



# CITY OF TOPEKA

CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE  
MEETING MINUTES

## PUBLIC HEALTH & SAFETY COMMITTEE

CITY COUNCIL  
City Hall, 215 SE 7<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 255  
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**Date:** December 14, 2020

**Time:** 3:00pm

**Location:** Classroom A; Law Enforcement Center 320 S. Kansas (virtual via Zoom as well)

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

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

### 1) Call to Order

Chairwoman Hiller called the meeting to order at 3:00pm. Committee members and staff introduced themselves.

### 2) Approval of November 16, 2020 minutes

Committee member Dobler made a motion to approve the minutes. Chairwoman Hiller seconded the motion. Committee member Ortiz was not present at the time. Minutes approved 2:0.

### 3) Discussion: Internet Reliability for Topeka Residents

Chairwoman Hiller stated there had been some updates from Cox, USD 501, and from the City Manager that carried over from the last meeting. Members in attendance introduced themselves.

#### a. Updates

##### i. USD 501 [video 3:00 minute mark]

Scott Gowan, USD 501, provided the following information:

- 3,034 families, serving roughly 5,900 students. The total student population is around 13,281. Around 988 additional students are prepared to be served by the district, but have not yet been enrolled in the Connect2Compete program for a variety of reasons.
- 1,127 hotspots received from T-Mobile. Still in the process of getting those delivered.

- Families needing assistance reach out to their schools who are able to get them connected to the IT Department.
- Students with multiple homes, unhoused, or consistently in different locations, they are connected with the hotspot.
- Have contacted several families with multiple students and provided resources to trouble shoot on how to save on bandwidth.
- Cox Communications has doubled the bandwidth for the households that are being assisted in the Connect2Compete program. Instead of 25 megabits per second, they are getting 50 megabits per second.
- One potential issue is that the current Grant partnership is scheduled to end at the conclusion of December. They are actively seeking out other sources of funding to continue the program should the legislature end the current grant.

Chairwoman Hiller inquired if there was any type of monitoring in place to capture the difference having the 50 megabits per second is having. Mr. Gowan stated there was not much in the way of monitoring, however there have been less comments made regarding connectivity issues than were made prior.

Chairwoman Hiller inquired if Mr. Gowan knew of additional resources to help families with the various issues surrounding connectivity or software issues. Mr. Gowan stated the district IT office was not the only resource, however additional resources would be helpful. There is room for a community strategy to address the need for additional broadband for everyone outside of just the students of Topeka Public Schools.

Final comments: Mr. Gowan noted he listened to the meeting of the Shawnee County Delegation of the Legislature. There seems to be positive momentum toward community strategy. He feels the conversations that have been had during these committee meetings has been a step in the right direction. Grant funding will be a key opportunity in being able to continue moving forward.

**ii. Cox Communications** [video 14:20 minute mark]

Megan Bottenberg, Cox Communications, added a caveat to the information Mr. Gowan shared about the doubled bandwidth to say that it will be pulled back once the 2020-2021 school year ends. The hope

would be that students will be able to be back to school in-person in the Fall of 2021.

Chairwoman Hiller inquired if the doubling of bandwidth was a consideration for other programs. Ms. Bottenberg feels there is potential, and that there will likely need to be a public/private partnership to continue the momentum, however we will start seeing more innovative ways to address this need.

Dawn McWilliams, Boys & Girls Club, noted there are three site locations that are operating currently. She stated they had sent out a survey to families that were participating in the current program and there had been very few if any comments related to poor connectivity as being the reason their child was needing to attend the program. Ms. McWilliams noted there was a need for internet safety. A new program was introduced to help K-12 students learn about safety.

Michelle Stubblefield, Greater Topeka Partnership, appreciated the work everyone has brought to the table so far, and is interested in continuing to support the mission as they are able.

Mike Siebert, DCF, provided information on a new program to assist children Sunflower Remote Tutoring 785-215-0919, located in the old Methodist Church at US-75 and NW 35<sup>th</sup> Street.

### **Past Broadband Taskforce; accomplishments and future**

No additional comments.

