



**MINUTES
HOMELESS ACTION COMMITTEE
SPECIAL MEETING
TUESDAY, OCTOBER 1st, 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, Terri Lee

ABSENT: Melissa Simms, Bernita Taylor

OTHERS PRESENT: John Ratliff, City Manager; Tammy Huffman, City Manager's Office; Cynthia Williams, City Manager's Office; Garrett Lam, City Attorney's Office; Tammy Branstetter, City Clerk's Office; Caitlin Gatlin, Communications and Marketing; Anthony Garibay & Heath Want, City Fire Marshall's Office; Christine James, Planning Director; Sergeant Ronald Dimmitt, Police Department; Cliff Haggemiller, Public Works Deputy Director; Tanna Vu, Alternate 3; Kim McConnell, Lawton Constitution; John Dunaway, Member of the Community; Captain Bryan Brinlee, Salvation Army

*left at 4:08 P.M.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

John Ratliff, City Manager, introduced Kim McConnell, Lawton Constitution.

John Dunaway, member of the Community, introduced himself.

Captain Bryan Brinlee, Salvation Army, introduced himself.

BUSINESS ITEMS

1. Consider approving the minutes of the June 27 and September 4, 2024, meetings.

A copy of the minutes from the June 27 and September 4, 2024, meetings may be obtained from the City Clerk's Office upon request.

Motion by Hampton, **Second** by Hankins, to approve the minutes of the June 27 and September 4, 2024, meetings. **AYE:** Hampton, Lee, Harris, Hankins, Williams. **NAY:** None. **MOTION PASSED.**

2. Review and discuss a funding request received by the City of Lawton from the Salvation Army in the amount \$2,147,000 for renovations to the existing Salvation Army facilities as well as the addition of a new low barrier shelter, discuss potential funding sources for this project and take action as deemed necessary.

Captain Bryan Brinlee, Salvation Army, provided background information on this item. A copy of the funding request received by the City of Lawton from the Salvation Army may be obtained from the City Clerk's Office upon request.

Brinlee discussed "community gaps" and defined them as identified gaps that the Salvation Army has recognized within the community. He said the Salvation Army has collaborated with its headquarters to develop a battle plan for the next three years.

Brinlee said the Salvation Army recognized three gaps in the following areas – chronic homelessness, strategic collaboration, and community engagement with residents and businesses. Brinlee said chronic homelessness has been an issue in Lawton for some time, and the Salvation Army has decided to try and tackle this.

John Ratliff, City Manager, asked Brinlee to explain what a low barrier shelter is.

Brinlee said a low barrier shelter is a facility that accepts people that are on drugs and/or have mental disorders – they don't turn anyone away.

Brinlee said for person to be accepted at a high barrier shelter, they must be somewhat free of drugs and must pass a background check. He said the Salvation Army used to offer a high barrier shelter. The annual budget used to operate the shelter had 28 beds and cost \$240,000. Brinlee said to operate a low barrier shelter costs twice this amount because the high amount of required training involved. Brinlee said the Salvation Army is wanting to open a low barrier shelter in order to tackle chronic homelessness.

Brinlee said in order for them to achieve the work that needs to be done with chronic homelessness, they must strategically collaborate with the community and the City of Lawton. He said it takes outside community engagement to get people to want to come to low barrier shelters.

Brinlee said many of the chronic homeless are not ready to enter a high barrier shelter, so low barrier is crucial to fighting chronic homelessness.

Brinlee discussed the proposed low barrier shelter to be placed where the Thrift Store is currently located. He said it would house 50 rooms.

Brinlee discussed the needed renovations at the current Salvation Army Center. He said these renovations must be done to open the facility back up. He noted that the sewer lines are dilapidated. Brinlee said what he wants to do is make this a low barrier shelter. He noted that Lawton does not currently have a low barrier shelter.

Brinlee said the staff that it takes to run a low barrier shelter compared to a high barrier shelter is three times the amount – they're a highly trained staff.

