

**ASHLAND CITY COUNCIL
BUSINESS MEETING MINUTES
Monday, August 19, 2024**

Mayor Graham called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

Mayor Graham and Councilors Hyatt, Dahle, Hansen, DuQuenne, and Kaplan were present. Bloom was absent.

I. Public Input

(15 minutes – Public input or comment on City business not included on the agenda)
none

II. ASANTE & ASHLAND COMMUNITY HOSPITAL DISCUSSION

Brandon Mencini, CEO of Asante Ashland Community Hospital (AACH) and Asante Rogue Regional Medical Center, spoke that he began his role mid-July 2024. Mencini reached out to Graham after recent community conversations regarding AACH and spoke that the hospital is not closing, but that Asante is reviewing anesthesia services system-wide. All surgical services are planned to continue with no gap in coverage as it relates to anesthesia. Mencini spoke that all service lines are being reviewed through a strategic planning process and was open for questions.

Dahle asked Mencini to speak to the overarching goals for the hospital. Mencini spoke of a comprehensive review nearing completion that began before his tenure and has included over a hundred key stakeholders including community members and current physicians. The findings will be reviewed by the board after completion. Hansen asked if Mencini could speak to Asante's retention efforts. Mencini spoke of the national trend of staff leaving the healthcare industry altogether and that retention is a top priority for Asante. Mencini spoke of the importance of a positive work environment and the need for long-term physician and advanced practice provider recruitment. Hansen spoke of the Emergency Room (ER) as an important part of the community and asked about its viability at current staffing levels. Mencini spoke that the ER is a vital component of a general acute care hospital and will be included in the strategic planning process. Mencini spoke that ER volume has increased, and he does not anticipate any changes to staffing. DuQuenne asked how the strategic plan will be shared with the community after it is completed. Mencini responded that his approach is to be transparent, and he will learn from his team and key stakeholders how to best share information with the public after it has been reviewed by the board and shared with internal employees. Kaplan asked about letters from Asante received recently by members of the community regarding continued coverage. Mencini replied he would find out about that. Hyatt spoke that AACH is a pillar in the Ashland community and thanked Mencini for communicating definitively that it will be continuing. Hyatt spoke that the decision to close the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) is when questions began surfacing in the community about

AACH and asked if Mencini could speak to that decision. Mencini spoke that this decision was prior to his involvement but he is aware it was a four-bed ICU. Mencini spoke that it takes at least 10-12 consistently full beds to provide the full array of services and resources necessary to maintain an ICU long-term. Mencini shared that the facility in Medford has two 24-bed units and a 16-bed intermediate care unit. Mencini spoke he did not want to speculate on why the decision was made prior to his involvement, but he could imagine having these beds 15-minutes away could have been part of the decision. Graham spoke that national reports about the strain on the medical establishment may be contributing to local concerns and asked if there was any process to provide input to the strategic plan prior to any change in services. Mencini spoke that he was unsure about a process for public feedback but that the strategic review is comprehensive to consider essential aspects and will look at areas of expected service growth in conjunction with projected community growth. Cotta spoke of the challenges with staff time in running Ashland's ambulance services to Medford instead of Ashland and asked if there were any anticipated changes to that. Mencini spoke that he would look into it. Graham asked if there was anything the Council could do to be a good partner with the hospital. Mencini replied that it is helpful for his workforce to hear that AACH will remain a pillar in our community.

III. CITY COMMUNICATION PROTOCOL

a. City Communication- Protocols and Procedures Presentation

Cotta requested that Council copy the City Manager when contacting department heads. When contacting staff under the director level, Cotta asked the Council to go through the department head who could then route the communication to staff to help manage workload. Cotta spoke of the group e-mail links in the department pages on the City's website. These group e-mails are to help questions be answered quickly by routing inquiries to a department instead of relying on an individual for a response. The City has a goal to respond within 24-48 hours. Cotta demonstrated how to contact individual councilors directly or in a group e-mail that goes to the entire Council. Cotta also demonstrated the use of the online form for public testimony that goes to the entire Council. Cotta added that the City has authorized users posting to its Facebook, Instagram, and Next Door accounts. Only posts from the official City of Ashland Website or official City social media platforms are official statements. Statements made by anyone from their own accounts, even committee members, are speaking on behalf of that individual and not the City. DuQuenne confirmed with Cotta that written testimony submitted online become public record. Hansen asked how to contact utility billing. Cotta demonstrated on the City's website how to access the bill pay portal and the group e-mail link that will contact the utility billing group. Cotta reviewed the Citizen Response Module (CRM) that is now live for reporting potholes and will be expanding to handle other issues such as streetlight outage and vandalism. Kaplan asked if this procedure changes the current way e-mails are being routed. Cotta clarified that when included, staff will respond to e-mails that are clearly a question and operational in nature. If the e-mail is a statement or not operational, staff will allow Council to respond. Graham confirmed with Cotta that the goal is to include everyone in the response.

