



MINUTES

The City Council of the City of Norman, Cleveland County, State of Oklahoma, met in Conference in the Executive Conference Room of the Norman Municipal Building on the 9th day of July, 2024, at 5:00 p.m., and notice and agenda of the meeting were posted at the Municipal Building at 201 West Gray Street 24 hours prior to the beginning of the meeting.

CALL TO ORDER

PRESENT

Mayor Larry Heikkila
Councilmember Ward 1 Austin Ball
Councilmember Ward 2 Lauren Schueler
Councilmember Ward 3 Bree Montoya
Councilmember Ward 4 Helen Grant
Councilmember Ward 5 Michael Nash
Councilmember Ward 6 Elizabeth Foreman
Councilmember Ward 7 Stephen Holman
Councilmember Ward 8 Matthew Peacock

AGENDA ITEMS

1. DISCUSSION OF AMENDMENTS TO THE CONTRACT BETWEEN FOOD AND SHELTER AND THE CITY TO OPERATE AN EMERGENCY, LOW-BARRIER SHELTER KNOWN AS "A FRIEND'S HOUSE".
2. DISCUSSION ON ALTERNATIVE LOCATIONS FOR A PERMANENT HOMELESS SHELTER.

Both items were discussed interchangeably. Councilmembers engaged in a comprehensive discussion regarding the future of the temporary shelter located on Gray Street. The conversation addressed regional collaboration, shelter operations, possible relocation, contract amendments, and long-term solutions for homelessness in Norman.

City staff presented updates and possible directions related to the contract with Food and Shelter for the emergency low-barrier shelter (A Friend's House) on Gray Street. Staff recommended addressing recent audit findings, exploring alternative property options, and potentially issuing a Request for Proposals (RFP) for redevelopment of the property.

Several Councilmembers supported contract termination in favor of a more structured, accountable solution. Others emphasized a humane, transition-oriented approach and the need for a permanent shelter. Suggestions included exploring the Griffin Memorial campus for a permanent shelter, evaluating Carter Street for supportive housing, and engaging neighborhoods early.

A sobering center was widely supported, with interest in collaborating with Norman Regional Health System. There was strong consensus that homelessness cannot be solved through enforcement alone, but requires integrated case management, mental health, and addiction support services.

Council emphasized the importance of regional collaboration, citing Houston as a successful example where municipalities aligned efforts to provide comprehensive homeless services.

- The former Griffin Memorial Hospital gymnasium building was discussed as a promising relocation site. The facility includes large square footage, separate wings for men and women, and HVAC/plumbing already in working order. Council directed the City Manager to re-engage the State Department of Mental Health about leasing this space rather than purchasing, could offer a cost-effective and swift solution.
- Carter property: Appraisal results expected the week of July 15, possibly suitable for permanent shelter or supportive housing.
- Porter Avenue (Norman Regional Hospital site): Council supported exploring this location if feasible.

Some Councilmembers expressed continued concerns over shelter limitations, lack of 24/7 operation, inadequate wraparound services, and its temporary nature. There was discussion regarding the shelter's location having negatively affected downtown businesses. Councilmembers noted the shelter was initially intended as a temporary solution.

Staff is negotiating updates to the operating agreement with Food and Shelter, including oversight. Contract termination provisions are expected to remain unchanged. Some members of Council preferred leaving the current agreement in place until a viable alternative site is confirmed.

Council expressed support for terminating the current contract responsibly and closing the current location with a 30-day notice if a transition plan and next steps are identified. Consensus to move forward with an RFP for redevelopment, seeking new shelter locations (particularly on Griffin land), and initiating community outreach and service partnerships.

Staff will bring back additional information to be discussed on July 23, 2024.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 6:17 p.m.

ATTEST:

City Clerk

Mayor