

# CITY OF TOPEKA

CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE  
MEETING MINUTES

## PUBLIC HEALTH & SAFETY COMMITTEE

CITY COUNCIL  
City Hall, 215 SE 7<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 255  
Topeka, KS 66603-3914  
Tel: 785-368-3710  
[www.topeka.org](http://www.topeka.org)

**Date:** March 19, 2025

**Time:** 9:30am

**Location:** 1st Floor Conference Room; Cyrus K. Holliday Building 620 SE Madison  
(virtual attendance option also available)

**Committee members present:** Councilmembers Karen Hiller (Chair),  
Christina Valdivia-Alcalá, David Banks, and Brett Kell (Zoom)

**City staff present:** Property Maintenance Director John Schardine, Director  
of Communications Dan Garrett, Community Engagement Division Director  
Monique Glaude', City Manager Dr. Robert Perez, Director of Planning and  
Development Rhiannon Friedman, Division Director of Housing Services  
Carrie Higgins, Captain Colleen Stuart, Fire Chief Randall Phillips, Fire  
Marshal Alan Stahl, Police Business Services Manager Gretchen O'Donovan,  
City Attorney Amanda Stanley (Zoom)

### Call to Order

Committee chair Hiller called the meeting to order at 9:30am. She  
introduced staff and committee members.

Committee chair Hiller spoke that the topic of focus for most of today's  
meeting will be the City of Topeka Homeless Strategy.

Committee member Valdivia-Alcalá inquired about City of Topeka Homeless  
Strategies being listed on the agenda. She feels over the past 5 years there  
has been more movement than ever regarding the unsheltered population,  
and with it being a big enough crisis it should stay within the Governing  
Body for any kind of votes.

City Attorney Amanda Stanley confirmed the Governing Body does not have  
to take up actions from committees.

1 - Public Health & Safety Committee  
Minutes Taken: March 19, 2025  
Minutes Approved: April 16, 2025  
Minutes Submitted By: TRJ

Committee member Banks concerned votes should be done through entire Governing Body not committee, hesitant to move towards action.

Committee chair Hiller advised she meant for it to be a Presentation and discussion, was not expecting action.

City Manager Dr. Robert Perez shared Lew McGinnis had 47 sanitation cases go through court, and we collected a little over \$61,000 in fines for the trash issue. He also gave kudos to all teams and staff that helped with the clean up of the trash and Legal team, courts, and City Attorney's office for seeing these cases through.

Committee member Valdivia-Alcalá thanked Property Maintenance Director John Schardine and his team.

#### **Approval of February 26, 2025 Meeting Minutes**

Committee member Banks made a motion to approve the minutes.

Committee member Valdivia-Alcalá seconded. Approved 4-0-0.

#### **Changing Our Culture of Property Maintenance (CoCPM)**

Community Engagement Division Director Monique Glaude' spoke of the Yard of the Month Program. The timeline will be April through September 2025, with this year starting in May so the judging panel can be identified. She recommended Keeping America Beautiful's Executive director as a possible Judging Panel Member, and to have an odd number of judges between 3-7. She also shared Duties of the Judges (document attached) to ensure judges are fair, and to give ideas of what to look at. Will possibly take 15-30 minutes per month.

Community Engagement Division Director Monique Glaude' also shared the Scoring form (document attached). Seasonal decoration was removed leaving 7 categories. She asked if committee can schedule time next month for judging panel discussion take place, so their ready to start in May. They would like at least a month to market the program prior to any judging taking place.

Committee member Valdivia-Alcalá inquired if the Committee or Monique's team was taking hold of the Program.

2 - Public Health & Safety Committee

Minutes Taken: March 19, 2025

Minutes Approved: April 16, 2025

Minutes Submitted By: TRJ

City Manager Dr. Robert Perez advised that staff would take the reign, but that Committee members should be the ones to recommend Community Leaders or folks within the Community who they would like to see as a judge.

Committee member Banks recommended 5 judges and the Committee be tasked with locating the judging members, or at least conversations on who members are.

Recommendations and comments for Judging Panel Members are to be sent to Community Engagement Division Director Monique Glaude' by 12:00pm Wednesday March 26, 2025

### **City of Topeka Homeless Strategies**

Committee member Kell spoke to the concerns of his colleagues with this topic in committee and not Governing Body.

Committee chair Hiller advised that the intent was to get some work done on it before it was presented to the Governing Body, and not to take any action today.

Committee member Valdivia-Alcalá stated she feels this is being rushed when we don't know where we are financially. That the Governing Body needs a comprehensive report showing exactly where we stand with what we are trying to achieve.

