

# LWVTSC Observer Reports

## January 2021

**USD 501 Board Meeting**  
**Thursday, November 19, 2020**  
**Observer: Janet Cathcart**

6pm via Facebook Live

All Board Members Present

### School Highlights

Highland Park High school sophomore Ajani Cooper was recognized for helping out when he witnessed a car accident in front of Highland Park High school. He helped the victims of the wreck while waiting for AMR to respond.

Pamela Johnson-Betts presented on the Topeka Public Schools Foundation Sports Park and Highlander Investment Funds along with a representative from Clayton Financial.

Resolutions for American Education Week and School Psychologist Awareness Week were read.

### Public Comments

Coach Hannah Alexander Topeka High Basketball coach spoke in support of starting winter sports.

Harmony Burgess Smith also spoke in support of starting winter sports.

### Superintendent's Report

COVID discussion on winter sports proposal – Board decided that bowling and swimming will continue as scheduled. Basketball will start practicing but will discuss at the December 3<sup>rd</sup> board meeting to compete in games. Wrestling is considered a high-risk sport so the start of wrestling will have to be revisited once the county health score card is down to 13. The Kansas State High School Activities Association Board of Directors will vote on Tuesday, November 24<sup>th</sup> on whether or not to delay winter competitions. Chris Reynolds Consulting Teacher of Fine Arts discussed the proposal for fine arts performances. In person performances will not take place if students are in remote learning. At minimum, TPS will need to be in hybrid teaching mode. TPS also looking at larger venues.

Major Maintenance Plan was approved unanimously.

One United Voice Platform was approved unanimously.

Meeting Adjourned: 7:48pm

**USD 501 Board Meeting  
December 3, 2020  
Observer: Annie Tietze**

All members present

- \* Coach Michael Williams from Highland Park named one of the 20 under 40 for his work integrating Special Education Students into special Physical Education Days.
- \* Public presentations were given by two basketball player sisters, their parent, and two other parents. All speeches were in favor of letting the season go on.
- \* During Superintendent's report, Mrs. Wallace and Mr. Gowan spoke about T Mobile hot spots to help with connection issues at homes, however this ends Dec. 30. This is a State Commerce grant.

There was an extensive COVID discussion. Superintendent Anderson explained the details of the COVID plan. There have been 31 new cases of quarantined staff who tested positive. The schools will all be virtual as 501 is in the red zone. They will remain without in-person learning for the time being because of so many cases and a staffing shortage with not enough substitutes. They may go back to in-person the week before the holiday vacation if they have moved to the orange zone and there is enough staff. Mr. Reynold's spoke about fine arts. Certain small groups can perform outside. Large groups such as orchestra and band are not practicing.

The next discussion was about the basketball season. There will be no spectators, 10 team members, 2 coaches, and social distancing for those not playing. The games will be shown online. The players will wear masks. There will be no competition with teams who won't be playing with the same guidelines. There were 5 Board Members who voted to support and 2 against. There was discussion about the possibility of arranging for athletes to be tested which was the reason one of the members was willing to vote yes.

**USD 437 Board Meeting  
November 16, 2020  
Observer: Mary Galligan (via livestream)**

Seven members present (one via phone)

Meeting open to in-person public attendance and live-streamed; recording available on the District's YouTube [channel](#).

The USD 437 School Board:

1. Approved the following unanimously:

- Meeting Agenda
- Consent items
- A motion to approve administration action to move Pauline Central School to remote education from Nov. 16-20, 2020 due to the number of students and staff in quarantine.
- A motion to move all schools in the district to remote education mode from Nov. 23, 2020 - Jan. 5, 2021, except for early childhood education, grades K-2, and identified specialized systems of support. On January 5, 2021, all schools will return to their current mode of education.
- A motion to go into Executive Session from 8 PM until 8:10 PM to discuss personnel under the KOMA exception for discussion of matters relating to non-elected personnel.
- Subsequent to Executive Session, a motion to release a teacher from the contract without monetary penalty.

2. Received

- Administrator reports on the impact of COVID-19 on students, staff and school activities.

3. Discussed the process related to adopting 2021 legislative positions

4. Adjourned at 8:12 PM.

**USD 437 Board Meeting  
December 7, 2020  
Observer: Mary Galligan (via livestream)**

Five members present

Meeting open to in-person public attendance and live-streamed; recording available on the District's YouTube [channel](#).

