

Citizen Government Review Committee Minutes
May 7, 2025

City Hall, First Floor Conference Room, Topeka, Kansas, May 7, 2025. Committee Chair Jim Kaup called the meeting to order at 11:00 A.M. with the following Committee Members present: Brian Broxterman, Connie Jacobson (Vice Chair), Jim Kaup (Chair), Shampayne Lloyd, Tamara Martin and Zachary Surritt (*alternate*) -6.

Chair Kaup asked if there was anyone signed up to speak under General Public Comment.

Brenda Younger, City Clerk, announced no one signed up to speak.

Tamara Martin moved to approve the meeting minutes of April 23, 2025. The motion seconded by Jim Kaup carried unanimously on voice vote. (5-0-0)

WORK SESSION: DISCUSS COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS:

Chair Kaup submitted a proposed outline for the final report format to include an introduction, identified issues/recommendations and appendixes. He stated if there was no objection from the Committee he would ask Bill Fiander, former City of Topeka Planning Director and Citizen Advisory Council Representative to appear as guest speakers at the meeting of May 21, 2025.

Following discussion, it was the consensus of the Committee to accept the format of the final report as suggested by Chair Kaup; and to invite Bill Fiander as well as the CAC President to the May 21, 2025, meeting as guest speakers.

Zachary Surritt submitted the 2nd draft of the Structure and Elections summary of recommendations (**Attachment A**).

Following discussion, it was the consensus of the Committee to address the topics separately in the final report.

Chair Kaup submitted a memorandum outlining his recent conversations with Professor Hannes Zacharias, Professor of Practice, University of Kansas School of Public Affairs & Administration. Below are the opinions of Professor Zacharias as it relates to the recommendations being considered by the Committee:

- The Committee should report as a finding that they received almost unanimous support for continuing the City Manager Form of Government and the fact of receiving little public input supports this finding.
- Professor Zacharias supports the recommendation that the Governing Body study the possibility of creating an auditor position, and that the resources of the Local Government Auditors Advocacy Committee would be valuable to the Governing Body in conducting that study.

Brian Broxterman submitted the 2nd draft of the Follow-up Mechanism for Committee/Board/Commission summary of recommendations (**Attachment B**).

Chair Kaup referenced the memorandum from City Manager Dr. Robert M. Perez dated April 29, 2025, outlining City of Topeka tracking mechanisms for constituent complaints and studies. He asked if they believe it addresses concerns raised in the summary.

Following discussion, it was the consensus of the Committee to include language about the implementation of the Tyler Enterprise Management (ERP) System by the City of Topeka. The system would enable all online and phone line customer service requests to be managed in one, public facing system while integrating and managing various core business processes within a unified platform for the City of Topeka.

Discussion ensued on how to incorporate and/or reference public input in the report for each recommendation. Following discussion, it was the consensus of the Committee to list the name and date of the person making the statement only as specific details of input from citizens, elected officials and guest speakers would be outlined in meeting minutes as part of the final report appendix.

Chair Kaup submitted the 2nd draft of the Citizens Government Review Committee summary of recommendations (**Attachment C**).

Following discussion, it was the consensus of the Committee to allow future Citizen Government Review Committees to select their own chair instead of having the mayoral appointee serve as the chair.

Chair Kaup submitted the 2nd draft of the Interlocal Cooperation summary of recommendations. (**Attachment D**).

Following discussion, it was the consensus of the Committee that overall they support interlocal cooperation encouraging efficiencies and economies in government. However, they expressed the importance of taking a realistic approach to creating a new joint body for this purpose as it may overlap the efforts of other intergovernmental committees/councils that are already in place and working to identify efficiencies and economies in government. It was noted there are likely other areas not listed in the summary where cooperation was taking place in government.

Chair Kaup submitted the 2nd draft of the Appointment of a City Auditor summary of recommendations (**Attachment E**). He also submitted an email from Douglas Jones, Johnson County Auditor's Office and member of the Association of Local Government Auditors Advocacy Committee, providing information about or starting an audit function for a municipal government.

Following discussion, it was the consensus of the Committee that they support the idea of appointing a City Auditor as well as it may be a good topic to consider for interlocal cooperation; however, the financial reality was that it may not happen for several years due to the resources it would require to establish an independent government auditor for the City of Topeka.

No further business appearing the meeting was adjourned at 12:14 p.m.

