

Tuesday Topics Summary

November 3, 2020

Carol Babcock, Co-chair of the Affordable Housing Project JUMP, spoke at our November 3 Tuesday Topics on Zoom. Carol began her talk by defining JUMP, which is an acronym for Justice Unity Ministry Project. JUMP began in 2012. It is a diversified, non-partisan, non-profit coalition of 29 congregations. Individuals are welcome to join.

JUMP is not a direct service organization, which means they don't provide for the immediate needs of people such as rent, food, etc. JUMP is a direct ACTION organization that challenges community leaders to make policy and funding changes to solve community problems. The group is currently working on transportation and mental health issues. Among their success stories is the Ride to Work program with SOTO (South Topeka Transportation Initiative) and NOTO (North Topeka Arts & Entertainment District) and S.A.V.E. (Strategies Against Violence Everywhere) that focuses on reducing gun violence dramatically in the next year.

Carol described in great detail the campaign for access to affordable housing. After listening to small group discussions about the housing situation in Topeka, JUMP voted to make affordable housing a campaign issue. They conducted a housing study and learned the situation was worse than they thought. Approximately 7,000 families renting in Topeka are living in bad conditions (for example, holes in apartment ceilings so big they can see the people upstairs and homes with dirt floors). A decent two-bedroom apartment in Topeka requires the renter to earn at least \$16an hour.

Other communities have an Affordable Housing Fund. Topeka needs an Affordable Housing Trust Fund to revitalize neighborhoods through rehabilitation or new construction. Such a fund needs a dedicated revenue source (public money) to leverage private money. A number of banks and companies have supported the Affordable Housing concerns, but their contributions are not long-term. JUMP is working to get the city to dedicate a line item to the budget to ensure the sustainability of the Affordable Housing Trust Fund. The city paid for a housing study that confirmed the problem and recommended the City Council fund an Affordable Housing Trust Fund with the goal to fund \$500,000 for 2021, \$1.5 million for 2022, and \$3 million for 2023. (Lawrence voted for a tax increase to fund their housing needs.)

At their November 17 City Council meeting the council will hear recommendations for implementation from the Affordable Housing committee.

Other JUMP campaigns:

- TRANSPORTATION (JEDO gave \$100,000 for one year)
- VIOLENCE REDUCTION (In 2019 Topeka Police Chief Cochran agreed to explore GEI – Group Violence Intervention – and District Attorney Kagay committed to implementing the program. Shawnee County Commissioners approved \$70,000 for a manager.
- PREDATORY LENDING – Lenders can charge up to 391% interest on a short-term loan. A statewide coalition, Kansas Payday Loan, is working to lower interest and provide better terms. They want a lobbyist to help gain support.
- A new campaign for MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION will be launched soon.

In answer to a number of audience questions and comments, Carol said Mars and Target had opted out of the SOTO transportation since most of the workers using it are part-time employees. One of the employers has rejoined. Habitat for Humanity has a committee that reviews requests for money from groups that need extra funding to finish a work in progress. Any individual in Topeka or Shawnee County is welcome to join and support JUMP. Dennis Bosley provided information for JUMP to connect with the police and Valeo. Grace Wilson suggested JUMP might want to connect with the YWCA Advocacy committee. Carol said a letter from the League to the City Council in support of the Affordable Housing Trust Fund would be greatly appreciated.

For more details, please see Carol's full presentation that is available on the library's website.