



CITY OF NORMAN, OK
CITY COUNCIL OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE MEETING
Municipal Building, Executive Conference Room, 201 West Gray, Norman,
OK 73069
Thursday, June 8, 2023 at 4:00 PM

MINUTES

The City Council Oversight Committee of the City of Norman, Cleveland County, State of Oklahoma, met in Regular Session in the Executive Conference Room on the 8th day of June 2023, at 4:00 p.m. and notice of the agenda of the meeting was posted at the Municipal Building at 201 West Gray and on the City website at least 24 hours prior to the beginning of the meeting.

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Schueler called the meeting to order.

PRESENT

Councilmember Ward 2 Lauren Schueler, (Chair)

ABSENT

Councilmember Ward 1 Austin Ball
Councilmember Ward 3 Bree Montoya
Councilmember Ward 7 Stephen Holman

OTHERS PRESENT:

Councilmember Ward 4 Helen Grant
Mayor Larry Heikkila
Mr. Darrell Pyle, City Manager
Ms. Beth Muckala, Assistant City Attorney
Ms. Jane Hudson, Planning and Community Development Director
Ms. Lisa Krieg, CDBG / Grants Manager
Mr. Wade Thompson, Parks Manager
Mr. Jason Olsen, Parks and Recreation Director
Mr. Shawn O'Leary, Public Works Director
Ms. Heidi Smith, Thunderbird Clubhouse
Ms. Linda Long, Thunderbird Clubhouse
Ms. Amanda Sherf, Chair, Continuum of Care
Ms. April Heiple, Food and Shelter Director
Ms. Windy Wood, Press, Norman Transcript
Ms. Lisa Webb, Admin Tech III, City Clerk Office

AGENDA ITEMS

ITEM 1: UPDATE ON THE CITY'S VECTOR CONTROL PROGRAM

Mr. Wade Thompson, Parks Manager, provided information on the City's Vector Control program, which the City has been implementing since the 1980's.

The City of Norman worked in cooperation with the University of Oklahoma in the late 1960's to develop a Vector Control Plan for Norman. The plan was designed to collect data, identify species and control mosquitos through use of Larvicide and fogging. Park Maintenance, in the past, has partnered with homeowners to place traps on private property to catch and count mosquitoes due to the need for electric service for the traps.

The monitoring traps have been updated. The traps use a light to attract mosquitos and a fan to force them into the net and are battery-powered allowing for more flexibility for placement at monitoring locations.

In the past, fogging was done with Aquavor, but it needs to be done at dusk or right after dawn, which is an issue because people and things are outside. The fog has to come in contact with the mosquitos in flight and is not always very effective at reducing the life cycle for the next generation of mosquitos.

The Vector Control Program going forward provides for increased frequency of trap monitoring, no longer uses fogging for mosquito control and uses Larvicide briquettes to control larvae from becoming mosquitoes. The briquettes are safe for bees and butterflies and targeted for flies and mosquitoes only. Two monitoring station traps are placed in varied places in each ward to get the most accurate counts for mosquitoes and publish counts on the website from June 1 through September 1 each year, based on the weather pattern and or trend. The acceptable threshold is less than 50 female mosquitos on a three-day period. When the threshold is reached, in partnership with the County Health Department, public information is put out on what people can do to help control the population. Events will be hosted in Parks to give out Larvicide and extra traps will be available for some private properties, as needed.

Councilmember Grant asked if Staff works with HOA's regarding their ponds, to which Mr. Olsen said we can put Larvicide in ponds and respond to HOA requests so they can put them out as well. Mr. Thompson said Staff will monitor for Tiger Mosquito (known to carrier virus like West Nile) and for Flood mosquitoes (smaller, dark colored) after heavy rainfall.

Mr. Olsen said that people need to protect themselves with "Deet" insect repellent when outside at peak mosquito times. Councilmember Holman asked if the City of Norman has a Vector Control Officer, as he has received a lot of complaints from the Eagle Cliff area due to its proximity to the river. Mr. Thompson said there is no dedicated staff member named as such at this time.

ITEM 2: DISCUSSION REGARDING THE CREATION OF AN ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW PROCESS FOR FENCE HEIGHTS FORWARD OF THE FRONT SETBACKS

Ms. Jane Hudson, Planning and Community Development Director, provided a presentation on fence heights forward of the property front setbacks.