Brenda Younger, M.M.C.
City Clerk

TO: Members of the Citizens Government Review Committee

FROM: Zac Surritt

RE: Second Draft Issue Paper – Structure and Elections

DATE: May 7, 2025

ISSUE: The structure of Topeka's municipal government, elections, and local representation.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT: The City of Topeka's Charter lays out the form of government the city will operate under, what positions and how many are elected, when, how, and for how long those local representatives are elected, and how the redistricting process occurs. Currently, the City of Topeka operates under a council-manager form of government with the governing body made up of nine council people, each elected to represent one of nine geographic districts all made up of relatively the same number of constituents, and one Mayor, who is elected by the voters of Topeka at-large. All governing body members are nonpartisan and elected to four-year terms with no term limits. Topeka elections for its governing body are held in odd-numbered years and staggered so that not all members are being elected at once. All even-numbered districts are elected one year, and all odd-numbered districts and the mayor are elected two years later. It is required by state statute that municipal elections occur on the same schedule as all other elections in the State of Kansas, meaning that primary elections occur in August and general elections occur in November. Primary elections are only held for offices where there are four or more candidates on the ballot by the filing deadline. If three or less candidates are on the ballot, no primary election is held, and that office is decided by the voters in the November election. Every ten years after the official United States Census report, a redistricting commission is formed by the City of Topeka to review the City Council district boundary lines and recommend any necessary changes to ensure that all nine districts are roughly even in population. That redistricting commission is made up of nine Topeka voters, each representing a Council district and appointed by the Council member of each district.

CONFEREES: Each conferee that appeared before the Committee spoke about or were asked about this topic. Each of them spoke in favor of the current council-manager form of government, as well as being in favor of the current staggering of elections, the number of council members, four-year terms, and maintaining no term limits. On the April 9, 2025, meeting, representatives from the League of Women Voters Topeka-Shawnee County spoke out against the City's process of redistricting in both how members of the redistricting commission are appointed and how current council members' addresses are taken into consideration when reviewing district boundaries.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

- Deborah Dawkins, Written, March 17, 2025: In support of the Council-Manger form of government as well as alternating, staggered terms for the governing body.
- Joseph Ledbetter, Written, March 25, 2025: Against the Council-Manager form of government. Supports a Strong Mayor form as well as reducing the number of council members to seven, with two of those elected at-large.

COMMITTEE DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS: The Committee recommends that the Governing Body take the following action(s):

- **Form of Government: No action.** This Committee found no strong evidence or support for changing the Council-Manager form of government. In fact, many strongly supported this form.
- **Number of Council members: No action.** This Committee heard that nine Council members works well, allowing more members to sit on each committee and be at the same place without concern for the Kansas Open Meetings Act. It also makes the City Council more representative of citizens as a whole.
- **Elections and Terms: No action.** There is strong support for staggered elections so experience and institutional knowledge is retained while allowing new members time to fully understand their responsibilities. Four-year terms were also supported and have become more and more common in cities similar to Topeka. Four years was determined to be enough time for any new governing

body member to spend time getting to know the city better and their responsibilities without needing to worry about another election for a reasonable amount of time. There was no strong stance on term limits from conferees or the public. Some cities have opted to enact term limits on their Mayor and Council members where there is a limit of serving two or three terms depending on the city. The Committee discussed the item of term limits for Governing Body members with consideration of what was presented to the Committee as well as research that had been conducted into the structure of other cities similar to Topeka. It is an item that may be considered in the future, but no action is being recommended at this time.

- **Redistricting: Take action.** The Committee recommends that the Governing Body amend the structure and considerations of the redistricting commission, so the council members are not the only ones appointing commission members while then having their own addresses considered when the commission makes any potential changes to district boundary lines. The Committee recommends that the commission still be made up of nine members appointed by the governing body to represent each district, but with the addition of an additional tenth member who is appointed by the Administrative Judge of the Topeka Municipal Court who shall serve as Chair of the commission. The Committee also recommends that it is written in the charter that when the redistricting commission makes its own recommendation to the Governing Body, the new boundary lines are not made with the consideration of incumbent council members' home addresses.

TO:

FROM: Members of the Citizens Government Review Committee

RE: Follow-up mechanism for Committee/Board/Commission recommendations

DATE: May 6, 2025

ISSUE: Inconsistent follow-up from City members to citizens that email/call with issues, concerns or ideas.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT: At the 3/26/25 CGRC meeting, Melodene Byrd expressed concern about the high turnover of executive positions and the lack of follow-through from the City.

CONFEREES: Melodene Byrd, 3/26/25.

PUBLIC COMMENT: NA

COMMITTEE DISCUSSION: CGRC discussion from 3/23/25. Group discussed this recommendation with one change requested by Committee Chair Kaup. This change request is the 2nd bullet in section 7.

