



CITY OF TOPEKA

CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE

CITY COUNCIL
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Date: March 9, 2020

Time: 3:00 p.m.

Location: 1st Floor Conference Room, Holliday Building, 620 Madison

Committee members present: Councilmembers Karen Hiller (Chair), Sylvia Ortiz, Neil Dobler

City staff present: Brent Trout (City Manager), Mike Haugen (Property Maintenance Division Director), Corrie Wright (Housing Services Division Director, SGT Josh Klamm (TPD)

Call to Order

Chairwoman Hiller called the meeting to order at 3:05pm. Committee members introduced themselves. Committee member Dobler was not in attendance at this time.

Approve February 17, 2020 meeting minutes

Committee member Ortiz made a motion to approve the minutes. Chairwoman Hiller seconded the motion. Motion approved 2:0.

Homeless Update

SGT Josh Klamm, Topeka Police Department: A number of residents in “Tent City” are relocating as many of the individuals are on railroad property. Overall, things are progressing smoothly. The Kansas Department for Aging and Disability Services (KDADS) provided funding that will allow 28 households to be housed for six months. SGT Klamm estimates about 45 people residing at Tent City. This is only for six months, however other services are being provided as well.

Chairwoman Hiller inquired about the percentage of retention of original participants in Housing First program. Ms. Wright stated 88% of the original recipients were still in their permanent housing.

Committee member Ortiz inquired about notices to campers. SGT Klamm stated numerous meetings have been held to keep individuals up to date. The railroad has been on site to mark property lines. Some of the property belongs to the City. All of the campers have been made aware of the situation.

Chairwoman Hiller thanked SGT Klamm for the continued work.

Corrie Wright, Homeless Taskforce: The City is working with Valeo for receiving grant funding. The grant will provide funding to cover full rent for twenty-eight individuals. If individuals are able to pay some of the rent, additional funding will be made available for others. Once individuals are housed, it will be difficult to transition them into a program such as Shelter Plus Care. There is a collaborative effort being made by many organizations. Valeo is offering SORT applications to assist individuals with receiving Social Security. Currently, housing is being provided with services being offered but not made mandatory. The hope is people will except help from the programs so they will not have to go back to an unsheltered type of situation in the future.

Committee member Ortiz inquired about the Homeless Taskforce and what the conversation has been. Ms. Wright stated vouchers for the Housing First initiative will be provided to individuals this week. The camping issues has continued to be a top agenda item at the monthly Homeless Taskforce meetings. The City is not selecting the people who will receive the program, Valeo is doing that. Individuals who have expressed an interest in housing and have been attending meetings will be given the first priority, with remaining vouchers offered to others.

Committee member Ortiz inquired about the selection and distribution process. Ms. Wright stated the City is not making the selection, this will be done by Valeo. The people who have shown up to the meetings and expressed an interest in housing will be priority. Committee member Ortiz thanked Ms. Wright, Barry Feaker, Valeo, and SGT Klamm for their continued work with the unsheltered population in the city.

Chairwoman Hiller shared the credit and thanked Dr. Russell Burton as well.

Natasha Jackson, resident at Tent City, inquired if there was a way to remain on the property. Ms. Jackson feels comfortable with where she is living and asked if there was a way to remain where she is, if it's on the City property? Chairwoman Hiller stated Tent City was located on private property and the railroads are currently marking property lines and that the land belonging to the City would remain public. Ms. Jackson inquired about the possibility of tiny housing. Chairwoman Hiller noted this may be an option that could be further investigated.

Dr. Russell Burton addressed the committee to state Ms. Jackson is residing next to the levy on city property, and inquired what the definition was for "being on the levy". Chairwoman Hiller stated City Manager would need to look into that.

