



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: July 16, 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, and David Banks. Absent Brett Kell

City staff present: City Attorney Amanda Stanley, Director of Communications Dan Garrett, Fire Marshal Alan Stahl, Changing our Culture Program Administrator Nicole Stovall, Property Maintenance Director John Schardine, Director of the Office of Inclusive Communities Monique Glaude, Planning and Development Management Analyst Quinn Cole, Assistant City Manager Avery Moore, Director of Planning and Development Rhiannon Friedman, Commander Jennifer Cross

Call to Order

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

Approval of May 25, 2025 Meeting Minutes

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

Committee chair Hiller shared that Changing Our Culture of Property Maintenance (CoCPM) is transitioning into the fourth year out of five. We're both resetting and reviewing the original goals, updating our Property Maintenance Code, as well as the fines and fee structure.

Committee member Valdivia-Alcalá spoke to there being a need in the future to allow more time for the Social Determinants of Health presentations for our own education as well as staffs education.

Social Determinants of Health

Director of LiveWell Shawnee County Sarah Karns-Vincent spoke to Livewell Shawnee County being rebranded a year ago from Heartland Healthy Neighborhoods. The greatest needs are determined in the Health Assessment process; then the goals and objectives are written into the Health Improvement Plan. She shared there are seven Impact Teams who work to improve the health and well-being of Topeka and Shawnee County, more information can be found at Livewellsnco.org

- **Active Environment:** Works to improve parks, sidewalks, trails, and other shared spaces so people can enjoy the outdoors and live healthier, more active lives no matter age, background, or ability.
- **Healthy Babies:** Works to lower infant death rates and support healthy development in babies and young children. Zip Code 66604 has the highest infant mortality rate in the County. They provide a lot of education and resources for new parents. Currently they're getting ready for a Community Baby Shower, more information will be shared on Facebook later.
- **Healthy Food Access:** Works to help with nutritional education and access to healthy food. There is a lot of need for access to healthy food, it's a high barrier in Shawnee County that's being watched closely.
- **Mental Health:** Focuses on improving mental health resources, and support individuals at every age and stage of life. It is the highest health need in Shawnee County. Currently working on providing a mental health resource guide modeled after Riley County.
- **Sexual Health:** Provides education, support, and advocacy to help people in Shawnee County make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health. Looking at barriers related to sexual health education, as well as testing in the community.
- **Substance Misuse:** Addresses substance abuse and issues that come up in the community, as well as individuals around the use of substance. This trickles into every other area previously mentioned.
- **Tobacco/Aerosol Prevention:** Is working on providing better resources to parents of teenagers, as well as prevention and how to address the issue in the community.

Committee member Valdivia-Alcalá inquired on Healthy Babies how long the Baby Shower initiative has been going on, as well as how long 66604 has had the infant mortality rate. LiveWell Shawnee County Healthy Babies Chair Danielle Twemlow reported the Baby Shower initiative is going on for ten years, and that 66604 has been since 2017-2018 and in the last two years was worse in the state.

Committee member Valdivia-Alcalá inquired if they focus on Food Deserts. And if so would like to see something official on where the Food Deserts are located at in town. Director of LiveWell Shawnee County Sarah Karns-Vincent shared yes that their current Health Improvement Plan does address Food Deserts.

Committee member Valdivia-Alcalá inquired on Sexual Health what barriers their running into. Director of LiveWell Shawnee County Sarah Karns-Vincent shared there's controversy on what education to provide, or to provide it at all. High school age range is the greatest need but target young adults to mid adulthood.

Committee member Valdivia-Alcalá spoke to hoping for City partnership with the possibility of a subcommittee. With all the work that has been done, would like a summit where we can spend time and use examples on how other cities have utilized the information in a proactive way.

Director of LiveWell Shawnee County Sarah Karns-Vincent spoke to there being an annual action summit every December. It is one of two times where the entire coalition gets together in one room. She will send invites, thinks it December 12, 2025 this year.

Committee member Banks inquired as to how does the impact team decide their goals and actions that they may take. Director of LiveWell Shawnee County Sarah Karns-Vincent spoke to it being a very lengthy process. From the results of last year's surveys, they were able to determine what the community said their highest needs are regarding health.

Changing Our Culture of Property Maintenance (CoCPM)

1. Outcomes:

Changing our Culture Program Administrator Nicole Stovall spoke to the four challenges for 2022-2026.

