



CITY OF TOPEKA

CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE

CITY COUNCIL
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Date: August 12, 2019

Time: 3:00 p.m.

Location: Holliday 1st Floor Conference Room, Holliday Bldg 620 SE Madison

Committee members present: Councilmembers Karen Hiller, Sylvia Ortiz (Chair), Aaron Mays.

City staff present: Sasha Haehn (DNR Director), Mike Haugen (Director, Code Services)

Call to Order

Councilmember Ortiz called the meeting to order. Committee members and staff introduced themselves.

Approve June 24, 2019 Meeting Minutes

Councilmember Hiller made a motion to approve the June 24th minutes. Councilmember Mays seconded. The motion was approved 3:0.

Overview of the Property Maintenance Code Division operations

Councilmember Ortiz began the meeting by stating the next Public Health & Safety Meeting would be discussing the Public Camping Ordinance. Sasha Haehn, Director of Neighborhood Relations, communicated activities of the Homeless Taskforce. The Housing Services Division's Continuum of Care program receives the large grant funding from HUD (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development) which then helps to support the ShelterPlus Care program. The Executive Committee of the Homeless Taskforce has been exceptionally focused on the application process for this grant. This grant brings \$1.6 million to the City to support the ShelterPlus Care program as well as funding Community Action's Tanglewood facility. Ms. Haehn would ask Homeless Taskforce board members to attend the next meeting. Councilmember Hiller stated there was some crucial discussion by the Taskforce which covered camping and services that are or will be offered.

Councilmember Ortiz asked Staff with the Property Maintenance Code to provide an overview of the division and operations. Ms. Haehn introduced PMC Division Director, Mike Haugen, who provided a presentation to the committee of the division and a brief overview of the Property Maintenance Code Division. (This presentation will be posted to the Committee webpage <https://www.topeka.org/citycouncil/public-health-safety-committee/>).

1 - Public Health & Safety Committee
Minutes Taken: August 12, 2019
Minutes Approved: September 16, 2019

Topics covered included:

- Division personnel chain of command
- Code Officer zones/coverage area
- Data regarding the ways cases and inspections are opened
- Right of entry process
- Basic process for a case
- Types of violation categories
- Types of sanitation violations
- Definition of “Rodent Harborage”
- Weeds, Grass, annual plants and vegetation
 - Mr. Haugen stated there are questions that come up regarding volunteer trees. This is currently not something that Code addresses, as the division does not have the manpower or resources to deal with that currently.
 - Mr. Haugen provided committee members with an example of the letter of notice that property owners receive. Mr. Haugen stated postcards were mailed to individuals who had received citations in 2018 to let them know Code would be continuing to issue citations in 2019. This was done with the hope that past offenders would be proactive and not have to be cited for the same issue(s) again.

Councilmember Hiller inquired if Mr. Haugen had been able to identify whether the postcard was successful in preventing past offenders with reoffending. Mr. Haugen stated he had not been able to obtain that information and would need to review past case records to determine the answer. Postcards were sent to all Code offenders from 2018, not specifically weeds/grass/vegetation offenders. Mr. Haugen stated the office had received around five phone calls from constituents who were unhappy about receiving the postcard, however he heard from many more who were appreciative of the reminder.

Mr. Haugen stated Code Officers were now marking open cases for grass/vegetation violations with lime green flags. This marking has been beneficial to Mr. Haugen, other supervisors, and anyone concerned when questioning if a case was already open.

Councilmember Ortiz inquired about highlighting a section of the letter in red ink rather than simply bold. Mr. Haugen agreed. Councilmember Hiller stated she would like to have further discussion as the committee continues to review information following the presentation. Mr. Haugen stated the Property Maintenance Division has a goal to keep the communication with the public open and frequent.

Councilmember Mays inquired about the backlog of abatement properties, and if Mr. Haugen could provide further detail regarding the selection preference for citing types of properties and the priority level attached; such as commercial over residential, large acreage over small yard, severity of

violation. Mr. Haugen stated there is no priority list. Issues are addressed by a first-come-first-serve basis. Mr. Haugen continued that occasionally, priority is given in special circumstances such as a neighborhood near a special event site where many people would be attending, or a major intersection, or if numerous phone calls are received on a single property. There is no preference for enforcement of a violation. Mr. Haugen stated direction is provided at the beginning of each year for code officers to start the review and citation process at major intersections and locations first and check them frequently, as these areas are gateways to the city and the first things that are seen when people are driving around.

