



CITY OF TOPEKA

CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

PUBLIC HEALTH & SAFETY COMMITTEE

CITY COUNCIL
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Date: October 13, 2021

Time: 10:00am

Location: 1st Floor Conference Room; Holliday Building 620 SE Madison (virtual via Zoom as well)

Committee members present: Councilmembers Karen Hiller (Chair), Christina Valdivia-Alcalá, Neil Dobler

City staff present: City Manager Brent Trout, Chief of Staff Bill Cochran, Monique Glaudé (Director of Community Engagement & Ombudsman), Mike Haugen (Property Maintenance), LT Andy Beightel (Police), Chief Craig Duke (Fire)

1) Call to Order

Committee member Hiller called the meeting to order at am. Committee members and staff introduced themselves.

2) Approval of July 30, 2021 minutes

Committee member Valdivia-Alcala made a motion to approve the minutes. Committee member seconded the motion. Minutes approved 3:0.

3) Digital Equity & Inclusion Partnership: Update

Scott Gowan, IT Director with Topeka Public Schools, provided an update on the work being done by the Digital Equity & Inclusion Partnership. Updates included:

- Continue working together throughout the process
- City has interviews scheduled for the Digital Navigator and Technical Navigator positions
- Internal team is putting together a handbook for those Navigator positions
- TPS 501 received additional funding through the FCC to allow continuation of the hotspot resources program and family connectivity program, through June 30, 2022. The allowance that the FCC has set aside matched the request grant, of \$1.3M. The funding will be enough to continue to do what TPS has been doing, but it is not enough for the longer term plan that the Partnership is looking at.
- The longer term community project is looking to reach individuals and families beyond those already receiving assistance through TPS's program.

Chief of Staff Cochran stated he had received inquiries from churches in the 6th & Leland area and they wanted to know if they would be eligible for any of this? Mr. Gowan was not sure if this would be something that could go through the school district, but asked Chief of Staff Cochran to email him and they would work to find a way to help. Chief of Staff Cochran noted the children at the church were Topeka Public School students.

Chairwoman Hiller asked if the grant will allow for additional hotspots to be purchased, or was only to maintain the current stock? Mr. Gowan stated T-mobile had provided a generous donation which allows for a capacity to add service to the current hotspots. TPS currently has enough hotspots to serve the population of students/families who are not being served with the in-home services, but the additional capacity will be helpful.

Mr. Gowan noted that the Partnership had presented the Administrative Policy to the Committee at a previous meeting, and inquired if there were any additional questions for him about it? Chairwoman Hiller stated the Committee had only expected an update from the Partnership at this time, but could review and prepare to bring questions for Mr. Gowan at the next meeting.

Chairwoman Hiller noted the City Manager had put a dollar amount into his proposals for this area from the American Rescue Plan (ARPA) grant, but did not know if it was targeted to any particular use. City Manager Brent Trout affirmed the outcome should be similar to what is being done by the (Kansas Health Foundation) grant that the City received, and that the ARPA grant dollars should allow the City the funding to be able to continue that assistance beyond the grant, so that the City has the technology literacy people in place and can continue once the (Kansas Health Foundation) grant is done.

Committee member Valdivia-Alcala inquired about the hub spots that had been mentioned as part of assisting in this need and asked if this would be part of the American Rescue Plan (ARPA) grant plan. She listed a number of agencies who have submitted a request for broadband infrastructure, or additions to current infrastructure to provide better quality of service. City Manager Brent Trout requested more information be sent to him about that initiative and stated if it was something that could be covered with that grant money, it could be added to the list of considerations.

Chairwoman Hiller stated that the Governing Body had agreed to have a work session about the ARPA designations, and requested that the Partnership provide additional details to the Committee about their plans for utilizing the grant dollars. The Committee has made mention that broadband is becoming less of a luxury and more of a utility. She would like to better understand which components have already been addressed, which ones may have pieces in motion but need additional funding to achieve, and which areas have not been addressed at all. Knowing where the “one-time dollars” are and what types of needs those dollars can provide for, may allow for other projects to be considered through the ARPA money. Mr. Gowan agreed and noted that the FCC grant was a one-time grant. It was the Emergency Connectivity Fund that is only for the 2021-2022 school year, only applies to schools and libraries, and is being administered through the e-rate. He was not aware of any continuing funds, although had heard through conversation with the Department of Commerce, that the Broadband Office will be looking at some strategies for digital literacy and would like for the Topeka team to be involved with helping them set some of that up. Mr. Gowan was not sure if any additional funding opportunities would come from that.

Monique Glaudé, Division Director of Community Engagement, stated they will be interviewing the Digital Navigator and Technical Navigator applicants this coming week. Both start dates would be November 1, 2021. She will bring further information to the November meeting.