City Manager Dr. Robert Perez shared that he thinks it will be helpful to get thoughts from Public Health & Safety Committee, to strengthen the presentation to take to City Council. He doesn't anticipate any decisions coming out of this committee.

Director of Planning and Development Rhiannon Friedman shared that Housing Services specifically has 18 employees that are either directly or indirectly day in and day out doing nothing but focusing on how to support the community, whether that be through homeless prevention or direct support to our unsheltered population.

Division Director of Housing Services Carrie Higgins spoke to Homeless Initiatives.

3 - Public Health & Safety Committee  
Minutes Taken: March 19, 2025  
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- Total spent 2022-2024: \$8,218,957.
- Total spent in 2024: \$2,822,230.
- \$1,745,2145 in Grant Funds - this includes Shelter Plus Care, HESG, Impact Avenues, and KDADS Boundary Spanner.
- \$1,077,015 in General Funds - this includes social services, EAS, and Impact Avenues.

Division Director of Housing Services Carrie Higgins also spoke to Homeless Prevention/Rehab Initiatives.

- Total spent 2022-2024: \$14,358,379
- Total spent in 20224: \$5,567,621
- \$3,717,621 in Grant Funds - this includes CDBG, HOME, FHLB, EECBG, and Lead grants.
- \$1,850,000 in General Funds - this includes DREAMS and HOME match funds.
- Programs include: Weatherization, Accessibility, Emergency Repair, TOTO, Major Rehab, Exterior Rehab, Property Maintenance Rehab, Infill, and CHDO partnerships.

Division Director of Housing Services Carrie Higgins shared Current City of Topeka Programs in place that work with unsheltered individuals:

- Equity. Access. Shelter. - a single point of access to help individuals with rent or mortgage assistance.
- Impact Avenues - a program to assist homeless students and families with wrap around services and housing.
- Shelter Plus Care - housing program to help homeless individuals with severe mental illness or substance abuse.
- HESG - funding for Rapid Rehousing, Homeless Prevention, and Emergency Shelter.
- KDADS Boundary Spanner - a program to assist individuals exiting a Nursing Facility for Mental Health to find housing and connect with wrap around services.
- Social Service Grants - funding allocated to partner agencies to assist with our vulnerable citizens, minimize crime, and optimize success.

Director of Planning and Development Rhiannon Friedman spoke to 2023 - 2024 Abatements.

- Total Cost: \$245,732.52

4 - Public Health & Safety Committee

Minutes Taken: March 19, 2025

Minutes Approved: April 16, 2025

Minutes Submitted By: TRJ

- Total Hours: 1,253.77
- WPC – 14 Abatements: \$175,310.60, 493.3 labor hours
- TDP – 4 Abatements: \$16,577.82, 291 labor hours
- PMU – 62 Abatements: \$33,657.00, 434 labor hours
- Public Works – 2 Abatements: \$20,187.10, 35.47 labor hours

Committee member Valdivia-Alcalá spoke to the concerns with the costs of the abatements and is it better to let the encampments stay. The feedback from District 2 is they understand it's their tax dollars being used they want abatements to continue.

City Manager Dr. Robert Perez shared as we continue the cleanups, we've adjusted some of our processes to include a 30 day notice instead of a 2-day notice with our partners.

Committee member Kell stated that some other avenues should be investigated for long-term cost savings.

Director of Planning and Development Rhiannon Friedman shared that with Warming Centers the city's role has always been to assist and support and not lead these efforts as it falls outside our core services. We have been able to partner with Community Partners such as the Rescue Mission and several churches. EAS is onsite daily to complete assessments. Planning and Fire coordinate temporary approvals for buildings to allow overnight occupancy. The Behavioral Health Unit periodically checks in and assists if an issue arises.

Division Director of Housing Services Carrie Higgins spoke to the Point in Time Homeless Count the total number of individuals is down 12, we saw a decrease in the number of unsheltered individuals that correlates with an increase in the number in transitional housing or emergency shelters. It is a great testament to the fact that we have more housing available. Cornerstone has been adding units over the past several years. There are 534 individuals, 399 households. There are strict rules and definitions we follow for this count. We don't count anyone couch hopping, in Shawnee County jail, but consider themselves homeless, it is strictly individuals that are either unsheltered in transitional housing or emergency shelter.

Director of Planning and Development Rhiannon Friedman shared last year was the first year doing the count in July which was helpful. People experiencing homelessness interact in different ways in different climates. We're trying to accurately represent as best as possible the true and full number of people experiencing this, because until we can secure that number then we don't have a benchmark to be able to work against becoming closer to Built for Zero.

