



CITY OF NORMAN, OK
CITY COUNCIL OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE MEETING
Municipal Building, Executive Conference Room, 201 West Gray, Norman,
OK 73069
Thursday, May 14, 2026 at 4:00 PM

MINUTES

The Oversight Committee of the City of Norman, Cleveland County, State of Oklahoma, met in Regular Session in the Executive Conference Room in the Municipal Building, on Thursday, May 14, 2026 at 4:00 PM, and notice of the agenda of the meeting was posted at the Norman 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 Grant called the meeting to order at 4:00 pm.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Councilmember Ward 4 Helen Grant, Chair
Councilmember Ward 8 Scott Dixon

OTHERS PRESENT

Councilmember Ward 3 Robert Bruce
Councilmember Ward 6 Joshua Hinkle
Mayor Stephen Holman
Mr. Darrel Pyle, City Manager
Mr. Rick Knighton, City Attorney
Ms. Kathryn Walker, Assistant City Attorney
Mr. Anthony Purinton, Asst City Attorney
Mr. Clint Mercer, Director of Finance
Mr. Jason Olsen, Director of Parks & Recreation
Ms. Lisa Krieg, CDBG/Grants Manager
Ms. Amanda Shref, Community Services Manager
Ms. Kara Fritts, Community Outreach Social Worker
Ms. Heidi Smith, Director of Operations, Thunderbird Clubhouse
Ms. Katherine Griffith, Admin Tech III, City Clerk

AGENDA ITEMS

1. DISCUSSION REGARDING POSSIBLE CHARTER AMENDMENTS RELATED TO TAX INCREMENT FINANCING.

Ms. Kathryn Walker, Assistant City Attorney introduced a discussion regarding whether the city charter could require a supermajority vote for adoption of TIF districts. Ms. Walker referenced a 1966 court case from Norman, where the property owner sought to rezone agricultural property to multifamily zoning.

- The planning commission recommended single-family zoning.
- Council adopted multifamily zoning, but the ordinance failed because an ordinance required a supermajority vote.
- The Oklahoma Supreme Court ruled that, unless expressly authorized in the city charter or state statute, a simple majority vote is sufficient.

Ms. Walker explained that the current Local Development Act (LDA) already establishes voting thresholds for TIF districts:

- A simple majority vote is required if the proposal aligns with the statutory review committee's recommendation.
- A two-thirds majority is required if it does not align with those recommendations or conditions.

Because the city charter currently states that council actions are adopted by majority vote except in limited circumstances, any requirement for a higher threshold on TIF approvals would likely need to be added directly to the charter rather than through ordinance alone.

Staff presented draft language that would:

1. Amend charter language to clarify exceptions may exist to majority vote requirements.
2. Require an affirmative vote of six council members to approve any ordinance to create a TIF district that allocates more than a specified percentage of city sales tax increment.

Ms. Walker cautioned:

- There is no direct case law addressing this issue under the Local Development Act.
- Any charter amendment could potentially be challenged legally.
- However, placing the requirement in the charter would provide a stronger legal argument than using an ordinance alone.
- A charter amendment could potentially be challenged before voter approval or later if applied in practice.

Ms. Walker noted uncertainty because the Local Development Act implements a constitutional provision and courts may determine that statewide law overrides municipal charter provisions.

Discussion centered on limiting any supermajority requirement specifically to TIFs involving city sales tax because:

- Sales tax is the city's primary operational funding source.
- Property-tax-related impacts also affect other taxing jurisdictions.
- Restricting the amendment to sales tax may strengthen legal arguments that the issue is a local concern.

Councilmembers preferred using a percentage threshold rather than a flat dollar amount.

Item 1, continued

Councilmembers asked about a similar charter amendment in Bethany, which staff explained was adopted with a broad charter amendment prohibiting public funds as incentives and has not been legally challenged at this time. The amendment may unintentionally affect other city activities, including funding for nonprofits and public partnerships.

Staff clarified that Council cannot impose a higher voting threshold for TIF approval solely through policy or ordinance and a charter amendment would be the legally stronger mechanism.