Brinlee said the Salvation Army will end up running a low barrier warming center that they do every year. He said work must be done to the sewer lines underneath the building to get the building back to functioning condition to house the warming center. The cost of these repairs are \$72,000. He noted that statistics could be provided to the City of Lawton on low barrier shelters and the achievements the Salvation Army makes while running the warming center in the wintertime.

Brinlee said if they were to convert their current shelter to a low barrier shelter, the needed remodel of the second floor would cost \$635,000. He said the operational costs for running a low barrier shelter would be \$460,000 annually, regardless of the number of beds.

Brinlee said the Salvation Army has been looking for funding and will continue to look for funding over the next three years so they can achieve their goal of opening a low barrier shelter.

With regards to the approximately \$2.1 million request the Salvation Army is asking of the city, Ratliff asked Brinlee if the Salvation Army will be contributing any money.

Brinlee said we're not asking for \$2.1 million.

Ratliff asked how much funding the Salvation Army is asking for.

Brinlee said the ask is for \$72,000 for the needed repairs to get the warming center up and running. However, if the City of Lawton wants to help and be involved in starting up a 50-bed low barrier shelter, the cost would be \$980,000. Brinlee said he would have to have the first year's operational costs set aside to be able to transition and open up the low barrier shelter.

Sergeant Ronald Dimmitt, Police Department, asked Brinlee what they do with registered sex offenders or other high-risk offenders.

Brinlee said unfortunately because of where the shelter is in relation to the Boys and Girls Club, sex offenders would not be eligible to come into a low barrier shelter.

Dimmitt asked if the warming shelter will be handicapped accessible.

Brinlee said yes.

Hampton asked Brinlee if the Salvation Army has other low barrier shelters in other cities that are operational right now.

Brinlee said yes, we do.

Hampton asked if other cities are contributing to the Salvation Army.

Brinlee said yes. He said we qualify for all kinds of grants, and we also write our own grants. Brinlee said we have an entire financial team out of Oklahoma City that goes after endowments and other funding sources. Brinlee said their budget zeros out every year. They also have internal audits as well as outside audits that are done every year. He said they have a zeroed-out budget right now.

Hampton asked if there is history of a financial relationship between the City of Lawton and the Salvation Army.

Brinlee said he doesn't know if there's been a prior history with any type of funding from the City of Lawton to the Salvation Army, but he's sure they've probably worked together.

Chairman Harris said we have a Housing Task Force that already has a very interactive software that all the agencies that they work with are already using to engage people with. He asked Brinlee if they'd be interested in being a part of this.

Brinlee said we've talked to that group and done an assessment, but there are only two agencies in town using the software where case managing is concerned. He noted that there must be an organization going around to make sure that everyone is using the software. Brinlee said we can try using the software, but the software package is not set up for a shelter or food pantries.

Chairman Harris said that as a Council, public safety is number one. He said he feels an obligation to the citizens that don't want to be engaged by people who are panhandling. He asked Brinlee for suggestions on how to merge the two goals.

Brinlee said we have to create outside engagement. He noted that people hate treatment at first. He said it's important to engage people where they're at and take them to a central place where they can get help. However, if we'll be bringing people to a certain area, we have to get ready for it. The second phase is to control sustainability and maintain positive media involvement. This will show citizens and businesses that we care about their concerns.

Hampton said we have ongoing initiatives that we've been working on – this is not a new discussion. He asked Brinlee if he has applied for CDBG funding.

Brinlee said we have not.

Hampton said he thinks requesting CDBG funding would be a logical place for Brinlee to start. He said the city has already spent quite a bit of money committing to the initiatives they've started to combat homelessness.

Ratliff said one way to proceed is the Committee could choose to recommend that Captain Brinlee present to Council and make a formal request for \$72,000. The Committee could also recommend that Brinlee pursue CDBG funding first.

Dimmitt asked if there are any prerequisites for LPD bringing individuals who are intoxicated to the warming shelter.

