



# CITY OF TOPEKA

CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE  
MEETING MINUTES

## SOCIAL SERVICE GRANTS COMMITTEE

CITY COUNCIL  
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**Date:** September 11, 2020

**Time:** 10:00 a.m.

**Location:** 1<sup>st</sup> Floor Conference Room; Holliday Building 620 SE Madison

**Committee members present:** Councilmembers Karen Hiller (Chair), Christina Valdivia-Alcalá, Michael Padilla

**City staff present:** Corrie Wright (DNR), City Manager Brent Trout

### 1) Call to Order

Chairwoman Hiller called the meeting to order at 10:00am. An overview of the goal of the committee meeting was reviewed. Committee members introduced themselves and agency members who were attending via Zoom were asked to introduce themselves.

### 2) Senior Centers as a Model: A Collaborative Discussion

Chairwoman Hiller asked Brett Martin with United Way to begin the conversation. Mr. Martin stated many of the attendees have been discussion collaboration and changes as well as strategic planning for the near future. The topic of senior services came about to bring these conversations to the City's committee and Governing Body as well.

Questions by the panel to agencies:

Mr. Martin began by stating that the COVID-19 pandemic has introduced many challenges to agencies who offer programs to the senior population. Today is an additional way to bring many voices together to find ways to talk about collaborations, ways to share resources, and strategic plans for moving forward in the next few years.

Susan Harris, Jayhawk Area Agency on Aging (JAAA), stated their agency is currently reviewing the four-year plan. This meeting is a good way to bring to the table challenges that the senior centers or other agencies are experiencing, to help identify funding opportunities for the upcoming years.

Mr. Martin asked the senior centers to provide input regarding the challenges they are experiencing as an agency or program. And to discuss some changes that have been identified within the landscape.

Debra Dawkins, East Topeka Senior Center - Stated the largest challenge is the need for reliable technology. Seniors are back in the building. Partnership with Washburn University where seniors attend twice weekly for physical fitness. The focus has been on eating right and staying physically active. With pandemic, the Washburn students will be facilitating the program virtually. There have been challenges with finding ways to use Zoom on the TV to allow for participant interaction. Cleaning is also a challenge. A position was added to have someone clean the restrooms and building hourly. With new positions, but no additional funding, the executive directors are taking on more duties as well as trying to be funded. Ms. Dawkins noted their salary is tied to services provided and did not feel being docked on grant applications should happen.

Committee member Valdivia-Alcalá inquired about the challenges with Zoom. Ms. Dawkins stated the plan was to have the seniors attend the community center with Washburn students instructing the class remotely from the campus. The Wi-Fi is sometimes slow. Parks and Recreation is working to try their best to fix the issue, however it may come to the senior center purchasing their own router and internet service.

Committee member Valdivia-Alcala asked about the challenges faced when the center was shut down due to the pandemic. Staff also called seniors daily. Since returning, the seniors have adjusted well to the “new norm” with wearing masks, restricting physical contact and helping to clean.

Committee member Padilla inquired if there were programs to help with coping with depression through this time. Ms. Dawkins noted prior to the pandemic, a program was in the works to bring partners in from Washburn, Valeo, and Shawnee County Health Agency to provide assessment and case management skills to work with those individuals who are showing signs of mental health struggles whether it be depression or on-set dementia.

Kathy Votaw, LULAC Senior Center - Stated seniors are living longer. The services required for respite care is growing. The senior centers are not able to assist with dispensing medication, “babysitting”, transporting to all of the medical

appointments, etc and many have had to be turned away. Respite care is a huge need in Topeka, but it is not affordable for many of the seniors.

The center opened back up June 10<sup>th</sup>. The oldest seniors were the first to come back...they had nothing to fear. LULAC purchased a fogger to help with cleaning, as it was too difficult to maintain the level of cleaning manually. It was difficult in the beginning to enforce safety rules. Daily schedule changed to Monday, Wednesday, Friday to allow for running the fogger and deep cleaning on Tuesday and Thursday. There are a lot of inter-generational programming between high school seniors and college comp class and the seniors at the center. The internet service with Cox Communications is outrageous. There is Wi-Fi capacity for about 85 people, but it diminishes quickly as they are set up not only for individuals in the center, but also as a hot-spot for school children to tap into for their schoolwork. Mental health programs have been ongoing for a little while. Grief counselors from Midland come regularly to speak with the seniors. Counselors have also given presentations on PTSD, and other mental health struggles. The pandemic threw some of that programming off, but Ms. Votaw would like to see that come back noting there is a huge need for it.

