

**MINUTES FOR THE STUDY SESSION  
ASHLAND CITY COUNCIL  
January 19, 2016  
Council Chambers  
1175 E. Main Street**

**CALL TO ORDER**

Mayor Stromberg called the meeting to order at 9:53 p.m. in the Civic Center Council Chambers.

Councilor Voisin, Morris, Lemhouse, Seffinger, Rosenthal, and Marsh were present.

**1. Look Ahead review**

Delayed due to time constraints.

**2. Discussion of approaches to downtown behavior issues**

City Administrator Dave Kanner explained that the Council, in conjunction with staff, developed a list of potential actions the City could take to address some of the behavior issues downtown. Staff came back with a report on actions that would have budgetary implications first. They were also prepared to discuss two other priority items that did not have budgetary implications.

Police Chief Tighe O'Meara explained that later in 2016 the Police Department would deploy second and third officers presently at the Police Academy. They were looking at making one of those officers a secondary Central Area Patrol (CAP) officer. This would dedicate two CAP officers to the downtown area. The second officer would take on a detective position and team up with another detective to comprise a new problem-solving unit (PSU) to address specific issues in town. This would give the department the flexibility to redeploy to the Exit 14 area if needed and assist if something acute happened during the midnight shift. If approved to hire two officers, that process would have to start soon in order to have officers ready by summer 2017. Chief O'Meara was not sure if they would have enough candidates for the Police Cadet Program and thought they might need to modify the program to include any college student interested in exploring a career in law enforcement in addition to students from the criminal justice or related field.

**Public Input**

**Don Stone/395 Kearney Street**/Thought the City had an obligation to provide some form of assistance to those living on the street not by choice. However, those on the street by their own choice exhibiting behavior not up to the standard Ashland was willing to tolerate should be escorted to the city limits and encouraged to leave town. He urged the City to use any legal way possible to make these people feel unwelcome.

**Andrew Kubik/1251 Munson Drive**/Explained of the six options in the Council Communication he supported Option 2 that would add two new cadets at \$10,000, Option 4 that provided two outreach workers at \$37,000 and Option #6 that would add two downtown ambassadors at \$35,000. The total cost was \$82,000. Adopting these options for summer 2016 would give the City a clear indication if this were all they needed in addition to hiring the police officers mentioned earlier. He did not have a full understanding of the situation downtown and thought initiating the simpler options was a good start. He also noted the need for firefighters might supersede the need for police officers.

**J.C. Romero/no address**/Explained he was a home free person and member of the community. The no camping ordinance and other such ordinances that targeted a certain class of individuals were against his father's law and the constitution. He felt that these laws must be stopped immediately before it damaged the community. He had some ideas to improve the downtown area that included more porta potties. Home

free people are blamed for many things they did not do and provided examples. In addition, he thought the City should talk to the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) and have them monitor things downtown. He would start CERT training March 2016 and was more than happy to patrol the downtown area.

**Erick Wallace/no address/**Explained he was home free and a resident. He renamed the camping ordinance the anti-homeless ordinance. The ordinance failed to mention a clear definition of camping. He read the definition of camping from Webster's Dictionary noting it did not classify camping as sleeping in a sleeping bag. Another issue was the City complaining about the downtown problem and the only thing they could come up with was more police, more jackbooted thugs to harass and intimidate the homeless community. According to the ordinance, anyone sleeping was camping. This was selective enforcement. He asked Council to imagine if they are targeted just for living.

Councilor Marsh asked Mr. Wallace if he had a choice of being "housed" or "homeless" what he would choose. Mr. Wallace responded he would choose to be free, and not to be a slave.