Several members expressed concern that major long-term financial commitments should not proceed based on a narrow one-vote margin, with one member stating if a project cannot secure six council votes, it may indicate the project should not move forward or should rely more heavily on private investment instead. When questions were raised about whether the proposal should go through a charter review commission staff explained:

- A charter review commission is only required every ten years.
- Recent charter amendments adopted in April were proposed directly by council.
- The 2019–2020 Charter Review Commission had previously considered requiring public votes for TIFs over \$5 million but did not reach consensus.

Councilmembers discussed how thresholds should be structured:

- Percentage of city sales tax increment.
- Percentage of the general fund.
- Combination of percentage and dollar amount.
- Sliding-scale approaches.

Concerns included:

- Inflation making fixed dollar amounts outdated.
- Sales tax volatility year to year.
- Determining what level of TIF participation significantly impacts city finances.
- Examples from previous TIFs were discussed, including:
 - University North Park Phase 1 uses approximately 60% of the city's sales tax increment.
 - Campus Corner relying more heavily on sales tax than originally anticipated after property tax revenues declined.

Staff agreed to analyze the proposed FY 2026–2027 budget, evaluate what sales tax percentage thresholds would significantly impact city finances and return to council with recommendations and additional analysis for future discussion.

2. DISCUSSION OF INTERIM SOLUTIONS FOR HOMELESSNESS.

Mr. Darrel Pyle, City Manager introduced the discussion by explaining that the term “interim” could refer either to a short-term period of approximately 60–90 days while expanding capacity at the current shelter, or a longer 18-month period before a new permanent shelter becomes operational.

Item 2, continued

Mr. Anthony Purinton, Assistant City Attorney, emphasized that service providers, particularly City Care, strongly recommend prioritizing indoor shelter solutions over outdoor encampments.

According to shelter and outreach data:

- Individuals in shelters are significantly more likely to obtain permanent housing.
- Extended stays in tents or encampments do not improve housing outcomes.

Discussion on expansion of the Gray Street shelter included the installation of a sprinkler system is necessary for public safety and liability reasons, especially if funds are available.

Concerns were expressed that portions of the building remained unsafe or uninhabitable regardless of sprinkler installation. City Care indicated willingness to financially assist with improvements to the current shelter, including fire sprinklers and related infrastructure upgrades, if doing so would increase shelter capacity. Staff explained that if council consensus existed, they could refine cost estimates for an interior expansion plan and present updated information at the next council meeting.

Councilmembers noted:

- Downtown shelters have existed in Norman for decades.
- Shelter operations predate many current downtown businesses.
- Lack of shelter space could result in increased unsheltered camping throughout downtown areas.
- Churches and nonprofits should play a larger role.

Mr. Purinton repeatedly emphasized outdoor encampments presents substantial liability risks and the risks significantly increase when solutions are implemented quickly. Liability cannot be entirely removed from the city.

Staff described homelessness, traditionally handled by state or county agencies, as the most difficult issue local governments currently face, and one that no city has fully solved

Staff reported that more than 60 individuals were currently camping in Francis Cate Park in violation of municipal code and lease agreements. Encampment numbers rose from around 11 individuals two weeks earlier to approximately 50 at the time of this meeting and increased by two to three individuals per day.

Council members debated whether to temporarily suspend enforcement of campsite rules until alternative shelter options could be identified. Some neighborhood residents expressed desire to avoid further displacement of homeless individuals unless a clear alternative destination exists.

Council members asked how enforcement would function if camping in parks is prohibited and adequate shelter space is unavailable. Staff stressed that the City has an ongoing struggle to balance public safety, constitutional protections, and shelter capacity limitations. Staff stated that most encampment related concerns arise after park hours and as populations grow, there is increased difficulty in managing encampments.

Item 2, continued

Concerns include:

- Fire and safety hazards
- Flood risks due to encampments located in flood plains
- Assaults occurring within encampments
- Individuals enforcing their own informal rules
- Conflicts between encampment-created rules and municipal code requirements
 - One example: encampment residents created rules regarding cigarette disposal, despite smoking already being prohibited in city parks under municipal code.

