



City of Lawton

Homeless Action Committee

Lawton City Hall
212 SW 9th Street
Lawton, Oklahoma
73501-3944

Minutes

Thursday, June 5, 2025

3:00 PM

Lawton City Hall
3rd Floor Conference Room

Recommending Body

"Official action can only be taken on items listed on the agenda. As a recommending body, the Committee may review and discuss agenda items, propose and enact floor amendments, and then choose to make a recommendation to the City Council or provide direction to the City Manager. The Committee may also defer items for further review, refer matters to the City Attorney, or send items to standing committees, boards, commissions, or authorities for additional study. In some cases, items may be postponed to a later date or removed from the agenda entirely."

Meeting Called to Order

Tim Wilson, Interim City Attorney, said since we don't have the Mayor here as the chair, and we don't have a vice-chair, we need to elect someone to be chair for this meeting.

Motion by Weger, **Second** by Williams, to elect Hampton to chair the meeting. **AYE:** Hampton, Weger, Williams. **NAY:** None. **MOTION PASSED.**

Statement of Compliance with Oklahoma Open Meeting Act, 25 O.S. 301-314

The meeting notice and agenda were posted by the City Clerk's Office as required by State Law.

Roll Call

PRESENT: Allan Hampton, Bob Weger, Sherene L. Williams, Bernita Taylor (Non-Voting), Melissa Simms (Non-Voting)

ABSENT: Stan Booker (Chairman), Terri Lee (Non-Voting)

OTHERS PRESENT: Julia Mantzke, City Council Relations Liaison; John Ratliff, City Manager; Tammy Huffman, City Manager's Office; Tim Wilson, City Attorney's Office; Tammy Branstetter, City Clerk's Office; Gary Brooks, City Housing & Community Development; Larry Parks, City Community Enrichment Department; Charlotte Brown, City Community Enrichment Department; Captain James Churchwell, Lawton Police Department; Detective Donald Pauley, Lawton Police Department; Sergeant Ronald Dimmitt, Lawton Police Department; Tanna Vu, Committee Alternate 3 Member; Kim

McConnell, The Lawton Constitution; Captain Bryan Brinlee, Salvation Army; Sarah Svec & Alicia Scheall, Family Promise of Lawton; Brooke Brown, Grandeur of Grace

Introduction of Guests

Guests of the meeting introduced themselves.

Business Items

1. Review and discuss the proposed 2025 Annual Action Plan and make a recommendation to the City Council.

Gary Brooks, Housing and Community Development, provided background information on this item.

Brooks said our recommendation is that we adopt the plan as is, and then make amendments once it's been accepted by HUD. He said I provided the documents, but the annual action plan project activity list is pretty much the same as last year's - the only thing that is probably a little confusing is the program income in CDBG is \$140,850. Brooks said I put that in there, but there's not really a sure expectation that it's going to arrive this year. He noted the City of Lawton has an NSP account. The NSP program closed in 2016. Brooks said I think the last quarterly reports they did were in 2019. That money was technically program income from that program, and it can be transferred to CDBG upon approval by HUD, and that approval is pending. Brooks said I have no idea whether it will be accepted as allowed to transfer to CDBG, but in the chance that it is, having it in the proposed plan keeps us from having to amend it later.

Brooks said everything else is pretty much laid out as the prior year. He noted that the total grant amount went down by a few thousand dollars. Our CDBG administration is \$147,000 - it's always around \$150,000. All the projects are the same as last year.

Chairman Hampton asked if there is a deadline.

Brooks said the initial deadline is June 24th. If you go beyond June 24th, you have to make a written request to extend our time for submission. The drop-dead deadline every year is August 16th, and if you don't have it submitted by August 16th, then you lose funding. He noted that when you ask for an extension, you generally ask for a month or something. You have to get your timeframes met on posting and all of that, and you can run that concurrent if you amend both the action plan and the consolidated plan. Brooks said you usually have to make changes to both. He said they have to be posted for 30 days, and they would like to have two weeks' notice of posting.

Chairman Hampton asked if there is a penalty for asking for an extension.

Brooks said no - there's no penalty.

Charlotte Brown, Deputy Director of Community Enrichment, said the penalty comes with the August 16th deadline. If you don't have it submitted by then, then you completely lose all of your funding.

