should provide a drop-in center or a legal campground.

Chief Spalding explained that responding to calls and providing services to homeless individuals takes Staff away from other important tasks. Additionally, some homeless individuals enjoy their lifestyle and have no intention of living differently. Building a camp will only encourage more people to come to the community.

Mayor Jones called for public comments.

Pete Gimre, owner of Gimre's Shoes, said this was a complicated situation and there is no simple answer. He has documented what has happened at his business and it is most disheartening when his customers say they do not want to come downtown as often because of the aggressive behaviors. It is difficult to run a retail operation and he is trying to provide good wages, 401(k)s, and give good reasons to want to work for Gimre's. This becomes harder over time when there is less foot traffic coming into the store because people do not want to come downtown because of aggressive behavior, which affects commerce throughout town. He agreed that the City could not push the problem down the road, but businesses downtown are being affected. The City needs to think about the employees in those businesses.

David Oser, 254 W. Irving, Astoria, said language is powerful and describing this as a problem of homelessness, a lot of categories are being lumped together. Lumping the category of people who have chosen a life without a fixed residence in with the rest of the homeless people does most homeless people a disservice. Those people should be called vagrants, travelers, or transients, not homeless people, because they are not part of the community. Part of the solution is to support and provide the police with as many tools as is allowed to enforce the laws so that the community's compassion and help can go to those who want it, who can benefit from the services provided, and who are harmed more than anyone by being lumped together with others.

David Reid, 4924 Cedar, Astoria, Director of the Chamber of Commerce, said the economy of Astoria is fragile. Allowing fewer people to feel comfortable coming to downtown has a huge affect and that affect contributes to the problem because fewer people will have incomes. Protecting the economy is important. A dead downtown is

a dead town. All businesses need to be protected from antisocial behaviors. Visitors who see a group of people sitting in a doorway will move to the other side of the street even though it is perfectly legal. He encouraged the Council to stop looking for a solution and start looking for multiple small solutions, each addressing different parts of the problem.

Chief Spalding said Staff had some conceptual ideas for dealing with some of the issues and asked for feedback on each of them. He listed Staff's recommended tools and the Council discussed as follows:

- Update ordinances related to the possession and consumption of alcohol – All of the Councilors supported updating these ordinances, but Councilor Rocka believed the consequences would be ineffective.
- Update ordinance related to obstruction of public rights of way, sidewalks, and roadways – All of the Councilors supported this as well. Councilor West noted the City already requires a permit to place a sandwich board on a sidewalk, so this would make sense.
- Create exclusion zones for repeat offenders – All of the Councilors supported exclusion zones. Staff noted that if the Council wanted to pursue exclusion zones, a work session would be scheduled to discuss the details.
- Councilor Herman recommended police bicycle patrol along the Riverwalk. Chief Spalding stated he planned to deploy the small electric bubble car along the Riverwalk and in downtown.
- Councilor West recommended more lighting along the Riverwalk, downtown, and around Pier 39.

Chief Spalding added that Staff can look to other jurisdictions and agencies for successful tools. He believed the City needs to find better ways to hold people accountable.

Mayor Jones believed extending the Property Watch Program was a good idea. He noted that the Sunday Market supported removing picnic tables from Heritage Square. City Manager Estes explained that removing the picnic tables was part of Staff's crime prevention through environmental design concept. Creating spaces without niches or nooks can prevent problems. He confirmed for Councilor Brownson that in order for City property to be included in the Property Watch Program, the City must require the same standards across all departments and facilities. Chief Spalding added that trespassing violations can only be enforced with permission of the property owner. So, City Council would have to authorize the Police Department to deal with trespassing under the Property Watch Program.

Mayor Jones believed that posting the Property Watch placard on buildings would act as a deterrent.

Chief Spalding said the Property Watch Program made sense for public property because the officer would know who had permission to be on the property.

Mayor Jones stated this work session was not City Council's overall approach to homelessness. Future work sessions would discuss different aspects of the work to address homelessness. A small percentage of the homeless population has directly and negatively impacted livability, quality of life, and the local economy. He hoped the City could put more resources and effort into assisting the homeless people who need and want assistance.

Chief Spalding asked City Council for direction on camping because Staff wanted to move forward on that this summer.

Mayor Jones suggested Staff continue as they did last year with the same process. Councilors Brownson and West agreed.

Chief Spalding explained that Staff's process was complaint driven and based on the availability of resources.

Councilor Herman wanted to know how many people removed from camps sought services, the types of services they received, and how many turned down services after qualifying for placement at Helping Hands.

City Manager Estes asked City Council if they were interested in participating in the Pride parade in June and the Regatta parade in August.

The Councilors discussed their availabilities. Mayor Jones and Councilor Herman agreed to walk behind a banner in both parades.

Mayor Jones said he read on social media that a group was gathering to attend the May 6th City Council meeting to encourage a ban on plastic bags. House Bill 2509 is progressing steadily through Salem, so he did not want to spend City resources drafting a local ordinance that would only be superseded by the State ordinance.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 3:09 pm.

ATTEST:



Finance Director

APPROVED:



City Manager