CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS, Topeka, Kansas, Tuesday, July 28, 2020. The Governing Body members of the City of Topeka met in special session at 6:00 P.M., with the following Councilmembers present: Hiller, Valdivia-Alcala and Duncan; and the following Councilmembers participated remotely: Ortiz, Emerson, Naeger, Padilla and Dobler -8 . Mayor De La Isla presided -1. Absent: Councilmember Lesser -1.

AFTER THE MEETING was called to order, Councilmember Duncan asked for a moment of silent mediation.

THE PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE was recited by those present in the chamber.

PUBLIC HEARING

A public hearing to obtain citizen input on the City of Topeka’s five-year 2021-2025 Consolidated Action Plan and FY 2021 Annual Consolidated Action Plan, was presented.

Brent Trout, City Manager, stated approval of the five-year Consolidated Action Plan includes program plans for approximately $21.4 million dollars in HUD grant funding for the plan period 2021-2025; and the annual action plan outlines specific funding for each program type in the upcoming year (2021).

Mayor De La Isla opened the public hearing and asked if there was anyone present who would like to speak.

Teresa Miller spoke in opposition of eliminating empowerment grants. She stated the grant funding remains crucial for needed improvements in low-income neighborhoods to build pride and ensure safety. She noted the Stages of Resource Targeting (SORT) grants will only be allocated to approximately five neighborhoods and those funds should be available to all neighborhoods.
Councilmember Valdivia-Alcala asked Ms. Miller how her Neighborhood Improvement Association (NIA) was informed of the reduction of empowerment grants.

Teresa Miller stated her neighborhood was informed about the reduction of funds at a Community Advisory Council (CAC) meeting where residents were requested to complete a survey regarding the matter. She noted she has not seen the responses of the survey; however, everyone that attended the meeting stated they did not want to lose empowerment grant funding opportunities.

Councilmember Emerson asked staff to speak to the reason why the SORT grant process was being changed as it relates to receiving empowerment grant funding. He stated the perception of process seems unfair.

Brent Trout, City Manager, stated the reason for the change was to help with housing issues by shifting part of the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding in the amount of $77,000 for weatherization and $66,000 for empowerment grant funding. He reported the intent was to assist with improvements in low-income neighborhoods; and staff would review the process criteria regarding SORT and empowerment grant funding and report back to the Governing Body.

Councilmember Valdivia-Alcala expressed concern with the shift in empowerment grant funding and noted Community Action, Inc. has increased their staff as well as funding for weatherization of area homes. She cautioned against duplication of services and expressed the importance of providing NIAs with as much grant funding as possible.

Corrie Wright, Housing Services Division Director, reported the reference made to the Topeka Housing Trust Fund was with the intent to reach out to community businesses and request matching dollars for the $77,000 to help more individual families. She noted the CDBG
funds would be used as the matching dollars, which would be allocated to the Topeka Housing Trust Fund. She stated the weatherization program offered by Community Action, Inc. will not be active program until July 2021; and the $100,000 offered by Community Action, Inc. will be distributed between five counties and include a three-month waiting period.

Councilmember Valdivia-Alcala asked staff for an explanation of how funding would be generated for the Topeka Housing Trust Fund. She requested improved communication from staff regarding these types of processes and spoke in opposition of reducing empowerment grant funding.

Councilmember Ortiz asked how staff determined the amount to be used for weatherization and if this was the only weatherization program being offered to city residents. She questioned the funding program being offered by Osage County, Kansas; and if the City’s weatherization program should be privatized.

Brent Trout reported staff made the determination to divide the funds approximately in half with no specific formula used.

Corrie Wright stated the emergency services program would accomplish some weatherization for immediate health and safety needs; however, exterior repairs such as siding and installation repairs would not be considered immediate health and safety issues. She noted the program seems to be delayed with the allocation of funds.

Councilmember Hiller reminded the Governing Body the implementation plan for the housing study would be presented in 120 days (September 2020) and many of the pieces that are being considered for the affordable housing activation are connected to the consolidation action plan. She recommended the Governing Body delay the approval of the consolidated action plan until it could be considered in conjunction with the housing study plan. She noted there
continues to be a lot of neighborhoods that would like to be included in discussions and the five-year Consolidated Action Plan does not have to be approved until December 31, 2020.