- Reduce current substandard structures by 50% in five years. This is by establishing a system within existing laws to do complete interior inspections on all structures that appear to need it and/or upon request. Establish a single visit complete inspection system that provides for one inspection and one write-up procedure for all violations. Allow extensions to parties who are working on compliance. Set up a system for referring property owners to paid or volunteer laborers. Initiate courtesy inspections. Establish processes and consequences such that citizens will want to take care of issues so that Code does not request access. Establish communitywide or neighborhood wide campaigns if needed.

Committee member Valdivia-Alcalá inquired on a home that's abandoned, condemned, has had the boards removed by homeless and police get called. Is there going to be more information and notes on property regarding what has all taken place. Changing our Culture Program Administrator Nicole Stovall shared that it is set up in the Tyler system for that to be allowed, other departments with permission would be able to view.

Property Maintenance Director John Schardine shared "Coffee with Code" for the public to be able to meet and share questions or concerns in a safe environment. Possibly meeting at community centers or library for about sixty to ninety minutes, three times per year. To include Fire, Zoning, and Community Navigator.

- Reduce Deterioration in Vacant Structures. This is by staff establishing procedures to advise owners of long-term vacant or soon-to-be vacant structures about "Mothballing" standards. Encourage owners to implement and refer them to resources for advice and assistance. The process would be implemented through Vacant Registry through communications. Establish strategy with the Topeka Police Department to optimize vacant structure security.
- Reduce the expense/revenue gap on abatement cases by 50%. To establish a system and culture whereby it is clear the City of Topeka expects owners to take full responsibility for their properties. Include implementing current capacity to increase fines for extended or repeat violations.

Committee chair Hiller shared that what they've been doing is tied to just properties that has abatements, so when talking about interior violations that weren't getting hit at all, that's the part of the emerging work staff is doing to figure out the fines and fees structure, they've been stuck on the criminal side with the best intent, but you have to actually go to court and have a conviction before you would log the violation permanently.

- 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. The Police Department would rate 80% or more of properties as in compliance with CPTED (Crime Prevention through Environmental Design) principles within 5 years. At the same time, tree and shrub abatements by City

Departments would be reduced by at least 50%. Initiative will require a minor amendment of the new legal interpretation of the Code about vegetation that is over 12" that has turned into shrubs, trees or vines as well as synch-up with non-IPMC section of the TMC that addresses the same issue. Will likely require a community education campaign in conjunction with a volunteer assistance campaign. An optimal partnership with all departments who deal with exterior maintenance issues (Police, Engineering, Zoning, Forestry, KDOT) as well as combined ticketing, billing, and collections system would seem to be in order.

Committee member Banks inquired about what can be done about the Nursing Home on 21st Street that has had numerous complaints, not mowed and had multiple break-ins. Property Maintenance Director John Schardine shared the owners live out of state, we're always making contact, informing them of the conditions. At first, they would send someone out to mow or board it up, now we do not hear back from them probably due to the money they owe us. We will stay on top of this, until hopefully they sell.

Committee member Valdivia-Alcalá inquired if a violator comes up for permits is it still the discretion of the department whether to allow or not, or can we create a system to where it's not allowed until their where they need to be with maintenance, violations and paying fines. Director of Planning and Development Rhiannon Friedman shared that it is set out in code that up to a certain amount the City Manager can waive, but once it's over, or we do waive it, we must give notice to the Governing Body.

Committee member Valdivia-Alcalá inquired about concerns with our collection agency and looking for alternatives. Committee chair Hiller shared when we established this initiative we weren't collecting the money, just doing the work involved, that has remained a challenge. Yet what's happened because it's being handled through criminal complaints instead of administrative complaints, you must go to court and convict to have the offender status. City Attorney Amanda Stanley clarified our code allows administrative and criminal. The problem is collecting, a lot of the LLCs do not have assets, or they're individuals that are simply impoverished and can't pay their bills. State law allows you to keep it as lean while you collect.

2. Marketing and Education

Director of Communications Dan Garrett shared their back on track with social media posts every other week for CoCPM, last week was a See Click Fix App reminder. We are also going to have some earned media with one of the local news outlets.

