



CITY OF TOPEKA

CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

PUBLIC HEALTH & SAFETY COMMITTEE

CITY COUNCIL
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Date: March 25, 2021

Time: 10:00am

Location: Executive Conference Room; 3rd floor City Hall 215 SE 7th (virtual via Zoom as well)

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

City staff present: City Manager Brent Trout, Monique Glaudé (City Ombudsman), Corrie Wright (Housing Services), SGT Josh Klamm (TPD),

1) Call to Order

Committee member Hiller called the meeting to order at 10:00am. Committee members and staff introduced themselves.

2) Elect 2021 Committee Chair

Committee member Valdivia-Alcalá made a motion to nominate Committee member Hiller to serve as the 2021 chair. Committee member Dobler seconded the motion. Committee member Hiller accepted the nomination. Motion approved 3:0. Councilmember Hiller will serve as the 2021 Public Health & Safety Committee Chair.

3) Approval of December 14, 2020 minutes

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

4) Discussion: Internet Reliability for Topeka Residents

Committee member Dobler stated he had been meeting with some of the people who had been attending the past Public Health & Safety Committee meetings to further work on the broadband initiative. Scott Gowan (USD 501), Lazone Grays (IBSA), Michelle Stubblefield (GTP), Monique Glaudé (CoT), Ann Mah (State Board of Ed), were part of this work group. Mr. Lazone Grays, IBSA, Inc., has been a member of this research team and provided an update regarding some of the work the small group has been doing since the last committee meeting. Highlights include:

- Vision: To create an ecosystem that improves our neighborhoods, institutions, economy, and quality of life through affordable digital participation.

- Four pillars that are brought out of the National Digital Inclusion Alliance, which is one of the leading digital inclusion organizations in the United States.
 - Affordable/Equitable Access
 - Affordable Devices
 - Digital Literacy & Citizenship
 - Tech Support
- The scope of the program includes the city of Topeka
- How do we get there?
 - Central Point of Contact
 - Americorps Vista (stipend)
 - Dedicated City Employee
 - Digital Navigators- must know all contact points and share collaboratively. This area was not always included in the 3-legged stool model, which also included devices, connectivity, and digital literacy. This would help close a gap by helping individuals find out what services are available. Things at the State and Federal levels move so quickly, it is difficult for the average person to keep up, and this position would help make that connection.
 - USD 501
 - City of Topeka
 - Community Group
 - Topeka & Shawnee County Public Library
- Implementation:
 - Next Steps
 - Those being impacted are included at the table
 - Coalition for Digital Inclusion. People in the neighborhoods have technical abilities who would like to help and would like a seat at the table.
 - Data Sources
 - Census Data
 - Coalition Members
 - Would like to have the City of Topeka take the lead
 - Full Time Employee to coordinate
 - Set up a fund through the Topeka Community Foundation

Chairman Dobler spoke about the background of how this group came to be, and noted the group has been meeting regularly. The first question to understand if

the city had the infrastructure in place to support this type of initiative was able to be confirmed. From there, the group has been reviewing the other barriers, and working to find possible solutions.

Committee member Valdivia-Alcalá suggested making resources available in Spanish as well. Chairman Dobler agreed this would be a great idea and noted it would likely be something the Digital Navigator would help with. Chairman Dobler expanded on the idea of duties that would be assigned to the Digital Navigator. That individual would assist with finding resources for and connecting people with those resources, as they relate to the subject matter.

Mr. Grays noted that although digital literacy and training is not specifically included in the Federal and State funding of stimulus packages that have been moving through, there is a latitude for cities and counties to appropriate monies for digital literacy training as well as for Navigators. He would like to put that information forward to the City of Topeka and Shawnee County for consideration. The main component that seems to be lacking is adoption of a public broadband program. Mr. Gray spoke about the Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) program, which is a new FCC initiative. This program will make available \$3.2 billion to assist with subsidizing up to \$50/individual homes for good, high-speed internet, as well as providing a rebate for the purchase of computers. The list provided to the Committee shows some known resources for where this service can be obtained as well as where the devices are. The EBB is in motion, but very few people know about it. Mr. Grays stated he felt the initiative roll-out would likely happen in about a month and he would like to have systems in place to allow the community to have the best chance at receiving the benefits of the program. Mr. Grays has signed his organization up to receive some of the funding through EBB, and has been notified that the EBB is preparing some generic marketing material to send to him. He would like to see additional, more targeted marketing material as well. These materials will be in English and Spanish.