Committee member Valdivia-Alcalá inquired if there have been any warning that the numbers could increase for homelessness because of what were going through right now as a country.

Division Director of Housing Services Carrie Higgins shared that it is a concern. Last year's numbers were at an all-time high Nationwide. There is an expected increase.

Committee member Banks stated how important the information they received today is, their able to pass along to the rest of the community. This information gives him the ability to show his constituents there is light at the end of the tunnel.

Committee member Valdivia-Alcalá spoke to having a small presentation created that lets the community know what it takes to get Built for Zero off the ground.

City Manager Dr. Robert Perez spoke to whether we continue encampment cleanups, his recommendation is we continue due to Public Health and Safety issues. Services are provided ahead of time to the individuals in the encampments. He also spoke to warming centers and needing to determine city and county's role. Dr. Perez also shared that other communities if they establish a homeless individual is from another community they bus them back there for support, deciding if we should consider a Topeka First Initiative.

Committee chair Hiller spoke to encampment cleanups if there is any data or stories from partners. What the standard success ratio for how long someone with an emergency voucher stays? Is there a reason we let the encampments get so big before we step in?

**Next Meeting**

Committee Chair Hiller requested to meet April 16, 2025 at 9:30am

**Adjourn**

Committee Chair Hiller adjourned the meeting at 11:01am.

<https://youtube.com/live/AcluY5IFZ6Y?feature=share>

## **Duties of the Judges for the Changing Our Culture of Property Maintenance Yard of the Month Program**

### **1. Review and Understand the Judging Criteria**

- Familiarize themselves with the official judging guidelines, including landscaping, curb appeal, maintenance, creativity, and sustainability.
- Ensure all selections align with the program's goals and community standards.

### **2. Conduct Yard Evaluations**

- Visit nominated properties in person or review submitted photos, depending on the judging format.
- Assess each yard based on the scoring system
- Take notes and discuss standout features or areas of improvement.

### **3. Score and Rank Nominations**

- Use a standardized scorecard or ranking system to evaluate each yard fairly.
- Consider factors such as originality, eco-friendliness, and neighborhood impact.
- Discuss and agree on the final selection to ensure a consensus.

### **4. Ensure Fair and Impartial Judging**

- All residential properties within Topeka are eligible for nomination, regardless of neighborhood, property size, or location.
- Judges will ensure that nominations represent all areas across the city, ensuring fair recognition of efforts in the community.
- Refrain from favoritism or bias toward specific nominees.
- Recuse themselves if they have a personal connection to a nominated yard.
- Follow ethical guidelines to maintain integrity in the selection process.

### **5. Provide Feedback (Optional)**

- Offer constructive feedback to participants upon request to encourage community engagement.
- Suggest areas for improvement for future nominations.

### **6. Announce and Recognize Winners**

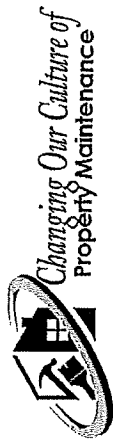
- Participate in presenting awards, yard signs, or certificates to winners.
- Assist in taking photos or publicity, and social media promotion.



- Help engage the community by sharing insights on why the winning yard was chosen.

## **7. Promote Community Engagement**

- Encourage participation by spreading awareness about the programs.
- Support outreach efforts through local events, social media, or community meetings.



## Yard of the Month Program Scoring Form

#	Category	Scoring Criteria	Score (1-10) *
1	Overall Appearance	Cleanliness, organization, and general upkeep of the yard.	
2	Lawn Maintenance	Grass is well-maintained, free of weeds, and property edged.	
3	Landscaping Design	Use of flowers, plants, shrubs, and layout of the garden or yard.	
4	Creativity & Uniqueness	Unique elements such as artistic decorations, themed gardens, or personal touches.	
5	Sustainability Practices	Eco-friendly practices such as drought-resistant plants, rainwater collection, or composting.	
6	Curb Appeal	How well the yard enhances the overall look of the street/neighborhood.	
7	Neighborhood Impact	Positive influence on neighbors and encouragement for others to maintain their yards. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Neighbor's observations</li> <li>✓ Judging panels observations</li> <li>✓ Before-and-after photos</li> </ul> (Any combination of 2 or more)	

\*Score Scale: 1 – very poor, 2 – poor, 3 – fair, 4 – below, 5 – Average, 6 – Slightly Above Average, 7 – Good, 8 – Very good, 9 – Excellent, 10 – Outstanding

**Score Total:** \_\_\_\_\_

PROPERTY ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_  
 JUDGE SCORING: \_\_\_\_\_  
 DATE: \_\_\_\_\_