



Changing the Culture of Property Maintenance

“ We Can Do This!! ”

Public Input – September 2021



Goals:

- **Safety of People**
- **Protection of Structures**
- **Maintenance of an attractive environment**
- **Improvement of property values**



Operational Goals for Enforcement:

- **Straightforward, kind and fair**
- **Cost-effective**
- **Fully integrated with other departments**
- **Fully integrated with other services**

Key Players:

Property Maintenance

Police, Fire, Community Engagement

Forestry, Engineering, Zoning

Shawnee County (Tax sales, other)

KDOT (mowing)

Neighborhood Associations

Individuals

Private Sector



Examples of Issues

- Neglected interiors and exteriors
- Vegetation
- Junk/trash
- Inoperable vehicles
- Vacant property
- Enforcement
- Process
- Fairness
- Results



Types of Action Steps

- Policy Changes
- Enforcement Procedure Changes
- Community Campaigns
- Change our Culture



FACTS (1):

- **Property Maintenance inspects 6000 properties per year on average - premises, exteriors, interiors**
- **2020 Housing Study cited 4300 substandard structures**



FACTS (2):

- Topeka bills \$1.5 M and only collects \$960K on fines and fees, all assessed at actual cost - loses over \$500K per year!
- Most people want to see more done with overgrown vegetation – yards, lots, right-of-way



FACTS (3):

- Most people would like to see vacant properties reoccupied if possible, at least secured and taken care of by owners.
- Many properties people thought needed to be demolished have been saved/restored beautifully, or could have been



Aspirational Goals for Change

- **Never more than 500 substandard properties in our City**
- **Culture change - more owners and occupants take control/care of properties without Code involvement**



Public Health and Safety Committee Preliminary Recommendations

- Reduce substandard structures by 50% in 5 years
- Reduce deterioration in vacant structures
- Reduce the expense/revenue gap on abatement cases by 50%
- Improve the appearance of the community through management of overgrown vegetation

Substandard





~ Substandard ~

- Interiors
- Exteriors
- Process
- Q. Are our standards OK? What about our inspection and notice systems?

Vacant Properties



~ Vacant ~

- Structures and Lots

- Intentional

- Abandoned

- Security

- Mowing and Dumping

- Q. What more can we do to prevent issues and/or get owners to take care of them?

Overgrown



~ Overgrown ~

- ➡ Grasses
- ➡ Trees, Shrubs and Vines (City has agreed to add back)
- ➡ Q. What can we do to see properties and blocks maintained...without write-ups at all?
- ➡ Q. Can the community do an initiative to get Trees, Shrubs and Vines cut back the first time? Ideas for Partners? Strategies to maintain?

Trash



~ Trash ~

- Residents yards
- Dumping
- Q1. Suggestions regarding Residents who keep accumulating trash or hoarding?
- Q2. Solutions to prevent dumping??

Change the Culture/ Save Money



More efficient inspections or notices?

More compelling fines?

Better social service systems?

Stronger neighborhood systems?

Community campaigns?

?????



Time Frame

- For the most part, the City of Topeka would like to reach our goals by 2026.
- Q1. Does that seem reasonable?
- Q2. Are you willing to help the City reach these goals?



Wrap-up

➡ Q. Any other thoughts or suggestions?

Our goal is to gather all responses and submissions and fine-tune our plans in October-December 2021 so that this initiative can begin in 2022.

On behalf of the City Council Public Health and Safety Committee, City Manager, Property Maintenance Division and other City Staff....

THANK YOU!!!

Public Health and Safety Committee and Staff Contact Information

- Councilmember, Karen Hiller – khiller@topeka.org
- Councilmember, Christina Valdivia-Alcala – cvaldivia-alcala@topeka.org
- Councilmember, Neil Dobler – ndobler@topeka.org
- City Manager, Brent Trout – btrout@topeka.org or 368-3725
- Property Maintenance Division Director, Mike Haugen – mhaugen@topeka.org
- City Council Executive Assistant, Liz Toyne – etoyne@topeka.org or 785-368-3710



Public Health and Safety Committee Upcoming Meeting Dates

October 13, 2021 10:00 AM – Noon Holliday East (and Zoom)



APPENDIX

IDEAS (1):

From PH&S Committee Preliminary Recommendation and City Manager and Staff's Initial Response

- Establishment a voluntary access norm for interior inspections.
- Establish single-visit complete inspection system to provide one inspection and one write-up procedure for all violations.
- Allow extensions to parties who prove they are working to address issues
- Have a referral system to responsible volunteers or paid laborers who can help with tasks.
- Activate section of Code that allows for courtesy inspections.
- Establish processes/consequences to incentivize voluntary compliance to address issues before being written up..

IDEAS (2):

From PH&S Committee Preliminary Recommendation and City Manager and Staff's Initial Response (cont.)

- **“Mothballing” info delivered to owners by Code Staff &/or Vacant Buildings Registry vendor, also on City website.**
- **Strategy with Police Department to optimize vacant structure security.**
- **Establish system and culture that makes COT expectations clear that owners will take responsibility for their properties.**
- **Possibly increase fines for extended or repeat violations, and perhaps a neighborhood/block initiatives for maintenance.**
- **Minor amendment of the Code about vegetation over 12”, as well as synch-up to non-IMPC section of the TMC to address same issue.**
- **Create communitywide volunteer initiatives**



IDEAS (3):

Ideas and possibilities prior to 8/17/21

- **Friendly door hangers in advance of neighborhood or block visits**
- **Consistent and regular schedules rather than by complaint**
- **Comprehensive**
- **Educate about relationship between property improvement and safety and health**
- **Look at Code Enforcement as First Responders!**
- **Change fees to allow higher fees for repeat or multiple property violations by the same owner**



IDEAS (4):

Ideas and Possibilities from prior to 8/17 (cont.)

- Asset attachment (attach liens to other properties)
- Shawnee County Extension has offered to teach how to identify weeds vs. flowers and tree seedlings
- Landlords charge a little more and do all mowing on houses
- Reinstate a tool lending program – freestanding or home improvement center partners
- Referral list for mowing and handyman services
- Navigator assistance?
- DREAMS program refreshes how the City works with neighborhoods
- Word with SNCO to have more tax sales



IDEAS (5):

After August 17

- Get help for residents who don't know how to identify or kill off plants
- Make sure street and utility projects are repaired and seeded at the same quality in all parts of town...to instill pride
- Address to the public the issue of allowing overgrown on city-managed waterways and some easements
- Include neighborhoods that are aging and where ownership is transitioning as much as others, to prevent decline
- More Christmas in April type programs
- Reinstate Neighborhood Enhancement Program, or something like it
- More charities to help seniors
- City leads by example with its properties and street sweeping

IDEAS (6):

After August 17 (cont.)

- Promote older and less expensive neighborhoods as well as our fancy ones when we promote our city....attract buyers
- Celebrations and recognitions for improvements
- Educate, educate, educate regarding standards and resources
- Encourage people who are getting volunteer services to have friends or family present to help
- Scout troops, youth groups – vegetation clearance is a good activity, even in COVID
- Christmas in April – do more like that
- Charities to help homeowners more



IDEAS (7):

After August 17 (cont.)

