

MINUTES

Eugene City Council and Eugene Water and Electric Board of Commissioners Virtual Joint Work Session Eugene, Oregon 97401

September 27, 2021
5:30 p.m.

Councilors Present: Jennifer Yeh, Claire Syrett, Greg Evans, Emily Semple, Matt Keating, Alan Zelenka, Randy Groves, Mike Clark

Commissioners Present: Mindy Schlossberg, John Brown, Sonya Carlson, John Barofsky, Matt McRae

Mayor Lucy Vinis opened the September 27, 2021, work session of the Eugene City Council in virtual format.

Board President Mindy Schlossberg opened the September 27, 2021, work session of the Eugene Water and Electric Board of Commissioners in virtual format.

1. **JOINT WORK SESSION – Electrification, Climate, and Drinking Water Discussion**

EWEB General Manager Frank Lawson and City of Eugene Sustainability Manager Chelsea Clinton provided an update on the preliminary results of EWEB's electrification study, updates on the City's Climate Action Plan implementation and EWEB's drinking water resiliency efforts.

Council Discussion:

- Councilor Clark – appreciated the presentation and the work being done in this challenging area; asked for additional information on peak demand/reliability and the difference in cost; asked if there will be rolling blackouts as demand increases from other parts of the power grid and it impacts reliability; asked about the carbon intensity differential of peak demand electric delivery; asked if the electrification study looked at alternatives for the general public to use during times of grid failure, such as burning natural gas or using generators.
- Commissioner McRae – thanked staff for the presentation; clarified that the proposed tapering of fossil fuel usage over the next 30 years does not suggest anyone invest in fossil fuel infrastructure; stated that the argument Eugene is a tiny contributor to national greenhouse gas emissions is accurate but not relevant, and every community making the same argument has contributed in part to the current climate crisis; asked if there was a policy in Eugene requiring all new buildings to run on electricity; stated the community has 30 years to make the transition to electrified buildings and asked if that provides sufficient time and resources to meet the incremental increase in demand; asked staff to clarify whether overall emissions would be lower if only electricity was used for heating in the region, and if the resulting carbon peak would diminish over time as the community expands renewable resources.
- Councilor Groves – thanked staff for their presentations; stated his interest in the pace and timing of how transitions to electrification are made; asked staff for detail on the impact to hydroelectric generation as a result of spillway reductions from the Department of Fish and Wildlife, recent court rulings and drought conditions, stating such information would be most useful before City Council begins to deliberate on these significant issues; asked about the region's solar capacity investments; asked what consideration is given to water storage sites and engineering their roof structures to hold solar panels; asked about hydrogen production efforts from NW Natural.

- Commissioner Brown – asked about carbon originating from electricity loss in buildings; asked for the percentage of carbon-free resources within EWEB’s portfolio; asked about the impact on hydroelectric generation if the Snake River dams are eliminated and/or chinook salmon are moved to endangered status; asked about the impact to hydroelectric capacity should the federal government require all such facilities to plan, design and construct for a “1 in a million year event,” such as what is happening with the Leaburg dam.
- Councilor Yeh – asked for clarification on issues related to the expansion of solar capacity and storage technologies; discussed shared priorities around electric vehicles and energy efficiency.
- Commissioner Barofsky – advocated for greater collaboration on creating energy efficiencies; stated a major stumbling block for Eugene is that 50 percent of housing is rentals and it can be difficult incentivizing landlords to weatherize and create efficiencies; stated that further expansion of carbon offset programs is needed and he hopes the City will soon be able to purchase offsets that are used to protect and retain local watersheds.
- Councilor Syrett – thanked staff for the presentation; agreed with the statement that the cheapest energy is that which is never consumed; stated as the council considers how to move to decrease carbon intensive energy delivery, it must recognize this region has benefitted from access to cheap energy, but as demands grow disproportionately to capacity, expectations around pricing and accessibility must be adjusted; stated that an informed and deliberate approach to energy production and consumption will prevent rolling blackouts; asked about differences between peak usage during extreme weather events versus average peak demand; stated the dual electric/gas heat pump proposal is surprising as it was not included in previous meetings and feels like a sales pitch to assist NW Natural in avoiding action from City Council to limit their expansion; expressed concern about a public-owned and governed utility partnering with a for-profit energy company and noted she is therefore unlikely to support any such proposal.
- Commissioner Carlson – stated discussions about peak demand should not prevent moving forward on the work needed to improve energy efficiencies; stated she is also skeptical of dual heat pump proposals and would want to see more data on how NW Natural is decarbonizing; recognized that society has limited energy resources, and while the least carbon intensive ones must be used, at times more will be needed for the sake of reliability and safety.
- Councilor Evans – thanked staff for their work; asked about the installation backlog of electric vehicle charging stations and if it will be a public or private agency responsible for their installation; asked about dark zones in the city that do not have sufficient overhead light for travel, and if existing infrastructure can be used to create better roadway lighting; asked about the age of the power grid and what upgrades are needed to improve reliability and security.
- Commissioner Schlossberg – asked how to move forward with policy work to ensure completion of the City’s Climate Action Plan 2.0 deliverables; expressed the need for this group to move beyond questions and into action; asked EWEB if they can create a directive codifying their intent to work more closely with the City on these issues.
- Councilor Keating – noted the double standard which exists in not forcing people to buy electric, yet landlords can effectively force tenants to have an account with the fossil fuel industry; stated he applauds the residential program summary but it is lacking avenues to engage renters beyond energy/water saving supplies; asked that tenants be allowed to share home energy score recommendations with their landlord despite current lack of incentives for them to be acted upon; questioned whether it is cheaper to reduce emissions by electrifying new buildings or retrofitting old ones; asked if EWEB could handle increases to demand resulting from an outright ban on new natural gas hookups.
- Councilor Zelenka – noted the desire to improve weatherization of multi-family housing is long-standing; stated electrification poses enormous equity concerns, particularly to low-income residents, something that must be considered; asked EWEB for a breakdown of how electrification plans will impact low-income residents.

- Mayor Vinis – noted that Council has created a roadmap for much of this work through the City’s Climate Action Plan 2.0, which intersects with EWEB’s work and calls for investments in energy efficient and low income housing; stated her interest in reviewing data on the broader impact of new efficient buildings versus retrofitting old buildings; stated her interest in further discussion about pilot projects that focus on renewable resources and the creation of microgrids to boost resiliency; stated that for Council to move forward, it can direct staff to provide further information on these topics as well as request the same from EWEB.

NOTE: The discussion on drinking water was tabled due to time constraints.

Mayor Vinis adjourned the meeting at 7:01 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Brooke Freed
City Recorder AIC

(Recorded by Jay Ferris)

Link to the webcast of this City Council meeting [here](#).