Staff emphasized:

- The city can prohibit camping in specific locations but cannot force individuals into shelters or designated locations.
- The number of unhoused individuals already exceeds existing and planned shelter capacity and will continue even after current interim measures.
- Future closures and transitions involving state mental health facilities may increase demand further.
- Staff will continue coordination with state agencies regarding future facility availability, transition planning and additional shelter opportunities.
- Most individuals relocate voluntarily after repeated outreach and offer of assistance.
- Police may issue trespass warnings, but arrests are relatively rare.

Representatives from the Police department stated that encampment related enforcement occurs daily across Norman. Trespassing is one of the city's most common non-traffic citations. Previous encampments have been dismantled through a standard decommissioning process involving notice posting, outreach, referrals to services and trespass enforcement.

Mr. Purinton outlined three broad categories of possible approaches for interim options.

1. Maintain the Status Quo

- Continue operating current shelter capacity.
- Enforce laws related to camping and trespassing.

2. Expand Indoor Shelter Capacity

- Increase beds at the existing shelter.
- Building modifications and infrastructure improvements under consideration include:
 - Fire sprinklers
 - HVAC systems
 - Additional bathrooms
 - Firewalls
 - Expanded kennel space for pets
- Current occupancy limitations are driven by fire safety, plumbing, wiring access, and climate-control limitations.
- Sprinklers would significantly improve safety even without additional beds added.
- The proposed upgrades would improve both safety and occupancy capacity
- Potential contract amendments with City Care could be completed quickly.
- Staffing needs are associated with expanded capacity.
- Additional operational costs and reimbursement procedures, existing architectural and engineering budget allocations for the future shelter project may help fund interim improvements.

3. Create an Outdoor Interim Solution

- Develop a managed temporary encampment or outdoor shelter location.
- Potentially on state-owned property rather than Park land. Preliminary discussions with the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services regarding:
 - Temporary use of state-owned property.
 - Potential indoor and outdoor interim solutions on former campus facilities.
 - Possibility of short-term lease or memorandum-of-understanding agreements.
 - Potential concerns identified include:
 - * Building conditions
 - * Lack of heating or climate control
 - * Lead paint
 - * Liability exposure
 - * Management responsibilities
- Any outdoor solution would require structured management and oversight.
- Simply opening land or buildings without management would not be responsible.
 - Potential support services discussed include:
 - * Bathrooms
 - * Showers
 - * Consistent case management
 - * Contracted nonprofit management partners

Mr. Purinton emphasized that all options involve legal, operational, and liability risks, especially given the compressed timeline. Independent nonprofit operators could potentially reduce some liability exposure, but operational costs will increase. Overall Council consensus is to expand the current shelter and increase beds.

Councilmembers discussed the possibility of creating a coordinated nonprofit structure, potentially through a 501(c)(6) or similar organization, to organize efforts among local churches and nonprofits. The proposed organization would:

- Coordinate funding and outreach efforts
- Provide centralized leadership and planning
- Allow participating organizations representation in decision-making
- Improve coordination of existing charitable efforts

Officials noted that many churches already conduct outreach work, but that coordination could improve the effectiveness of those efforts. Discussions regarding Faith-Based and Community Solutions to address the homeless situation included:

- Transitional housing and halfway-house concepts.
- Community-managed shelter partnerships.
- A proposal involving Hope Ministry House was mentioned as a possible long-term transitional housing effort.

Councilmember Hinkle proposed exploring an emergency residential camping ordinance that would allow property owners to voluntarily permit camping on private property, noting that the City likely does not have enough individual property owners willing to host encampments for all unsheltered individuals. The owners would be required to apply, accept liability and insurance responsibility and establish management standards and rules.

Item 2, continued

Staff stressed that no realistic solution would eliminate trespassing or encampment related issues. Even with expanded shelter capacity or outdoor sheltering options, there would likely still be individuals without available placements.

Councilmembers revisited prior discussions about potentially relocating shelter operations to a larger building on the Griffin campus. The building was viewed as potentially preferable to the Gray Street shelter because of its size and possible long-term redevelopment benefits.