- Glass collector machines that give \$\$ for deposits
- Citizens (such as VIPs) marking and photoing grass and weeds

IDEAS (8):

September 13, 2021 meeting

- ▶ When a property maintenance violation is identified what resources are given to the property owner?
- ▶ The Planning department identifies property discrepancies in neighborhood plans that are separated out. The discrepancies are not on your report. It seems like you're not looking at the big picture.
- ▶ Are the largest amount of cases in poverty areas? What are the expectations? How are they being addressed? How are we helping owners to come into compliance?
- ▶ Hire people in the neighborhoods to cut grass (violations).
- ▶ Is there a breakdown of property owners versus landlords?
- ▶ Obtaining numbers – Who are the property owners in collections? How many local landlords versus out- of-town landlords? (Steve Vogel – SNCO Landlord Association has some data.)
- ▶ Interior inspections are important - Why isn't it enforced?
- ▶ It's challenging to have rental inspections done prior to a new move-in. This could possibly take 30-45 days for a landlord.
- ▶ Substandard properties - In reality, what is a good number to strive for? 3% seems to be a good number.
- ▶ What is the incentive for property owners/landlords to come back into the inner city to repair the dilapidated properties? Chicago, Kansas City, Memphis have good programs.
- ▶ Incentive programs for property owners needs to happen.
- ▶ It's not the 1970's – What are we doing now to keep property owners in Topeka?

IDEAS (8) cont.:

September 13, 2021 meeting

- ▶ TOTO program – What is the price value? It needs to be lowered for people to buy blighted properties.
- ▶ Utilize the youth via Washburn Tech, local high schools (Lazone Grays has ideas to assist in the LMI neighborhoods. His contact information will be provided at a later date.).
- ▶ Gentrification – try to make sure it doesn't happen.
- ▶ In the 1970's, OIC designed a job training program- LMI youth were hired to take care of properties owned by elderly in neighborhoods.
- ▶ Old programs helped the community - Tool Lending Library & the \$1 home buying program.
- ▶ 1970's Hi-Crest – there were 30-40 trustworthy young men who could be contacted by the NIA to assist people with projects.
- ▶ In the 1970's, YCAT Industrial Center ensured the youth volunteered in the community. Currently, the youth are OSHA certified. Unsure when or if they'll be allowed to volunteer.
- ▶ 1970's Mr. Abbott had a clinic that assisted neighborhoods.
- ▶ Community gardens need to be set-up in neighborhoods.
- ▶ CERT program
- ▶ CARE program – tenants are giving up because landlords aren't fixing the properties.
- ▶ City of Detroit – 15 years ago there was a program where empty lots were turned into gardens (4-6 acres of community gardens). The city provided the seeds.

IDEAS (8) cont.:

September 13, 2021 meeting

- Neighbors need to help neighbors.
- Is the city still allowing property owners to turn large homes into multi-housing units?
- Neighborhood Clean Ups – in the past, the Topeka Youth Project assisted the elderly and were involved and helped.
- Vacant Properties – all property owners need to be treated the same/don't separate. It will cause a bureaucratic mess.
- Key players need to be on the same page (judges, prosecutors, etc.) on how they enforce violators.
- People should sit in a Property Maintenance Hearing and hear all of the property owner's financial issues.
- Property owners need to utilize programs in the community to address their issues.
- Out-of-town registry for banks/property owners needs to be established to ensure they're held accountable for the upkeep of properties. Penalties need to be enforced in a timely manner. It shouldn't take 1 1/2 years.
- Vacant properties - Death of property owners causes squatters/vandals/burning down of properties.
- Neighborhood watch – only 3 participants are aware/involved. Consistency is a challenge. Social media doesn't replace face-to-face connectivity.
- Rice Road- an increase in meth usage. Neighbors are scared and reach out to community leaders to call the Topeka Police Department.
- Overgrowth – A property owner received a violation letter. However, the City property across the street had grass the same height.

IDEAS (8) cont.:

September 13, 2021 meeting

- USD 501 needs to start a program employing youth to cut grass in the neighborhoods. Program framework
 - Administrator/2. Identify youth/3. Identify projects/4. Distribute projects
- Washburn Tech East - There aren't a lot of local kids participating.
- Topeka Way to Work Program – the youth have lost trust in the City. The City needs to focus on building partnerships with schools, business, etc. to employ youth.
- Washburn Tech has a program for student's to start a business. The city needs to provide funds to hire students to start projects like mowing grass?
- Go back to programs that worked like the Enhancement that assisted NIAs and neighborhoods.
- The City of Topeka needs to build a better relationship with the youth.
- Neighborhoods can't depend on the City to do the work for them. The Division of Community Engagement established programs e.g., "Rock the Block" to help the neighborhoods. During the handoff the neighborhoods didn't continue the efforts. The neighborhoods have to be willing to do the work.
- Centralized searchable listing of bid lists for small businesses. Teach people how to bid on the projects.
- Open Air Ditches – Central Highland Park NIA was informed that open ditches could be included in their neighborhood plan. However, Property Maintenance is now enforcing the open air ditches. UPDATE - Major Klumpp is currently working on the language to approve native vegetation.
- Youth must be involved. We need to try to get them involved. Why can't USD 501 have more programs/vocational trainings, jobs?

IDEAS (8) cont.:

September 13, 2021 meeting

- Memphis, TN – sold dilapidated homes for \$10,000 encouraging affordable home ownership. The TOTO program needs to lower the home value.
- It's hard for property owners to buy a home that has experienced blight for 10 years and then be expected to turn it around immediately.
- Youth – don't have the funds to pay for trade schools. We need to find the funds for their tuition.
- Afterschool programs need to be created to teach kids how to sharpen blades, etc.
- Trash – Do we have local hoarding specialists? Mental health agencies that can assist. The neighbors need to be identified and provided with help.
- Everyone needs to be held accountable for their property upkeep.
- Trash – Provide dumpsters at ½ price for move-outs.
- Clean-up's – Neighbors Helping Neighbors
- Dumpsters – set on fire after clean-up
- The City of Manhattan – after a storm ensures that debris & limbs are picked up.
- Would it be helpful if the City of Topeka created such a program? Would it change the culture of the community? Possibly.
- Tool Lending Library – people don't have the equipment. In lieu of the program what if big box stores provided a coupon/reduced rental rates.
- It's important to talk to your neighbors and get to know each other/reach out/dialogue.

IDEAS (8) cont.:

September 13, 2021 meeting

- Neighborhood Contests – beautification projects – e.g., certain day a week once a month everyone does a clean-up
- Free dumping needs to happen more often. Neighbors with trucks need to assist.
- SENT's new construction in Hi-Crest has increased the property values. This strategy works.
- Inmate programs – the cost is exuberant. There is the potential of them escaping.
- Social Service System – people are calling and finding out they've run out of money. They need to be provided more funds quickly.
- Tenants need to be provided information about who has funding to help them quickly.
- How many people are willing to help change the culture of Topeka? 12 people raised their hand.
- Councilmembers Valdivia-Alcalá and Hiller noted that Mr. Lazone Grays with IBSA Inc. had a wealth of knowledge in this field. They suggested people contact him at lazoneg@ibsa-inc.org or call 913-735-4272.

IDEAS (9):

Public Input Online Form – Received September 15, 2021

Vacant Properties – Structures or Lots

How can we be more successful at getting people to mow and manage vegetation on vacant properties?