Councilmember Valdivia-Alcala stated she concurs with Councilmember Hiller. She spoke in support of approving the housing plan and consolidated action plan simultanously. She stated it was her understanding the Community Action, Inc. weatherization program has three full-time employees and seven other employees that support the program with various tasks.

Councilmember Duncan asked for confirmation of the consolidated action plan deadline.

Brent Trout stated the deadline to submit the Consolidated Action Plan was December 31, 2020, allowing time for the Governing Body to consider the plan at a later date.

Corrie Wright stated she would provide Governing Body members more detailed information on the Community Action, Inc. weatherization program for clarification.

Upon no one else appearing, Mayor De La Isla announced the public hearing was closed.

PUBLIC HEARING

A public hearing for the purpose of hearing and answering objections of taxpayers relating to the proposed City of Topeka 2021 Operating Budget was presented.

Brent Trout, City Manager, reported the proposed budget was based on the direction of the Governing Body. He stated there have been substantial cuts within various departments; however, staff was still able to accomplish the majority of work needed for the operation of the City with no mill levy increase this year.

Mayor De La Isla opened the public hearing and asked if there was anyone present who would like to speak.

Michaela Saunders distributed and read a letter from the Topeka Sustainability Advisory Board. She stated they will provide a report in a couple weeks to the Governing Body and are ready to support staff in sustainability efforts.
Councilmember Valdivia-Alcala thanked Ms. Saunders for the important work the Board does and stated she looks forward to implementing an agenda to address pressing issues.

Councilmember Duncan asked how the duties of the City of Topeka employee Sustainability Advisory Board role would be absorbed.

Brent Trout reported staff will be looking at positions within the Utilities Department that could assist in the role.

Anton Ahrens, Topeka JUMP member, spoke in support of allocating funds to the Topeka Housing Trust Fund to address the affordable housing crisis. He requested the Governing Body support the proposal by Mayor De La Isla to hold a portion of reserve funding in a Topeka community foundation, which over time, will accumulate enough interest to be a long-term funding source for the trust fund. He suggested one or more Governing Body members direct the City Manager to allocate funds in the amount of $2 million for the Housing Trust Fund in 2021.

Mayor De La Isla stated the City has reserve funds that are not being used and one of the proposals was to allocate a portion of those funds to be stored in a community foundation, and then used as a leverage to secure match funding as well as include the allocation of City funding to the community foundation. She stated as an example, the community foundation would continue to invest the funds brought to them allowing a return on investment to the City of approximately $3 million. She reported the City could use 50% of the interest from the funds to leverage in the community each year and the other 50% would be added back to the total consistently reinvesting back into the community and in turn utilizing private funding to assist with the housing stock problem.
Councilmember Hiller recognized the need to leverage and grow money for affordable housing and asked JUMP members if they have raised additional funds for the affordable housing trust fund.

Anton Ahrens stated he would check on the efforts being made by JUMP to raise money and report back to the Governing Body.

Shanae Holman, Topeka JUMP member, stated they are working and communicating with local banks to secure private funding. She expressed the support of taxpayers to allocate funding to support a core value of the community they care about.

Upon no one else appearing, Mayor De La Isla announced the public hearing was closed.

Councilmember Emerson referenced the massive increase to the City’s property insurance premium and asked if it would be helpful to propose an amendment to cap the amount the City could spend on insurance.

Jessica Lamendola, Administrative and Financial Services Director, stated she would prefer not having a limit on property insurance, but instead, will expand the RFP committee when looking at the broker and risk management firm to include an industry representative. She reported once the risk management firm has been identified, and the additional information needed regarding 2021 insurance quotes has been gathered, staff will engage the Governing Body for direction and consideration. She noted any savings achieved through the new process will be allocated back into the budget.

Councilmember Duncan stated he has had multiple conversations concerning the elimination of the grant writing position. He stated the City needs to have the ability to have resources available to reinstate the position if needed in the future. He referenced the request to
increase Zoo admission fee rates by $2 per person and requested it exclude all child admissions and only apply to non-county residents.

Jessica Lamendola reported there will have to be cuts to revenue since the Zoo admission fee rate increase was figured into the proposed 2021 budget.

