

**Topeka Property and Premises Enforcement and Improvement 2021
Preliminary Recommendation, City Council Public Health and Safety Committee 7/8/2021**

Thank you to Property Maintenance staff for walking through the details of their part. Many things are going well. It's time to address some challenges and move forward.

Let's assume our goals for Property and Premises are:

- Safety of people
- Protection of structures
- Maintenance of an attractive environment and property values

Let's assume, operations-wise, that we want to be:

- Straightforward, kind and fair
- Cost-effective
- Fully integrated with other departments and services

Let's note, that there are a number of City departments involved in these issues: Property Maintenance, Forestry, Engineering (Sidewalks), Police (Patrol), Fire Dept and Zoning; some who should be involved (Executive, Community Engagement, Development Services, others); and some outside the City (KDOT, for instance, Shawnee County Tax Sales, Kansas Legislature, and Neighborhood Associations). We likely need to include everyone mentioned, and perhaps some others, to work on this.

Aspirational Goal: Bring up the quality of structures and premises in Topeka, Kansas so that structures and premises violations are the exception rather than the rule. That our number of substandard properties is never over 500, so that owners are motivated to take care of properties before City enforcement Departments are even called.

Four (4) City of Topeka Structure Challenges:

1) Reduce current substandard structures by 50% in 5 years –

Establish a system, within existing laws, to do complete interior inspections on all structures that appear to need it and/or upon request. As part of that, establish a single visit complete inspection system that provides for one inspection and one write-up procedure for all violations. Include allowing extensions to parties who are working on things, having some sort of system to refer responsible parties to paid or volunteer laborers who can help those who need it. Activate the section in the Code that allows for courtesy inspections. Establish processes and consequences such that citizens will want to take care of issues so that Code does not even request access. This may involve establishing communitywide or neighborhood wide campaigns.

2) Reduce Deterioration in Vacant Structures – Staff establishes procedures to advise owners of long-term vacant or soon-to-be vacant structures about "Mothballing" standards, encourages owners to implement and refers to resources for advice and assistance. This process would be implemented by Code staff and/or Vacant Buildings Registry vendor through communications accompanying already established

communication. Staff would establish strategy with the police department to optimize vacant structure security.

- 3) Reduce the expense/revenue gap on abatement cases by 50%** – Establish a system and culture whereby it is clear that COT expects owners to take full responsibility for their properties. This is likely to include implementing current capacity to increase fines for extended or repeat violations where good-faith efforts are not made as well as a referral system to paid or volunteer laborers who can assist, perhaps also neighborhood or block initiatives for maintenance.

- 4) Improve the appearance of the community through management of uncultivated and overgrown vegetation such that the average resident or visitor would score Topeka’s property appearance at least a 7 on a scale of 10 and the Police Dept would rate 80% or more of properties as “in compliance” with CPTED (Crime Prevention through Environmental Design) principles within 3 years at the same time reducing the amount of tree/shrub abatements by City Departments by at least 50% (Links with #2 above)** - Initiative will require a minor amendment or new legal interpretation of the Code about vegetation that is over 12” that has turned into shrubs, trees or vines as well as a synch-up with a non-IPMC section of the TMC that addresses the same issue. It will also likely require a major community education campaign in conjunction with a major volunteer assistance campaign to bring our community back to this threshold standard. Optimal partnership with all departments who deal with exterior maintenance issues (Police, Engineering, Zoning, and Forestry...also KDOT) as well as a combined ticketing, billing and collections system would seem to be in order.