I look at it the pride we have for our homes. Some people may not have the resources. Maybe have volunteers or neighbors who care enough to take on these challenges.

Ideas for possible partnerships?

Partner with landscapers, implement companies, garden clubs, churches, a group who could lead and educate volunteers to care for these lots that need cared for by mowing and landscaping. Partner with landowners and help them to help themselves.

How can we be more successful at getting people to keep vacant structures secured?

That is a big question. It will likely be teamwork.

Additional comments by same participant, received via email 9/29/21:

I attended the meeting last Thursday night at Garfield park. This weekend I visited with two gentlemen that are landlords in Topeka and invited them to tomorrow night's meeting in Oakland. Between three family members they have 66 rental properties. They didn't seem interested in coming but shared that if they did it would be nice to have available sites throughout Topeka that a dumpster could be placed for anyone to use, until it is filled. Every two months. They have their own system in place but while others might not it could be helpful for others to help keep Topeka clean and attractive. I also talked to Sunflower Association of Realtors today asking if there was anything the community of realtors might do. I just put that out there so I don't know where that will go. They do have volunteers that are at the yearly Winter Wonderland.

IDEAS (10):

September 16, 2021 meeting

- ▶ How do you find out the status of vacant homes?
- ▶ Should pictures be added to the See Click Fix tickets?
- ▶ Vacant Properties
 - ▶ Can properties be relinquished to the city?
 - ▶ The community needs to get involved and neighbors need to own their block.
 - ▶ Establish fruit orchards in empty lots – neighbors will mow and maintain the orchard. The neighbors will benefit and it will improve the neighborhood.
 - ▶ Orchards require less maintenance and beautify the area.
 - ▶ Are fines increasing on properties with multiple violations?
 - ▶ Do the increased fines encourage people to come into compliance?
 - ▶ Why doesn't Everygy paint stumps and use killer on trees they remove. Otherwise, it becomes a continual problem every year.
 - ▶ How do you find out who is the property owner?
 - ▶ When a property has a violation. Neighbors should contact the owner and let them know of the issue.
 - ▶ A database should be created listing all of the violators. Every 30 days that a property owner's name remains on the list they should be issued a new ticket.

IDEAS (10) cont.:

September 16, 2021 meeting

- A website should be created for Neighbors to Help Neighbors.
- The Nextdoor app has a feature for neighbors to post volunteer needs/opportunities.
- Resource lists – it would be helpful for neighbors to know that there's help available.
- Facebook – some neighborhoods
- The blight issue of an area is determined by the tolerance level of the neighborhood
- Street lighting is a great deterrent for abandoned areas.
- Lighting in the alleys helps to deter illegal activity. The community needs to know about Evergy's street light program.
- A Property Maintenance Youth Internship program needs to be created. The interns could take pictures and write-up violations. In addition, they could learn skill sets to assist with other industries; construction, etc.
- Dumping
 - The cost of dumping can be prohibitive to some property owners/tenants resulting in illegal dumping.
 - The lack of transportation is a leading factor in why people don't go to the dump.

IDEAS (11):

Public Input Online Form – Received September 16, 2021

Vacant Properties – Structures or Lots	
Do you have ideas how we can better attract people to buy and redevelop these properties?	Assist, partner, and educate about financial and homeowner opportunities such as special financing, first time home owner and T.O.T.O program.
What about dumping on these properties? Any ideas on how we can better prevent or manage that?	Educate and assist the community about how to maintain their properties.
Trash	
Any suggestions on how to reduce this problem, therefore making our city look better and by extension feel healthier in addition to saving taxpayers money?	Giving incentives or offer incentives for recycling and or encourage trash pick up days.

Public Input received via email September 18, 2021

Suggest we improve on practices and threats of criminal prosecution for people who get notices to paint their houses. If people have written bids from reputable contractors, who simply have to schedule out, can't extensions be granted without what is apparently a required 90-day cycle of continued requirements for check-ins and threats of criminal prosecution?

IDEAS (12):

September 20, 2021 meeting

- Goals
 - Sustainability
- Key Players
 - Keep America Beautiful – picks up tires and leverage volunteers hours
 - Non-profit sector
 - Citizen Advisory Council (CAC) – should be listed somewhere between Neighborhood Associations and Community Engagement
- Issues
 - Does the punishment fit the crime? – 6 months in jail/\$490 for mowing violation not corrected within 3 day timeframe
 - Do admin fees exceeded our cost?
 - We don't really want city staff engaged in providing lawn service on private property
 - Property owners should be told who filed the complaint
 - Not inspecting the interior of vacant properties
 - Tenants not maintaining property and landlord has no ability to fine their tenant or have personal property issues addressed (could this be added into the lease?)
 - No impound lot for cars
 - Why does Property Maintenance have to send out a second letter if they have already sent out one?
 - Coordination with other utility company's to maintain their property (fallen light poles, dumping furniture)
 - Unequal enforcement of code violations on larger properties such as old schools
 - Need to treat everyone the same, system that is consistent in enforcement, able to be fair to assist those in need of help (physical or financially)

IDEAS (12) cont.:

September 20, 2021 meeting

- Action Steps/ Ideas
 - Sell more of the vacant properties
 - Put up fence or plant trees to help reduce grass growth, plant buffalo grass, other natural grasses to prevent overgrowth
 - Can we hire people to go out and mow the vacant properties
 - Hold tenants liable for maintaining property instead of property owner (for certain issues such as mowing, personal property, nuisance)
 - Contract with company to mow the overgrown properties
 - Could Property maintenance staff be more proactive in looking at properties instead of just reacting to complaints.
- Standards for Interior/Exterior
 - People who are not able financially or physically able should have a different program or assistance to help them instead of being fined. Those who are just negligent should be required to pay higher penalties
 - Give more time for landlords to evict negligent tenants
 - Increase city's stock in affordable housing
 - Reassess zoning requirements in areas with large number of vacant units
 - CAC Affordable Housing and Resources Committee – need more reps to come and participate to provide more input for this committee
 - Sometimes standards are too high such as when a house has two different colors or window trim needing to be a different color than the body of the house
 - Assistance Programs for homeowners to help with property maintenance violations – not enough assistance available to help – need more programs. More education on available programs/ resources lists – get input from property owners about what resources they need or would like more assistance with.

IDEAS (12) cont.:

September 20, 2021 meeting

■ Vacant Properties

- Inspectors go on to property and check out the back – can only inspect from a neighboring property – why can't they inspect if the property is vacant?
- After property has been abandoned for a long period of time can the City take over the vacant lots
- Can vacant lots be repurposed in ways that require less maintenance or ways that would benefit the entire community (community gardens, native plant gardens, etc.)
- Program in South Bend Indiana 1000 houses in 1000 days – mass demolition of properties all over the City – maybe implement a similar program.

■ Overgrown

- Managed natural landscapes/native plant gardens – need more definition on how these properties can be maintained and how property maintenance can better identify managed natural landscapes vs. negligent overgrowth and noxious weeds; provide more public education (for neighborhoods, property owners, etc.) and education for property maintenance staff; update ordinance to reflect natural landscaping exceptions; Top soil degrading natural habitat; evasive plants causing damage to natural habitat as well – example honeysuckle growing along the Shunga Creek; Master Gardeners or other groups that could assist property owners with overgrowth issues/ creating more managed natural landscapes. Use community gardens as a teaching tool to help others learn how to properly grow and maintain community gardens in their areas.
- Doing vegetable gardens with schools has not been successful because you need to have some kind of summer program to continue maintenance on it. Might be more successful with other types of gardens that don't require as much maintenance.
- Trees and shrubs – find a resource for people who don't have the physical or financial capacity to trim or cut. Partner with Master Gardner's Association
- School to provide physical education credit to kids who mow lawns that have violations
- Put violations on back taxes
- Easement overgrowth – who is responsible?