Committee member Padilla inquired about transportation difficulties similar to those experienced by East Topeka Sr. Center. Ms. Votaw noted the Board decided it was best to only allow six people to ride the bus at a time. Costs have gone up because multiple trips must be taken. Average day, two busses run 3-4 trips.

Committee member Valdivia-Alcala noted the commitment shown by Ms. Votaw and the LULAC staff for the participants and the seniors in the community. Committee member Valdivia-Alcala suggested the senior centers work together to communicate and coordinate ideas to find ways to become more efficient. Committee member Valdivia-Alcala also commended the inter-generational programming, noting it is important to bring the generations together to learn from one another.

Chairwoman Hiller inquired about the average attendance and service area. Ms. Votaw noted LULAC is not strictly neighborhood-based and listed some of the areas in town where people come from. The majority of pick-ups are from the west side of town. With regard to programming, Ms. Votaw listed out the programs offered through LULAC. Even with the pandemic, they are at full capacity. Ms. Votaw believes they will continue to see an increase of participants.

Ms. Dawkins returned to the podium to answer the same questions. The East Topeka Senior Center served about 400 individuals pre-pandemic. Service is provided throughout the community. There are roughly 15-20 people per day coming now, but many of those are different people in attendance depending on the program. There are about 350-400 total people currently on the list. There are about 100 people who participate in the medical transportation program. Chairwoman Hiller inquired about the previous transportation program. Ms. Dawkins stated that was before she began working at the center. Ms. Dawkins has been trying to coordinate with a center in Lawrence on how to take seniors outside of the Shawnee County line to get to medical appointments that are other places.

Debbie Lake, Papan's Landing Senior Center - The center is currently serving about 10-15 seniors daily. Staff is calling the other seniors who are not attending in person programs to check in on them and provide some social interaction. Valeo also used to come in for mental health screening and programs, pre-pandemic. The pandemic has created a number of challenges. Ms. Lake stated medical transportation has ceased unless the individual is already attending the Papan's Landing center. Funding and reliable internet have been challenges as well. Ms. Lake would like to be able to provide some programming on a virtual platform. Staff is limited at this time as well. Regular cleaning takes place, but there have been challenges with getting the seniors to accept the new regulations...it is slowly getting better. There are some home visits taking place, but not as many as people are scared about having people into their homes.

Committee member Valdivia-Alcala inquired about the lack of staffing for setting up and running programs, and wondered if there would be a possibility to partner with some of the agencies attending the meeting today to help with that aspect. Ms. Lake stated they had discussed that topic...having students from Washburn come in to teach the seniors how to use Zoom or other virtual platforms on their phones or computers. Ms. Lake stated painting has become a favorite for the participants more recently as they can spread out and be creative.

Committee member Padilla stated ArtsConnect might be a resource to reach out to for help with activity programming. He also noted that collaborating with the other senior centers may provide a way to share some of those programming resources.

Chairwoman Hiller stated she had been under the assumption that there was perhaps COVID recovery funding available, but was not positive of the particulars.

Karen Streeter, SLI – Ms. Streeter noted the needs of seniors with intellectual or developmental disability (IDD) are growing. Currently, SLI serves 77 seniors (over the age of 50) daily who have IDD needs and are able to meet those needs to the best of their ability. A person with severe IDD typically only live into their 60s. Many individuals with IDD are showing signs of mental, physical, and emotional struggles in their 50's that other individuals will not show until their 60's or 70's. Ms. Streeter stressed the importance for consistency and involvement of seniors with IDD in the general community to allow for as much quality of life as possible for as long as possible.

Ms. Streeter noted that the clients with SLI remain in their homes at this time due to many of them falling into the high-risk category for health. All of the programming has been taken to those homes. The costs for providing PPE and staffing the homes around the clock have significantly risen. Ms. Streeter stated people with disabilities want the same things we all do...to be seen, to be cared for, and to be safe.