The USD 437 School Board:

1. Approved the following unanimously:

- Meeting Agenda
- Consent items
- A motion to approve the use of a therapy dog at the high school.
- A motion to move the next Board meeting to December 14.
- A motion to go into Executive Session for 30 minutes, from 7:31 PM until 8:01PM, to discuss personnel under the KOMA exception for discussion of matters relating to non-elected personnel.
- Subsequent to Executive Session, a motion to release a teacher from the contract without monetary penalty.

2. Received

- Administrator reports on school activities.

4. Adjourned at 8:01 PM.

### **Shawnee County Commission Meeting**

**Nov. 19, 2020**

**Observer: Vicki Arnett**

All three commissioners were present.

Stephany Kublman recognized county employees for raising \$11,780.64 in donations for Greater Topeka United Way.

Bill Presinger, CEO of Valeo made a presentation update on mental health services.

Most of the agenda was routine. Brian Cole with Shawnee County Department of Corrections made a request to approve funds from CARES Act funds to purchase an upgrade to inmate tracking system. This enhancement would place a GPS device in inmate required wrist bands. This will enhance contract tracing during COVID. It will also alleviate staff time devoted to reviewing video recording of inmate movement in order to determine contacts. Brian Cole also announced that the female Deputy Director of Shawnee County Corrections, Angela McHardie, has resigned to take a position as the director of Kansas Juvenile Corrections Facility.

Betty Greiner presented a request to approve a formal resolution on how the county budgets for annual medical services at the Shawnee County detention centers.

Lea Dawn Welch with court services requested approval of purchasing policy waiver in order to enhance cleaning efforts in the court rooms due to COVID. Cleaning will take place twice per day.

Kellen Seitz with Stormont Vail Events Center requested approval of a request for additional operating funds not to exceed \$200,000. from the contingency fund. Request was approved unanimously.

After much tense discussion between the commissioners, the emergency order of the local health officer was approved 2-1 with Commissioner Riphahn voting no.

During public comments, Topeka JUMP requested to be a part of the JEDO board's committee on SOTO transportation. Liz Greg stated the committee wasn't meeting. Commissioner Cook informed her the committee was meeting and expected to make recommendations at the Dec. 9 JEDO meeting.

During administrative communications, Betty Greiner informed the commission the mill levy is \$48.157, slightly lower than last year.

Erin Mahon with Emergency Management stated the department had reapplied for certification as a storm ready community. He also thanked the multiple fire departments which responded to the recent grass fire in Rossville.

Commissioner Riphahn announced the election canvass took place on Mon. Nov. 16.

## **Shawnee County Commission Meeting**

**Nov. 23, 2020**

**Observer: Mary Jo Hobbs**

Three Commissioners present.

The commissioners approved voucher payments including \$648,438.55 in CARES Act disbursements to these community-based programs: Catholic Charities, Darting Basketball Academy, Doorstep Inc., East Topeka Council on Aging, Family Service and Guidance Center, Helping Hands Humane Society, Kansas Children's Discovery Center, Kansas High School Assn., LULAC, SENT, Sheltered Living Inc., Sunshine Connection, Topeka Rescue Mission, United Way, Valeo, and YWCA. They also granted funds to Auburn-Washburn and Shawnee Heights School Districts, Cair Paravel, Hayden High School, and St. Matthews Catholic Church.

Commissioners approved a resolution to exempt Reser's Fine Foods, Inc. from property taxes for 10 years on an addition to their plant.

Commissioners approved a contract between the Sheriff's Office, Corrections, Topeka Police Department, and Valeo Behavioral Health Care to split costs to fund a full-time

employee in the Crisis Response Program. The county's part of the agreement will be funded with \$10,000 from the Inmate Wellness Account and \$10,000 from the Sheriff's operating budget. The City of Topeka and Valeo will both contribute \$20,000 each. Corrections Director, Brian Cole said the position would enhance the existing program to create 24-hour coverage for clinicians to work with law enforcement officers to help people with mental health issues. Cole said the service can defuse conflicts in interactions that can turn deadly. He said individuals involved are often already Valeo clients who are calmed by the presence of a familiar caregiver who understands their situation and medications. The director said the program saves consumer and law enforcement lives and keeps people from being incarcerated, estimating that it saves the county \$100,000 - \$200,000 per year.