IDEAS (12) cont.:

September 20, 2021 meeting

- ▶ Trash/Dumping
 - ▶ Team up to Clean up and clean up collaborations through the CAC
 - ▶ Setting property out on curb (couches, etc.)
 - ▶ Renters – how can landlords get more involved or make adjustments to their leases
 - ▶ Memorials up for months or years and no one wants to remove them – needs to be a time limit on these.

IDEAS (13):

Public Input Form – Received September 20, 2021

Do you have ideas how we can better attract people to buy and redevelop these properties?	Assist, partner, and educate about financial and homeowner opportunities such as special financing, first time home owner and T.O.T.O program.
What about dumping on these properties? Any ideas on how we can better prevent or manage that?	Educate and assist the community about how to maintain their properties.
Trash	
Any suggestions on how to reduce this problem, therefore making our city look better and by extension feel healthier in addition to saving taxpayers money?	Giving incentives or offer incentives for recycling and or encourage trash pick up days.
Involvement	
I am interested in helping solve the issues I have identified.	Yes
Issue	Trash-effectively support a more clean environment

IDEAS (14):

September 22, 2021 (Session 1, Holliday Building)

- Goals
 - We want to be known as the city that gives good quality customer service.
 - Property Maintenance isn't working in many of our districts.
 - As we look at the straightforward kind and fair we need to also consider strategic as well.
 - Property Maintenance needs to become more strategic to benefit all neighborhoods.
- Key Players:
 - Administrative Hearing Judges
 - The Administrative Hearing Judge needs to have a better understanding that continual allowance of extensions to repeat offenders doesn't help the issue.
 - What does it mean to be kind? Providing additional time isn't kindness.
 - SNCO Waste
- Issues:
 - There is a clear disconnection on how properties are maintained.
 - Numerous problems in Property Maintenance.
 - There needs to be a change in management and city government.
 - We have real issues and not ancillary ones.
 - The court and prosecution process isn't working.
 - Out-of-Town owners have the perception of nothing that you do to me will affect me. The City of Topeka legal department needs to be afraid of property owners lawyering up.
 - There is a disconnection with realtors. Complete communication with all elements of people working with realtors.

IDEAS (14) cont.:

September 22, 2021(Session 1, Holliday Building)

- Issues (continued):
 - We need a better attitude about the city's cleanliness.
 - Litter ordinance
 - SNCO Waste isn't picking up all of the bulky items.
 - The SNCO Waste Director is responsible to communicate with their customers on the services offered.
 - People don't understand the policy.
 - Property Maintenance is not doing anything about the blight.
 - A city should be run like this.
 - Education campaign – communication, email customers, door hangers.
 - Courts need to understand a clear direction.
 - It would help if judges lived in the city and had the issues in their neighborhoods.
 - How many cases are being closed? The number of cases doesn't matter.
 - There isn't any problem solving in Property Maintenance.
 - Hi-Crest NIA
 - The previous inspector would listen
 - Tried new methods for 30 days

IDEAS (14) cont.:

September 22, 2021(Session 1, Holliday Building)

- Issues (continued):
 - Contact the property owner and tell them what needs to be fixed.
 - Don't just write up 1 hours on the block and not write up the other violations on the block.
 - Utilize a door hanger that informs the owner to clean up the property or go to court.
 - People aren't afraid of the fines/fees.
 - Residential demolition property is treated differently from commercial properties – It isn't fair.
 - How could a residential property receive 5 administrative fees and the White Lakes property hasn't.
 - Why haven't these issues been fixed? That's the question that needs to be asked.
 - We want the cases to be closed – doesn't want to see the issues in court.
 - The dilapidated properties are being overlooked by Property Maintenance.
 - The abatement timeline is too long.
 - How can a property owner receive a violation? But, a city property directly across the street has an outstanding violation that hasn't been addressed.
 - Why do citizens have to bring things to the city's attention to get resolved?
 - Staff should have empathy for tenants.
 - People are moving out of the city because of Property Maintenance.
 - The top priorities shouldn't be bike trails.

IDEAS (14) cont.:

September 22, 2021(Session 1, Holliday Building)

- Issues (continued):
 - There needs to be a citizen's committee (including CAC/NIA/NA's, etc.) involved in all components of Property Maintenance Creation so whatever recommendations can go to the Governing Body and the City Manager. Starting at the creation of policies & guidelines through the implementation and assessment.
 - The city has to stop involving neighborhood leadership and citizen participation at the end of the process instead of from day one.
 - Understand that things aren't happening quickly – there still has to be a balance between Property Maintenance and due process.
 - Aesthetics are not property maintenance issues. We need to be able to draw the line between what is essential to have safe structures and the fact that one may not like the color of paint on a property.
 - Fund more city staff.
 - Abatement of legitimate property maintenance issues.
 - Historically people use Property Maintenance in a vindictive manner. This issue needs to be kept in mind.
 - Sidewalks – the city should pay for 100%. Look at state law. There are currently two cities that pay 100% for sidewalk replacement. The 50/50 program isn't a big help for property owners.
 - Land banking – in 2000 Tennessee Town NIA created a version of land banking and turned around an entire block (1200 block of SW Lincoln). Land banking as it applies to property maintenance is an effort to get properties before they deteriorate to utilize for future development.
 - Citizen initiatives
 - Lawn mower program would employ youth while beautifying neighborhoods.
 - Local NIA officer/landlord works with KAB to abate abandoned tires in Tennessee Town NIA.
- What is Property Maintenance?
 - Is it punishment through fines?
 - Or, is it about abating nuisances.
 - Historically in Topeka these haven't been the same. The fines aren't working. The issues persist. Instead of someone knocking on their door and giving them a fine. The City should knock on the door and ask 'how can we help'?

IDEAS (14) cont.:

September 22, 2021(Session 1, Holliday Building)

- Action Steps/Ideas:
 - Get to know your neighbors
 - Mentor neighbors
 - Large amounts of limbs in yards
 - People need to participate in opportunities provided to them.
 - A huge lack of participation.
 - Annually neighborhoods are provided two free waste dumpsters and 1 landfill event.
 - The CAC supported the events and distributed information to the NIAs.
 - As a volunteer I have devoted 40 hours weekly. What value is it to me by allowing people to continue with their quality of life? What's in it for me?
 - Enabling people not to do what they need to do.
 - Trying to lift up neighborhoods
 - It takes time
 - Apathy
 - It's a different time period
 - Initiatives are going to take time
 - Mowing program in neighborhoods
 - Neighbors are mowing multiple yards in their neighborhood
 - We all don't have the same level of standards
 - How are flower beds that don't turn into weed patches?
 - The expense of sharing information into the community shouldn't come out of the NIA budget.
 - SNCO Waste Director does not address the issue of mattresses still sit over 1 week. Then it ends up in another neighbors dumpster. Overall it sits there 2-3 weeks.
 - The issues are people problems.

