ASHLAND CITY COUNCIL
RETREAT MINUTES
Saturday, March 1, 2025

Council Present: Mayor Graham, Councilors Knauer, Dahle, DuQuenne, Bloom, and Kaplan.
Council Absent: Hansen

Sabrina Cotta	City Manager
Alissa Kolodzinski	City Recorder
Carmel Zahran	Assistant City Attorney
Jordan Rooklyn	Deputy City Manager
Kelly Burns	Emergency Management Coordinator
Mariane Berry	Finance Director

I. **CALL TO ORDER** – 9:00 a.m.

II. **EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT EXERCISE** (Pages 2- 8 of attached)

Exercise about how to react during an emergency wildfire situation lead by Kelly Burns. The Mayor, each Council member, Cotta, and Rooklyn were given a scenario of where they are when the fire notification is sent out. Discussion on:

- How to respond based on their individual circumstances
- How to maintain governance once evacuated
- Activation of legal authorities
- Disaster Declaration process

FUTURE OF ASHLAND – Livability survey results facilitated by Jordan Rooklyn (pages 9-12)

- Rooklyn presented the results of the Livability Survey (link in attachment)
- Results are based on respondents' perception not necessarily data

Discussion on the direction for the future of Ashland facilitated by Sabrina Cotta

Who are we now?	Who do we want to be?	Top Priorities
Too old "The Manor"	More families in community	Not be risk averse
1/3 of the population below median income/ two tail economic situation (Above and below median income levels, no middle	Growth in economy- bring prospects in for jobs, housing and increase diversity and demographics in both age and race	Wildfire preparedness
Lack of childcare	More innovative- take more risks	Housing
Quiet & sedate, no events	Anti-fragile, not so easily influenced by things outside our control	Economic development- levers the City can pull/ diversity and growth
White- no diversity	Resilient	CEAP goals (Climate)
Bedroom community	Increase city's response capacity	Transparency and communication

Involved, kind, engaged	Be pro-active	Affordability
Educated & cultured	Good financial reserves	Fiscal resiliency
Outdoor enthusiasts	More strategic- focus on priorities and put attention and money towards the priorities.	Quality of quantity- ensuring good service delivery of essential services
Small		Fiscal resiliency and effective use of resources
Lack Jobs		
Lack housing		
Innovative		

III. FINANCIAL OUTLOOK AND DEPARTMENT WORKPLANS

Financial Outlook facilitated by Cotta (pages 12-19)

- Review of anticipated cost increases
- Reducing workforce through natural attrition
- Technological upgrades that can provide a service or assist staff
- Evaluating each vacant position for operational necessity
- Discussion on what can be done to make Ashland more affordable to those that live here and to attract new businesses and people to move to Ashland
- What City services do we want to fund, at what level of services and how will it be funded?
- How to best target services and the costs of those using it, to be in line with those paying for it
- How to balance the desire of service level to match costs (parks, fire, police etc.)
- The cost benefit of technology to allow folks to help themselves vs in-person services
- Review of priorities of 25-27 biennium and what to adjust for next biennium
    - Manage for Excellence – opportunity to work with partners to reduce costs. Definite improvement of communication
    - Livable Community – taxes, how to increase tax base
    - Rist reduction
    - Economic development
    - Affordability
    - Invest in the future
- Prioritize what to focus on without forgetting to maintain essential City services.
    - Focus on Livable community/affordability, risk reduction, economic development, efficient and effective government
    - Increasing personnel and material costs of 10-17%, and select revenue increases 5.5% (3.2% for general fund)
    - Approach for the 25-27 biennial budget will focus on essential services, workforce needs and reduction through natural attrition and aligning service delivery with revenue.
    - Discussion on how the Council creates the What (policy) and the How (operations) determined by City Manager
- Departments Work Plan Overview
    - City Manager Office

        - Prioritize strategic planning
        - Delay for now – ad hoc Charter Committee and set up a study session with updates proposed by staff
    - Recorder – discussion on records moving forward vs. how to manage backlog
    - Human Resources – need software for a variety of needs
    - Municipal Court- need software upgrade
    - Finance – Needs software upgrade for a variety of needs
    - Information Technology – how do we protect against cyber-attacks and natural disasters. What is outsourced vs what is kept in house? AFN report at study session.
    - Community Development – (most overtaxed department generally due to state mandates), Discussion on Council projects and needed staffing levels to meet those. How does the city shift staff to match priorities.
        - Add to workplan- railroad and University districts, B street yard etc. Possibility of code review and how that might address affordability, housing, timeliness etc.
        - Priority to fund staff in Community Development.
    - Police – need more space
    - Fire & Rescue – how to manage defensible space program and community by-in, need to shift to community focus, how to pool resources with other agencies.
        - Possibility of South Valley fire district
    - Discussion on how each department going to implement the priorities, what creative solutions are being considered and how can the City work with partners to reduce burden on city staff and be more responsive. And how can projects be funded.
    - Parks & Recreation – under the direction of the commission. Looking at cost recovery.
    - Electric Utility – capital projects, rate review. Consider strategic plan specifically for electricity, water and wastewater each.
    - Public Works – several projects are joint between PW and Community Development. Include facility plan results and how to move forward
        - Where does deferred maintenance live amongst the priorities - They are part of the capital plan

