



**MINUTES
HOMELESS ACTION COMMITTEE
SPECIAL MEETING
THURSDAY JUNE 27, 2024- 3:00PM
Lawton City Hall
3rd Floor Conference Room
212 SW 9th Street
Lawton, Oklahoma 73501**

Chairman Harris called the meeting to order at 3:00 PM. in the 3rd floor conference room of City Hall.

STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE WITH OKLAHOMA OPEN MEETING ACT, 25 O.S. 301-314

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

ROLL CALL:

PRESENT: Kelly Harris, Allan Hampton, Mary Ann Hankins, Sherene L. Williams, Bernita Taylor, Melissa Simms

ABSENT: Terri Lee

OTHERS PRESENT: John Ratliff, City Manager; Tammy Huffman, City Manager's Office; Cynthia Williams, Public Works; John Andrew, City Attorney; Garrett Lam, City Attorney's Office; Tammy Branstetter, City Clerk's Office; Christine James, Planning Director; Ronald Dimmitt, Police Department; Tanna Vu, Alternate 3; Mike Ray, Southwest Ledger

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

All Committee members and City of Lawton staff members who were present at the meeting introduced themselves.

BUSINESS ITEMS

- 1. Receive a report regarding ongoing efforts taken by the Lawton Housing Task Force to mitigate homelessness within the community.**

2.

Taylor gave a report regarding ongoing efforts taken by the Lawton Housing Task Force to mitigate homelessness within the community. A copy of the report may be obtained from the City Clerk's Office upon request.

Taylor said this group meets every 4th Thursday from 1:30PM – 3:00PM in the banquet room of City Hall. The Task Force has various committees that work on different areas such as prevention, medical, mental health and sustainability.

Taylor said when the Outreach Team goes out, they input information into the GIS System. The GIS System then generates a report. According to the most recent report, the Outreach Team made contact with 41 people. She said most of these people were encountered in Ward 5.

Taylor noted that the Outreach Team consists of volunteers, and it's mandatory they receive training before going out.

Taylor said the Prevention Team tracks the number of people who have been evicted. This team is working to develop a plan to reach people and offer them resources before *they* are evicted.

Taylor said the City Council voted in support of creating the Lawton Housing Resource Center. This facility will be equipped with showers and laundry facilities. It will also house services to help people when dealing with organizations such as the VA, social security and various mental health facilities.

Taylor said the shelter side of the Resource Center will include ten shelters for families. They will have their own laundry room. The location of the Resource Center will be at the former Roosevelt School at 15th Street and I Avenue. Taylor said the Resource Center will help people who are *ready* to come off the streets.

Chairman Harris asked if tiny homes will eventually be built on the same property as the Resource Center.

Taylor said yes – these tiny homes will serve as transitional housing for people coming off the streets or aging out of the system.

Taylor said if a person has addiction problems, they will first try to get them help with that issue.

Taylor said we also need to be working with those who will soon be released from incarceration.

Williams said sometimes people have enough money, they just don't know how to manage their money well. She asked Taylor if they've encountered people like this.

Taylor said this is why we need to catch people *before* they get evicted. She said some people are just staying in houses long enough to get evicted. Taylor said they're trying to figure out ways to get in contact with these people without breaking confidentiality.

Ronald Dimmit, Lawton Police Department, said LPD made contact with 1,200 people last year who claimed to be homeless.

Taylor noted that Dimmit is on the Outreach Team. Taylor said they are working to develop a strategy for what to do with these people when they come in contact with them.

Chairman Harris asked Taylor what the City of Lawton can do to help to without duplicating the services already being offered by the Lawton Housing Task Force.

Taylor said we don't just look at people who are experiencing homelessness. She said we talk to residents and business owners about the homelessness issue. Taylor said the City of Lawton will need to draft ordinances to help regulate issues facing the community due to homelessness (such as issues with shopping carts and unlawful camping).

Taylor emphasized the fact that addiction and mental health both play a role in the homelessness issue.

Hampton said there have been issues with criminal activities going on at businesses. He said some businesses are letting people steal from their store. He said he's been talking with the City Manager about developing a strategy for dealing with this.

Dimmit noted that many businesses have to follow corporate guidelines when it comes to prosecuting those who are stealing. He said that is part of the issue.

No action was taken on this item.

3. Discuss the status of the program to install signage regarding panhandling and take action as deemed necessary.

Christine James, Planning Director, gave background information on this item. In February of this year, staff was tasked with revamping the existing panhandling ordinance. The ordinance was drafted and sent to the legal department for review, and it's currently still in legal.

James said on Tuesday, the City Council directed staff to produce the signs. She said they have a total of eight signs to be installed at three locations. She said other potential locations have also been identified. James said right now, staff has 12 sign blades to use for sign installation. She said it would take about 90 days to have additional sign blades ordered and delivered.

Williams said she's seen homeless people at 38th and Lee Boulevard.

Dimmit said if they are on private property the business would have to turn in a trespassing complaint.