Scott Gowan, USD 501, noted that when the process began, the focus was on connectivity. He feels that although an important component, connectivity is something that can be achieved. He feels the bigger issue is getting the families and households online and active to make a difference in their situation. That will be a piece the group focuses on moving forward.

Committee member Valdivia-Alcalá requested additional information on the EBB program with Mr. Grays.

Monique Glaudé, City Ombudsman, stated the Community Engagement department was excited to participate in the program. With regard to the full time employee serving as the Digital Navigator, Ombudsman Glaudé stated the City could utilize the AmeriCorps Vista Summer Associate Program to begin in this roll by May 1st or June 1st through September 4th. This would cost a nominal fee and would allow for someone to begin work on this project for 40-45 hours weekly. Post-summer, there would be an opportunity to have an AmeriCorps Vista Fellow that could work on the program for a year. She stated this option would allow for someone to be able to begin on the program without having to cause stress about finding a full-time employee.

Chairman Dobler stated that the goal would be to eventually expand out to include more people. The City will not be able to achieve this alone.

City Manager Brent Trout discussed an opportunity that had been received through the Bloomberg Philanthropies, through a program called the Mayor's Challenge. An application was submitted, and if selected, the City could receive \$1m which could be used in the area to address access. That could look like having loaner computers, funding for access to the internet, etc. There are hundreds of people competing for this, but City Manager Trout remains hopeful. In addition, City Manager Trout noted the City could potentially use some of the money that the City will receive from the American Rescue Plan to use in this area. Those funding sources would be further down the road, but he wanted to make the group aware of what could be done in the future.

Committee member Hiller inquired as to when the results would be known for those funding sources. City Manager Trout stated that for the Mayor's Challenge, it would be three months before we know if we make it to the next phase to narrow to 50. The challenge used to only be for North America, however this year it is global and there will be hundreds of applicants. Once the 50 have been selected, they will receive some funding to help refine the application, develop it further, and then resubmit it. From there, 10-15 will be chosen as recipients. The decision could also be made to not wait, and to begin moving forward with the funding provided through the American Rescue Plan. The City will have through

December of 2024 to spend those funds, which will allow for a better plan to be developed and not rushed.

Councilmember Ortiz made a comment that she would like to have a Shawnee County representative to the table. She also suggested having USD 501 and the State sending some type of email blast out about this program. And that the City could put the information on all water utility bills. Other than the Federal level, Councilmember Ortiz feels most of the parties have been identified and invited to the table. She also congratulated Mr. Grays on his persistence in addressing this issue and his dedication to the program.

[Video 23:00 minute mark] Maren Turner, AARP, provided information about opportunities offered to AARP's senior members. Ms. Turner expanded on some reasons as to why AARP would like to encourage the City of Topeka to continue with pursuing a community-wide broadband initiative. Internet access is no longer a luxury, it has become an essential need. The senior population is behind on having access or knowing how to utilize internet service. With the ability to connect, individuals may be able to age in place longer. Services to assist with this include telehealth appointments with medical professionals and online patient portals, video meetings with social workers or access to online resources. The City of Wichita applied for the AARP Challenge Grant to provide 20 hot spot devices to each of their neighborhood area resource centers. The AARP Challenge Grant is open currently and closes April 14, 2021. Ms. Turner encouraged the City to apply for the grant. The manner in which the expansion of Federal and State funding for infrastructure is dispersed depends on the availability of data that shows those who have and do not have access, as well as the speed of the network on which the service has been deployed. This data is referred to as Mapping Data. Ms. Turner noted that local elected officials are better equipped to assist with providing information about their local geographic areas that may be most in need. AARP is creating a local advocacy group in Topeka to look at the broadband issue as well as other issues.