Jo Ann Tate with SLI provided additional information regarding the day-service programming and current practices for keeping the clients safe during the pandemic. Ms. Tate noted addressing the clients to understand their individual wants and desires to provide additional programming has become a priority to help with keeping the high standard of their quality of life. With aging programs, there are daily programs offered to slow the pace, and to allow for quiet time to help accommodate those needs. The support staff is incredibly important for keeping the clients safe. SLI wants to be able to find a program to fit any aged client that is receiving their service. Ms. Tate stated the restrictions imposed because of the pandemic have been very difficult on the clients. There is a lot of tension and stress that becomes behavioral problems because they do not understand why they cannot go out or socialize in society as they are used to doing. Family and guardians have not been able to visit in the same capacity as before. SLI brought the day service program to the clients of the residential service. In doing this, clients were able to enjoy some of the things as before, however also brought its own challenges with trying to come up with creative ways to bring the programming to each client. The day service program allows the

clients to have choices to participate in activities that are appropriate for their pace. There are a wide-range of clients in the day service program from 18 year olds to 80 year olds, and all of the needs must be accommodated for. By having a retirement program, it allows for some of those community members who are living at home and need something to do during the day that also offers a safe environment.

Chairwoman Hiller asked Ms. Tate to clarify the clients who come in. Ms. Tate stated there are some clients who attend the day service, but do not receive housing service from SLI. People of any age can attend SLI.

Ms. Votaw noted she was unaware of SLI/Sheltered Living and the programming they offered. She inquired about addressing the needs and is there a guide for identifying those needs. What are the signs of IDD? Ms. Streeter noted the struggles of aging that everyone deals with such as mobility and physical illness are accelerated for a person with IDD. SLI housing became about in 1971 out of a need for housing of adults with IDD. The agency changed the name from Sheltered Living to SLI, because the original name only spoke of the housing component. SLI provides much more than just the housing component.

Julie Nielsen, Legend Senior Living- With regard to challenges with regard to the senior centers, is that there has been a breakdown in the participation outside of the living facilities in an attempt to minimize the spread of the pandemic. Many of the seniors living at home are experiencing a quicker decrease of dietary, mental health, and physical components. Due to these things, there has been a rise in seniors looking into assisted living programs. There has been a spike in memory care requests in the past 26 weeks.

Mr. Martin asked Ms. Nielsen to elaborate on memory care. No longer able to get themselves to the dining room, or requires physical assistance to get to the dining room and feed themselves, or remember what day it is. Individuals with Alzheimer's or dementia would be considered to have a memory care need and are housed in a separate, specialized portion of the residential care facility.

Chairwoman Hiller inquired if those services are only for residents at the facility. Ms. Nilsen confirmed that it is only for residents, and noted the need is great for the outside programming.

Chairwoman Hiller requested the list of organizations from JAAA and United Way, as well as a list of attendees be sent to those in attendance today.

Ms. Harris stated the JAAA [www.jhawkaaa.org](http://www.jhawkaaa.org) and United Way could send the information. There was a question about the “Explore Your Options” book that used to be published by the State of Kansas. The service ended about six years ago. The most current copy can be found on the website, and is updated.

Mr. Martin stated United Way could also send that information out.

Janice Watkins, Topeka Habitat for Humanity, stated that the pandemic somewhat forced agencies to work collaboratively to provide resources to the community and thanked the United Way for the work done during the weekly calling sessions. Ms. Watkins spoke about the need to keep people at home longer with access to general maintenance, educational programs, and programs to provide resources to individuals which address deferred maintenance. Ms. Watkins noted the increased needs for socialization, however if the community cannot keep people safe in their own homes during the pandemic, they may not have other options. Topeka Habitat saw an example of this during the beginning of the shut-down when folks were not always safe at home, due to environmental concerns and accessibility, but also lacked some of the essential and basic needs. In response to this need, Topeka Habitat was able to partner with other area agencies to provide these resources in a way which had not been done previously. With that, Ms. Watkins asked Mr. Martin to speak more about the Healthify program which is a resource she feels has been beneficial for connecting organizations to members of the community.