Team Up to Clean Up: Presentation, Discussion

City Manager, Brent Trout, described the Team Up to Clean Up program. The program began in 2018. The idea was to bring various City departments together to work on an intensively needy neighborhood to help improve it. [Committee member

Dobler arrived]. The Neighborhood Relations Department plays a large role in the program. Outside partnerships, such as Habitat for Humanity and volunteers also join the initiative. Property Maintenance Division addresses code compliance issues. The Community Engagement Division mailed postcards to the individuals in the neighborhood to inform them of the program and when to expect City departments. [City Manager Trout provided a copy of the letter to Committee members]. Inmate crews assist with blight remediation. The Community Engagement Staff, along with NIA members also do “walk-&-talks” with neighbors by going door-to-door and speaking with people. A resource fair was not initially done in the beginning, however has been a positive opportunity to give back to the community. Credit counseling, community assessment and building workshops. Housing Services are involved with the walk-&-talks as well as providing information about various programs that may assist members of the neighborhood. This has been a successful program. Kansas Gas has come alongside to put house numbers on homes where they are not visible.

The Topeka Police Department and Safe Streets work to address various safety and security issues and provide resources for continued efforts that neighbors can continue with. Animal Control partners to assist with animal issues that may have become problematic in the neighborhood.

The Utilities Department complete fire hydrant and valve checks, as well as changing water meters out with new automatic readers. This process allows the Utilities Department to check for leaks that may not otherwise be known about. They will perform maintenance on the storm water inlets.

Zoning assists to make sure there are no violations within the neighborhood.

Various divisions within the Public Works Department step in to assist as well. Forestry trims trees that need it. The sign crew checks the street signs and replaces any that are damaged or faded.

City Manager Trout noted the services provided during the Team Up to Clean Up event are no different from services offered to the entire city daily, however, it is an opportunity for them all to come together at the same time to bring up the appearance of a neighborhood.

City Manager Trout discussed programs that proceeded the Team Up to Clean Up initiative. These programs were found to be less successful with bringing neighborhoods together and empowering the citizens who live there, and placed more responsibility on the Staff.

Positives with Team Up to Clean Up program:

- No additional costs. Departments utilize the funds they already have for those services.

- Able to look at bigger projects rather than simply trash.
- Goals are to clean up a particular neighborhood one at a time, rather than the whole city. Provides a more holistic approach with this method.
- Involves members of the neighborhood. People respond better to visiting with their neighbors than with just having Staff provide services alone. This method has a more lasting impact on the neighborhood.
- With regard to Staff time used. A few hundred hours, however this is during normal business hours, and no longer requires overtime pay like the other programs previously had.

City Manager Trout offered final comments regarding the Team Up to Clean Up event.

Chairwoman Hiller asked City Manager Trout to speak on growth from the programs prior to Team Up to Clean Up to what is happening now. City Manager Trout noted the involvement of many City departments and the resource fair had been positive for everyone involved.

Committee member Ortiz inquired if the clean up included trash pick-up for the residents. City Manager Trout noted that Shawnee County Waste Management and other refuse services will take one large item weekly in addition to the full barrels. Committee member Ortiz inquired in cases, such as hoarding, where a mass amount of trash needed to be addressed, what resources would be available to assist with this? A second concern raised by Committee member Ortiz was what could be done to not only help the one target neighborhood, but also the other neighborhoods within the city to help with addressing the trash problem. City Manager Trout noted that in addition to the large item pick-up from refuse services, some neighborhoods have purchased large dumpsters with their NIA funding to host their own neighborhood “dump” event. Committee member Ortiz inquired if information could be provided to let constituents know what would or would not be picked up by the inmate crews or the refuse companies. City Manager Trout noted that a clarification resource could be provided. Chairwoman Hiller stated the Shawnee County Refuse Department sent an annual postcard with pick-up dates listed and the information regarding acceptable and unacceptable items to set out were included.

Chairwoman Hiller appreciated the collaboration of involving neighborhoods to help with self-sufficiency; noting when things are automatically done for people, they begin to assume it is a City service that should be provided.