However, several concerns were raised:

- The building may no longer have running water
- Plumbing and climate control systems would require significant work
- Estimated preparation costs ranged around \$500,000
- Estimated preparation time ranged from three to six months
- The state appeared willing to consider only short-term use (30–90 days), not the proposed 18-month timeline

Staff clarified that earlier conversations about using the Griffin campus occurred before voters approved funding for a permanent shelter solution and before the city partnered with City Care as a shelter operator. Staff cautioned against presenting the Griffin option as a long-term solution because state officials had not committed to extended use of the property.

Staff cautioned that:

- The state likely would not provide immediate answers regarding use of state land
- Any temporary solution carried substantial legal and operational risks
- Shelter expansion alone would not fully solve encampment displacement issues
- There were no known available shelter beds in Norman or Oklahoma City outside of temporary inclement weather expansions

Staff concluded by emphasizing that even aggressive expansion efforts would likely not provide enough capacity for all unsheltered individuals, difficult enforcement and placement decisions would continue.

Councilmembers discussed the possibility of putting out a Request for Information (RFI) for potential shelter services and whether organizations outside the Continuum of Care (COC) should be invited to respond or if they would even be interested in operating temporary shelters. All responding organizations would be required to coordinate with the COC.

Ms. Heidi Smith, Director of Operations, Thunderbird Clubhouse & COC representative responded:

- Norman currently has only three entities providing emergency shelter:
 - City Care
 - Salvation Army
 - Women's Resource Center
- Existing shelters are already constrained by funding, construction, staffing, and fire code limitations.
- Additional funding alone may not realistically expand capacity.
- Some organizations may overstate their ability to provide services due to financial desperation.

Item 2, continued

Councilmembers debated whether to immediately enforce anti-camping laws and disperse the encampment or temporarily manage the existing encampment while longer-term solutions are explored. Staff emphasized that the current situation is becoming “unmanageable” and delaying decisions increases management difficulty and liability. Delayed enforcement only increases the size and complexity of the encampment and temporary tolerance of the camp could become a long-term unmanaged situation. Enforcement should occur sooner rather than later to avoid further growth.

City legal and administrative staff raised several concerns:

- The encampment remains illegal under existing municipal code.
- The city currently has no formal agreement regarding encampment management.
- Staff expressed concern about selectively enforcing laws.
- Creating a legal framework for the existing situation would require significant work and time.

Mayor Holman, councilmembers and staff supported continuing negotiations with the state, exploring temporary expansion options tied to additional shelter beds and pursuing any workable interim solution while acknowledging homelessness remains a broader regional issue.

By the close of discussion, there was no full council consensus regarding allowing the encampment to remain indefinitely. While some council members favored immediate enforcement, others favored temporary managed status while solutions are developed.

Staff summarized the likely interim approach as:

- Continuing outreach efforts, directing individuals back toward available services and coordination with:
 - State Department of Mental Health
 - Outreach teams
 - Community service providers
- Maintaining current operations temporarily while broader discussions continue.
- Legal ramifications of allowing camping activity in the park while city ordinances currently prohibit it.
- Inconsistent enforcement across city parks leads to legal implications if Francis Kate Park were treated differently from other public areas.
- Leaving the encampment open-ended without management authority creates safety and liability concerns including:
 - Floodplain risks
 - Severe weather exposure
 - Public health and sanitation
 - Lack of oversight
 - Potential growth of the encampment
- Individuals displaced from other locations are often directed toward Francis Kate Park due to lack of alternatives.

Item 2, continued

Staff emphasized the complexity of the issue and the lack of sufficient infrastructure and staffing at the city to manage a sanctioned encampment effectively.

- Successful models require extensive planning and resources not presently available. Staff outlined major requirements typically associated with sanctioned encampments:
- Bathrooms and waste management
- Water access
- Security and fencing
- Controlled entry and exit
- Rules and behavioral agreements
- Case management services
- Partnerships with nonprofit or governmental entities
- Case Management and Resources
- Staff highlighted severe shortages in outreach, case management capacity and insufficient resources; (federal, state and local)

Discussion continued and direction was given to begin the 72-hour notice period the following day, considering the predicted weather concerns and approaching storms, while providing continued outreach and engagement with service providers.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 6:43 pm.

ATTEST:

City Clerk

Mayor