There was a need for a 20-minute executive session to consult with an attorney on a personnel issue concerning non-elected personnel, specifically salaries.

## **Shawnee County Commission Meeting**

**Nov. 30, 2020**

**Observer: Mary Jo Hobbs**

Chairman Riphahn and Commissioner Cook were present. Commissioner Mays attended by phone.

The commissioners approved voucher payments including \$311,399.02 in CARES Act disbursements to community-based programs: Darting Basketball Academy, Doorstep Inc., Family Service and Guidance Center, Harvesters, Jayhawk Area Council on Aging, Kansas Children's Discovery Center, One Heart Project, Stormont Vail Healthcare, Sunshine Connection, Topeka Housing Authority, Topeka Rescue Mission, and YWCA. They also granted funds to Shawnee Heights and Seaman School Districts and Holy Family and Hayden High schools.

The board approved a request from the District Attorney's office to transfer \$90,000 of their 2020 budget surplus to the Cold Case project, and \$20,000 to lease additional office space in 2021.

The Public Health Department received approval of a contract for no more than \$18,200 with the University of Kansas Medical Center Research Institute to help complete accreditation requirements. Edith Gaines, Financial Services Manager at the Health Department, told commissioners that the staff is inundated with work from the COVID-19 crisis and the staff from the Research Institute is experienced in the areas needed.

Commissioners approved a request to begin a national search for a new health department director with a salary from \$75,929 to \$100,550. Ms. Teresa Fisher, formerly the Family Health Division Manager, was approved as Interim Director.

In Administrative Communications, Comm. Mays reported that he was attending remotely because his wife has tested positive for the novel coronavirus and so he was quarantining.

There was a need for an executive session to consult with an attorney on a personnel issue concerning non-elected personnel, specifically salaries for 20 minutes and a 20-minute consultation with attorney concerning acquisition of real property. *Note: Chairman Riphahn did not mention that there would be a delay before this session would begin but the commission did not return, and the video ended after 77 minutes.*

### **Shawnee County Commission Meeting**

**Dec. 3, 2020**

**Observer: Vicki Arnett**

All three commissioners attended with Commissioner Riphahn attending in person and Commissioners Cook and Mays attending via phone. It was later learned that both Commissioners Cook and Mays' wives have tested positive for coronavirus.

The agenda was routine and lasted 17 minutes. The Solid Waste reminded the public that Sat. Dec. 5 will be the last Sat. household waste collection until Feb. 2021. He also reminded the public that electrical items may also be dropped for recycle. Some electronics require the collection of a recycle fee. Brian Cole with the Shawnee County Corrections announced that the health and mental health services at the detention center will be undergoing an accreditation process soon. Parks and Rec. announced the Reindeer Bell scavenger hunt. The department hides a bell in various parks and those who find the bells can report the finding on the website. Prizes will be awarded such as free fitness pass or up to 100.00 gift card on to be used toward Parks and Rec. programs or rental. There will also be a public meeting on the new plans related to the waste dump. The date was not announced. Commissioner Cook reminded the public to drive through Potwin to see the lights.

An executive session was announced to discuss salaries of non-elected personnel and matters of attorney client privilege.

### **Shawnee County Commission Meeting**

**Dec. 7, 2020**

**Observer: Mary Jo Hobbs**

Three Commissioners participating via Zoom "due to COVID-19."

The meeting began with Chairman Bill Riphahn informing the public that they could participate in the meeting if they called the Clerk at (785) 251-4040 or sent a notification to [commission.mail@SNCO.us](mailto:commission.mail@SNCO.us)

The commissioners approved CARES Act disbursements in the amount of \$1,760,509.46 to these community-based programs: Capper Foundation, Doorstep Inc., and ERC. Schools funded were Heritage Christian, Most Pure Heart of Mary, USD 501, and USD 372. Taxing entities receiving funds were Shawnee County Fire District #2, and Soldier Township.