Councilmember Hiller distributed a handout and expressed the importance of reviewing the budget in its entirety when considering proposed amendments. She commented on the following:

- **Fund Balances:** The need to look at fund balances and recommended adjusting the “other lines” in the funds other than the general fund, liability fund and risk reserve fund for itemized purposes in 2021, and not alter fund balances. She stated she believes this would be a more accurate way to budget and reflect the intent of the Governing Body when the budget was passed.
- **Personnel Fund:** Personnel fund issues have been addressed thus far. She noted there was approximately $700,000 being shifted from the general fund to other specific funds and an additional $600,000 allocated to the health care fund. She suggested coming up with $1 million from somewhere else in the budget to preserve the funds and not put the funds at risk.
- **Utilities Plan:** The Governing Body should consider creating a utilities plan in 2021 similar to the Pavement Management Plan that would replace water lines with cash. She stated the City should consider a sales tax for utilities otherwise utility fee rates will continue to rise.
- **Health Care Fund:** Costs need further review. In comparison with Shawnee County, the City spends approximately $2 million more per year and claim rates are higher.
- **Parking Enterprise Fund:** The financing of the Downtown Streetscape Maintenance in the amount of $100,000 she believes was an inappropriate expenditure. She will look for an alternate source of funding.
- **Police Department/Code Enforcement/Animal Control:** She stated she has concerns regarding the Police Department and deploying police officers to complete other duties than policing - such as code enforcement and animal control. She noted that staff had reported contracting HHHS to contract animal control services, but that HHHS had declined. She prefers police officers perform traditional policing functions.
- **Anti-Blight Strategies:** She referenced anti-blight strategies and the loss of one inmate crew used for abatement services. She requested the Governing Body figure out a way to replace abatement and/or clean up services and improve collections for abatement and demolition of properties because the City loses approximately $500,000 annually.
- **Information Technology (IT) Fund:** If CARES Act funding could offset the IT budget proposal wish list due to technology upgrades being a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic.
Brent Trout stated in regards to the IT budget he would consult with the IT Director; however, CARES Act funding could not be used for already budgeted items and most likely would need to be used by the end of 2020.

DISCUSSION of, and possible ACTION on, the 2021 Proposed City of Topeka Operating Budget, was presented.

Brent Trout, City Manager, stated if there are specific amendments to the budget they would be accepted at this time.

Mayor De La Isla encouraged Governing Body members to send amendments to the City Manager before the August 11, 2020, Governing Body meeting to allow staff time to prepare and make adjustments to the overall budget as needed.

PUBLIC COMMENT was expressed by the following individuals:

Chris Deister read a letter to the Governing Body relating to an ultimate distribution of funds for both City of Topeka and Shawnee County government entities and general priorities.

The following individuals submitted public comment via electronic mail: Joseph Ledbetter and Betty Philips. (Attachment A)

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE CITY MANAGER, MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL;

Brenda Younger, City Clerk, announced there would be no Governing Body meeting on August 4, 2020, due to the 2020 Primary Election.

Brent Trout, City Manager, stated the Strengthening Police and Community Partnerships (SPCP) group would host a meeting on August 12, 2020, from 6:00 – 7:00 p.m. and on August 13, 2020, from 12:00 p.m. -1:00 p.m. in the first floor conference room at the Cyrus K. Holliday building. He announced the CARES Act added a new program offering assistance to citizens for
unpaid water bills and on August 25, 2020, by appointment only, staff will meet with individuals who need assistance on their unpaid water bills. He stated individuals interested in the program could call 785-368-4461 for more information.

Mayor De La Isla announced a special meeting of the Governing Body would be held on August 25, 2020, at 6:00 p.m. in the City Council Chambers to discuss topics that would include a citizen advisory council, the independent police auditor and immunity. She expressed the importance of the community working as a team in regards to police reform. She asked the Governing Body to send agenda requests to the City Manager.

Councilmember Duncan reminded citizens to complete the 2020 Census and vote on August 4, 2020, for the Primary Election.

Councilmember Hiller stated citizens could join and/or participate in the August 12 and August 13, 2020 SPCP meetings on Facebook Live. She stated the August 25, 2020, special meeting of the Governing Body will include important discussion topics.