IDEAS (14) cont.:

September 22, 2021 (Session 1, Holliday Building)

- Vacant Properties:
 - Property Maintenance has good policies and is doing a good job.
 - Why doesn't Property Maintenance enforce the codes?
 - Owners of multiple properties doesn't fix the properties for 3 years and nothing happens?
 - Why does it take so long for violations to be addressed?
 - Why does it take so long?
 - Multiple violations have been done on a property and there are no results.
 - Why are the continual violators allowed to have multiple violations?
 - Only concerned about the properties being fixed.
 - Why can't the state law be changed and a lien be put on the property where the owner resides?
 - The court process is slow and the City of Topeka has no control over this issue.
 - 4 Levels of Discretion (possibly there are too many layers)
 - The Property Maintenance Inspector – authorizes 1 extension only with a plan of action
 - Supervisor – unreasonable plan will be sent to the Administrative Hearing Judge
 - Fines – The fines are dependent upon the type of violation.
 - The Oakland NIA is reinstating the neighborhood watch and citizen patrol.
 - Central Park NIA – In the past, neighbors painted 20 vacant houses.
 - The fee structure needs to be reviewed.
 - It's not enough to just board up the windows and doors.
 - There need to be working windows/doors for both the front and back of the home.
 - Rental property owners that are working on replacing windows & doors need to have the option of boarding up to ensure their properties won't be vandalized.
 - Allow homes to be boarded until they are rent ready.
 - Continual vandalism is a huge issue.
 - Resource – Clear view (plexiglass product to utilize on windows)

IDEAS (14) cont.:

September 22, 2021(Session 1, Holliday Building)

- ▶ Overgrown:
 - ▶ Utilize young people in the neighborhood
 - ▶ Mowing neighbors in need yard
 - ▶ Removing Shrubs/vines
 - ▶ Teaching them how to use the necessary equipment and maintenance methods
 - ▶ Working directly in their neighborhood
 - ▶ Lawn mower bank
 - ▶ Classes at community centers "Teach the Basic"
 - ▶ How to recognize the blade/How to gas the equipment
 - ▶ The elderly could utilize the program.
 - ▶ Create pools of opportunities
 - ▶ Trees
- ▶ Most of the problems are not in the City of Topeka right-of-way.
- ▶ There need to be more education and knowledge shared about the maintenance of trees.
- ▶ Trash/Dumping:
 - ▶ Bulky items pick up information needs to be communicated to the community.

IDEAS (15):

Public Input Form – Received September 22, 2021

Substandard Properties – Interior and Exterior

Do you have any suggestions for changes in our standards?	We need a way that residents can become a more substantial part of the process like this: https://kctenants.org/about . Also, we took away the neighborhood officers, and when they were in place they didn't like carrying through with the regulations. There seems to be no enforcement in my neighborhood.
Do you have suggestions for changes in our enforcement procedures – inspections, notices, follow-ups, and so on?	We need a real plan that works with the local non-profits.
For those who are familiar with the administrative hearings and court processes, any ideas on how we can make those more efficient or better?	We need a more streamlined process to deal with absentee owners of dilapidated properties.
What about our processes with inoperable vehicles (aka junk cars)?	Nothing happens to junk cars. We need a real process. The narrow streets and lack of sidewalks make the junk cars a serious safety risk to kids who walk to school.

Vacant Properties – Structures or Lots

How can we be more successful at getting people to mow and manage vegetation on vacant properties?	work with local landscaping companies and add the fees to water bills.
Ideas for possible partnerships?	local nonprofits and landscaping companies could have mowing and landscaping crews that the city contracted. Tighter reins on landlords for their renters. Add it to the leases.
How can we be more successful at getting people to keep vacant structures secured?	land trust and other grants that help with gap funding for rehabs.
Do you have ideas how we can better attract people to buy and redevelop these properties?	Look at what Detroit did with letting property owners on a street buy vacant properties for \$1.
What about dumping on these properties? Any ideas on how we can better prevent or manage that?	Add patrol.

Overgrown

Neighbor strategies?	We need a website or app where we can report when something is not being taken care of.
Any ideas of how we conduct a major initiative for vegetation clean-up in Topeka and who the partners may be?	Work with local nonprofits like SENT if they had the beginning capital they could use this as a job training program.

Trash

Any suggestions on how to reduce this problem, therefore making our city look better and by extension feel healthier in addition to saving taxpayers money?	We need major communications on people leaving their cans at the curb fulltime.
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IDEAS (16):

September 22, 2021 (Session 2, Garfield Community Center)

- Goals
 - Fix up homes
 - Create strategies that address the issues section by section
- Key Players:
 - Churches
 - Shawnee County Appraiser's Office
 - City of Topeka Development Services
- Issues:
 - Topeka Rescue Mission residents filter into the neighborhood and steals from residents. Neighbors feel locked in their homes.
 - People are moving out of North Topeka due to these issues.
 - High crime area
 - Concerned about the number of TPD officers patrolling the neighborhoods. Lt. Beightel confirmed there are 3-4 officers typically in the area daily. Please contact him if you would like TPD questions.
 - Property owner passed away and the grass isn't being cut. It doesn't make sense tha the City has to maintain the grass and out it on the tax role.
 - Absentee landlords are an issue.
 - There needs to be a consideration for set-backs for builders in LMI neighborhoods. A setback is the distance from the road/alley to the neighbor. It also has a minimum square footage requirement.
 - Infill housing has been declined in LMI neighborhoods in the past.
 - Instead of tearing down substandard housing in LMI neighborhoods and having overgrown lots the preference would be to incentivize small investors to fix the properties.

IDEAS (16) cont.:

September 22, 2021(Session 2, Garfield Community Center)

- Issues (continued):
 - Small investors meet and discuss existing inventory.
 - Small investors and contractors feel threatened by the permit process.
 - Why are incentives provided to large corporations but not small residential investors?
 - Development Services needs to dialogues with small investors on a frequent basis.
 - It's not fair when someone buys a home and then immediately receives a violation.
 - Why can't small investors pull a permit and do the trade work themselves followed-up with a City inspection? This may encourage people to get a permit and remove some shoddy work.
 - The requirement to hire an electrician, plumber or HVAC contractor is too costly of an investment in the dilapidated neighborhoods.
 - Small investors are doing the work and not getting the projects inspected anyway.
 - Contractors aren't interested in partial jobs/projects.
 - Is there an existing private financing for repairs program for small investors?
 - Local banks work well with small investors.
- Action Steps/Ideas:
 - Invite TRM representative to a meeting and inquire on the following:
 - What's your process for allowing the residents in and out of the facility?
 - What programs do you have for the residents?
 - What time are they released?
 - Do you know the amount of traffic throughout the neighborhoods on a daily basis?