#### **iii. Possible future broadband leadership structure [video 27:00 minute mark]**

Chairwoman Hiller inquired about future steps. She noted that Lazone Grays had sent her some suggestions, and asked for comments from others in attendance. Mr. Siebert stated he felt it was important to watch the amount of broadband usage in the home to know the amount of broadband they are using or what additional needs they may have. Mr. Gowan stated whatever leadership structure moves forward, it should identify if it is a system-wide structure or a house-wide structure, or both? And to identify options for each of those scenarios. He stated it would be important to hear

from the stakeholders as well as field experts. It would also be important to find ways to bring connectivity to places where it is currently unavailable.

Chairwoman Hiller listed items out regarding the “to the house” approach. Capacity to use would include bandwidth, hardware, skills to use, and safety.

Committee member Dobler noted he felt this would be the time to begin working toward focusing on the leadership structure to carry these conversations forward. He asked Ms. Stubblefield about her thoughts regarding the Greater Topeka Partnership’s stance. Ms. Stubblefield stated GTP is willing to support these issues, and supported a task force, however they would not take the lead. She stated the GTP would recommend a tri-share type of leadership to consist of government, private companies, and members of the public. Chairwoman Hiller agreed that perhaps JEDO needs to discuss the next steps concerning leadership, and how to incorporate more ideas on how to hear from the general public. Mr. Gowan stated he would be willing to serve on the committee and suggested picking up where the previous taskforce left off. He also noted it would be very important to include voices from as many sections of the community as possible. Ms. Bottenberg stated that adoption was another key piece to the next step. She noted there are a lot of moving parts and that hearing from providers would be helpful as well. Ms. Stubblefield referenced the document sent by Mr. Grays, and noted it was a fairly short list but that it would be a starting point to add to.

Chairwoman Hiller noted the current committee was near the end of annual service, and inquired if Committee member Dobler felt the conversation should be continued by the next committee. Committee member Dobler suggested reaching out to the County Commissioners to inquire about their interest in moving forward on the conversation and taking it to JEDO.

Committee member Ortiz arrived to the meeting.

Committee member Ortiz would like to have this item placed on the January agenda to continue until JEDO can pick it up.

**b. Discussion, possible action**

Chairwoman Hiller noted if anyone had additional suggestions, to please email the City Council Assistant, Liz Toyne at [etoyne@topeka.org](mailto:etoyne@topeka.org).

**4) Unsheltered Population Update: Homeless Taskforce & TPD**

[video 51:00 minute mark]

SGT Josh Klamm, TPD, provided an update on the following:

- Roughly 200-250 unsheltered individuals. Difficult to track them down. Tent City used to serve as a main location for most of that population, and now they are spread out around the city.
- CARES Act purchased about 300 special re-usable masks and hand sanitizer that will be handed out in the following week.
- Receives numerous calls about campsites. Many of the places such as 1<sup>st</sup> street & I-70, is now abandoned. Those individuals have been moved to a location they are able to legally camp at. This site is also railroad property. Recent weather has been an issue.
- Near Kansas & Topeka - Kansas Turnpike Authority property
- A few other locations that are on private property. Unable to enforce in those areas due to requiring the property owner needing to report trespassing.
- There are some individuals breaking the public camping ordinance in NOTO. They have refused services, refused to move, and have had ample notice to find a legal location. Enforcement action will be taking place within the week.
- Continuing to work with the Topeka Rescue Mission and Valeo to assist the unsheltered populations. COVID-19 restrictions have made it difficult for some of the typical ways to help in capacities that had been available in the past.
- Challenge has been individuals have spread out, rather than being in a more centralized location (or few locations).
- The individuals are placing campsites in locations that are very challenging to physically get to, which causes a hindrance. There is a high populated campsite to the south west of the Topeka Boulevard Bridge which is difficult to get to but is noticeably growing in numbers.

Committee member Ortiz inquired about trash at 10<sup>th</sup> and Jefferson. SGT Klamm noted that those individuals had been moved, but have left a mess.

Committee member Ortiz inquired about the strategy for handing the items out. SGT Klamm stated they would begin in campsites where there are many people, and hand items out until they run out.