RECOMMENDATIONS: The CGRC recommends that the Governing Body take the following action:

1. Council/Staff correspondence Collection & Categorization

- **Timely Documentation: Ensure that feedback requested from Council/Staff members is collected at a designated time frame after meetings/correspondence and documented in a shared, accessible platform (e.g., project management tool, shared document).**
- **Categorize Feedback: Classify feedback into themes (e.g., general suggestions, concerns, specific action items, policy**

changes) to streamline the follow-up process and assign responsibility accordingly.

2. Designate Responsible Parties

- **Assign Clear Ownership:** For each piece of feedback, designate a responsible person or team member to address the issue. Ensure that this individual has, or has access to, the expertise or authority to take the necessary actions.
- **Set Deadlines:** Establish reasonable deadlines for the resolution of each piece of feedback. Ensure that assigned owners are aware of these timelines.

3. Action Plan Development

- **Prioritize Feedback:** Not all feedback may require immediate action, but all feedback will require immediate follow-up. Establish a prioritization process, such as:
 - **Critical Issues:** Requires urgent attention and resolution.
 - **Medium Importance:** Can be addressed in the medium term.
 - **Low Importance:** Requires consideration but not immediate action.
- **Create an Action Plan:** For each piece of feedback, an action plan should be developed that includes specific tasks, responsible people, and deadlines.

4. Regular Progress Updates

- **Status Reports:** Provide regular updates to the Council and person requesting the action on the progress of addressing feedback. This could be through periodic emails, meetings, or a shared dashboard that shows the status of all feedback (e.g., completed, in progress, pending).

- **Transparency:** Ensure that all members have visibility into the status of each action item. This transparency fosters accountability and keeps the committee informed.

5. Follow-Up Meetings/Check-ins

- **Scheduled Reviews:** Schedule follow-up meetings or check-ins (e.g., bi-weekly or monthly) to review the progress of feedback implementation. These meetings can be used to discuss any challenges or roadblocks encountered during the implementation process.
- **Continuous Feedback Loop:** Use these meetings to encourage further feedback from Council/Staff members on the resolution of previous feedback and to ensure that no item is left unresolved.

6. Feedback Evaluation

- **Evaluate Effectiveness:** Once feedback has been addressed, evaluate the effectiveness of the changes or actions taken. This can be done through surveys, discussions, or a formal evaluation process.
- **Lessons Learned:** Document any lessons learned from the follow-up process to improve future feedback management and ensure continuous improvement.

7. Final Report & Acknowledgment

- **Final Summary:** Once all feedback has been addressed, create a final report that summarizes the feedback, actions taken, and outcomes achieved. This document should be shared with the Council for transparency and accountability.
- **The Council or city member contacted should arrive at a decision within 180 days of presentation.** This could include Governing Body action to place the issue on the agenda for vote following submission of a valid petition.

- **Acknowledge Contributions:** Acknowledge the contributions of Council/Staff members who provided valuable feedback. Recognizing their input fosters engagement and encourages future participation.

8. Automated Follow-Up Tools

- **Use of Technology:** Consider using automated tools (e.g., task management software like Asana, Trello, or Monday.com, etc.) to track feedback and automate reminders and deadlines. This can help ensure that feedback is not overlooked and that follow-ups are timely.

Conclusion: Implementing a well-structured follow-up mechanism ensures that Council/Staff feedback is not only acknowledged but actively incorporated into decision-making processes. This approach promotes transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement, ultimately leading to more effective and responsive Council/Staff operations.

DRAFT REPORT FOR COMMITTEE DISCUSSION

ISSUE: Citizens Government Review Committee

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT:

Amendments to the Charter provisions for the Citizens Government Review Committee could be beneficial to the mission of the Committee—to examine the structure of City government for possible modifications.

CONFEREES: None

PUBLIC COMMENT: None

COMMITTEE DISCUSSION: On April 23 the Committee discussed the proposed issue paper.

- 1. Timing of Committees. The initial proposal was to shorten the period between Committees from 10 to five years. The thinking was that events can occur rapidly, and five years would allow the Committees to be more responsive to changes, or the need for changes. Also, five years could make it easier to follow-up on the recommendations made by a previous Committee. Following comments by the City Clerk a majority of the Committee chose to stay with the current 10 year provision.**
- 2. Number of Committee members. The initial proposal was to increase the size of the Committee from five, plus an alternate, to 10. Further, that some of the membership would be representatives of civic organizations, such as the League of Women Voters and the Citizens Advisory Council, in order to better achieve public engagement. Following discussion the Committee reached a consensus to have 10 members, one residing in each council district, chosen by the councilmember**

for each district, with the 10th member, the chair, appointed by a municipal court judge. The Committee thought this approach would provide more visibility for the public and more of a sense of ownership by the City Council.