IDEAS (16) cont.:

September 22, 2021 (Session 2, Garfield Community Center)

- ▶ Standards for Interior/Exterior:
 - ▶ Substandard Structures
 - ▶ Are you talking about fences, garages and out buildings?
 - ▶ Is a case still open if there are multiple violations on multiple structures on the property?
 - ▶ Interiors
 - ▶ Is the city going to inspect the interiors of all homes in Topeka?
 - ▶ The property maintenance & court system isn't working. There are two properties that have had ongoing violations for seven years equaling \$10,000 - \$25,000 in fines. There is a breakdown in the system.
 - ▶ Substandard properties have outstanding taxes and fines and their becoming dilapidated on a daily basis.
 - ▶ The SNCO tax sale listing needs to add dilapidated properties to the list quicker.
 - ▶ SNCO doesn't want to become a property owner.
 - ▶ Interior inspections – Can the inspection be done when the property goes up for sale?
- ▶ Vacant Properties:
 - ▶ Why doesn't SNCO Assessors office allow non-owners to make a request to add a property to the auction list? This is a problem.
 - ▶ The County indicated a non-owner doesn't have the right to add a property to the list.
 - ▶ Education program – What can be done when someone dies and a property is put into probate?

IDEAS (16) cont.:

September 22, 2021(Session 2, Garfield Community Center)

- Overgrown:
 - North Topeka west vine – SNCO Research Extension indicated it isn't a weed. Japanese Hops is an issue in the area.
 - SNCO Master Gardeners offers great educational opportunities.
 - Weeds
 - Poke weed – red berries that blooms white flowers (potentially poisonous) and it takes 4-5 years to kill it.
 - H & R Block Neighborhood Block Beautification Grant
 - HOT NIA President applied and won a grant for alley beautification.
- Trash/Dumping:
 - SNCO Waste provides 40 yard dumpsters free annually
 - Dumping fees for \$75/per ton
 - A lot of dumping on vacant lots
 - Neighbors help neighbors mowing
 - Burning trash is an issue
 - A lot next to Little Russia owned by BNSF always has illegal dumping
 - BNSF is difficult and challenging to contact. The yard master is hard to contact. The state level seems to work better.
- Wrap Up
 - There should be a timeframe (1 year, 2 years or 3 years) by neighborhood aligning with these initiatives to assist with the goals to keep as a whole.
 - Will there be a follow-up meeting in a year?

IDEAS (17):

September 23, 2021

- Standards for Interior/Exterior
 - City offers great programs to help lower income homeowners but the timelines are very long for when you can use the services that the process is often longer than a person has to address a property maintenance issue. Take some of these programs and match them up with violation timelines to better help low income homeowners. Example Fire; not insured and were given three months to get it fixed/demolition; were told that the house has to be vacant for an entire year before it could be considered for the City's voluntary demolition program. It would be helpful if these programs were more aligned.
 - Council Member Ortiz – would like to see City allow people to register on their properties when they are working on them. There should be a process where property owners can register and have time to bring the homes up to code before being given a citation if they are already working to have things fixed. Also, letters should be in both English and Spanish or have at least one line providing a help line in Spanish.
 - Council Member Naeger – would be helpful to have more than just one line in Spanish “ We are contacting you about the state of your property and want to make sure that you have the resources you need. Please contact ...”
 - Substandard housing that people are living in (disabled people) – mold, - have Building trade students at Washburn/Washburn Tech East to do volunteer work (carpentry) – community service type projects that would allow them to get hands-on experience and also repair homes through affordable programs for LMI homeowners and residences. This would provide more formal structure instead of just having volunteers in the community. This would provide students with on the job training and also a sense of giving back to the community.
 - How are substandard property goals defined? The numbers and words come from housing study. Currently, If you have a property violation it is substandard, but the City Manager would like staff to work with this committee to more clearly define a more accurate definition of substandard properties.
 - For permits you have to live in the home and it be your primary residence; if not, you have to hire a qualified licensed and insured contractor to complete the work which causes some issues with having work completed on homes by property owners.

IDEAS (17) cont.:

September 23, 2021

- Vacant Properties
 - Mowing and Dumping - Could be a transitional job opportunity for people to have the opportunity to be reconnected to their community. Paid to individuals to get the work ethic and skills needed rather than having inmates do the work. Could be non-custodial parents who are behind in child support. This would allow them to be eligible for more support services that could help them reintegrate into the community.
 - Reducing deterioration in vacant structures – like the differentiation between “vacant” structures and “deteriorated” structures and would like us to consider that in future program discussion including vacant property registration programs.
- Overgrown
 - Tree trimming partnership where they could come every two weeks to cut one or two branches to help people trim trees back in a more affordable manner (\$20 every two weeks vs. \$500 all at once)
 - Program where people that owe money to the City for property violations could work off the debt by improving their property and other properties that have violations.
 - Opportunity for an entrepreneur through Go Topeka Business startup a landscaping business
- Trash/Dumping
 - Have dumpsters for tires or tire clean up – have dumpsters throughout the City a few times a year
 - Homeless don't have trash service or place to put trash so they may dump or leave items on other people's property
 - Council Member Ortiz – people paid to remove property and have been dumping in East Topeka – if we can identify violators then we can charge them – need to have more dumpsters, but monitor them so
- contractors don't abuse them. Public education on what trash companies will accept (large items pick up policies).
 - People get rid of items when they get new replacements
 - Sunday check in – help pick up and have conversation and get ready for the next week. Some kind of system to help people get rid of items every week. How can we implement something like that?

IDEAS (18):

Public Input Form – Received September 25, 2021

Substandard Properties – Interior and Exterior

Do you have any suggestions for changes in our standards?

Although the most critical structural elements are addressed in the code enforcement powerpoint (eg roofs, rotting trim/siding and foundations), the inspectors seem to be more focused on less-critical issues (eg paint and tall weeds). Agree these are violations that need to be addressed, but a painting over these problems is like putting lipstick on pig. Taking care of these issues would extend the life of the house and would also make all future repairs much more impactful. Painting over rotten trim and soffit just to get the inspector off your back isn't solving the problem. A refocus on actually solving the major issues to save the houses. But, fixing roofs and foundations is costly. How about an EASY program that allows the county to offset property taxes by such a repair if made in a 'challenged' neighborhood? Not just the offset for increased value, but an actual credit for major repairs. Maybe the utility companies could also contribute to an off - set program by forgiving some utility costs? This would not likely cover the entire cost, but could be a start. Perhaps a list of low-interest lending agencies or homeowner programs to help repair houses could be compiled?

Do you have suggestions for changes in our enforcement procedures – inspections, notices, follow-ups, and so on?

The inspectors have a wealth of knowledge and could provide great advice to people if allowed-especially when major renovations are needed on a property. Instead of immediately sending a letter telling you to paint the trim or repair a window, a conversation with the home owner about the problem and the plans for the property could go along way. Allowing the inspector to discuss the situation with the owner before immediately issuing a citation would help change how we see these people. Major renovations can take years of work. Allowing these changes to be made without the hassle of going in front of a judge and sitting for hours to explain the delay, why not allow the code enforcement officers more authority to grant extensions or negotiate a timeline as long as progress is being made? Court should be reserved for extreme cases. The inspectors should be allowed to deal with the majority of issues without a judge

Trash

Any suggestions on how to reduce this problem, therefore making our city look better and by extension feel healthier in addition to saving taxpayers money?

In some cases, Everygy charges the homeowner for alley lights to be turned on. Could the city take on the responsibility for alley lighting? This might discourage dumping but also some of the other bad activity in alleys.

Changing our Culture

Any other suggestions on how we can Change our Culture of Property Maintenance in Topeka? Remember our goal along with you is to improve our communities with healthy, safe, and appealing properties everywhere in our city. And just as importantly, to see a gradual reduction in city oversight.