James said the eight signs that are currently in production will be installed at the following three locations: NW Fort Sill Boulevard / NW Cache Road, NW Sheridan / NW Cache Road and NW Sheridan / Gore Boulevard. She said staff will have these signs installed within two weeks.

Ratliff said this Committee will make a recommendation to the City Council regarding potential locations to install signs.

Williams said she would like to see a sign installed at 14th and Lee Boulevard.

James said this is not an arterial roadway – staff was trying to focus on major roadways. She suggested the sign be placed at SW 11th Street and Lee Boulevard. She said signs could also be placed at SW 38th and Lee Boulevard.

Chairman Harris asked if the signs will be placed on existing poles.

James said most of them will be. She said the goal of the sign is to make sure that the roadways are clear of pedestrians. This is why are limiting the locations to arterial intersections with medians.

Chairman Harris asked John Andrew, City Attorney, why we can't outlaw panhandling.

Andrew said the United States Supreme Court said there is an inherent 1st amendment right to free speech in the act of panhandling. Andrew said when drafting the ordinance, he will highlight that panhandling is causing a public safety issue. He said the ordinance will also be content neutral. He said different cities try different things, but you cannot outright outlaw panhandling.

Garrett Lam, City Attorney's Office, said part of the issue that Oklahoma City faced when they lost at the 10th circuit was that they argued this public safety issue, and they had no evidence to backup their arguments. Lam said the 10th circuit said you can panhandle in medians.

Hampton said he thinks the signs are a wonderful idea.

Andrew said other municipalities have incorporated these types of signs. He said there's nothing constitutional about the signs, and they seem to work in some cities.

Chairman Harris asked how much the signs cost.

Cynthia Williams said the cost to make the sign is \$38, to put it up is another \$30, and it's another \$75 if a pole must be installed. She said right now, this is coming out of the Street Department's budget.

Williams suggested there be a sign installed at the intersection of NW 82nd Street and Cache Road.

Ratliff thinks the Committee needs to agenda an item in future to discuss specifically where we wants signs. This way, the City of Lawton can plan accordingly.

Hankins said she thinks the city should proceed with the installation of the eight signs that are currently in production and receive feedback from the public before proceeding to order additional signs.

Williams said she is already getting feedback from citizens regarding issues with panhandling at the locations she mentioned.

Cynthia Williams said staff will have the means to install four additional signs.

Ratliff said the City Council will have to approve the Committee's recommendation regarding the locations to install the four additional signs.

Motion by Hampton, Second by Williams, to proceed with the installation of the eight approved signs that are currently in production and receive feedback from the public before proceeding to order additional signs. **AYE:** Taylor, Hampton, Hankins, Harris, Simms, Williams. **NAY:** None. ***MOTION PASSED.***

Motion by Williams, Second by Hampton, to recommend to the City Council installation of four panhandling signs at the following locations: SW 38th Street / Lee Boulevard / SW 11th Street and SW Lee Boulevard. **AYE:** Taylor, Hampton, Hankins, Harris, Simms, Williams. **NAY:** None. ***MOTION PASSED.***

4. Discuss ways to address issues with shopping carts within the community and take action as deemed necessary.

Chairman Harris said he has video and photographic evidence on his phone where there are 18 shopping carts in a neighborhood, in the alleyway or in people's backyards. He said a lot of homeless people use shopping carts to collect their items. The carts are all over town. Chairman Harris asked Lam to research ways to regulate this issue.

Lam said he has reviewed an ordinance drafted by the City of Torrance, CA. He said they adopted a system to retrieve abandon shopping carts. The ordinance does not deal with shopping carts that

are in use by a person or with carts being stored on private property. He said California has state law to back them with requiring cart identification. He said Oklahoma doesn't have this sort of law.

Lam said the ordinance written by the City of Torrance creates a lot of city interaction. They require retailers have shopping cart containment plans, and they pay a fee to have the plans approved. Lam said he thinks the City of Lawton should try coming up with a condensed version of the ordinance drafted by the City of Torrance.

Lam noted that picking up shopping carts is something that could be implemented through Neighborhood Services. He also thinks it's important that the shopping carts be labeled so we know where they belong to.

Andrew said he found that Patterson, New Jersey deems all shopping carts a nuisance. They claim that the accumulation of shopping carts creates conditions that reduce property values and promote blight. Andrew said he thinks this is an effective approach to take.

Chairman Harris said some businesses also have locking systems that do not allow their shopping carts to leave their stores.

Ratliff said the city could potentially zone the shopping carts out of certain areas, declaring them a nuisance in certain areas. This would need to be reviewed by the Planning Commission. He said he likes the idea of a shopping cart containment plan as well.

Motion by Hampton, **Second** by Harris, to direct the legal department to draft a ordinance for review and consideration at a future meeting. **AYE:** Taylor, Hampton, Hankins, Harris, Simms, Williams. **NAY:** None. ***MOTION PASSED.***

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Hankins, **Second** by Hampton, to adjourn the June 27, 2024 meeting. **AYE:** Taylor, Hampton, Hankins, Harris, Simms, Williams. **NAY:** None. ***MOTION PASSED.***

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 4:25 PM.