Chairman Hampton asked Brooks if they have recommendations put together for the City Council.

Brooks said our recommendation is to adopt the plan as is.

John Ratliff, City Manager, asked Brooks if we included busing in the plan.

Brooks said we did not. I emailed HUD either yesterday or the day before. Basically, there are two problems with the busing. The first problem is that it comes out of the 15% for Public Service Organizations (PSOs). Initially, I think we proposed \$50,000. The total amount allocated for PSOs is \$110,700, so if we allocated \$50,000 to the busing, that would reduce the amount available to other public service organizations by that same amount. The second problem—and this one is more critical—is something I think Jackie McBride may have missed in her response. I believe she read the first part but didn't catch the second part. The issue is that anything we've funded out of our budget prior to making it a Public Service Organization cannot be replaced by CDBG funds. In other words, CDBG funds cannot be used to supplant city funds. So, if the city was already paying for the bus tickets, then we would have to meet and exceed that—we would have to go above and beyond the city's existing funding. The regulations clarify that the city can continue its current level of spending independently of CDBG. However, any CDBG funding would have to be in addition to what the city is already providing.

Ratliff said I don't think there was a line item for the funding—we used manager contingency funds last year. So there wasn't an actual set-aside specifically for busing. I think what we did is different, and that would be my response to that—because we didn't actually have dedicated funds set aside for it.

Brooks said given that, I think we could do it - it's legitimate. The guidance just says to be careful with how you do it—it's pretty simple, but still, we must be cautious.

Ratliff said we would want to bus an individual back to a place where they have a support system—family, a job, or whatever the case may be.

Ratliff asked Brooks if we have a carve-out for administrative costs in the plan, because we're going to want to develop the metrics.

Brooks said within the administration costs—the \$147,000—we've typically allocated around \$20,000 over the last few years for professional services. Some of that covers routine expenses, but it's a small amount—about \$3,000 or so—that goes toward our share of building costs like bug spray and similar items. With regard to the Consolidated Plan, the reason we included that amount again is that there's an Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice that's done every five years. I spoke with—I think it

was Lisa Krieg from Norman—and she mentioned that if we're not expecting any significant changes from our last analysis (and we aren't), then we're not required to conduct a new analysis every five years. Based on that, the option is not to do the analysis again this year, and that money can instead be redirected towards the item we're currently discussing.

Brown said we would have to make amendments to the Consolidated Plan and the Annual Action Plan for that agreement. So that's what we recommend. We're recommending approval of the existing plan now, and then we'll come back with the amendments once HUD has finalized this agreement—so that we don't miss the deadline.

Ratliff said that makes sense.

Brooks said the funds we currently have include rollover amounts from prior years. Based on what we have from those previous years, we believe there's enough to cover between \$50,000 and \$60,000.

Ratliff asked what the deadline is.

Brown said the first deadline is June 24th.

Chairman Hampton asked if the hard deadline is August 16th.

Brown said yes.

Brooks said the council meetings are on the 10th and the 24th. Initially, I think I had posted for June 10th—after I adjusted for the April 22nd meeting that was canceled. I chose the 10th because waiting until the 24th seemed precarious.

Ratliff said I recommend that the committee move to make a recommendation to the council to approve the plan as it is.

Motion by Williams, **Second** by Weger, to recommend to the City Council approval of the 2025 Annual Action Plan as presented. **AYE:** Williams, Hampton, Weger. **NAY:** None. **MOTION PASSED.**

2. Receive a report from Bernita Taylor regarding ongoing efforts taken by the Lawton Housing Task Force to mitigate homelessness within the community.
- **STRICKEN**

Chairman Hampton said this item has been stricken, and we will consider it at a future meeting.

No action was taken on this item.

3. Receive an update from staff regarding a proposed amendment to the city's panhandling ordinance.

Tim Wilson, Interim City Attorney, provided background information on this item. He said this is still in legal. We had the Police Academy this week, so that slowed us down. Also, the Mayor has asked for some changes to be made to the trust indenture for the Lawton Unhoused Trust Authority and the associated resolution for the indenture, so that's been a priority getting that on for next week's council meeting.

Chairman Hampton said there were some items like no panhandling zones and no blocking of sidewalks.