I attended the meeting on Thursday, Sept 23 and was disappointed that a rep from the Topeka PD wasn't in attendance. For 'challenged' neighborhoods the police are critical to helping solve the problem. Nothing discourages home maintenance more than people who are afraid in their own neighborhood. The drug and prostitution houses need to be addressed. The people who frequent these places are loud, scary and armed. Theft and basic safety are major fears of anyone living around these places - the thought of attempting home repairs seems like an open invitation to steal tools and break windows. The police take complaints but nothing happens. We know the patrol officers are very busy and don't have time to deal with this. Maybe some dedicated officers or personnel to help specifically with issues in these neighborhoods? Similar to a community officer, but would also have an eye toward property maintenance and code enforcement? Even something as simple as more drive throughs in alleys and such would be helpful.

IDEAS (19):

Public Input Form – Received September 28, 2021

Substandard Properties – Interior and Exterior

Do you have any suggestions for changes in our standards?	design policies that encourage best practices by occupants and penalize the relevant party (owner or occupant). Require rentals to address property maintenance (mowing, appearances etc.) so a party is accountable or it's built into costs.
Do you have suggestions for changes in our enforcement procedures – inspections, notices, follow-ups, and so on?	require 2 sentence response to the public if you are reporting back conditions or status on see click fix. Closing an issue without status for resolution doesn't help the situation.
What about our processes with inoperable vehicles (aka junk cars)?	cars should be on gravel in a space designed for parking cars (driveway, back of lot) cars decaying and dripping oil in the public right of way and adjacent to sidewalks present an environmental risk. There needs to be a better mechanism to shift a call or ticket from police to property maintenance more efficiently.

Vacant Properties – Structures or Lots

How can we be more successful at getting people to mow and manage vegetation on vacant properties?	require properties that are renting to build it into their contracts. when not addressed, but the responsible party. Or pass policy stating that mowing of all properties is default responsible to the property owner despite occupancy.
Ideas for possible partnerships?	parks and rec/ county mowing contractors. would make for a larger contractor, most likely get a better price with a larger company capable of processing faster.
How can we be more successful at getting people to keep vacant structures secured?	offer it up as an RFP to volunteer groups like church groups or civic minded groups. City pays for materials (smaller cost) volunteer group provides people power.
Do you have ideas how we can better attract people to buy and redevelop these properties?	have the chamber market them. Have planning dept/ development services provide list that chamber maintains of redevelopable commercial properties or housing stock
What about dumping on these properties? Any ideas on how we can better prevent or manage that?	empower neighborhood groups with a process for them to transport materials that 're dumped and have the dump visit comped by City
Other	have system with the county to have advertising signs placed on properties that have extensive back taxes so that developers will start pondering what they can do to redevelop the site if it ends up going on the county's tax sale list.

IDEAS (19) cont.:

Public Input Form – Received September 28, 2021

Overgrown	
Any ideas on how we can better get all properties mowed and managed regularly without having Code Enforcement called? (Think of the different categories...from irresponsible local or absentee owners, renters who don't have lawnmowers or necessarily the incentive to mow and trim, to people who just need help.)	Similar to ideas on boarding houses, find some civic entities or church groups who might be willing to add to their mowing contracts to have their contractors mow these properties. A list is assigned each week or bid on by these contractors who will be paid by local benefactors in the community like churches and civic groups.
Neighbor strategies?	work with NIA's to create neighborhood mowers (kids, adults looking for further income) Neighborhood Relations and NIA (if there is one) could function as fiduciary distributor of moneys to compensate these localized mowing teams via the existing relationship with NIA. Could help build minority and low startup cost mowing businesses in underserved communities.
Training programs?	(Same from Neighbor strategies) work with NIA's to create neighborhood mowers (kids, adults looking for further income) Neighborhood Relations and NIA (if there is one) could function as fiduciary distributor of moneys to compensate these localized mowing teams via the existing relationship with NIA. Could help build minority and low startup cost mowing businesses in underserved communities.
Other suggestions about how to handle grass cutting and other overgrowth with a gradual reduction in City intervention (and therefore taxpayer cost) as a possibility?	City purchase fleet of 150 battery electric mowers and extra batteries to be placed with NIA leads and lent out for neighbors to mow. NIA member given stipend for their electricity to keep mower and extra battery charged. neighbor paid X dollars per yard mowed or given gift card to local business/grocery store in return for mowing.
Trash	
Any suggestions on how to reduce this problem, therefore making our city look better and by extension feel healthier in addition to saving taxpayers money?	City help navigate legal hurdles and allow neighborhoods to remediate such houses exteriors quarterly. City provides compensation for dump visits or dumpster rentals.
Changing our Culture	
Any other suggestions on how we can Change our Culture of Property Maintenance in Topeka? Remember our goal along with you is to improve our communities with healthy, safe, and appealing properties everywhere in our city. And just as importantly, to see a gradual reduction in city oversight.	have an ongoing property maintenance committee with oversight AND input to City staff, that is staffed by 1-2 council people. must have a minority number of property owners in comparison to renters. Also must have underserved races and populations as a part of this process.

IDEAS (20):

September 30, 2021

■ Operational Goals

- Is it possible to have the verbiage for the first letter? "I see you have a problem and we want to help you".
- What type of list of resources are provided to violators?
- How often are the resources updated?
- City of Topeka website – listing of resources
- The letters need a different tone.
- Can the resources be updated annually?
- What can a neighborhood do to help neighbors?
- Can the Boy Scouts, churches and other organizations help?
- 44% of Property Maintenance properties are owned by landlords. What % of cases are owned property owners who don't reside in the home?
- Slum landlord cases need to be handled in an expeditious manner.
- 75% of HI-Crest West NIA properties are owned by landlords. The property owners that live in the neighborhood take care of their properties.
- Why aren't court costs being charged to violators?
- Administrative fines are arbitrary.
- Why was the owner of White Lakes only charged for one administrative fees with all of the outstanding violations?
- Stop extending cases month after month, year after year.
- The City of Topeka Legal department needs to go after the repeat violators. Once you hold them accountable the message will go out.
- Could another shell corporation purchase the slum properties?
- The City needs a better intel on who is purchasing properties.
- The city needs to serve the owner at the resident address.
- The legal department should be provided the information on commercial properties be sold.
- Silos in property maintenance deter obtaining information to address violators.
- There's a huge amount of people coming into Topeka and purchasing properties. They don't come back and check on them. Solution – Other property owners can make personal contact with the owner and share their concerns.

IDEAS (20) cont.:

September 30, 2021

■ Operational Goals cont.

- The wording of the code addressing weeds & vines is being reviewed.
- There are a large number of MI neighbors who are unable to afford limb dumping fees.
- Can the city assist LMI neighbors to remove dead trees?
- Neighbors shouldn't be held accountable for their neighbor's trees that grow along privacy fences.
- Who is responsible for maintaining the grass that grows along the creek beds? Water Pollution Control
- Have any Shawnee County Commissioners attended these sessions? No
- Activating young people is essential.
- It's clear once the income inequality happened in our community in the 1970's and all of the community engagement went away.
- How do we make it easier for people working harder and sacrificing family time?
- Income is a huge player in the issue.
- CRC North and Community Action are working on a partnership that would result in a Preschool opening at the location.
- Social media – people depend upon it in lieu of face-to-face interaction.
- Greater Topeka Partnership (GTP) needs to offer current residents with incentives.
- City of Topeka staff/Planning – Why don't they offer incentive to home builders?
- We should be focused to growing Topeka.
- We lost 5,000 residents in the last 7 years.
- People have got to want to live here.
- Legislator – Offer senior citizen home owners who are retired with a 25% tax relief program. The money could be utilize for home maintenance.
- Offer youth with incentive pay for volunteering in the neighborhoods.