A public hearing was held on a Conditional Use Permit to allow the City of Topeka to build a 1-million-gallon elevated water tower at 1627 SW 65<sup>th</sup> St. in Williamsport Township. Braxton Copley, of the City of Topeka, said the tower would improve water security and pressure to Montara, and Kansa Fire Commerce Park as well as ensure critical fire flow and accommodate future growth in the area. Commissioners approved the CUP.

The commissioners extended the state of local disaster emergency in Shawnee County until June 30, 2021. This will keep the county eligible for COVID-19 related funding and supplies.

Commissioners approved a contract for \$13,660 for analytical software, licenses, and training for the Health Department. Craig Barnes said the software is the same as that used by KDHE and Kansas Health Institute, which will help in coordinating data. County SPARK grant funds will be used for the purchase. Commissioners also approved using \$84,216 of SPARK funds to extend the agreement with Kansas Health Institute to provide data analytic support for the Health Department. Barnes said KHI's time and expertise had been a tremendous asset in creating timely analysis of COVID-19 data to help guide the county's response.

Public Information Officer, Amanda Monhollon, requested approval of \$4,710 in COVID-19 Relief Funds for Lamar Advertising for space on 6 billboards for education and awareness of mitigation practices for stopping the spread of COVID-19. The county is presently advertising this message on 21 billboards but, with the approval of the extension, all but 6 will end after December 3<sup>rd</sup>.

There was a need for a 15-minute executive session to consult with an attorney on a personnel issue concerning non-elected personnel, specifically salaries. No further action was needed.

**Shawnee County Commission Meeting  
December 10, 2020  
Observer: Elvera Johnson**

All commissioners present, virtually

Commissioners approved a request to use Stormont Vail Events Center to vaccinate for COVID-19 and possibly provide other medical services. For Solid Waste, they approved an agreement with Keep America Beautiful to allow them to sponsor recycling events



and other activities that benefit the county. The commission approved extension of a contract for processing of electronic waste. For public works, they approved a request to fill any entry-level road and bridge maintenance positions and they approved purchase of Cold-Mix asphalt. For information technology, they approved replacement of 2 AC units in the data center of the Courthouse. For the Sheriff's office, they acknowledged receipt of a contract agreement to extend and upgrade the radio system. For human resources, they approved step increases for classified and unclassified employees. They approved establishing salaries for elected/appointed officials, with the exception of themselves. They approved small item Capital Improvement Project requests from various departments. For court services, they approved purchasing Lexan/PlexiGlas barriers from Binswanger using County SPARK funds. For Corrections, they approved the solicitation of bids for inmate clothing and other needed supplies for 2021. For Parks and Recreation, they approved a concessions contract and some building maintenance projects.

Court Services announced that they are watching the pandemic situation to see whether they need to suspend jury trials. The Health Department announced that there are now 3 sites available for COVID-19 testing. Anyone can get tested. No symptoms are required. Appointments are preferred, but not required. Tests are free.

A 15-minute executive session was announced. Privacy was required for attorney/client discussion.

## **Topeka City Council Meeting**

**Nov. 17, 2020**

**Observer: Vicki Arnett**

All council members participated via zoom. Councilman Lesser was absent due to COVID.

The council approved expenditures June 27, 2020 through July 31, 2020. The council approved the suspension of rules of the governing body in order to meet virtually and not allow in person public testimony. Public comments will be entered into the record of the meeting.

The council approved establishing a public hearing on Dec. 8 for the purpose of responding to public input regarding considering budget amendments.

The council approved the planning commission's recommendations to approve the reconstruction and expansion of an electric substation at 6<sup>th</sup> and Golden by Evergy.

After much discussion, the council approved the request by a security guard denied a permit to appeal the denial in order to appear in person to Dec. 1.

Public comment will be a part of the minutes of the meeting. Council Chambers are closed to the public.

City manager and council comments included court dockets are closed until no earlier than Dec. 4. The need for a buyer to save the historic Menninger Tower building and clock was discussed. Warnings to the public about the serious spread of COVID in the community were made by all council members. The mayor mentioned her concern for the hospitals in Topeka being full. The progress made during the construction season was commented on. Council woman Hiller commented the city utilities have made progress on electronic billing. Council woman Valdivia Alcala commented on the tragic accident on Lyman Rd. and the need for sidewalks and cross walks in the area.