Mike Siebert, DCF, inquired about phone plans that only allow a certain amount of data to be used monthly, and how this might be addressed. Mr. Gowan stated families of students are receiving unlimited data currently, which is paid for by the school district through Cox Communications. With the new EBB, families will be able to receive a higher limit of service, and will receive a subsidy of up to \$50/month. Once more is known about that, it will be pushed out. Considerations

have been reviewed with regard to focus on unlimited strategies. The group will be looking into a number of solutions, not just a single-provided solution.

Chairwoman Hiller appreciated the structure that is supporting the document presented, and appreciated the question brought forward by Mr. Seibert.

Committee member Valdivia-Alcalá voiced appreciation for Ms. Turner's information and would like to see a continued partnership with AARP as we move forward with this initiative.

Committee member Dobler stated the small group will continue to meet, and will reach out to those who have expressed interest, and will continue bringing updates to the committee meetings.

Chairwoman Hiller inquired about what else needed to be done by the Committee at this time. Committee member Dobler stated the small group would continue to meet to begin the ground work for what an advocacy group may look like. They will bring an update to the next Committee meeting.

5) Unsheltered Population Update: Homeless Taskforce & TPD

[Video 40:05 minute mark]

Reverend Barry Feaker with the Topeka Rescue Mission, and Bill Persinger with VALEO, provided a PowerPoint presentation. There are some innovative things they would like to see in the future. [*This presentation will be available on the committee's webpage at <https://www.topeka.org/citycouncil/public-health-safety-committee>*].

Presentation Highlights:

- Homeless Shelter and Service Continuum
 - TRM Street Reach/Valeo/Law Enforcement/Other
- Mobile Access Partnership (MAP) - City Manager Trout was able to find some funding to assist with some of the emergency programs to keep them from being diminished through the pandemic. The MAP goal is to create a more holistic way to care for themselves and receive assistance, by reaching people right where they are. Each area listed would have a mobile vehicle to provide services.
 - Mobile Food Pantry (TRM)
 - Shower/Laundry/Hope - Valeo Behavioral Health Care

- Mobile Health Clinic - Stormont Vail
- Para-medicine vehicle
- Allied providers, future partners, future projects
- TRM Emergency Program Shelter - social distancing and other restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic has made it more challenging to care for these individuals. The goal would be to have more people into permanent housing and programs to help them succeed in caring for themselves.
 - TRM Rapid Rehousing - partnership with TRM and City of Topeka to help relocate 20 people, so far, to help facilitate funds. Operation Food Secure is another program partnership with the local government that has helped to provide 5 million meals to the people in the community so far this past year.
 - Treatment (Mental Health/Substance Abuse)/Domestic Violence Shelter Referral
- Extended Emergency Low Barrier Shelter (TBD) - the hope for this type of program would be to close the gap between individuals who actively are participating in programs and housing programs, and those who are needing assistance but are not yet ready to accept help. Something between a homeless shelter and living on the streets. The pallet program was introduced as an idea. Pallet is an organization out of Seattle. The shelters are 100 sq ft homes that can be built quickly, have 2 - 4 bedroom options, and have their own electric options. This program is intended to be temporary, not permanent. This would offer someone on the street a low-barrier shelter for a determined amount of time while extending offers for additional services. The question would be whether the community would want to have a designated camp. Rev. Feaker discussed some potential site locations, and possible partnership and funding needs and ideas.
- Long-term transitional program housing (TBD) - There has been some discussion about the former Holiday Inn West and what it would take to turn the rooms into apartments. This would be a very affordable project.
- Goal - Permanent Housing. This continuum would be to help individuals get from the street into self-sufficient and stable permanent housing.