Brinlee said no, they should be good to go – there are needle boxes installed on the walls, and they can choose to store any weapons they may have in a box during the take in process.

Ratliff said he thinks Captain Brinlee's concern is that we're about to get into the colder season, and he'll need some action to be able to standup the warming facility.

Brinlee said that's correct.

Motion by Williams, Second by Hampton, to recommend that Captain Brinlee present to Council and make a formal request for the \$72,000 for needed repairs at the warming shelter and to recommend that he apply for a CDBG grant for additional funding. **AYE:** Hampton, Lee, Harris, Hankins, Williams. **NAY:** None. **MOTION PASSED.**

3. Discuss excluding various City of Lawton parks from a proposed ordinance to criminalize unauthorized camping in non-designated areas and take action as deemed necessary.

Ratliff provided background information on this item. He said this agenda item is what we talked about at the last Council meeting, which was allowing Olson Park to be an exception to the anticamping ordinance within city limits. If Council decides to put this in place, we would have a place for the police to tell homeless people that they can go to.

Dimmit noted that we have 30 registered sex offenders that are homeless. He said it would be a felony for sex offenders to be taken to a park.

Ratliff asked what we do if we have a homeless person who is a registered sex offender that is found sleeping near a school. He asked if we arrest them and charge them with a felony.

Dimmit said if we know at that point that they're a registered sex offender then yes.

Dimmit said as of now, we have no probable cause to stop someone that's asleep on the sidewalk unless there's a crime or somebody calls in a trespassing complaint.

Ratliff said if the anticamping ordinance moves forward, police will then have probable cause to stop them.

Dimmit said that's correct. He said the ordinance will allow police to do more to regulate and see who all is in our city. He said it will also help police find out if we have unregistered sex offenders in the area. However, Dimmit emphasized that police will not be able to take everyone to the park.

Ratliff said as police encounter these people, he thinks we should tell them what Dimmit suggested, which is that if they're a registered sex offender, they're going to have to figure something out, but they can't stay where they are. If they aren't a registered sex offender, they can go to Olson Park.

Ratliff said the reason we chose Olson Park was that it's less than an acre – you can only put so many people there.

Christine James, Planning Director, said if the ordinance moves forward, she thinks the “park” designation may need to be removed from Olson Park. She said the public thinks a park is somewhere they can send their kids to.

Ratliff said the initial discussion was to allow the homeless to stay at the park from 11:00PM – 7:00AM, and that was it. The parks are closed during this time. Once the parks open, they're expected to be gone. The idea was to provide a place for people to temporarily go to for sleep. Ratliff said this is an exception to the rule of not being able to camp within the city limits. He said he thinks if we're going to tell people they can't do this, then we have a moral and ethical obligation to provide them with a place that they can go.

Chairman Harris asked if this is a permanent solution.

Ratliff said no – it's a temporary solution.

Ratliff said this is an exception to the rule of not being able to camp within the city limits. He said he thinks if we're going to tell people they can't do this, then we have a moral and ethical obligation to provide them with a place that they can go.

Ratliff noted that if we decide we don't want to do the anticamping ordinance, then we don't need to do this. However, without any sort of ordinance in place, we'll continue to have what we're getting right now, which is people sleeping everywhere. Ratliff said he realizes this is not a perfect solution, but it's a solution.

Hampton said he agrees with Ratliff in the sense that we're going to have to do something. He noted that Olson Park is closest to the feeding station. He said he understands there are things that need to be flushed out, but he's committed to allowing Olson Park to be a temporary solution for a holding place for these people. Hampton said he thinks there needs to be some sort of fence or barrier installed around the park because there are houses in that area.

Williams asked how long is temporary.

Ratliff said really until the services can catch up.

Chairman Harris asked if we want to allow children in Olson Park.

Williams said no.

Dimmit said he doesn't like this idea because they have no way to vet who is going in and out. He thinks that no one under the age of 18 should be allowed in the park.