Previous Councilmembers wanted to create a possible Ordinance on how to administratively handle fence heights forward of the front setbacks. The process that they are proposing is similar to Lot Line Adjustment. Someone applies, bring in surveys, and the Planning Director, City Engineer, Building Office and possibly the traffic engineer reviews them.

Ms. Hudson said Staff does not receive many of these requests and these will not be located in the core area (platted subdivisions). These will be on larger 2 acre lots, in agricultural areas, r-1 zoning and not have to go to Board of Adjustment (BOA). If not approved, they would have to go to BOA and to District Court if BOA Denies.

Councilmember Holman asked about the Miller property located on Jenkins Avenue, if they would not have had to go to BOA if this had already been in place.

Councilmember Schueler said she was glad to see this process moving forward so that residents do not have to incur the extra associated costs.

ITEM 3: PRESENTATION OF THE INFORMATION RECEIVED FROM THE 2023 POINT IN TIME COUNT

Ms. Lisa Krieg, CDBG / Grants Manager, introduced Ms. Amanda Sherf, Continuum of Care Chair, Ms. Heidi Smith and Ms. Linda Long with the Thunderbird Clubhouse. Thunderbird Clubhouse is the collaborative applicant for the Point-in-Time (PIT) Count this year.

Ms. Sherf, Chair, Continuum of Care, and Ms. Smith, Thunderbird Clubhouse, presented information on the 2023 Point-In-Time (PIT) Count for the committee. The PIT is required by HUD in order to receive federal funds for housing, it creates a snapshot of the scope and scale of homelessness in Cleveland County at a single point in time and happens the last few days in January.

The Continuum of Care is charged with coordinating and conducting the count and the data is used locally to plan programs, allocate funding, track progress towards goals outlined in the Homebase Strategic Plan and better meet the needs of our homeless neighbors.

The HUD definition of unsheltered homelessness for the PIT is, "Individuals and families sleeping in a place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation", (e.g., abandoned buildings, train stations, or camping grounds).

The count does not include those who are staying with friends or family commonly known as doubling up or couch surfing, or residing in a hotel/motel/fixed camp site, at their own expense. The unsheltered count is limited to those that are found by the teams on the day of the count and who agree to participate.

ITEM 3: (continued) PRESENTATION OF THE INFORMATION RECEIVED FROM THE 2023 POINT IN TIME COUNT

The PIT is separated into two sections,

1. Unsheltered, commonly referred to as street homeless, counted by volunteers on January 26th.
2. Sheltered, those who are utilizing Emergency Shelters, Transitional Housing, Safe Havens. Shelter data is analyzed from HMIS data for Sheltered count.

Planning for the Cleveland County 2023 PIT began in October 2022, with identification and documentation of all known locations, volunteer recruitment, training on using the collection program and volunteer safety. The City of Moore and Norman participated in the 2023 count, actually went out in the weather into public parks to conduct counts and do surveys on the unsheltered homeless. 47 volunteers were utilized in three shifts, canvassed 98 sites and completed 34 surveys.

An OEC Round Up Grant was received to provide warming kits including winter gear, hand warmers and menstrual product kits, for the homeless.

The Point-in-Time count results for 2023 showed 74 unsheltered and 139 sheltered homeless in Cleveland County on January 26th, the designated Cleveland County PIT count day. The surveys showed that the majority of the homelessness was the direct result of unemployment.

The survey does not include homeless that may be living in non-habitable structures and in most cases receive services from Norman entities. Homelessness is on the rise in Norman and across the nation, but not always included in the numbers due to lack of visibility. The growth of homelessness is a result of more visibility due to smaller encampments in more public areas after the closing of the three biggest encampments in Norman. An additional increase in the numbers is anticipated due to the affordable housing crisis and the expiration of COVID funds assistance.

ITEM 4: WARMING SHELTER UPDATE

Ms. April Heipel, Food and Shelter Director, gave the May 2023 warming shelter update.

97 unique guests stayed at shelter at least one night.
Six people moved into permanent housing, (35 total since November 2022)
Two people started employment.

The Veterans Administration is visiting the shelter regularly to provide veterans with services. Central Oklahoma Community Mental Health connected multiple guest to mental health services. Social Workers are available at A Friends House from Five – Ten p.m. to assist with connecting guests to resources, building housing plans, case plans, assessments, apply for SNAP, Sooner Care, etc.,

ITEM 4: (continued) WARMING SHELTER UPDATE

After conversations with the City Manager regarding lines on the sidewalk, the gathering area has been moved to the east side of the building in order to keep the sidewalk clear for pedestrian traffic.

