



CITY OF TOPEKA

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EXCERPT

HOLLIDAY 1st FLOOR CONFERENCE ROOM, Topeka, Kansas, Friday, July 30, 2021. The Public Health & Safety Committee members met at 10:30 A.M., with the following Committee members present: Hiller (Chair), Valdivia-Alcalá, Dobler.

The following is an excerpt of the draft minutes from the meeting:

Property & Premises

Chairwoman Hiller reviewed, as a refresher, that the Committee adopted a preliminary recommendation at the July 8, 2021 meeting. At that time, there were two small amendments.

Following the July 8th meeting, Staff was given time to turn in a response, and that was received, on time, around July 22 or 23. That response will be what is reviewed and discussed today. The idea for today being that we will have a preliminary recommendation to put out for public comment, and then loop back around with this Committee to have a final report for recommendations to the Governing Body.

Chairwoman Hiller stated that the public in-input hearings will not be to talk about what the problems are, but rather how we can collaborate and move to “yes” for solutions and challenges that we have mutually agreed on.

Staff Responses to Working Document

City Manager Trout provided a memo which provided information and tried to summarize some of the primary issues that Staff have identified. There are some examples of issues that Staff is encountering, and some ways to make slight modifications to programs. He noted there are some items that would requiring taking action steps in order to look at campaigns to get the word out on various areas that we are trying to impact. There may be some actions steps that require policy changes, and maybe even ordinance changes. Some of the steps that we see occur, but that it would be contingent on the comments provided at the public input meetings. The intention of the response to the document was not to go that deep, but simply how the City would attack some of these issues, and identify and call out where some changes would be occurring, or that have already been modified in how we do business, that maybe are more recent. City Manager Trout provided the example of the Vacant Property Registration program, and the recent change in how it is done. City Manager Trout stated the Staff feedback to the document was trying to balance what we can do with the Staff, and with the laws, to eventually accomplish the goals that have the Committee has espoused to, while also realizing Staff is struggling a little bit regarding how many, for example, substandard houses we have.

With regard to addressing substandard housing cases, being able to better define what components the Committee or Governing Body would want to include to help Staff begin addressing those cases.

Committee member Valdivia-Alcala inquired about a time study that had been discussed at the last meeting. City Manager Trout noted there were two different types of time studies that they were going to look at, however has not thought more about who would conduct the time studies, whether it would be internally through another department, or contracted out.

Chairwoman Hiller referenced the role of the Administrative Hearing Officer, and Senior Inspector role, that were added fairly recently. And that layers of appeals that we have. It looked like Staff was envisioning giving the Inspectors a little more authority for extensions, but the language was not very clear. City Manager Trout responded that that additional authority was a response to the staffing shortage that the division was experiencing currently. The desire is to have voluntary compliance with individuals showing noticeable progress to addressing the issues. Mike Haugen, Property Maintenance Division Director, agreed that the addition of the Senior Inspector position was a beneficial addition to the division. Currently, however, due to the staff shortage, he has been in the field filling in. The Senior Inspector's role is to follow up on properties that have received warrants to make sure everything is done correctly, to ensure the work is consistent and is following policy.

Chairwoman Hiller noted she would like to perhaps see some policy change, and any campaigns, be identified following the public hearings, to create a more concrete list to take along, and possibly having those policy changes included. With regard to the campaigns, she would like to identify if there are initiatives where we would need partner agencies or neighborhood associations, etc. and that it would be an opportunity to lay it out and let people engage.

Affirm Next Steps

Chairwoman Hiller provided some suggestions of what it might look like. One thought was to find a simple way to put the Committee's recommendation out front, and ask people to react to those; as to whether they support the Aspirational Goals and the Challenge Goals, and then engage them in how we could achieve those goals. Her hope would be that the participation is constructive and productive to help us move forward, rather than rehashing old issues.

Chairwoman Hiller also noted there had been some suggestion of creating a survey. She suggested that the survey could also be the framework that is used in the public engagements; so that there was structure, and also a way to compile the feedback. She would like to begin setting those public input sessions.

Framework: City Manager Trout noted that it is likely feedback would include hearing problems. He noted having the moderator help keep the meetings on track by stating that along with a problem, requesting a suggestion for solving a problem would be much more beneficial, and a critical piece of the framework for these meetings. Chairwoman Hiller agreed.

Chairwoman Hiller referenced a recent campaign where a neighborhood had been targeted to cite for paint violations. She felt the topic would be worth a conversation, to decide whether the notices would be sent out in February, and to work through whether giving notice a year out

rather than the current 90 days would be an equally successful way to notify people, or not. City Manager Trout agreed and noted that paint is sometimes a particularly difficult type of case, because there is a limited number of available contractors and sometimes sending a notice adds complexities. However, for most instances, the Division has simply requested proof of a plan to address the situation, such as showing a copy of a contract. The goal is to gain voluntary compliance to have the house painted.

Chairwoman Hiller stated she would like to have neighborhood-based hearings located in the targeted neighborhoods, or make sure community members in nearby areas know they are invited to attend, because she would like to receive feedback from all areas of the city.

City Manager Trout noted that when the notices are sent out, there is no way to know what the recipient's response will be, or what situation they may be facing. However, being consistent with encouraging people to contact the Division can sometimes help resolve concerns or questions.

Committee member Valdivia-Alcala inquired if it would be possible to turn this memo into a slideshow, or something easier to understand in simpler terms, would be helpful for the public sessions.

Chairwoman Hiller provided suggestions for the presentation format, to create a slide with information on the goals, another one on operations and what we want to do, one to note the other departments that are part of the team, one to include aspirational goals, and one that would lay out the four challenges with a picture/chart/graph.

Committee member Valdivia-Alcala reminded that she had brought another presentation to the Committee at an earlier time, and wondered when a good time would be to work through it. Some of the ideas from the article would be newer, and may be able to show if there is an interest in Topeka for those changes. Chairwoman Hiller felt this would be the time to do that. Most of the materials have been made available online already, however putting it together and including it with the presentation materials may be helpful as well.

City Manager Trout requested a couple of weeks to get a webpage established and made live, with a goal date of being August 15th. He acknowledged that some of the presentations, minutes, and other materials from these meetings could already be found on the Committee's webpage at: <https://www.topeka.org/citycouncil/public-health-safety-committee>, beginning in 2019, and that he would envision webpage completely separate from the Committee to facilitate this topic.

Holliday Bldg Hybrid, in-person and Zoom attendance options: September 14, 2021 @ 10:00am-12:00pm. Additional hybrid meeting would be September 16, 2021 @ 6:00pm-8:00pm. The meetings would be live-streamed and recorded.

Additional Property & Premises Comments

Chairwoman Hiller would like to bring a report to the Governing Body at the August 17th meeting. She is hopeful the briefing would also bring awareness for the public input sessions.

She instructed for all materials be added to the agenda website (<https://topeka.novusagenda.com/agendapublic/>).