**Louise Shawkat/870 Cambridge Street/**There were constituents of Ashland asking for creative solutions to the responsibility the local society has to folks who were homeless and those with behavior issues. The majority of people had not had an untreated mental illness, a financial disaster, or a life-changing event that resulted in homelessness. There were individuals who wanted to sanitize Ashland. She questioned if Ashland wanted to demonize and criminalize this part of the population. Homelessness was a symptom of a greater societal problem. Removing and ticketing them was an appeasement for those who were uncomfortable facing the reality of one of our social problems. She thought Ashland could build upon the successes it had experienced helping those in need.

**Jacob Rubanowitz/357 Vista Drive/**Explained he was an honor student at Southern Oregon University (SOU) and a member of student government. He was concerned with articles he had read in the Daily Tidings and conversations he had heard regarding the downtown. He was worried some of the ordinances passed were discriminatory against homeless folk. He had heard one of the solutions was posting signs that instructed tourists on how to interact with homeless people implying Council had an issue not based on conduct but directed towards the homeless. This made him worry about acting in good faith.

Councilor Marsh thought option 2. Add two cadet positions to the Police Department for \$10,000 was an obvious place to start. A uniformed presence downtown was the most powerful thing the City could do. Councilor Seffinger agreed a uniformed presence was the best deterrent for negative behavior.

Councilor Rosenthal did not think the timing was right to hire two new police officers. Option 3, renting two jail beds from Jackson County was not feasible at this time either. He liked option 4. Social service outreach workers downtown from May through September and option 5. Education and signage downtown.

Councilor Voisin wanted Council to be dissatisfied with the proposals. They did not solve any of the issues and there were ways that would. She did not want the police focusing on behavior that included drinking alcohol in public, possession of open containers, smoking marijuana in public, and urinating or defecating in public. Instead, she wanted them dealing with gang behavior, shootings, cybercrimes, stopping sex trafficking, keeping schools safe from gun violence, catching bank robbers, muggers, killers, and citing those who texted while driving. There were other ways to deal with the behavior the city was experiencing from travelers. She would not support any of the proposals.

Councilor Marsh asked Councilor Voisin to elaborate on these other ways to deal with the behavior issues. Councilor Voisin referred to the success a 12 year old encountered who treated the homeless as part of his family. She suggested the Housing and Human Services Commission develop a master plan on what the

City could do for its homeless and travelers.

Councilor Lemhouse clarified this was not about homeless people and had never been about the homeless. This was about behavior. Some of Council had worked with people in poverty for decades. He worked with people in poverty daily and understood the challenges they faced. There were many services for people in need or homeless. This was not about people in poverty or homeless. Ignoring small issues like behavior led to bigger issues and referenced the Broken Window theory. The City was on the right track and the proposals were reasonable. He supported options 2, 4, and 6, wanted funding mechanisms for each as well as budgetary information on hiring two police officers.

Councilor Morris wanted to see what other cities were doing like Palo Alto, CA. He also supported options 2, 4, and 6 but was not sure there were funds for two more officers. It was also evident piling money onto the problem did not solve the issues and used the Resource Center as an example. He further emphasized the issue was behavior and not homelessness.

City Administrator Dave Kanner suggested postponing the item on the February 1, 2016 Study Session agenda regarding the Electric Utility and schedule a continued discussion of this item instead. Council agreed. Staff would provide funding mechanisms for Options 2, 4, 5, and 6. Council was also interested in options to run the Ambassador Program using volunteers.

Mayor Stromberg explained there were two distinctly separate but related issues. One was behavior occurring downtown that was unacceptable, possibly criminal, threatening, and antisocial. The City needed to find ways to address that. At the same time, Ashland had local homeless people and he was concerned the behavioral issues were interfering with the City's ability to help them. Jackson County Mental Health would establish a facility during 2016. The City also wanted to assist anyone interested in getting out of homelessness. He thought the Housing and Human Services Commission could give Council input on these matters.

Councilor Seffinger wanted an emphasis made during the winter to give the City more of a sense who the local homeless were and what the City could do to help them further.

Meeting adjourned at 10:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted  
Barbara Christensen  
City Recorder