She asked City Manager Pyle about immediate concerns of shelter location and transition plans. City Manager Pyle said he received a call from a downtown business letting him know that the City of Norman is not a good neighbor and asked if there is a process to not see windows broken constantly at the shelter and asked about an alternative to boarding the windows to limit the replace cost, could they use vinyl art work to cover up the Plywood used instead of glass.

City Manager Pyle asked about the vehicles left in the parking lot, to which April said one has been moved to an auto repair shop and will be taken to the owners permanent housing and the other is now at Food and Shelter, waiting for the owner to obtain housing.

Chairman Schueler asked about fencing, the east area for a place to gather? City Manager Pyle said construction fencing was used on the East and North side of the building. The alley space is no longer used by the Post Office and is visible to the Police Department, making a better congregation place. Need cameras and some signage, encouraging guests to not use the alley to relieve themselves, but come to City Hall to use public restrooms. Councilmember Holman asked if the front door has to be the entrance. City Manager Pyle said due to fire, supervision, etc., this is the most effective entrance for intake.

Holman said glass breaking in buildings around town, not just downtown Norman, has become a major issue. City Manager Pyle said cameras have caught different people and this does not seem to be an organized crime. He said the Police Department followed up on 19 car smash and grab situations, made arrests and found it was a very organized group from Oklahoma City.

Chairman Holman said reports show 35 people at the shelter found permanent housing since the opening in November 2022. He asked if behavioral issues led to the 911 calls to the shelter. Ms. Heipel said the majority of calls were for medical issues. Calls for behavioral issues is rare and there was only one last month.

Chairman Holman asked if there are known sex offenders staying at the shelter. Ms. Heipel said the intake process screens out sex offenders.

An average of 10 people per day are turned away due to no available beds. Housing resources have slowed down, Section Eight vouchers have dried up and is making transitioning into permanent housing difficult, unless they have their own financial resources.

Chairman Holman voiced concern that people who get turned away wander around and are a magnet for trouble and business operators are concerned. He said there are issues with rules not being enforced and police not responding to calls for public urination. City Manager Pyle said the courts do not prosecute people if they are just relieving themselves.

He said he recently watched the Police Department respond to shelter incidents and take someone to jail. The Norman Municipal Court system has a special docket for homeless people and their unique situations. The judges are putting homeless in jail if repeat offender and behavior is not changed.

ITEM 4: (continued) WARMING SHELTER UPDATE

Councilmember Holman asked if the Police Department can report back on things they are taken care of. City Manager Pyle said he will get with the Police Department to determine problems and patrolling the homeless population and known problem areas.

Councilmember Grant said there are many unhoused staying in cars and people staying at the library due to lights, cameras and a feeling of safety. Ms. Heipel said a major barrier for people who want to come inside is having animals.

Councilmember Grant asked if the majority of unhoused people come from being released from healthcare facilities. Ms. Heipel said they had four people with Hospital bags, dropped off, at Food and Shelter two weeks ago, all not from the local area.

Councilmember Holman asked if there is any legal prohibitions, zoning issues where the shelter is located. Assistant City Attorney Beth Muckala said, zoning was not looked at closely in the beginning because it was meant to be temporary. Center City Code includes this building as Civic Government use, open to the public.

Councilmember Holman asked if the shelter is moved to another location, what are the realistic expectations, will there be no gap in services.

City Manager Pyle said they have a letter of intent with the Oklahoma State Department of Mental Health on the Griffin land. An interim solution could be 718 Porter Avenue, a building owned by the City of Norman, good structure and could be 90 days before ready to use, with fencing and cameras installed.

Councilmember Holman said that it is not ideal to move again, as the goal is to find a permanent spot close to Food and Shelter and the Griffin property is ideal. Ms. Heipel said the shelter is needed and they can do it at any location.

City Manager Pyle said the Salvation Army is about to add 70 beds. They require guest to show progress in 14 days and for them to be moving towards a goal and asked if there are guests at the current shelter who refuse services. Ms. Heipel said they are a low barrier shelter and they do not force resources on anyone.

Ms. Heipel said if Food and Shelter is called regarding people sleeping at business, someone will come get them and put them up in motels.

Chairman Schueler said she wants to be sure the Oversight Committee will continue to receive regular shelter updates.

Councilmember Schueler said the shelter situation and the expiring lease can be discussed further at the next conference meeting. The loss of this shelter to the community would bring more problems and a long term solution needs to be found.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 5:45 p.m.