Chairwoman Hiller asked Ms. Watkins to explain Topeka Habitat’s Aging in Place Program. This program is designed to keep low-moderate income homeowners, who are over the age of 55, in their home by assisting them with fixing basic, moderate, and in some cases critical home repair issues. The program takes a holistic approach by connecting the homeowner with a construction staff member, as well as with a family services individual through Habitat where other areas of needs are assessed and those needs are connected to those resources within the community. Pre-pandemic, a maintenance series program had begun which provided guidance on how to access resources, and perform some preventative maintenance. This program had been scheduled with LULAC, however had to be shut down for a time. Ms. Watkins is hopeful the program will

be able to begin again, however the Aging in Place program never shut down, and staff is receiving 80-100 requests for service daily. There are four staff members at Topeka Habitat.

Mr. Martin elaborated on the Responsive Coordination meetings. These meetings occur weekly on Tuesdays at 3:00pm. To be part of that meeting, please email [BMartin@unitedwaytopeka.org](mailto:BMartin@unitedwaytopeka.org). The Healthify program recognizes the social determinants of health. This buzz phrase is described as being everything that effects health outside of a doctor's office. Such as housing, transportation, energy, food, built environment, and others. Through a partnership with Blue Cross Blue Shield, the Healthify intelligence platform was developed. This allows organizations to make referrals to one another and close the referral loop. The idea is to allow for data tracking in an aggregate way in order to find the types of needs people have, where they are entering and exiting the system, and the assets of the community. Once that information is known, a gap analysis can be performed to begin making connections with various agencies. These relationships can be formalized as well as providing data that the agencies can use to analyze the landscape of the community. This data is helpful when applying for grants, as well as being able to show where needs are with tangible numbers and statistics. Blue Cross and Blue Shield is paying for the platform.

Committee member Padilla stated he felt the conversations were very helpful. Transportation is important to the community, but is costly. He inquired about the intake process to assess additional resources that were available to the individual outside of the transportation program. Ms. Votaw and Ms. Dawkins provided information about the program for their organizations. Neither agency asks questions to applicants about additional resources, as the participants who enroll in the program make it known that they do not have any additional alternatives.

Committee member Valdivia-Alcalá voiced concern for asking too many questions with regard to alternative transportation.

Ronnie Padilla, LULAC, asked the senior center directors if they have been asking their senior participants if they have been counted by the census, and if they have been registered to vote.



Ms. Lake commented on the transportation issue stating that the discussion of transportation has been around for many years. One of the issues, is that families and other resources are not an option due to the liability and insurance that would be required when transporting a senior. The senior centers carry that insurance.

Committee member Padilla stated he would like to ask family members and community members to support the transportation programs offered by the senior centers. That particular resource is expensive, and if donations could be made to assist with that cost on behalf of a family member who utilizes the program, it would help lessen the financial strain on the senior centers.

Mr. Martin noted a comment that had been made regarding one doctor's appointment turning into multiple appointments, and introduced an idea of bringing the primary care field to the table with these discussions. Stormont Vail Health is building Healthify as a referral system to their network. If the conversation can rise to the level of looking at systems. By including schedulers, physicians, and other healthcare components in the conversations, it grows from individual programs into a system. By creating an awareness of knowing where an individual is coming from and where they are going to, it would help provide efficiencies. Mr. Martin would like to have more conversation on this topic, and ask the second question that time did not allow for at this meeting which is: "What would an ideal senior services system look like to our community?"

Committee member Valdivia-Alcalá suggested Mr. Martin organize a one-day or half-day symposium to host the discussion and with a goal of moving on what has been learned.

Chairwoman Hiller inquired if Ms. Harris had any final comments. Ms. Harris voiced appreciation for the conversation and challenges that were brought to the table to continue looking at.

Chairwoman Hiller noted that in addition to hearing about some of the needs, the Public Health and Safety Committee has a meeting on September 14<sup>th</sup> to discuss the issue of broadband service.

### **3) Schedule next meetings; Adjourn**

Chairwoman Hiller adjourned the meeting at 11:58am.

Meeting video can be viewed at: <https://youtu.be/HVwN8KmM1zY>