



# CITY OF TOPEKA

CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE  
MEETING MINUTES

## PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE

CITY COUNCIL  
City Hall, 215 SE 7<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 255  
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Date: July 13, 2020

Time: 3:00 p.m.

Location: 1<sup>st</sup> 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), Corrie Wright (Housing Services)

### Call to Order

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

### Approve June 8, 2020 meeting minutes

Committee member Ortiz made a motion to approve the minutes. Committee member Dobler seconded the motion. Motion approved 3:0.

### Staff Update: Homelessness in Topeka

SGT Klamm was unable to attend the meeting. Liz Toyne, Council Assistant, read a typed report from SGT Klamm to the committee.

Corrie Wright, Housing Services, provided reports on the ShelterPlus Care program, as well as the emergency housing program that occurred with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### ShelterPlus Care, March 2019

- 34 vouchers issued which included 46 people
- 24 households completed enrollment and got into the program
- Current time: Four households have been terminated from the program, giving an 83% success rate. Significantly better than national average for housing program offered to chronically homeless individuals.

### Emergency Housing Program, March 2020

- Six month program
- Issued 32 vouchers of which 23 were used
- Zero terminations

- Due to cost savings from not using all of the vouchers, the program assistance will be able to cover a seventh month of rent for these individuals.
- KDADS and partners are working with the individuals to get longer-term resources for the individuals within the community. Most current update was unavailable at time of committee meeting.

Committee member Ortiz expressed concern to assist individuals who relied on the lunch program from Let's Help. Ms. Wright stated the Community Engagement division of the Topeka Rescue Mission (TRM) was awarded a USDA grant which allows them to hand out sack lunches to the unsheltered. Sack lunches are handed out at TRM's campus as well as at Let's Help. Ms. Wright stated that program will be able to be amplified after receiving new CV Funds, which are received from HUD.

Committee member Ortiz inquired if TRM offered weekend services. Ms. Wright stated she believed they did, however would look into it and report back. Additionally, Ms. Wright would send the committee a list of food services that were being offered throughout the community.

Chairwoman Hiller inquired about the Cares Act dollars and when that funding would run out. There was concern expressed about the cooler months ahead. Ms. Wright stated that the ESG funds have a specific two-year time limit and must be used by the end of that time. Agencies who have been receiving the ESG funds have been directed to utilize those funds within a year and a half, in order to allow for time for administrative processing and timely submission. Programs included in this grant assist with rapid rehousing, homeless prevention and shelter operations.

Chairwoman Hiller inquired about the requirements for agencies receiving the Rapid Rehousing or Homeless Prevention funding and if they have to be COVID-19 related. Ms. Wright responded the need for the funds must be COVID-19 related: such as loss of hours or loss of job. These funds will be used for anyone who meets the eligibility criteria, although agencies typically have some flexibility on whether or not they choose to assist someone. If an individual is unemployed, for example, there is a high likelihood that they will not be able to sustain the housing accommodations once the timeframe has expired and would not be a good use of funds.

Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) CV funds do not have the same timeframe requirement, however Staff prefers to keep those on about a two year cycle as well. Those funds assist small business grants and mobile testing units in East Topeka. If the Governing Body approves the mobile site, it will be set up in East Topeka.

Chairwoman Hiller asked Ms. Wright to speak to the activities on the Staff level about assistance to the unsheltered as the cooler months arrive. Ms. Wright responded that her division is seeing a lot of need regarding rent assistance. Evictions are going to begin happening within a week. If the Governing Body

approves the 2019 Consolidated Annual Action Plan Amendment at the July 14<sup>th</sup> meeting, staff can begin getting that money out to individuals immediately to help prevent them from having to go to court for an eviction hearing.

Chairwoman Hiller inquired if the predictions indicate the numbers are rising. Ms. Wright did not have the information on hand, but from what she is hearing and the requests that are coming in, there will be more applicants.

Committee member Ortiz inquired if the Homeless Taskforce has been meeting. Ms. Wright confirmed meetings have been occurring monthly via Zoom. Committee member Ortiz would like an update from Corrie in September, following the next Taskforce meeting.

Ms. Wright noted there would be an update for the committee pending approval of a proposed upcoming utility event. The event would occur by appointments and applicants must have received a disconnect notice, or have actually had the water cut off, in order to be eligible. Payments for assisting up to six months payment of water utility will be available. Committee member Ortiz felt this was a great idea and encouraged staff and City Manager to get the word out about the event to as many people as possible. Brent Trout, City Manager, added the idea behind the program was to also help households who may be near the edge to homelessness stay in their home.

Chairwoman Hiller expressed caution with regard to how information is documented in order to lessen the possibility of property owners or homeowners from allowing an account to fall into disconnect, simply for the reason of receiving free money from the City.

Committee member Ortiz inquired if it was known how many people fell into this crisis category. City Manager Trout responded he did not have that specific number, however at his last update, there were \$1.6 million in arrears. Typically, at this time of year, that amount would be \$1.2 million arrears.

### **Review & Discuss: Setting Public Hearings Regarding Property Maintenance**

Chairwoman Hiller inquired how the committee felt about pursuing the public meetings. Committee member Ortiz stated she did not feel comfortable with holding the public meetings at this time, and that online meetings may be difficult for members of the community.

Committee member Dobler expressed agreement with Committee member Ortiz, and suggested touching back in another month to see how things may have changed.

Chairwoman Hiller requested committee and staff members brainstorm on ideas of how to move forward with the public engagement meetings in the future and to bring those ideas back to the August committee meeting.

**Other items before the committee**

Chairwoman Hiller noted the Housing Study was on the agenda for the July 14<sup>th</sup> Governing Body meeting. Code Compliance is mentioned in the study, and recommendations on how to best invest with public and private cash dollars. Chairwoman Hiller asked the committee to think about encouraging staff to review the information regarding demolition, and that perhaps a master plan could be developed to see how many houses could be brought up to “safe and affordable” category, rather than demolished.

Committee member Ortiz thanked staff for their continued work and diligence.

Chairwoman Hiller planned the next committee meeting will be August 17, 2020.

**Adjourn**

Meeting was adjourned at 3:34pm.

Meeting video can be viewed at: [https://youtu.be/ktdJu4I\\_hw0](https://youtu.be/ktdJu4I_hw0)