



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**



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



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**

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



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 _____ meeting

▶ _____



IDEAS (9):

September _____ meeting

➤ _____