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1. Committee Membership. The Committee recommends that the Charter be amended to provide that the Citizens Government Review Committee be comprised of 10 members, one member from each council district, who resides in the district and is appointed by the councilmember for that district. The 10th member would serve as the chair and be appointed by the mayor.**

REVISED REPORT FOR COMMITTEE DISCUSSION

ISSUE: Interlocal Cooperation

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT:

- 1. Kansas law gives local governments a broad, liberal grant of authority to enter into interlocal agreements, encouraging efficiency and economy in government. This benefits taxpayers while still protecting public health, safety and welfare.**
- 2. Under the Kansas Interlocal Cooperation Act (K.S.A. 12-3901, et seq.) if each participating unit of government has the power to do something separately, then they may do so jointly via an interlocal agreement, e.g. law enforcement, distribution of water.**
- 3. Topeka and Shawnee County have a history of some successful joint undertakings, including:**
 - a. Topeka-Shawnee County Public Library**
 - b. JEDO**
 - c. Gage Park Improvement Authority**
 - d. Metro Topeka Airport Authority**
- 4. Agreements between Topeka and other cities, Shawnee County, townships, USDs and Rural Water Districts are all possible.**
- 5. While Topeka has had experience with interlocal agreements there are additional areas of governance which the City should identify and then perform an analysis as to whether Topekans would benefit from new arrangements/agreements. These include:**
 - a. Housing for the unsheltered**
 - b. Public health/Mental health**
 - c. Law enforcement**
 - d. Firefighting**
 - e. Emergency services**

6. While the Intergovernmental Cooperation Council exists to facilitate the exchange of information among participating entities, its membership and mission may be too limited to serve as the vehicle for facilitating interlocal agreements.

CONFEREES: Councilmember Duncan (3/5/25)

League of Women Voters (4/9/25)

PUBLIC COMMENT: None.

COMMITTEE DISCUSSION: The Committee reviewed the first draft of this issue paper on 4/23/25. The Committee did not want the original proposal that recommendations either be adopted or rejected by the Governing Body within a fixed period of time following their presentation to the Governing Body.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. The Governing Body and the BOCC hold joint meetings at least every two months, to consider matters of mutual concern, including the review of existing interlocal agreements and how they are serving the public.
2. The Governing Body direct the City Manager, City Auditor or City Attorney to research the Secretary of State's records of agreements, filed per the Interlocal Cooperation Act, to identify those pertaining to programs and services which the City has not previously considered providing via interlocal agreements.
3. The Governing Body, working with the BOCC, create a joint body, similar to JEDO, to identify areas where cooperation can result in efficiencies and economies. That body would make recommendations to the Governing Body and the BOCC for those matters of highest priority, with timelines for the necessary actions to reach desired outcomes. Interlocal agreements would be used to provide a degree of certainty, and longevity, to any

agreed-to cooperative measures. To help ensure that the recommended actions of the body are given proper consideration, annual reports would be given to the Governing Body by the City Manager or City Auditor.

REVISED REPORT FOR COMMITTEE DISCUSSION

ISSUE: Appointment of a City Auditor

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT:

- 1. The purpose of a city auditor is to collaborate with the Governing Body and City Manager to elevate trust in government by providing objective, independent assurance and advisory services.**
- 2. A city auditor would conduct performance audits to provide objective analysis to assist the Governing Body and City Manager to:**
 - a. Improve the performance of city programs and services**
 - b. Reduce costs**
 - c. Facilitate decision-makers in taking corrective actions**
 - d. Contribute to public accountability**
- 3. A city auditor would also conduct financial audits to provide an independent assessment of the city's financial condition, its use of resources and other financial information.**
- 4. Topeka is the largest city in Kansas without a city auditor.**

CONFEREES:

PUBLIC COMMENT: Leo Hafner (4.23.25)

COMMITTEE DISCUSSION:

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1. Amend the Charter to create the office of City Auditor. The Auditor would be appointed by the City Council, and serve at the**

pleasure of the City Council. An Audit Committee of the Council would provide direction to the City Auditor.

- 2. The City Auditor would perform both performance audits and financial audits.**
- 3. Among the duties of the City Auditor would be to:**
 - a. Ensure that studies and reports produced by the City and its consultants have their Governing Body-adopted objectives and timelines complied with.**
 - b. Provide analysis and recommendations that will help the Governing Body assure the public that potentially controversial actions have been thoroughly, objectively and independently vetted.**
 - c. Handle internal whistleblower reports.**
 - d. Advise the City on risk management, including employee discrimination claims, self-insurance levels and commercial coverages.**
 - e. Conduct performance audits of programs and services.**
 - f. Conduct financial audits of programs and services.**
 - g. Advise the Governing Body and City Manager on the use of outside consultants and other providers of services.**