Chairwoman Hiller inquired about Committee member Ortiz's thoughts for moving forward with reports on the unsheltered population. Committee member Ortiz felt having quarterly updates was beneficial, and would like to see them continue.

Corrie Wright, Housing Services, provided the following updates [video 1:05:45 minute mark]:

#### Housing First Initiative

- The most recent 6 month program is near the end.
- Of the 24 households (30 people):
  - There are 10 that have been able to sustain being in their homes on their own.
  - There are 3 households that have been extended, as they are close to being sustainable.
  - There are 11 that unfortunately have since gone back on the street.
- A success rate of 42% of the participants have, or will be, able to sustain housing on their own through the program. These were positive numbers for working with chronically unsheltered individuals.

Chairwoman Hiller inquired if Ms. Wright had any comments as it related to the broadband conversation, and the homeless population. Ms. Wright stated the Homeless Taskforce is working on the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) data base. With the better data, provided through the HMIS Capacity Building Grant, the group is able to compete for more funds. Ms. Wrights would hope to see the HMIS program be very accurate by the end of 2021, and the City would be more competitive for the Continuum of Care grant which funds the Shelter Plus Care program. This data would also allow the community, not necessarily the City of Topeka Government, to apply for a Chronically Homeless Housing Grant to continue providing shelter to the unsheltered population.

- The Homeless Taskforce has been discussing the various funding that is available throughout the community.
- Operation COVID-19 Basic Assistance Program is a \$1.5 million program that has been sole-sourced to Community Resources Council (CRC), to help with

rent, mortgage, and utilities. It does not have the HUD Federal Guidelines. Individuals interested in more information on this funding need to call CRC at 785-233-1365 to make an appointment. Appointments are going through January. This is the only program that the City of Topeka has for mortgage assistance, and has minimal requirements. There is still the HESG program, however HUD restriction guidelines are placed on that program.

Mike Siebert noted United Way put a comprehensive resource list together. He noted Topeka is the only city in the entire state that is using the \$1.5 million toward assisting the lower income and unsheltered populations, and he felt that was impressive. He also referenced [www.auntbertha.com](http://www.auntbertha.com) as a resource. This is a nation-wide movement.

#### **5) Property Maintenance – Discussion and possible action**

[video 1:18:00 minute mark]

Chairwoman Hiller noted there were four challenges that had been narrowed on the list to include:

- Reduce current substandard structures by 50% in 5 years
- Reduce deterioration in vacant structure
- Reduce the expense/revenue gap on abatement cases by 50%. This is mostly in reference to the amount of staff time and requirements, rather than fees associated.
- Improve appearance of community through management of uncultivated and overgrown vegetation

Chairwoman Hiller noted that throughout the conversations, there seemed to be a consensus that some type of community-awareness initiative(s) would be needed in order to reach any of these goals. She stated Property Maintenance would likely be involved in some capacity, but would not be the lead entity on these programs. It is a community issue, rather than a Property Maintenance issue.

Chairwoman Hiller asked City Manager Brent Trout to discuss whether or not it would be reasonable for the committee to push some of these initiatives out as recommendations. As a committee, one challenge would be that these initiatives would be more administrative in nature, and less policy-related. City Manager Brent Trout reiterated comments from the Chairwoman and added that setting goals that are achievable will be important for obtaining success. City Manager

noted there will be a change in structure of the division come 2021, following the move to the Topeka Police Department. There are also some staff that are taking different positions. The abatement crews have been reduced to one, which has created a very large back-log to address the vegetation cases. There will be a shortfall with capacity, but the concepts are good and there is certainly interest to work toward accomplishing the goals.

Mike Haugen, Property Maintenance Director, noted the items as have been described by the City Manager, are on target and correct.

No additional comments from the committee.

#### **6) Other Items**

The next meeting will continue with Broadband discussion, as well as Property & Premises Enforcement and Improvement discussion.

#### **7) Adjourn**

Chairwoman Hiller adjourned the meeting at 4:37pm.

Meeting video can be viewed at: <https://youtu.be/SWoI1sBcW6k>