Ratliff said that's currently in the ordinance—you can't impede someone or force them to go around you on a sidewalk. So that can be enforced now - there's no limitation. If someone is panhandling on a sidewalk, and it causes someone to have to take evasive action, then that would be a violation of our ordinance.

Wilson said it's a public safety issue. With regard to the no-panhandling zones, it's my understanding from some research we've done that Oklahoma City may have something like that, so we're going to need to look and see what we can put in those and where we can identify those.

Chairman Hampton asked if setbacks from the curb will be included.

Wilson said we will look at that.

Ratliff said I think Tim's going to look at that, but the existing ordinance says you can't go into the street or interfere with traffic. So if you're doing that now, that would violate the existing ordinance, even without the buffer zones.

Wilson said that is our current code—like John is saying—where we're talking about people getting onto the streets - it's a public safety issue. The courts tend to affirm the panhandling ordinances when they address issues like public safety. Panhandling is considered a form of speech, so any regulations have to be content neutral.

Ratliff noted that there have been a lot of complaints about panhandling in particular. From my understanding, people will stop and give money, and then the panhandler will actually step into the street to collect it. That violates existing code. So if that behavior is observed, that's something that can be immediately actioned.

Sergeant Dimmitt, Lawton Police Department, said we'd have to have some type of physical evidence—either a call from someone, or an officer driving by and witnessing it, or something else along those lines. If someone has a video, they could also go and file a complaint at City Court.

Wilson noted that another option would be to station a police officer in that area or in the

parking lot. And sure enough, someone would probably walk out there and do it in their presence.

Sergeant Dimmitt said I've gotten with the schools, and school officials say they've had a major increase in homelessness and panhandlers around the schools, so that would also be a reason for us to be looking at it for safety purposes.

Ratliff said that's a good point. I think one thing we've got to keep in mind is that we have a tendency to group them together, but homeless and panhandlers are not synonymous. I've seen some folks by the Walmart near my house who didn't look homeless to me—they were wearing nice clothes and nice shoes. So, not all panhandlers are homeless. I think we've got to guard against making that assumption, because it's not always true. Some people have a home, but they're still out begging.

No action was taken on this item.

4. Receive a report from Lawton Police Department on Sex Offender Registrations, to include individuals listed as homeless.

Detective Donald Pauley, Lawton Police Department, provided background information on this item. Detective Pauley said currently, there are 161 sex offenders being tracked in the City of Lawton. Of those 161, 24 are currently locked up. In the last month, I completed seven warrants, and those individuals are not included in the 24 already incarcerated. So, there are potentially seven more who will be going to jail within the next few weeks, since their warrants have come back. Additionally, 28 of the 161 offenders are listed as homeless on their current registry.

Detective Pauley said from May 6th through May 9th, we conducted a compliance check in partnership with the United States Marshals Task Force. By teaming up with them, we were able to act as a force multiplier—meaning we had more personnel involved than usual. We had 19 officers from the Lawton Police Department and another 18 from the U.S. Marshals Task Force. Together, we carried out compliance checks across the board for offenders within the City of Lawton. We were able to check in with about 130 out of the 161 individuals. As a result of that operation, we made nine on-site probable cause (PC) arrests, and identified 14 others that required immediate follow-up investigation. Those 14 may result in either warrants or additional on-site arrests, depending on whether we make contact with those individuals before the next time we coordinate a round of warrants. That being said, I also have a sheet here that lists all offenders currently registered as homeless, and notes whether they are currently locked up due to recent warrants or PC arrests.

Ratliff asked how long individuals are kept in our custody if they're arrested for failure to comply with the registration laws.

Detective Pauley said the problem I run into with this is that each person's situation depends on whether they post bond and their individual history. Right now, because Comanche County Jail is holding so many individuals, I have several that have been

ordered out, but because of history, I have some that have gotten larger bonds. For example, I had one individual—Damien—who had a failure to register last year. He was released from the Department of Corrections on January 9th. At the beginning of February, I wrote a new warrant because he failed to register again. In March, he was picked up on that warrant and placed back in county jail. Due to his history and other factors, he was given a \$75,000 bond, and he's homeless. About four weeks later he posted bond and came in to register. However, he failed to check in for 16 days in a row. For homeless individuals on the sex offender registry, they are required to check in every seven days. So I issued a new warrant, and he was arrested and is now back in jail. If you look at the timeline, he has been out of jail three separate times, and during those periods, he re-offended three separate times. Detective Pauley noted that this type of situation is common.