4) Changing the Culture of Property Maintenance; Work session (video 20:55 minute mark)

Chairwoman Hiller noted the goal of today is to have a work session to pull together everything that has been gathered from the public, staff, and Committee members, to narrow things into items that can be implemented within the next few years. Prior to the meeting, Chairwoman Hiller had requested Staff and Committee members to provide around ten suggestions from feedback that was provided.

City Manager Trout noted a meeting had been held between Property Maintenance and Municipal Court and that the prosecution provide a presentation to the Committee as to how they work through cases and interpretation of the code. He felt this was a component that was still missing, and would like to request to have those individuals attend and present at a future meeting. Chairwoman Hiller stated the legal piece which includes legal code, interpretation, policy and procedures that could potentially be lumped together as a task. It might be a recommendation for that package to be processed through as a 2022 initiative.

- (1) Policy Issue -

Committee member Valdivia-Alcala referenced the presentation by Karen Black with May 8 Consulting, that was added to the Changing the Culture of Property Maintenance website [<https://www.topeka.org/citycouncil/changing-the-culture-of-property-maintenance-public-input-meetings>]. Committee member Valdivia-Alcalá feels partnerships within the community will continue to be an integral part of this process. The Greater Topeka Partnership has been open to conversations, and that they would be interested in bringing Ms. Black to Topeka to present, and that her investment would be welcomed. Committee member Dobler felt that bringing in an outside voice of someone with experience in this area would be a great way to move forward with this process and was supportive of the idea. Property Maintenance Division Director Mike Haugen stated their department would welcome hearing from Ms. Black as well. He suggested that current practices of the City's housing issues also be included with Ms. Black's proposal, as most of the information discusses vacant neglect and abandoned properties only. Chairwoman Hiller stated the proposal may have also included deteriorating properties, to which Division Director Haugen voiced appreciation for and would like to know more about it. City Manager Trout noted that many of the ideas that Ms. Black discussed in her video were things that the City of Topeka were already doing, or had also identified as things to improve on. City Manager Trout noted that of the ideas Staff had been working on, having additional detail and suggestions from Ms. Black, specifically for the City of Topeka, would be helpful to refine Staff's ideas and process to make sure the City is doing everything to the best of their ability. Division Director Haugen noted he had suggested, to the State of Kansas, to put together a comprehensive training for the State to help provide tips of things that are working for other communities. Many of the national presenters speak to their regional initiatives. And that often State law does not allow Topeka to pursue some of these ideas.

- (2) Vegetation -

- Approve ordinance and set date for when it would go into effect.

- (3) Community Engagement - (in vegetation, trash, mowing)

- Assigning a City Staff "point person" and look for a partner(s) to assist in leading programs.
 - Summer youth mowing program funded by money already set aside in the budget for inmate crew. Division Director Haugen noted there were some concerns surrounding a youth

program. There were some state laws regarding children around machinery as well.

- Perhaps setting up a program to identify properties that would be deemed safe for contractors to bid on with a RFP, that would help catch up on a number of properties and trained staff could address properties that may be less safe.
- Committee member Valdivia-Alcala felt it was important to keep money within the neighborhoods if a contractor was helping to mow neighbors' properties.
- Chairwoman Hiller noted another idea from the public input meetings centered on having business, who have mowing done for their properties already, agree to add a few more nearby sites annually to their contract. That perhaps churches or other groups/individuals could offer to pay for "x" amount of additional properties. This partnership could help reduce the gap by having fewer complaints turned in to Property Maintenance followed by the rest of that legal process.
- Committee member Valdivia-Alcalá spoke to NIA's possibly helping to take care of, or providing a resource, for elders in the neighborhood to mow.
- Division Director Haugen stated that the current code requires grass to be addressed at 12 inches. However, in order for a standard mower to complete the job, it should be addressed at closer to 8 inches, or less. Chairwoman Hiller noted the marketing for having an up-front fee to help maintain lawns more times throughout the growing season, may be appealing to property owners and the City.
- Landlord Association has internally been discussing creating raise in rent to cover expense for mowing, or reversely giving discount or end of season return for tenants who perform the service themselves.
 - (3a) Sub-division: Training -
 - (3b) Sub-division: Small Businesses & Entrepreneurial Strategies -
 - (3c) Community based strategies for direct assistance
 - Central list of identified providers found on City's website.
 - SeeClickFix reports could be forwarded to vendors/organizations

- Working with local hardware stores, lumber yards and possibly organizations for a program to rent equipment or get materials.
 - Public-Private partnerships, for future consideration.
 - (also possibly under “Trash/Dumping”) – ways to address dump fees and being able to have volunteers, or anyone, get stuff hauled to the dump without requiring the \$75 fee.

