



CITY OF TOPEKA

CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

PUBLIC HEALTH & SAFETY COMMITTEE

CITY COUNCIL
City Hall, 215 SE 7th Street, Suite 255
Topeka, KS 66603-3914
Tel: 785-368-3710
www.topeka.org

Date: May 21, 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), David Banks, and Brett Kell (zoom). Absent: Christina Valdivia-Alcalá

City staff present: City Attorney Amanda Stanley, City Manager Dr. Robert Perez, Director of Communications Dan Garrett, 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, Changing our Culture Program Administrator Nicole Stovall.

Call to Order

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

Approval of April 16, 2025 Meeting Minutes

Committee member Banks made a motion to approve the minutes. Committee member Kell seconded. Approved 3-0-0.

Changing Our Culture of Property Maintenance (CoCPM).

Committee chair Hiller thanked Changing our Culture Program Administrator Nicole Stovall for her work on Changing Our Culture of Property Maintenance (CoCPM). Hiller announced in two weeks data will be finalized and collected pertaining to CoCPM and will be distributed to the departments.

Director of Communications Dan Garrett spoke to the release of the Yard of the month to media on May 20, 2025.

Renter Safety Net - Issues, Reports and Discussion - Committee, Various Staff

- I. Housing and Credit Counseling, Inc (HCCI) - Full Report - Numbers including eviction, maintenance and education from 2024. Division Director of Housing Services Carrie Higgins provided information on the 420 calls for 2024.
 - a. 240 calls regarding landlord, maintenance, mold, fair housing, bedbugs

- b. 49 calls late rent, no evictions have been filed to date or termination issues for non-compliance
- c. 29 calls with clients with a court date for eviction due to late rent
- d. 10 calls retaliatory eviction
- e. 56 workshops, education classes conducted

Committee member Banks asked how constituents can receive information from HCCI services. Higgins responded social media, ending mailers to Social Service agencies; including the City of Topeka. Banks suggested providing information to Neighborhood Improvement Association (NIA) would be beneficial.

- II. Kansas Legal Services (KLS)- Full Report- Numbers, Topics, Comparison from 2023 to 2024 (see Governing Body May 20, 2025 Item 4G: Professional Service Contract Renewal-Kansas Legal Services, Inc.-Eviction Defense Program Administration). Division Director of Housing Services Carrie Higgins provided updates from the report from KLS. She noted that it is a goal to do more education and awareness of programs to folks before they get to the court system.
 - a. May 1, 2023 to April 30, 2024, prior to City contract, 52 clients were advised, 1 client provided limited representation, no clients with full representation.
 - b. May 1, 2024 to April 30, 2025, with the City contract, 92 clients were advised with 17 limited representation, 10 clients had full representation.

- III. Fire/Property Maintenance Unit (PMU) Partnership Schedule. Fire Marshal Alan Stahl reported:
 - a. 216 buildings with interior exits; continuing to partner with Code for more inspections
 - b. 189 apartment buildings with exterior exits; Apartment inspections are from late summer to fall 2025. There will continued partnership with code compliance housing inspectors and try to be onsite at the same time. Stovall added when code inspectors can not be there at the same time there are checklists and cross training provided to staff.

Committee chair Hiller asked what the minimum number of unit's shared with Fire and PMU. Stahl responded interior units are inspected annually, currently at 216, and exterior units are once every three years. He continued to speak to the interaction with residents on a joint inspection for public space. He expressed the importance of the property maintenance inspector gain a connection with the resident.

Committee chair Hiller asked if brochures are being distributed to all residents. Stahl responded that there are not brochures left at a door; he continued to speak to the importance to get the brochure to the right person and not thrown away. Stahl and Stovall concurred that there is constant communication, awareness and cross training with both Fire and PMU on properties. Stahl added that there is current discussion of the code adoption for 2024 concerning exit structures and

spoke to the importance of insuring that certain sections of the code be included to have consistency from Fire and PMC codes for property owners

Committee chair Hiller stated at the next Public Health and Safety committee meeting there will be a draft of the recommendations for the International Property Maintenance Code (IPMC).

Committee member Banks asked about the details of cross training and the fireworks stands schedule. Stovall and Stahl responded that it is informational driven and working together in the field that leads to the success of cross training. Stahl stated that having the ordinances in place does help with inspections to ensure that the proper steps are taken with enforcement.

Committee member Kell supports the fireworks stand process. He added his suggestion of having additional information on signage for fireworks being dispersed.