Detective Pauley said many of them claim to be homeless, but the problem is they don't have a designated place—like a “green zone”—where they are allowed to stay. So, they register as homeless, but then try to live somewhere else where we can't locate them. If we catch them, they get a new case. If not, they continue on until we do or until they move somewhere else or something else happens.

Williams asked if sex offenders are supposed to be on Facebook.

Detective Pauley said it depends on their charge. If they have an internet-related charge, such as possession of child pornography, they are not allowed to have internet access. However, once they have fully completed their sentence and are no longer on probation or any other restrictions, those internet restrictions fall off. The sex offender registry itself does not control whether they have internet access or what they do online. What we do require is that they provide their Facebook or other social media accounts, including their actual usernames, as well as their email addresses. So, I have access to some of that information. If we receive any relevant information, we can investigate further, issue warrants if necessary, and have a way to monitor what they may be doing on social media.

Taylor said she would like the committee to allow Brooke from Grandeur of Grace to speak about what she does, if she would like to.

Chairman Hampton asked if this is regarding sex offenders.

Brooke Brown, Grandeur of Grace, said yes, we do serve registered sex offenders. We assist registered individuals with housing because we recognize there are many barriers to finding housing. These barriers often force them to register as homeless, which can lead to non-compliance. So, we do provide assistance, despite the laws making it very difficult. If I know who is registering as homeless, and I'm interacting with those who are actually unsheltered on the streets, there's a better chance I can provide help—sometimes by working directly with the Lawton Police Department to assist them. We do offer these services because there are very few, if any, other organizations that say they will serve this population.

Taylor asked if this housing is outside the city limits.

Brown said we mostly house individuals outside of city limits because it's very difficult to find housing within the 2,000-foot restriction zone. As a result, the majority end up in rural areas, which makes employment and transportation more challenging. We do take that into consideration. Of those we have served, several have shown compliance, which is encouraging. The stigma around this issue is real, but I'm glad to see many are making positive changes. Most want to better themselves—they aren't defined by their past mistakes. So, we do our best to eliminate any barriers we can.

Sergeant Dimmitt asked Brown if there are guidelines regarding those they cannot help.

Brown said that financially, because Grandeur of Grace serves veterans and veteran dependents, we cannot assist anyone who does not meet those guidelines. Usually, though, we can find a relation—grandchildren are included as well. When someone outside those guidelines comes to us, we work with other organizations. Typically, when advocating for someone, we can find resources to help them, which sometimes includes transporting them to a location where they have family, friends, or other support.

Chairman Hampton asked Brown how many individuals they are assisting now.

Brown said at last count, we had 10 that we were actively assisting.

Chairman Hampton said we're trying to focus on the Kid's First Initiative here. He asked Detective Pauley if in his work he finds many individuals violating the rules in or near areas where kids are.

Detective Pauley said yes, and that's the biggest problem we run into. If you look at how the registry is worded regarding living arrangements—just focusing on that for now—every sex offender has to live at least 2,000 feet away from any school, park, or daycare. When you think about how the city is laid out, it's intentionally divided so that each neighborhood has a park or school. Many places also have in-home daycares as well as commercial daycares. For daycares, that includes every home daycare that has a DHS license. If the home daycare has more than four children in the residence, it counts as a daycare for this purpose. About every other month, I get an updated listing from DHS of every licensed daycare in the state. I have to separate those out and log them, then add them to the map I maintain. I have a partial GIS map that's been created, but it needs to be reworked. That map is currently on the website, so it at least gives us an idea.

