

**DURANGO CITY COUNCIL
and
LA PLATA COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
JOINT STUDY SESSION MINUTES
CITY HALL
949 EAST 2ND AVENUE
TUESDAY, JANUARY 21, 2020**

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Youssef called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m.

ROLL CALL

Present on behalf of Durango City Council were Mayor Melissa Youssef, Mayor Pro Tem Dean Brookie, Councilor Barbara Noseworthy, Councilor Kim Baxter, and Councilor Chris Bettin.

Present on behalf of the La Plata County Board of County Commissioners were Commissioner Gwen Lachelt, Commissioner Julie Westendorff, and Commissioner Clyde Church.

Present on behalf of Durango City staff were Interim City Manager Amber Blake, Assistant City Manager Kevin Hall, City Attorney Dirk Nelson, and City Clerk Amy Phillips.

Present on behalf of La Plata County staff were County Manager Chuck Stevens, County Sheriff Shawn Smith (arrived later in the meeting), and County Attorney Sheryl Rogers.

Present for the discussion on homelessness was Jenn Lopez of the Athena Group.

1. Discussion Items

1.1. Homelessness

1.1.1. Strategic Plan Presentation from Athena Group

Ms. Lopez of the Athena Group provided the presentation on the Homelessness Strategic Plan, beginning with acknowledgment of the volunteers who worked on the PATH (Planning & Action Team on Homelessness). She noted that many of the team members were present in the audience and asked them to raise their hands. The PATH received a round of applause.

Ms. Lopez acknowledged the project sponsors (the Board of County Commissioners and the City Council) and sponsors (Colorado Health Foundation, Colorado Housing and Finance Authority, The Rochester Hotel and Leland House, St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Volunteers of America, and Manna Soup Kitchen). She also introduced Heather Martinez, who created the visuals for the Strategic Plan.

Ms. Lopez said the Athena Group was asking for formal endorsement or adoption of the Homeless Strategic Plan and for funding to be committed to its implementation. (A copy of the Plan was included in the agenda documentation.) She reviewed and highlighted major components of the Plan, noting that its 32 strategies were divided into tiers – those that can be accomplished in a short time and those that require other strategies to be in place first or that require more development. Goals of the plan were provided as follows:

1. Provide for an array of strategies built on common ground and that effectively balance the array of interests in the community.
2. Establish a systematic approach that aims to keep people housed or to get them into housing as quickly as possible, enabling a future in which homelessness is rare, brief, and one-time whenever it cannot be fully prevented.
3. Leverage existing strengths in order to create a much greater chance of success in reaching the major goal of preventing or limiting the occurrence of homelessness.
4. Develop a system that is highly coordinated and supportive of more shared leadership, also to enhance chances of success.
5. Promote dignity and respect for all involved throughout the system.
6. Build community connections and understanding over time – eventually as a part of all strategies, which could include broader community involvement and/or learning opportunities.

7. Whenever resources are insufficient to meet all needs at any given time, give priority access to those individuals and families who lost their housing while living in the area and/or who will choose to continue living here for the foreseeable future.

Ms. Lopez commented on plan implementation and the role of local governments, which must identify funding to support setup and buildout for the first three years. She said without adequate funding, the project would be set to fail. Total investment was estimated to cost up to \$170,000 annually, plus potential additional local investment in an organized camp. She reviewed the following plan components and their cost:

Strategic Plan Implementation New Investment Opportunities	
<i>Primary Investment Request</i>	
	Cost Estimates
Establishing Coordination System	
Systems Navigation and Coordination Director position*	\$95,000
Support staff for position and navigation center*	\$50,000
Data system enhancements, including possible technical assistance for set-up	\$10,000
Office support, supplies and set-up	\$15,000
Total	\$170,000
<i>Additional Investment Opportunities</i>	
Permanent Camp Establishment	
Consulting Support and Feasibility Analysis**	\$15,000-\$20,000
Site improvements	TBD based on site
Bathroom facilities and portable water	TBD based on site
Nonprofit sponsor and part-time staff support	\$30,000-\$40,000
Camp Manager Stipend (\$1000 a month for 12 months)	\$12,000
Transportation	TBD based on site
Supplemental Support for Tier 1 Action Items	
There are a number of opportunities to help fund tier 1 activities. If interested, the team suggests waiting for establishment of the council to help prioritize which actions may be most impactful for local government to support.	TBD

Ms. Lopez said the Athena group recommended establishing an interim working group immediately to guide the first steps toward implementing the plan.

Ms. Lopez and Mr. Hall responded to Council and Commissioner questions and comments.

There was discussion regarding the different tiers for strategies and which strategies would be included in each tier.

There was discussion about the projected costs of the various strategies.

Commissioner Westendorff noted that the cost projections did not include any sort of facility cost or rental.

Discussion regarding cost continued, including discussion on sustaining management of a homeless facility over time.

Ms. Lopez said she had not identified a source of infrastructure funding other than local government.

Ms. Lopez and Mr. Hall commented on the need to establish the interim working group quickly.

There was discussion regarding establishing a temporary site.

Councilor Noseworthy said a plan should be in place by spring.

A discussion regarding funding and camp management ensued.

There was discussion of adoption or some sort of formal recognition and acceptance of the Strategic Plan.

Ms. Lopez responded to Commissioner Westendorff's question regarding how the camp would benefit other communities in La Plata County, such as Ignacio and Bayfield. She said the Athena Group had not been asked to create a plan for the entire county.

Mr. Hall said, with services in place, a formal camp, and the navigation center, Durango's facility would have a broader reach.