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Minutes Taken: 7/16/2025

Minutes Approved: 9/17/2025

Minutes Submitted By: TRJ

They interviewed the Property Maintenance Director John Schardine about code compliance and some of our buildings that should be coming out next week. Also, regarding the Yard of the Month we have selected our first winner, an email will be sent out tomorrow.

Director of the Office of Inclusive Communities Monique Glaude' shared the Community cleanup is scheduled for the second week of October. It's being led by city employees, with an invitation for the community to join, more information to come. The Community Navigator position has been filled, and they start Monday August 4th. The position was created to connect neighbors with local resources and opportunities, which include housing, food, healthcare, employment, navigating local programs, as well as assistance with completing applications. They will work closely with Property Maintenance, Municipal Court, Division of Housing, and all the community partners as well.

Committee chair Hiller inquired about how many submissions Yard of the Month received and what area of town. Director of Communications Dan Garrett shared there were thirty-one submissions, they were from all over town, with some being self-nominations and some were others that were nominating another yard.

3. Life-Threatening Violations

Property Maintenance Director John Schardine shared that certain violations require greater attention, instead of sixty days for housing violations there are certain violations that are considered life and safety. It's been narrowed down to nine; Structural Integrity, Fire Safety, Electrical Hazard, Gas and HVAC Systems, Plumbing and Sanitation, Egress and Accessibility, Hazardous Materials, Pest Infestations, and Unsafe Occupancy. We're going to cite and call and contact the owner. These are usually interior, which is self-reporting typically an occupant of a rental or an apartment that are not getting any response from the Property Maintenance of the rental property. Once notified an inspector is sent out, if issue is identified we call the owner and let them know there is a serious issue and give them one-two weeks to show they have hired a contractor, or fixed the issue, if not we're going straight to court and prosecuting due to being a Life and Safety issue.

Committee chair Hiller inquired about what happens if you have a residential property that is occupied by a family, and it's been determined to be unsafe. Property Maintenance Director John Schardine shared he reaches out to Division Director of Housing Services Carrie Higgins and lets her know the situation and she works with her contacts. There has never been a case yet that she hasn't helped.

4. Vacant Properties

Planning and Development Management Analyst Quinn Cole spoke to the Land Bank being adopted in 2023. Its purpose is to serve the public in providing for the orderly, planned, and reutilization of abandoned, tax-foreclosed, or otherwise underutilized residential properties. Its fully funded operating budget for a three-year pilot period is \$500,000. It works by the Land Bank acquiring the land, acquired parcels are forgiven for any outstanding property taxes or code violations, the Land Bank funds/performs maintenance or demolition as necessary, then the Land Bank sells properties to responsible owners. The Land Bank is governed by a five-member board of trustees appointed by the mayor, including one City Council member, one city staff member, one resident representing NIA, and two residents at-large. All land transactions are reviewed and approved by the board of trustees. The public launch was in 2024, and the current inventory is nine vacant lots. Three of the nine lots are within Laurens Bay, then the other six are scattered throughout the city, many of which are Neighborhood Revitalization Plan (NRP) eligible areas. There is an interactive map online as well to see inventory. She shared that we had our first parcel transfer in the Central Park Neighborhood. It was sold to Capital Reality LLC for five hundred dollars, with the plan to build a three-bedroom, one-bath single family home with a selling price of \$110,000-\$125,000. She also shared the Short-Term Goals (End of year 2025) is to acquire and turn over at least one property with an existing structure, learn more from Shawnee County about tax sale process, and refresh and new marketing efforts. You can get involved with Land Bank by buying land, donating land, participating in public meetings, or by sharing with interested parties.

Committee member Valdivia-Alcalá spoke to the three Laurens Bay parcels that no matter how if the properties are sold and money goes to the Land Bank it feels like laundering of some sort, and she does not agree.

Changing our Culture Program Administrator Nicole Stovall shared that she and Property Maintenance Director John Schardine work with Planning and Development Management Analyst Quinn Cole to provide her with properties that have a lot of violations and are continuously having issues to see if property owners are aware of the Land Bank.

Next Meeting: Committee Chair Hiller requested to meet August 20, 2025 at 9:30 a.m. 1st Floor Conference Room; Cyrus K. Holliday Building 620 SE Madison.

Adjourn: Committee Chair Hiller adjourned the meeting at 10:53 a.m.

The video of this meeting can be viewed at: <https://youtu.be/Spx1-e3lZHk>