- IV. Housing Navigator Update and Placement. Stovall reported the Housing Navigator position will now have the title of Community Navigator; the position is currently awaiting with Human Resources for approval. The position will be under the Community Engagement department. Committee chair Hiller spoke to the history of the Housing Navigator position. City Manager Dr. Robert Perez spoke to the title of Housing Navigator and how it will have Ombudsman and Community Navigator roles to help the community and Governing Body with department issues. He added the Housing Navigator will also be a resource for constituents having code compliance situations.
- V. Annual Inspections on Government-Assisted - HUD, KHRC, THA, COT. Director of Planning and Development Friedman spoke to the recent Kansas State Legislative session House Bill 2099 allowing the City of Topeka to conduct interior inspections of private residential housing properties when the owner received direct public financial assistance for tenant rent. The bill did not pass. City Attorney Stanley confirmed that the Legislative Bill is still alive and will have one more year; it has made it through the House and Senate. She added there will continue to be discussions with the President Kansas State Senate and other communities to lobby for the Bill.

Division Director of Housing Services Higgins spoke to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Shelter Plus Care program. The program includes an inspection prior to when a tenant moves in and an annual inspection. The Impact Avenues Program also has inspections prior and annual ensuring the

housing is safe and up to code. The City of Topeka reports back to HUD to receive funding. She continued to speak to the Topeka Housing Authority (THA) that receives funding directing from HUD. THA conducts their own inspections; public housing is in apartment complexes and Section 8 recipients receive vouchers to give to landlords. She added that private landlords, such as Timberlee, Plaza West, Highland Park Apartments go through Kansas Housing resources Corporation (KHRC) which provides oversight of properties and then KHRC reports to HUD; inspections are based on a scoring system and not necessarily done annually but no less than three years. Lastly, the Housing Tax Credit properties, which KHRC provides oversight to properties, does not have set inspections.

Committee chair Hiller thanked staff for the work on the information provided.

- VI. Timberlee, Motive Power, Madison Street, other complexes - Status Check. Director of Planning and Development Friedman spoke to Timberlee. She reported that HUD, the end of March 2025, put a relocation management company on site, to help identify new housing options for individuals that have to move. Friedman noted she will get the information on number of tenants that are remaining that need assistance from THA. Stahl spoke to the tenants that are not on assistance and that the building remains open; there are no current code violations only lost the HUD funding.

No current update on Motive Power or Madison Street.

- VII. Axon Use - Success and any Downsides – Report. No report .

- VIII. LLC Ordinance - Data Report. City Attorney Stanley spoke to the background of LLC and the reluctance to file complaints against LLC's and the response to municipal court. She spoke to the gap in the code for the City of Topeka. She continued to speak to the law for Kansas and it is permissible to charge and proceed with a business in the absence if there are certain processes in place. In 2023, the Governing Body adopted a standard for businesses that states if there has been a charge, with a misdemeanor, and do not show up to court then the City can proceed with violations. She believes the ordinance is working as intended and is being effective.

- a. Since 2023, 417 cases against LLC's. 36 default judgements of a complete process, 220 cases have been corrected through violations and then dismissed, 21 cases dismissed for varied reasons such as sold property. 140 open cases. Stanley spoke to the ongoing number of new cases, 2 cases open pending from 2023, cases from ongoing activity of properties, rezoning issues, properties actively making repairs for violations, weather related.

Committee chair Hiller spoke to the challenge of keeping LLC's out of court and if can things can stay at the City administrative level.

- IX. City Retaliation Ordinance. City Attorney Stanley spoke to her support of the language in the ordinance. She continued to speak to the education for people to continue to bring cases forward.
- X. Life Safety Categorizations. Stovall spoke to the 2025 violations are compliance issues that pose immediate or significant risks. The violation prioritization list has been shared with inspectors.
 - a. (1) Structural Integrity (2) Fire Safety (3) Electrical Hazards (4) Gas and HVAC Systems (5) Plumbing and Sanitation (6) Egress and Accessibility (7) Hazardous Materials (8) Pest Infestations (9) Unsafe Occupancy
- XI. Fines/Fees Update - including Life Safety, Repeat Offender considerations. City Attorney Stanley reported an update from Judge Thadani that the LLC ordinance has currently brought in \$157,349 in fines and fees.
- XII. Escrow Opportunities. City Attorney Stanley spoke to escrow opportunities through Kansas Legal service. She added Manhattan, Kansas is the only city with an ordinance for escrows; it was reported it had not been used in 20 years. Committee chair Hiller thanked Stanley for research on escrow opportunities.
- XIII. Other. Committee chair Hiller spoke to tenants of Lew McGinnis properties receiving rent reductions of compensation for not receiving services such as trash. City Attorney Stanley suggested to have Class Action approach go through Kansas Legal Services. She suggested for further education the Supreme Court website would be a good source for eviction processes or small claims court information.

Next Meeting: Committee Chair Hiller requested to meet June 18, 2025 at 9:30 a.m. Law Enforcement Center (LEC); 320 S Kansas Avenue Classroom A.

Adjourn: Committee Chair Hiller adjourned the meeting at 11:03 a.m.

The video of this meeting can be viewed at; https://youtu.be/_cLpvbhvEI4