Councilmember Valdivia-Alcala stated she requested an executive session from the City Manager to discuss a personnel issue of non-elected personnel and the City Manager refused to call an executive session. She reported many Governing Body members have received emails stating a City Administrative Court Judge gave serious opinions on a Facebook page and people took screenshots of the now deleted post and comments. She stated that City judges sit in a quasi-judicial position and it was her understanding judges were not allowed to put themselves in positions of conflict with the public. She again requested an executive session to discuss how this would be handled and believes what has occurred has created racial tension.

Councilmember Ortiz thanked Mayor De La Isla for scheduling the August 25, 2020, special meeting. She announced she will be on vacation that week and was not sure if she would
be able to attend the meeting. She also announced on Saturday August 8, 2020, the East Topeka South NIA trash pickup event will take place. She thanked the City Manager for the information on the water assistance program. She reported there was a pandemic EBT card program available until July 31, 2020, at 5:00 p.m. in the amount of $291 per child for low to moderate income students that qualify; financial assistance programs are being offered by Evergy for electric and gas; and HOST program funds remain available for small business owners.

Councilmember Emerson reported there was approximately $500,000 still available in the HOST program grant funding to be allocated in September, October and November, 2020. He expressed appreciation to local school board members for making the tough decisions to provide education to students during difficult times.

Councilmember Naeger stated there continues to be a need for high speed internet for students and in response Cox Communications was offering high speed internet services for those students that receive free or reduced lunches. She noted for more information on the program contact Cox Communications at www.cox.com/c2c or call 855-222-3252.

Councilmember Dobler reminded citizens to vote on August 4, 2020, for the Primary Election.

NO FURTHER BUSINESS appearing the meeting was adjourned at 7:54 p.m.

(SEAL)

Brenda Younger
City Clerk
Attachment A
Kelly L. Bogner

From: Betty@networkplus.net
Sent: Tuesday, July 28, 2020 5:36 PM
To: City Council; Brent Trout; Michelle De La Isla
Cc: Joe Ledbetter; City Clerk
Subject: Fwd: For Record on Budgets

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CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

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Joe has mentioned several of these issues to me in the past and I have to agree they definitely have merit. Certainly they can gradually be implemented and the enormous interest from borrowing money is a problem, which Karen Hiller has brought up on several occasions.

Betty Phillips

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Begin forwarded message:

From: Joseph Ledbetter <joe@josephledbetter.com>
Subject: Fwd: For Record on Budgets
Date: July 28, 2020 at 3:57:36 PM CDT
To: cwiliet <cwiliet@aol.com>, Carol Marple <hedgetree@yahoo.com>, q4jaz <q4jaz@aol.com>, Teresa Miller <teresa-miller@att.net>, Terri Roberts <director@ahna.org>, Betty Phillips <bettlyphillips2@cox.net>, Nellie Hogan <fostermom00@aol.com>, Spencer Duncan <langston76@yahoo.com>


---------- Forwarded message ---------
From: Brenda Younger <BYounger@topeka.org>
Date: Tue, Jul 28, 2020 at 3:44 PM
Subject: RE: For Record on Budgets
To: Joseph Ledbetter <joe@josephledbetter.com>

Hi Joe,

If you would please email cclerk@topeka.org in case I'm out of the office - this email address will catch all 3 of us.

Thank you.
I stand in support of the TPD BUDGET, WHATEVER IS needed. 
Privatise Water line repairs. 
Privatise Street repairs– It is obvious after 10 years of increased taxes that the City staff will not repair the potholes to last more than a few weeks, or months so privatise repairs with contractors. 
Privatise all tree removal. (Forestry Department). 
Make the early retirement more attractive. And Don't re-fill those positions! Cut at least 50 jobs that are NON emergency personnel. This city, at this size should be no more than 1,030 FTE's instead of close to 1,200! 
Stop the out of control Revenue Bond borrowing! 65 Million new issues this year I was told by Water staff yesterday. $215 million total debt-$20million Just for debt service! . We cannot afford to keep increasing these debts with a shrinking population! We keep putting the funds into the bank to build ever higher reserves- so we can borrow more! That's like taking your credit card and getting a cash advance, then putting it in savings(reserves) ,so you can borrow even more, and owe even more debt! 
A ridiculous train of 'logic' and a disastrous way to run the Utility Department. 
This thinking will run it into the ground. 
Thank you for prompt action to cut costs!