Ms. Lopez said her guess was that people are coming to Durango for services.

Commissioner Westendorff noted that the joint sales tax had been identified as a source of partial funding but said she has reservations about using the joint sales tax for ongoing funding for operations beyond three years.

There was discussing regarding long-term funding of a camp and the use of funds from the joint sales tax fund balance.

Staff noted that the current fund balance is a little over \$400,000.

Mayor Youssef suggested that using \$200,000 of the funds would be very helpful during year one of the project implementation.

Discussion of Mayor Youssef's suggestion ensued, including discussion of the process for appropriating the funds.

There was additional discussion regarding the use of joint sales tax revenue to fund operations.

Commissioner Westendorff said if there were a permanent location and an operating solution for the camp she would regard the Plan more favorably. She noted that at present the County Sheriff has been putting his resources into a temporary camp and has been doing that for a number of years.

There was discussion regarding identifying a site for a permanent camp.

Ms. Lopez cautioned against relying on the use of public lands as a complete solution.

Mayor Youssef said it is important for the community to know where the Council and the County stand with regard to the Strategic Plan. She asked for feedback.

Commissioner Westendorff asked for feedback from the County Manager.

Mr. Stevens said his biggest concern is that an appropriate group to manage such a facility has not been identified. He said the location and the resources to fund a camp are important, but management is critical. He said the plan provides what had been asked for. He said he is happy with the Athena Group's product, but the pressing need is for a managed camp.

Commissioner Lachelt noted the importance of moving forward.

Mayor Youssef commented on the City's process to date, noting that no satisfactory solution had been identified, because every proposed solution has had unintended consequences. She said she appreciates there is now dialogue and recognition of the need to address a key gap in services. She said the community has to endorse the plan, with the City's support.

Councilor Bettin said the next step is to move forward with formally endorsing the plan so the RFP can be issued.

Councilor Noseworthy said she would like to see a budget for what the City could reasonably contribute to the project.

Commissioner Westendorff said it wouldn't make sense for the County to declare its support for the plan without also supporting its funding.

Ms. Lopez noted that much of the money required to complete the first tier of strategies, approximately \$200,000 to \$300,000, will come from grants, thereby allowing the City and County to leverage their contributions.

Commissioner Westendorff commented on Ms. Lopez's expertise in leveraging grant funding.

Mr. Hall said he would set up the process for adoption of the plan.

Mayor Youssef thanked Ms. Lopez for the presentation and for her ability to bring a divided community together, which has been extremely important to the progress made.

There was discussion of what needs to be accomplished before the next joint meeting.

Councilor Noseworthy said formal adoption before April would be helpful for everyone.

Commissioner Westendorff said the County would look at the budget to determine its contribution and the source.

1.1.2. Purple Cliffs Camp and Transportation Update

Mr. Hall updated the Commissioners and Council on transportation to the current homeless camp in the Purple Cliffs. He said staff would like to use joint sales tax funds to pay the balance of the transportation contract.

Mr. Hall and Ms. Blake responded to questions from Council and the Commissioners regarding the contract for transportation service and ridership.

Sheriff Shawn Smith joined the discussion. He reported on the current status at the camp. He said numbers have been stable and he commented on recent pad expansion. He said some of the campers have vehicles, with about four being there on an average day, and one of those is up on blocks. He said people are sleeping in their cars instead of in a tent. He said the use of stores' shopping carts continues to be a problem. He noted the community's drop-off donations at the site.

Sheriff Smith responded to questions from the Commissioners and Council.

Commissioner Westendorff said she receives calls regarding the visual impact of the camp. She said it's important for the campers to contribute and keep the camp clean and in good order.

Sheriff Smith said volunteers have been instrumental in keeping the camp clean.

The Commissioners and Council thanked Sheriff Smith for the update.

Mayor Youssef thanked everyone who came for the presentation of the Strategic Plan.

1.2. Koshak Mesa/La Posta Road Update

Mr. Hall provided a brief update on potential development on Koshak Mesa and along La Posta Road, which is in the Joint Planning Area. He stated that the LaPlata Economic Alliance is conducting a sewer study, and staff is looking at reduced road standards for the area. He added that the first RFP garnered zero responses, but the recent RFP resulted in one response. The Study should be complete by May.

1.3. Process Improvement Meetings Update

Mr. Stevens provided a brief update on process improvement, stating that they held their first meeting with all the stakeholders and that the meeting was well attended, and progress was underway. Council Baxter asked who was in attendance. Staff replied that representatives from the County, City, DFPD, the Economic Alliance, financial institutions, architects and builders. Ms. Baxter asked if she could get a list of those who attended. Mr. Stevens said he would provide the list.

1.4. New Business

Councilor Noseworthy asked for a joint discussion to consider using the Pepsi Center site for the homeless camp.

Commissioner Westendorff expressed her reluctance to use the Pepsi Center site for the camp. She said once something is built on the property, which belongs to the County, the County would

no longer “really own it anymore, unless you’re prepared to tear it down.” She used, as an example, the City’s Recreation Center, which is built on County property, which, she said, “we technically own, but we’ll never have again.” She noted that the County has limited staff resources to perform an evaluation of the property.

There was brief discussion.

2. Adjournment

Ms. Blake summarized actions she would take regarding the Homelessness Strategic Plan.

Mayor Youssef adjourned the meeting at 6:00 p.m.

APPROVED:

ATTESTED:

Melissa Youssef, Mayor

Amy Phillips, City Clerk