City Manager Trout noted information regarding statistics and other information on the Team Up to Clean Up events could be found on the City of Topeka website. [<https://www.topeka.org/neighborhoodrelations/team-up-to-clean-up/>].

Chairwoman Hiller inquired about the growth of neighbor participation. Monique Glauvé, Community Engagement Division Director, addressed the committee. With regard to neighborhood clean-ups, Shawnee County has offered two large capacity dumpsters to

Neighborhood Improvement Associations and Neighborhood Associations for free, on an annual basis. NIA's are also able to utilize their funding to provide additional refuse containers as needed. The Community Engagement Division sends a weekly correspondence to neighborhood leaders, and Ms. Glaudé will include the info-graphic about Shawnee County Waste.

With regard to the inquiry about neighborhood participation, Ms. Glaudé estimated a 30% involvement rate, dependent on the neighborhood. When Staff completes the walk-&-talks, they do not partake unless an NIA officer is with them. Staff found that neighborhoods with a large neighborhood leader involved, the whole neighborhood would become more involved.

With regard to the resource fair, Ms. Glaudé stated she and Staff meet with the NIA officers to inquire what they feel the needs are of the neighborhood. From there, Community Engagement staff reach out to partner agencies to coordinate the fair.

Chairwoman Hiller inquired about the use of outside volunteers for these events. Ms. Glaudé stated that if it is determined that a neighborhood will need additional volunteers, Community Engagement Staff will make the introduction between the volunteers and the NIA officers, thus removing Staff from the process as to not take on managing projects or conflicting with schedules. Ms. Glaudé expanded to say any additional resources that a neighborhood expressed a need for, Staff would again make the introduction and step away.

The resource fair began in 2019. New in 2020, is Credit Counseling and Student Loan Default Counseling.

Committee member Ortiz inquired about a way to get the whole city involved in an initiative again. Ms. Glaudé responded by saying that in order for a city-wide clean up to be successful, there would need to be a large number of dedicated volunteers around the town. Ms. Glaudé stated she is grateful for any and all of the neighborhood volunteers, however there would need to be an "all-call" to inspire the younger generations to come out to help in their neighborhoods. During the conversation, Ms. Glaudé mentioned Takeover Makeover, a program that sent a group of volunteers into a neighborhood to assist in various clean-up or upkeep projects. The program was successful for a number of years, however on the final year, there were roughly 100 volunteers but no projects. If neighborhoods can identify a problem or need for the neighborhood, the Community Engagement Staff will reach out to the volunteer bases and community partners to connect them with.

Chairwoman Hiller inquired if there were opportunities for training that were offered to neighborhood leaders to develop self-sufficiency within neighborhoods. Ms. Glaudé stated the City is sponsoring ten neighborhood leaders to attend the Neighborhoods U.S.A (NUSA) in May, so they can network with other neighborhood leaders across the country to learn new and different ways of becoming a self-sufficient neighborhood. In addition to the neighborhood leaders attending, two members from the Mayor's Youth Council will also be attending.

Chairwoman Hiller inquired with City Manager Trout as to the Utilities Department scoping sewers. City Manager Trout confirmed and stated the department has a maintenance schedule for sewer scoping, however the systems within the Team Up to Clean Up

neighborhoods will receive the service during the program. Final comments, City Manager Trout noted ShareFest. Similar to a spring cleanup that has seen a positive impact on the community. April 25, 2020 is the date for this year.

Committee member Ortiz inquired about Keep America Beautiful. City Manager Trout noted they were active, although mostly with County programs, as they are no longer funded by the City.