- Inoperable vehicles and standards of measurement
- Vehicle registration
- Misconceptions surrounding the topic of vehicles and Code Enforcement: TMC 10.60.120 Parking of vehicles on non-paved surfaces
- Graffiti
- Housing violations
 - Exterior
 - Roofs and gutters
 - Broken windows
 - Accessory Structure
 - Interior
 - Hoarders - Mr. Haugen stated the first hoarding case is coming up. There are outside resources assisting the individual. Code Enforcement staff will only cover the sanitation portion of the hoarding. Staff will not cover the mental health component with the process. Mr. Haugen stated the VA and Adult Protective Services would be assisting as well.
 - Councilmember Hiller inquired if the individual was elderly. Mr. Haugen confirmed the individual was elderly and a veteran. Councilmember Ortiz stated she would be happy to help get Mr. Haugen in contact with state employees, if assistance is needed.

Discussion between Mr. Haugen and Councilmembers Hiller and Ortiz took place regarding the various community and state partners that may be able to assist with finding resources for hoarding cases.

Councilmember Hiller suggested that as the committee continues to meet regarding Code Compliance, to list policies next to administrative interpretations, and the community resources that the City partners with regard to the various issues that come up. Mr. Haugen introduced how work is continuing to strengthen the partnership between City departments.

- Unsafe structures
- Condemnation orders

Councilmember Hiller commended the work done by Mr. Haugen and his staff with being willing to help individuals find additional resources when a condemnation order is served.

- Dangerous/Unsafe Structures - Demolition
- A simplified version of best-case scenarios for when problems are addressed
- Week in the life of a Property Maintenance Inspector
- Ideas for future plans
- Rapid Process Improvement (RPI) - Sanitation Abatement Process
 - Mission
 - Steps of the process that were eliminated
 - Types of issues the abatement process is used on
 - Steps leading to abatement
 - Sanitation
 - Weeds
 - Inoperable vehicles
 - Graffiti
 - Efforts to reduce abatements and assist public

Councilmember Mays inquired about the use of inmate crews and whether there were any concerns regarding the public safety. Mr. Haugen responded the crews that were selected to participate in the program were low-threat individuals who are close to being released. Mr. Haugen continued to say the individuals selected work hard and the number of inmate walk-away cases have been few and far between. Ms. Haehn commented the individuals who have walked away from the sites are going to their homes, and are not seeking to commit crime sprees. Councilmember Ortiz stated improvements to the program and with the crews/inmate supervisors have greatly increased over the years.

Councilmember Hiller noted she would like to have more time to review the material provided, but felt that the presentation was helpful in breaking down the various issues in a way that the committee could prioritize and continue working through individual sections at a time.

Councilmember Mays agreed he felt the topics were covered adequately.

Councilmember Mays exited the meeting.

Ms. Haehn reviewed the expectations for upcoming meetings by the committee. The next meeting will review the Public Camping Ordinance. Two meetings following, the committee will review Property Maintenance topics.

The order of reviewing groups of issues was discussed. Councilmember Ortiz stated that from a Councilmember standpoint, having a detailed and specific breakdown of some of the processes that Mr. Haugen presented, would be the most helpful. Councilmember Ortiz stated she would like to review and have more detail included for the first three types of cases more in depth at the next committee meeting where Code would be reviewed. Those types of cases are: sanitation, weeds, inoperable vehicles, and graffiti, housing and unsafe structures. Councilmember Ortiz would like to have more information regarding the IMPC (International Property Maintenance Code).

Councilmember Ortiz suggested setting up a City email address, similarly to the Community Police Officers, which would allow constituents a way to write to the Code office, including their address, knowing that all of the code officers and supervisors would see that information. Mr. Haugen noted their office prefers to speak to the constituents in person. Mr. Haugen stated that he appreciated the idea of having a way for all Code Officers and supervisors to receive information from a citizen for instances when staff is covering for another area.

Councilmember Hiller suggested creating an internal deadline for committee members to turn questions (regarding topics that will be presented two meetings from now), about thirty (30) days prior to the scheduled meeting to allow staff to gather the information needed to answer those questions/concerns. Councilmember Hiller also suggested reaching out to constituent groups who may have an interest in specific subjects, such as neighborhood leaders, and the Landlord Association.

Councilmembers Ortiz and Hiller complimented Mr. Haugen on the information that was presented on, and noted they found it to be helpful.

Councilmember Ortiz inquired if there was any public comment. None at this time.

Other Items Before the Committee

None.

Schedule Next Meeting(s)

Adjourn

Councilmember Ortiz adjourned the meeting.

Meeting video can be viewed at: https://youtu.be/6Kf_nJjYQIA