Garrett Lam, City Attorney's Office, said he doesn't think the whole scope of liabilities has been considered here. If the city is going to designate a place for the people to come and stay and sleep, there will be sanitation issues and drug issues. Lam said it needs to be considered who is going to police this. He said he doesn't think this idea is ready.

Williams said she understands we're trying to get these people off the street, but we need to come up with something permanent. She said maybe we need to hold off on this a little longer.

Ratliff said he is also concerned about liability issues if we continue to do nothing. He said if we designate an area, it's easier to police and control. Ratliff said he's okay with not moving forward with this, but if we're going to talk about legal liability issues with respect to having a designated area then we shouldn't move forward with anticamping ordinance. He said it wouldn't be right to criminalize camping without offering a place for people to go. Ratliff said the Olson Park idea is just temporary until we can figure out a more permanent solution.

Brinlee said the Salvation Army owns the entire block, and he proposed the idea of having the homeless relocated to the ballfield on their property.

Dimmit asked if the Salvation Army would provide things for people to sleep on.

Brinlee said we have 400 portable cots. He said we can also work with the Red Cross to get tents. Brinlee said he can also make the engagement that needs to be made as well start doing the necessary training.

Dimmit said he thinks the homeless would be more inclined to go to a place where cots are offered for sleeping.

Brinlee said the problem with using tents is that it can be too private, and people end up getting in trouble with drug use and other activities. He said if we're going to do this, there must be a lot of positive engagement good leadership. Brinlee said it would be helpful if the city would be willing to help the Salvation Army with clean up periodically.

Lam said the purpose of this ordinance is to push people towards services. He said there's nothing that's going to stop the Salvation Army from setting this up on their private property because we're not enforcing anticamping on private property – we're enforcing anticamping on public property, which is city owned property. Lam said Brinlee's idea could effectively create a solution to the problem.

Hankins said she thinks we need to move forward and present this to the full Council for approval or denial. She said we have to have the best of a worst situation, and she thinks we have that.

Ratliff suggested that Brinlee present to the Council the idea that the Salvation Army has property the city can send people to if an anticamping ordinance is imposed within the city limits. He said Brinlee could also ask for support by means of having the city help with clean up.

Hampton said it's very good and corroborative of Brinlee to offer this partnership to the city.

Brinlee said indoor dining will also be provided at the same facility.

Dimmit said this also makes things easier for police being on private property. If something does go wrong and they need someone removed, the property owner has that right.

Ratliff said based upon what he's hearing, this Committee does not want to exclude any parks from the anticamping ordinance.

No action was taken on this item.

4. Discuss a proposed ordinance to penalize unauthorized camping in non-designated areas and take action as deemed necessary.

Lam provided background information on this item. A copy of the proposed ordinance to penalize unauthorized camping in non-designated areas may be obtained from the City Clerk's Office upon request.

Lam said the updated ordinance that was sent to Council for approval included the addition of Item D, which states the following:

“This ordinance shall not apply to public property where authorized camping has been expressly allowed by city ordinance, state statute, or by express written authorization of the city.”

Lam said that's the only thing that is new since the last time the Committee looked at this ordinance. It mirrors the state law very well.

Motion by Hampton, **Second** by Harris, to send the proposed ordinance to penalize unauthorized camping in non-designated areas to the City Council for consideration. **AYE:** Hampton, Lee, Harris, Hankins, Williams. **NAY:** None. **MOTION PASSED.**

5. Discuss a process for providing transportation to homeless individuals, either to an area where they have family support or, if no family is available, to a location outside city limits with a facility that has already agreed to offer assistance.

Ratliff said he didn't put this item on the agenda, and he's not sure if we're talking about using public transportation assets, but he doesn't think we want to get into this business. Ratliff said this is more in the lane of non-profits – not public business.

Williams said there is a church that already does this.

Dimmit asked if there is a way that LATS could transport the homeless to designated areas.