Questions from the Committee:

- Committee member Dobler stated that there is a potential crisis coming in the homeless population, and that being prepared for it as a community would be in everyone's interest.

- Committee member Valdivia-Alcalá inquired about the Covid vaccines, and inquired about how vaccines are reaching the unsheltered populations. Rev. Feaker noted the Johnson & Johnson vaccine has been, and will continue to be distributed by the Shawnee County Health Agency at the Rescue Mission shelter.
- Chairwoman Hiller inquired if the thought might be that some of the next round of COVID-19 funding could be used to help with the land development? Perhaps. The funding could help to keep the shelter smaller and to help with keeping the tent population from congregating too close together. Rev. Feaker would like to see what the City's thoughts are.

[Video 1:16:10] Bill Cochran, Chief of Staff, spoke about the Wheels of Change program. This program would be offered to unsheltered individuals to provide them the opportunity to work for a few hours a day. Transportation to and from their location to the worksite would also be provided. Additional wrap-around services would be offered as part of the program. The hope would be to have the program running by July of 2021.

Committee member Valdivia-Alcalá requested additional information with specific details regarding the program, once it is ready. She suggested having a presentation on the program brought forward in a future meeting.

Chairwoman Hiller inquired about the lead agency to run the program. Chief of Staff Cochran stated there was a requirement for there to be a partnership with a 501(c) 3 non-profit agency. One such partner has been identified, and more information can be followed.

SGT Josh Klamm, TPD, made a few brief statements about what has been happening with his unit. During the artic storm, a majority of the unsheltered population was able to be moved temporarily to hotels. The railroads have been working with TPD to clear some abandoned campsites. One of the newest issues occurring around the river is related to a large amount of lumber being dropped off. People have created fences around their campsites, which would not be allowed. This is not the unsheltered population doing this, it is SGT Klamm's thought that it is coming from someone in an industry, who has good intentions to help but is actually creating a large problem. He will be reaching out to the

individual who he thinks may be sourcing this lumber to request they stop. He will update the Committee in the future.

Corrie Wright, Housing Services, provided a few brief statements. The Point in Time results have gone out. Due to the reduced number of people at the Rescue Mission, the count of sheltered individuals went from 401 to 298. However, the unsheltered individuals went from 68 to 105, and only included the people we were able to count and who wanted to participate in the survey. In her experience with the program, this is the highest number of unsheltered individuals she has seen. Another significant issue is the percentage of people under the age of 18 dropped from 17% to 9%. The number of homeless males increased from 60.5% to 72%.

Chairwoman Hiller inquired about a Shelter First update. Ms. Wright stated the program is at capacity, and that the individuals are holding stable, which is encouraging.

City Manager Trout and Ms. Wright provided information for individuals who may be facing mortgage, utility, or eviction issues as the moratoriums end. The CRC is still taking appointments and have funding to help with rent, mortgage, utilities, and internet. Their phone number is 785-233-1365. Committee member Valdivia-Alcalá suggested adding this information to the water bills along with the City4 and NIA communications that have been going out.

6) Other Items [Video 1:37:04]

No additional items. Chairwoman Hiller noted that the committee has been working on Property and Premises discussions, and plan to bring more information to the April meeting. An update regarding the unsheltered population will be brought forward again in May.

Mike Haugen, Property Maintenance Director, stated they have been holding interviews this week to fill the two positions that the division is down.

Committee member Valdivia-Alcalá stated she had reviewed items discussed the past year in the meetings. She made notes of certain areas that she would be interested in knowing more about. She requested that Chairwoman Hiller have more detailed information come forward to the Committee once more prior to going before the full Governing Body. She would also like to explore options for

individuals of the low-median income community to participate in to bring their property up to code. However, she would also like to review how perpetual offenders are addressed. Chairwoman Hiller confirmed some of these topics will be presented to the Committee again for further review and discussion.

7) Adjourn

Chair adjourned the meeting at 11:43am.

Meeting video can be viewed at: <https://youtu.be/SXR7xAQEUPU>