Staff Reports

Mike Haugen, Property Maintenance Division Director addressed the following topics:

Postcards

Postcards were mailed to individuals who had received weeds cases the year prior. In 2017, 3,070 cases were cited for weeds. In 2018, 1,327 postcards were mailed out to repeat offenders. However, there were 5,400 weed cases that year. 2019, went from 1,320 postcards to 1,723. This makes it difficult to know if the notification is effective. The season also factors into the number of cases Property Maintenance can expect. The 2019 season kept abatement crews from being successful in keeping up with cases. Chairwoman Hiller inquired if Mr. Haugen was able to review cases and match names from one year to the next. Mr. Haugen stated that had not yet been completed, however it would take reviewing cases over a number of years past in order to better tell if the postcards were successful.

Fines and Fees

Mr. Haugen stated he provided the committee with 2017 information as it was a complete year. Cost breakdown. Money is still being collected. In 2017, \$993,000 in fees and penalties. Amount collected was roughly one-third, \$323,000. Collections received \$95,000 in 2017, however the money collected was for previous years. They were not able to provide an annual breakdown. Collections waived \$58,000 in fees. Bringing in about half of what is fined out. Mr. Haugen was not able to receive a complete answer from Shawnee County regarding the amount of abatement fees collected in taxes. Those payments would have been sent to the City's Finance Department, not the Property Maintenance Division. Chairwoman Hiller would like to know all of the payments to better understand if initiatives for repetitive cases were successful.

Inter-department partnering

When Property Maintenance initiates a case with other departments; those departments send the invoice to Property Maintenance, and that amount is reflected on the charge to the owner. Mr. Haugen was not sure how the other departments addressed invoicing when they initiate their own projects. Committee member Dobler inquired what the goal of this research was. Chairwoman Hiller stated there was confusion from citizens about the difference between city services and property owner responsibilities.

Committee member Dobler inquired as to how the budget was determined with regard to these processes being so unpredictable. City Manager Trout stated there is an understanding on an estimated number of cases to expect. Any fines that are paid back go toward miscellaneous revenue. Committee member Dobler inquired about how revenue is determined. City Manager Trout stated averages from past years was the current method, however it is a very difficult number to come up with.

Chairwoman Hiller suggested putting this forward with an RPI process to find ways to make this more efficient.

Recidivism Fines

City Manager Trout noted neighbors want to see action to have a troublesome property maintained. Repeat violators are given one written notice with regard to weeds and grass. After that, the property is added to a list for abatement crews to check on through the growing season. Once the grass reaches 12 inches, the crews cut the grass and the property owner is sent a fine. The ideal situation would be to have owner involvement and compliance with the ordinance.

Chairwoman Hiller wanted to make sure that the management of the program was clear in interpretation that this is not a service to be expected, but a public health management operation. City Manager Trout noted the owners are provided information to inform them they will be charged for non-compliance and additional time is given to owners who are making attempts to comply.

Issues for further consideration; plan next steps

Chairwoman Hiller provided a printed summary of items that have been addressed and where the committee currently stands. Chairwoman Hiller noted there are about ten issues that seem to be left to address.

Committee member Dobler inquired about setting the abatement fines, as this would be administrative. Chairwoman Hiller responded that there were three categories of solutions to the issues that the Committee had discussed in previous meetings; policy, administrative, and initiatives. Mr. Haugen stated Shawnee County authorizes the inmate crews. In previous years, they have sent two crews. One for abatements and one for mowing. However, in 2019, the County has not given the City information on whether they will be providing one or two crews. This information may not be known until April. City Manager Trout noted Staff would be able to work through the list and if there are policy issues or approval that needs to be addressed, those issues can be brought back to the Committee in April. Chairwoman Hiller agreed that the April meeting would be a time for Staff and the Committee to prepare information in order to move forward with the public input sessions.

Other items before the committee

Set next meeting

Tentative for April 20th at 3pm, with future meetings being moved to the second Monday of each month. Committee report to the Governing Body in May, depending on outcome of April meeting.

Adjourn

Meeting was adjourned at 5:00pm.

Meeting video can be viewed at: <https://youtu.be/ws1cqgvQRTM>