Dahle thanked Alissa Kolodzinski, City Recorder, for her work transferring City records over to the Laserfiche link in the new website and asked if September 1, 2024, is still the goal for completion. Cotta clarified this date is the goal for active committee documents and then disbanded committee documents will be uploaded. Kaplan asked about the archiving of City Council videos. Kolodzinski responded these will be uploaded to date back at least a year on the new site. Cotta clarified that these archives are links to the RVTV's site which has all the videos currently archived per the City's contract.

IV. Strategic Planning

a. Strategic Planning Initiative Presentation

Cotta presented a request to include a strategic planning initiative for the next biennium budget. Cotta spoke of an economic opportunities analysis underway and that the Ashland Chamber of Commerce (ACC) has an economic development plan. Cotta explained the City has several comprehensive plans, an old economic development plan, a Capital Improvement Plan, and other singular plans in place. Cotta spoke of a process for bringing all of those plans together into an overarching strategic plan for the City. This reference can help staff and the community understand the City's priorities when deciding on policy or budget allocations. A Strategic Planning Consultant would bring together existing plans and assist with public engagement in creating a Strategic Plan for Council to adopt. Cotta spoke of examples of plans she has worked on in the past and shared that the City of Colorado Springs recently completed a strategic plan which included the community and institutional partners in creating the plan and also regular feedback sessions to hear how the City is doing. Cotta asked to know Council's interest so it can be included in the next budget as a project out of the City Manager's office.

Dahle asked how often this plan would be reviewed. Cotta responded it depends on the timeframe tied to the goals but suggested a quarterly progress report uploaded to the website would allow the public to measure progress. Kaplan and Cotta reflected on the difference between a masterplan and an inclusive strategic plan. Hansen spoke that it is never too early or too late to plan, even with masterplans in flux. Hansen commented that the budgeted amount for this project seemed much less than other plans that are in process and asked about previous strategic plans. Cotta replied there has not been one in this format to her knowledge. Graham reflected on a five-year strategic plan that ended in 2016 that did not include this level of public engagement. Graham continued this might be the first time this type of approach has been taken to the overarching goal setting across the community. Cotta spoke that themes of community conversations include affordable housing, economic development, and wildfire. A long-term plan that includes these and other community-identified components are important for reference over time.

Hansen asked for Cotta's ideas on timing, selection, and how to move forward. Cotta recommended hiring a consultant as soon as possible during the next budget cycle in July 2025 so that it can be completed and utilized for planning for the following biennium budget cycle. Hansen asked what realistic expectation to have regarding community and partner involvement in this strategic planning process. Cotta responded this participation is crucial in providing breadth of perspective over time. Hyatt reflected that the town hall meetings over the last two

years have been exceptionally helpful in understanding the community's priorities. Hyatt asked what Cotta envisioned that public input piece to look like for the strategic plan. Cotta responded a consultant would consider the various aspects unique to Ashland, such as the student population, and multiple forums may be needed to include as many partners as possible.

Graham reflected there was discussion of a need for a strategic plan six years ago when the old one ended. Graham asked what kind of plan Cotta was envisioning. Cotta spoke to broad community involvement and reflection on what the community wants to look like in 10-15 years as opposed to, for instance, an organizational plan drawn up by Council in a work retreat. Graham reflected on a variety of City plans that have been recently redone, whereas other plans such as the economic development plan are out of date and asked how the strategic plan would be able to incorporate these. Cotta spoke of the strategic plan as not requiring individual plans to be fully fleshed out, but rather broader and more inclusive of other community plans such as the Ashland Chamber of Commerce's Economic Diversification Plan. DuQuenne asked if certain areas such as economic development might take more time. Cotta responded that some aspects may require more staff time to develop action items. DuQuenne spoke in support of developing a strategic plan at this time as the City emerges from the pandemic.

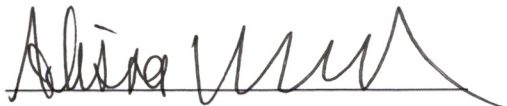
Graham spoke in favor of this strategic planning process adding there have been many decisions the Council has had to make over the last eight years without a roadmap of what is important to the larger community. As the council changes over time, it will be helpful for it to have a strategic plan in place to know what is important to the community.

V. Adjournment of Study Session

The meeting was adjourned at 6:38 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted by:

Attest:



City Recorder Alissa Kolodzinski



Mayor Tonya Graham