James noted that there are fixed bus routes, and some of them will be changing with the new plan.

Ratliff said he thinks we can get them close. He noted that LATS is really reliant on federal dollars. Given this, there are a lot of conditions they have to meet. Ratliff said he doesn't know that he can give a simple "yes" at this time.

Hampton asked Dimmit what police would need help with in transporting these individual.

Dimmit said it's harder for us to transport handicapped individuals in their patrol units. He said he's wondering if there is a way to transport these individuals without having to call an ambulance.

James noted that the paratransit offered by LATS offers transportation services for individuals that is not on a fixed route. She said there is an application that people fill out to get more information. She said this might not be a very quick response.

Chairman Harris said he will visit more with Ryan Landers about this about bring a report back to the next meeting.

No action was taken on this item.

6. Discuss the panhandling sign program established in February 2024, provide direction to staff regarding additional locations for signs, and take other action as deemed necessary.

Cliff Haggemiller, Public Works Deputy Director, provided background information on this item. He provided Committee members with a signalized intersection map depicting the various intersections in which signs have either been place or are proposed to be placed.

City Council has approved sign installation at the following intersections:

- 38th Street/Lee Blvd
- Sheridan Road/Cache Road
- Sheridan Road/Gore Blvd
- Cache Road/Ft. Sill Blvd

Chairman Harris asked if the spelling has been corrected on the signs.

Haggemiller said yes.

Haggemiller said staff is proposing additional signs be installed at the intersection of 44th Street and Cache Road in front of Lowe's and at the intersection of Sheridan Road and the entrance to Aldi's/Walmart.

Dimmitt said there are four homeless people that hang at the intersection of SW 67th Street and Quannah Parker Boulevard.

Haggenmiller said we have 15 signs installed right now, and we've purchased a total of 40. There are 25 signs remaining, and we install four signs at each intersection.

Hampton asked how long the 15 signs have been out.

Haggenmiller said the signs have been out approximately 30 days.

Chairman Harris asked if staff has been working on a QR code to place on the sign.

Haggenmiller said this is something that is possible, but it would cost more to have these added to the signs.

James said this was discussed at the last Committee meeting, but it was not an action item.

Lam said his understanding was that the QR Code would take you to a list of available resources – not a list of charities to donate to.

Chairman Harris said the QR Code could include both lists.

Chairman Harris noted that when Tanna Vu was at the United Way, she created a QR code that hyperlinks to a list of community resources broken down by category.

Vu said this list also includes all the non-profits that are funded by the United Way for donation purposes.

Cynthia Williams, City Manager's Office, said suggested that a dynamic QR code be used so that any links can be edited without having to replace the QR code.

Haggenmiller said he can make the sign if someone can send him the QR code.

Hampton said it would be beneficial to track numbers on how often the QR code is utilized if there is a means to do so.

Vu said the United Way is able to update their website and list of services without having to change the QR code. She said the link should be ready to go.

Ratliff said he's not opposed to the QR code, but he doesn't know that he's a huge fan of putting them where the signs are. He said he remembers discussion from the last meeting about a potential public safety issue stemming from people trying to scan the QR codes with their phones while sitting in their cars at intersections. Ratliff said he thinks this needs to be discussed more.

Dimmitt recommended signs be installed at the intersection of 82nd Street and Gray Warr.

Haggenmiller said only two signs would be needed at this intersection.

Motion by Williams, Second by Hampton, to recommend installation of 14 panhandling signs at the intersections of 44th Street/Cache Road, Sheridan Road/Aldis, 67th Street/Quannah Parker and 82nd Street/Gray Warr. **AYE:** Hampton, Lee, Harris, Williams. **NAY:** None. **MOTION PASSED.**

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Hampton, **Second** by Williams, to adjourn the October 1, 2024 meeting. **AYE:** Hampton, Lee, Harris, Williams. **NAY:** None. ***MOTION PASSED.***

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 4:33 PM.