Detective Pauley said every offender who comes to the office knows they have to get their address authorized by me, and I place it on my map. I update the map at least every two months. When you put all the schools, parks, and daycares on the map, it cuts out about 85% of the city as places they can live. There has been some movement

on how parks are counted. For example, the DA wants me to only include parks that have actual children's play centers or playgrounds. There is a big field off Sheridan Road and Lincoln Avenue that's listed as a park on every map, but since it's just open land without playground equipment or facilities, I don't count it as a park when mapping. Actual parks with playgrounds, basketball courts, tennis courts, and other amenities are counted, so the 2,000-foot rule applies to those. Because schools or daycares are also involved, sometimes the buffer zones overlap, making it effectively 4,000 feet from certain places on the map—this completely cuts off entire neighborhoods. For example, in the Park Lane neighborhood, when the area was sold, the back park that was not part of the school was not used as a park, so it opened up the whole neighborhood for offenders to live in. However, most offenders I deal with cannot afford to live there.

Detective Pauley said another important point is about offenders living with children. Whether or not they can live with children depends on their charges and specific restrictions in the law. If an offender is prohibited from living with children, the law says they can only live with their biological or legal stepchildren—but stepchildren must be legal, meaning through marriage, not common law. Also, if the child was a victim, they cannot live with them. So, for example, if a man wants to live with his girlfriend and they've been together for a while, but her children aren't his biological or stepchildren, then he is prohibited from living there. This creates more problems with trying to find housing for offenders. Because of all these restrictions, some offenders end up registering as homeless, moving from couch to couch, or staying at a girlfriend's house until they get caught or their circumstances change.

Detective Pauley said I do know quite a few offenders that are homeless and are living on the streets, and that number fluctuates. We keep track through contacts and registrations. Some of them show up clean and well-dressed, which indicates they have a place to stay when they come in. When offenders register as homeless, my rule is that they cannot spend more than three hours at any one residence. If they want to stay at their aunt's, mom's, grandma's, or girlfriend's house, that is allowed—but only for a limited time. You can take a hot shower, get a hot meal, interact with family—whatever it may be—but after three hours, you need to leave. If I find out you've been at a residence for more than three hours, I have to assume that you're living there, unless it's clearly some type of special event, like a graduation party, a birthday - obviously that changes some parameters. But again, everything is taken into context each time we make contact. All of those factors come into play when we try to determine who is living where.

Detective Pauley said another important factor when children are involved is distance from a park. There are safety zone restrictions for how close they can be to a park, particularly when it comes to loitering. That also comes into play when evaluating compliance.

Chairman Hampton asked if there are things that we can do to help to keep our neighborhoods safe, considering the number of sex offenders we're dealing with.

Detective Pauley said I guess the biggest thing is—we're entering a new era, a new area within that program. So even just talking about it now holds greater significance, because we're actively looking at different things we can do. Right now, the way things function—or at least before I came to this meeting—is that it mostly falls on police officers. If we happen to make contact with someone and then find out they're a registered offender, then we can act on that. But if we don't make contact, they could be walking around and nobody would know. There's nothing physically different between me and a sex offender just walking down the street, so you can't arbitrarily profile someone and assume anything. So when we do make contact with someone, for whatever reason, and then find out they're an offender, that's when we can start looking into it further. But without that contact, there's nothing we can do.

Detective Pauley said that's why, if we start looking into how we house them, where we place them, and what resources we provide, that goes a long way. Being proactive about housing helps create a better situation. If they truly are trying to stay out of trouble and walk the right path—as many of them are—then helping them find a stable place to live supports that effort. The problem is, they come here trying to do the right thing, but I have to tell them they can't live where they want to. I have to tell them they can't live with their mom. I have to tell them the resources they hoped to rely on won't help them. So what do they do? We end up creating a vacuum. Just by talking about these challenges and looking for new options—that's already a step in the right direction.

Chairman Hampton asked if there is a way for citizens to access some of this information. He asked if some of this information is private.

Detective Pauley said most of the registry isn't private—it's public information. So, what we've done over the years, even before I took over, is the city has basically deferred that responsibility to the state. For example, on our city website, we have a QR code or a link that takes you directly to the state's registry site. The state maintains all the offender information anyway. There's also a link (or there used to be) to the national registry site. So, if you search for an individual, and they're on any state registry, they'll also show up in the national registry—and it will show where they live.

Chairman Hampton raised concerns about the accuracy of these lists. He noted that it's important for the citizens to have updated information.