IV. **FOCUS AREA DISCUSSION: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, AFFORDABLITY AND LIVABILITY**

Focus Area 1 – Economic Development- facilitated by Rooklyn (pages 19-22).

- Proposed changes in TLT funding use
- The state dictates how the funds are spent
- What in the short term (2 years) can we do to increase tourism
- Council goals for use of TLT funds and how to measure the outcomes
    - No off-season, reason for people to be here year-round
    - Better and more creative use of indoor space and partnerships
    - Utilize the OSF buildings when plays aren't running
    - The funds are meant to be used to draw folks from 50+ miles away
    - Outreach to those who are not local and provide strategic marketing
        - Events calendar, Ashland app
    - The city's role is to provide funding and partner with businesses who do the work with specific outcomes to ensure success and to ensure clear accountability.

        - Council would like to see new approaches, and flexible on the different percents of spending of the TLT funds
        - Tourism is about 25% of economy- how can the City assist with increasing other avenues
            - Businesses' main difficulties are:
                - Lack of foot traffic
                - Able to attract and retain workforce
                - difficult to start a business here
        - Discussion on the use of forums and what the ideal outcomes may be
    - How can the City assist our anchor organizations in times of need while maintaining essential services
    - Discussion on how to create an economic development corporation
    - **Focus Area 2 – Affordability** - facilitated by Cotta
        - What is the city's role in getting affordable housing and/or workforce housing
        - Encouragement of development of the smaller lots in the city given Ashland does not have much land available for development
        - How can Ashland support landowners to develop more housing.
            - Density bonus incentives to build, accelerated process for affordable housing
        - Review housing production strategy – goal is to increase workforce and affordable housing
    - Common priority themes are affordability, fire, and economy
    - If additional funding available, the preference would be for fire protection
    - Look into vacancy fee, housing excise tax
    - Staff will come back with a proposal for a study session for housing trust fund usage
- Childcare program
    - Conversation should include Ashland School District and SOU representatives
        - Issues include - lack of space for certified programs, lack of providers, lack of knowledge how to run a business
    - Support outdoor programs, preschool could be in school districts
    - Continue childcare ad hoc and grant funding for one year then move funding to fire as needed
- Utility Discount Program
    - Desired outcomes of the program
        - Rate structure so lower users pay less or based on consumption for water
        - Electric is different as renters can use less electricity but those residences are generally less energy efficient. Program should be year-round, discount with assessment of energy audit
        - Broaden the program for more people and potential options for qualification (SNAP, OHP qualifier)
        - Progressive rate structure
        - What could the funding number be for the next budget – starting at 200,000 per biennium. With a look at the rate structure to see if we can develop a new one
- **Focus Area 3- Livability**

- Wildfire - High priority. Where else could wildfire division live if not in the fire department. Desire to focus more on the program and how would WARP and CERT integrate.
- Study session to assess fees and how to reach the goals for various funding goals such as wildfire prevention, homelessness etc.

- Public Safety – discussion on staffing levels. There will be an assessment on this fee to determine how to move forward. As a community, what is the service level you want to see. Provide information on what each dollar amount would fund to include in the budget conversation.
- Homeless Services- includes dusk to dawn lawn and severe weather shelter
  - Last biennium the City had grant funding. In the budget is $100,000 per year. The expenses of night lawn and shelter far exceed that amount. It would cost about $175,000 per year to maintain current service level.
  - A breakdown of expenses for the night lawn vs shelter and budget for each separately
  - Potential contract for a service provider for the night lawn. What would be included?
  - What is the level of service Ashland should/could provide shelter and standard policy verses an emergency situation
- Next Steps discussion (page 22)
  - Fee discussion
  - Future study session conversations
  - Flexible budgeting
  - Strategic communication
  - Short list of points discussed for budget creation
  - How the departments will reach council goals (future discussion)
  - How can funds in reserve fund be used

IV. ADJOURNMENT

V.

Alissa Kolodzinski

City Recorder Alissa Kolodzinski

Tonya Graham

Mayor Tonya Graham