- (4) Development Services: Home Rehab Projects –
 The question came up about Code Compliance requesting a problem be addressed, but Development Services not issuing a permit to complete the work without being a licensed contractor. There is a disconnect, between codes because one allows an owner living in the residence to work on issues on their own, but that if an owner does not live in the residence they are not allowed to do the work, unless licensed to do so. This is an example of something to be reviewed between departments. Suggested a round-table. City Manager Trout noted the Trade Unions would need to be included in these discussions. Chairwoman Hiller stated the round-table meeting would be separate from the Code Compliance conversations. Division Director Haugen stated the reclassification of permitting process would go through Development Services.

- (5) Trash/Dumping
 - Look into having more NIA’s begin dumping programs with their NIA funds. There are some current restrictions on how and when the NIAs can participate their dump days.
 - Idea to have a couple of community wide dump days throughout the community, in addition to NIAs placing dumpster in their neighborhoods.
 - NIA’s utilize NIA funds or coupon to help take loads to the dump.
 - Division Director Haugen stated another community has a tax that allows for “free” dumping on weekends. Although everyone pays into this tax, the sanitation cases are very low in that city because they are able to take trips to the dump without an additional charge any weekend throughout the year, rather than hoarding for the twice-a-year community dump programs.

- (6) Education/Community Connection
 - Video spots to put to Facebook, Channel 4 platforms, other media partner platforms

- Committee member Valdivia-Alcala suggested using members of the community to do those educational spots. Helps make it more personal for those neighborhoods.
- (7) Retail Parking Lots - Reminders through Community Engagement for retailers who are repeat violators. Division Director Haugen stated having a friendly letter come from the NIA to encourage repeat violators to address the issue before Property Maintenance becomes involved, may help neighborhoods look inward and would be better received than the letter that comes from Property Maintenance. Committee member Valdivia-Alcala noted that the Oakland NIA was very interested in partaking in this type of program. Division Director Haugen thought using the Oakland neighborhood as a pilot program would give a great indication of how it is received.
- (8) Neighborhood Self-Help Model
 - Seek guidance and partnership with national agencies, such as the Center for Community Progress. Division Director Glauvé stated that could be a potential resource, but would need to follow up with additional details.
 - Highlight neighborhoods that have been working hard together on strategies, perhaps making it a friendly competition between NIA's to be listed on the City's website.
 - Update resource and social service lists more frequently.
 - Additional training for Community Engagement Staff.
 - Training from Shawnee County Extension Office about noxious weed versus native plants.
 - CEPTED training with invitations for community to attend. A date would not be known; it would have to be once the pandemic has subsided considerably.
- (9) Abandoned Vehicles
 - Tow lots are filling up. There are a number of junk cars that are not registered and they are being towed at a rate that has become problematic for tow vendor, and other towing companies.
 - Interpretation of ordinance between Topeka Police Department abandoned vehicle program, on City streets, and Property Maintenance division, on private property. Division Director Haugen stated that with the shift of Property Maintenance moving under the Topeka Police Department, this process is getting better.
- (10) KDOT not keeping up on mowing and trash. Division Director Haugen noted he is hearing from KDOT that they are not able to mow due to staffing deficiencies and lack of budget and equipment. The City can put pressure on

KDOT and voices from the Governing Body members also goes a long way in moving requests forward.

5) Other Items (video 1:50:00 minute mark)

Next steps: Ten items will be distributed and sent out prior to next meeting. Staff and Committee asked to be prepared with responses.

City Manager Trout noted that the City Manager can hire a contractor up to \$50,000 without having to take the RFP to the Governing Body. If Karen Black is able to meet the items in the scope of the RFP, that may be something to move more quickly on. If the fee is over \$50,000, the process may take longer. Committee member Valdivia-Alcala inquired if the fee was over \$50,000, if it would be possible to partner with other agencies to keep the City's obligation under that threshold. City Manager Trout would look into various options.

City Manager Trout noted that Staff had been able to define "substandard" as it relates to sanitation cases. He will be sending that information to the Committee.

City Manager Trout inquired about when Legal can be included. Chairwoman Hiller felt there would be enough items for the next meeting, and that after the planning session, Legal could then be involved in the next step.

Committee member Valdivia-Alcalá noted she and Division Director GlauDé would be hosting two public input sessions for Spanish-speaking community members, and will provide that input afterward.

6) Set Next Meeting Date (video 1:55:45 minute mark)

November 8th 10am. Location TBD.

7) Adjourn

Chairwoman Hiller adjourned the meeting at 12:00pm

Meeting video can be viewed at: https://youtu.be/JH9i2_APdQ8