Detective Pauley said for the state, if you go to the Oklahoma Sex Offender Registry (OSOR), which is managed by the Department of Corrections, that's where all of Oklahoma's sex offenders are housed. If you visit the site as a member of the public, you can view all that information. For example, if you search "Lawton," it will give you a list—right now, my list shows around 246 people. As you go down that list, you can see every sex offender who has been associated with Lawton. It will indicate whether they've moved out of state, completed their registration time, are in transit, delinquent, and so on—all of that is listed on the far-right portion of the page. You can also see photos. If there's a current photo available, it will be shown. Some individuals don't have photos, but that's usually because they were never incarcerated—like if they pled out in

court and got a suspended sentence, serving their time only in county jail—so their photo was never uploaded to the system.

Detective Pauley said when they come in to register with me, the first thing I do is get all their registration information and take photos. I send those to the state. So, over time, everyone should have a photo in the system, though there are still some gaps due to transfers or people arriving from out of state. The bottom line is that communication plays a huge role. For example, let's say someone is being released from Dick Conner Correctional Center in Hominy, Oklahoma. He tells his case manager, "I'm going to Lawton." That information goes to the Oklahoma Sex Offender Registry, and he shows up on Lawton's registry. But if, after being released, he decides to go to Tulsa instead of coming here, and he never registers in Lawton, we have nothing on him—he's just listed on our registry. And if he never registers again, there's nothing we can do until we locate him. I can't take that case to the DA's office unless we can show that the crime—failure to register—is happening in Comanche County. If he left Hominy and actually registered in Tulsa, he's still in compliance. But if he didn't register anywhere, then he's non-compliant.

Tammy Huffman, City Manager's Office, asked how this many people are being monitored, specifically when it comes to the regulation of not being allowed to stay at one residence for more than a few hours.

Detective Pauley said they're not - it's by chance. I do compliance checks—that's how that works. I'll get a phone call, an email, or sometimes a tip through Crime Stoppers or another source that says an individual is living somewhere. Then I make arrangements within my schedule to try to monitor that situation, or I'll get someone from one of the task forces or other departments to help monitor and observe if the person is coming or going from that residence. That's how the monitoring works. It's difficult to maintain that kind of surveillance over a long period of time, but in the short term, technically, if someone just goes over to a house today, and there's nothing that says they're living there—I can't just arbitrarily monitor that. One other caveat when it comes to monitoring is this: a lot of individuals who are on probation or supervised parole through the Department of Corrections (DOC) and claim homelessness will have an ankle monitor. That monitor is provided through a DOC program. However, that only applies while they are under DOC supervision. Once their year or two of supervision is complete, there's no more ankle monitor tracking.

Vu said I think at the last meeting there was a question or a statement made about homeless individuals who are also sex offenders—like the 28 that were mentioned. She asked if these individuals are included on the map.

Detective Pauley discussed the paperwork that homeless offenders are required to complete when they check in with him. He said this is the form they fill out when they come to the Lawton Police Department. One of the lines on the form asks, "Where will you be for the next week?" and "What areas do you normally travel?" This form is filled out at the front desk. When I receive it, I review their responses. Some of them, for

example, might say, "I'll be at work." So, if this guy says he works at a certain place, that's what he lists as where he'll be. Now, he's obviously not going to be there the entire time, but that's all he wrote on the form. So the next time I see him, we'll have a conversation about that part. Each person fills out this form themselves—that's their check-in. Homeless offenders are required to come into the police department and check in every seven days. I think there are about 12 of them here that checked in on Monday and Tuesday. Out of those who are required to check in weekly, they will check in sometime between Monday and Friday of this week. I gather all this paperwork, and then next week I go through and mark off everyone who checked in like they were supposed to. For those who didn't, I mark them as "delinquent." By the end of that week, if they still haven't checked in, they'll either have a warrant issued or be contacted.

Simms asked if sex offenders fall off the list of sex offenders registered as homeless if they are staying in a shelter.

Detective Pauley said unfortunately, there's not a single shelter they can technically go to—because they have to abide by the residential laws, and there's no shelter in the City of Lawton that is at least 2,000 feet away from a school, park, or daycare.

No action was taken on this item.

Adjournment

Motion by Williams, **Second** by Weger, to adjourn the June 5, 2025, meeting. **AYE:** Williams, Hampton, Weger. **NAY:** None. **MOTION PASSED.**

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 3:50 PM.