IDEAS (20) cont.:

September 30, 2021

➤ Key Players

- Shawnee County Tax Assessor
- Shawnee County Counselor
- Community partnership relationships take time.
- How do we approach corporations and have the difficult conversations?
- Build a coalition

➤ Issues

- How are interior inspections handled when the landlord isn't addressing issues? The tenant has to allow the inspection.

➤ Action Steps/ Ideas

- Is there any oversight at the state level on blighted properties being sold?

IDEAS (20) cont.:

September 30, 2021

■ Standards for Interior/Exterior

- What is the definition of substandard? There isn't a clear definition. One violation could result in a substandard property.
- Everyone needs to be involved in the determining the marker for substandard.
- Can the City put liens on properties? The legal department is researching this option.
- How are the violations applied to a property owner's taxes
 - Special Assessment –
 - \$500 (\$300ish applied to taxes, remaining \$200ish in collection fees)
- Hundreds of thousands of fines are owed by deceased property owners.
- First violation notification letter – Don't send a registered letter. Property owners have to drive across town to the post office to pick up the letter. Solution – the first letter needs to be mailed and the last notice should be registered.
- Property Maintenance was part of a Rapid Process Improvement (RPI) – accused of moving too slow with notification. The process was changed and now there are complaints that their moving too fast.
- Grass violations process:
 - First class letter
 - Certified mail
 - Abatement
- Property Maintenance
- Letters
 - Too stringent
 - Harvard Behavioral Insight Team developed a softer letter the result was a .003% increase (2 out of 5,000 property owners complied.)

IDEAS (20) cont.:

September 30, 2021

➤ Vacant Properties

- Can liens/fines be continuously applied until the abandoned property is sold?
- Ordinance verbiage exception for property rehabilitation work for 6-9 months.
- Can a property owner deed a property to a Neighborhood Improvement Association?
Yes
- Why can't the City of Topeka and Shawnee County waive fees for the new owners?
- How are lots placed on the Shawnee County Tax Sale? SNCO Counselor has a form on their website to place on the tax sale. You need to contact SNCO for specific properties.
- First online tax auction is currently scheduled.
- Tax sales – it takes 4 years for a property to be added.
- If no one buys the property SNCO will be the owner.
- Land Bank – Chief of Staff informed the participants that the program should be created by the end of 2021.

➤ **Aspirational Goals** – no comments

➤ **Overgrowth** – no comments

IDEAS (20) cont.:

September 30, 2021

➤ Trash/Dumping

- Can the Valeo Case Managers assist hoarders one hour weekly to create a disposal plan?
- In house assistance is needed.
- Alley dumping needs to be charged to the property owner.

➤ Wrap Up

- Either do what Property Maintenance says or it will be abated.
- Create an incentive program – neighbors helping neighbors
- The neighbors on both sides of a property is a mess. But, my taxes are increasing. Shawnee County Tax Assessor needs to hear our concerns.
- Property Maintenance needs to have consistent proactive methods. Unable to due to current staffing issues. Down to 3 property maintenance inspectors.
- Each inspector is assigned 6,000 – 10,000 properties.
- Neighborhood dumpster events – neighbors dump items on the ground or overflow the dumpster.
- Chesney Park NIA has a weekly dumpster on Saturday.
- Offer dumping coupons to neighbors.
- Host a citywide clean-up event.
- How many people are committed to help the PHS committee? Two

IDEAS (21):

Public Input Letter -- received September 30, 2021

Letter to Editor 12/18/16

To Editor "An absolute need for code enforcement in Topeka"

A consultant (Jay Garner) for JEDO/ and Go Topeka recently said that Topeka suffers economically from a poor appearance. Another Consultant that is revisiting our economic development currently, is hearing similar concerns from our citizens with their survey answers. I have spoken to other economic development experts who tell me code enforcement is very important to a community's economic success. After looking into the sluggish, disjointed, and often directionless code enforcement being practiced in a large amount of the City, I wholeheartedly agree we have a poor appearance. Code enforcement is ineffective in dealing with trashy, un-mowed, vacant, commercial properties on our busiest streets, IE. SW 21st Street and Topeka Blvd. and Kansas Ave, et al. Additionally, they seem to be intimidated by several Topeka slumlords that don't even live in here (a number of them are out-of-county residents). They also, seem to be intimidated by a hand full of homeowners who care nothing about other homeowners on their block, or in their neighborhood.

Also,, if someone is taken to Court all they may get is a \$1 fine, or get another continuance, after yet another continuance. Some cases are open more than a year! I have seen landlords given thirty days to fix broken furnaces in cold weather by code enforcement. I have seen code enforcement take up to six months to finally force a landlord to get a licensed plumber, and actually fix a collapsed bath tub drain for a poor tenant. This is abusive to our most vulnerable citizens and is shameful. In HiCrest it has been common for tenants to be threatened with eviction if they call code enforcement, or if they even ask the landlord for repairs to be made. This type of activity by landlords is unconscionable! Houses that are left unpainted by landlords, are often not written up by code enforcement for years, even while code enforcement is writing up the same properties for un-mowed lawns, year after year. This makes no sense, and is wasting our tax dollars. Productivity of the city staff is key to being an effective and efficient organization.

Without consistent code enforcement we have devalued whole neighborhoods, and are destroying the property values of innocent homeowners. Additionally, it is destroying the tax base of the City of Topeka, Shawnee County Government, 501 School District, The Topeka-Shawnee County Library, Washburn University, and MTAA in many neighborhoods. Consequently we are making other citizen's taxes go higher! It is shameful that a Capital City has main thoroughfares and a number of neighborhoods looking so bad because of slum lords. Further it is costing us potential residents, and potential investment, and jobs. This problem is too big for it to remain unsolved in 2017!

IDEAS (22):

Public Input Email-- received October 1, 2021

Citizen would like to see City funding set aside to start an annual program to remove dead/unhealthy trees from properties of low-moderate income residents.

Public Input Email-- received October 1, 2021

Citizen recommendations refer to fees collected from Property Maintenance cases that are billed out, and the gap between what is sent out versus what is received. The recommendation is to have:

"that \$960K is basically investment money that can be counted on to make improvements. -If the city knows it can roughly expect \$900K to be paid (give or take), maybe it would be helpful to work from the idea of, "We have \$xxx, that we can spend on remediation costs. So how can we best spend it?"

- --One idea would be, maybe the city and NIAs can work together where the city can purchase mowing equipment, chainsaws, and the like that can be rented by prescreened and trained NIA members. These members can then use the equipment to address overgrowth and so forth, but under the watchful eyes of CoT oversight.
- --Another idea could be capping remediation costs yearly so it doesn't exceed the fines and fees that were taken in the year before. Which may leave some properties to be dealt with the next fiscal year but the city isn't as burdened by loss.
- In essence, take the fines and fees that are paid and getting ahead of it, instead of behind it constantly. And maybe that way "loss" isn't really "loss" -- kind of the glass half-full approach."