## **Topeka City Council Meeting**

**Dec. 1, 2020**

**Observer: Vicki Arnett**

All city council members were present on zoom. The mayor left early due to illness. Tony Emerson chaired the meeting.

The council heard the plan for snow removal.

The consent agenda passed unanimously.

A public hearing was conducted regarding the proposed Community Improvement District for the Downtown Ramada Inn. Owner Jim Parrish spoke about how the tax revenue increase could benefit the hotel. Although he received a PPP loan from the CARES Act, the hospitality industry has been extremely hard hit by the pandemic. Revenue has been generated during the pandemic from the apartment and business rentals in the building. The new tax revenue would be used to upgrade/replace elevators and windows. It will also be initially used to upgrade the fire suppression system. An ordinance will be introduced next week. No public comments were made.

The council heard a proposal from the Public Infrastructure Committee to approve the replacement of specific fleet vehicles. The proposal was adopted 10-0.

The council heard from Whitney Damron, municipal lobbyist regarding the city legislative priorities for the 2021 session. The priorities discussed were renovation of the Docking State Office Building, including the parking lot and assuring the inclusion of the Polk Quincy viaduct in the KDOT plan. Multiple tax proposals will be followed specific to impact on municipalities, including STAR bonds. The lobbyist reported that the session likely will include discussion of the governor's emergency authority and police reform. Discussion with council members included concern about city's the size of Topeka not receiving previous CARES Act funding directly to the city. The funding went to the county for distribution. The general sentiment appeared to be that the city needed to manage the funding for the municipality. The city is also concerned with being able to

offer KPERS buy-outs to city employees. Concern with state statute and blighted homes is of continuing concern.

Bill Fiander, Topeka Planning Commission presented a draft implementation plan of the Topeka Housing Study. Topeka JUMP testified in support of the plan.

A presentation was made by contracted finance staff to the city regarding the budgetary impact of the Zoo governance restructuring. Under the current plan, contracted building maintenance cost would increase. There is also increase cost to the city should attendance stay level or decrease. The attendance risk is completely borne by the city, not FOTZ. The accountant remarked the FOTZ attendance projects are likely too optimistic. Staff members are developing different scenarios to plan for future budget short falls should the decision be made to approve or change the plan.

Discussion was held of the proposed Consolidated Action plan projected for approval.

LaToya Burnett presented the SORT target area update. In 2021 the Valley Park neighborhood south of Washburn will be the target neighborhood.

A discussion and presentation was made by Councilwoman Naeger on the proposed expansion of the Human Relations Council to include LGBTQ populations. The council will vote next week.

The council reminded the public to see the Zoo lights, donate during Giving Tues., give to the Salvation Army Red Kettle campaign and/or the Christmas Bureau. City Manager Brent Trout reminded the council that a curfew ordinance will be under discussion next week. Also, on the agenda is CARES Act funding and equipment purchases.

## **Topeka City Council Meeting**

**Dec. 8, 2020**

**Observer: Vicki Arnett**

All city council members were present.

The council heard an update to city finances for 2020. Revenue has been up with sales tax leading to a positive ending balance. The recommendation was made to supplement the reserve fund.

The consent agenda was routine.

The council unanimously approved a request to vacate the unbuilt street right-of-way for SW Harrison and dedicate easements for utilities and access. The council also approved the amendments to the operating budget for 2020. The council approved the continuation of the imposition of the business improvement service fees within the Downtown Business Improvement District (BID). Downtown Topeka, Inc. manages the BID. In addition, the council approved the Community Improvement District (CID)

levying an increased sales tax of 2% for the Downtown Ramada Hotel & Convention Center.

The council approved the adoption of the 2021 state legislative priorities. The lobbyist for the city presented the priorities to the Shawnee County legislative delegation on Dec. 9. The council unanimously approved the recommended implementation plan for the Topeka Housing Study. Council approved the Consolidated Action Plan, 2021 annual Consolidated Action Plan and the 2021 SORT target update.

After much discussion, the council approved 8-2 to pursue a management agreement with Friends of the Topeka Zoo (FOTZ). The proposed method of financing of the capital maintenance of the zoo was approved 9-1 through the issuing of 2.85 million dollars in bonds over 7 ½ years. The council approved 9-1 using current revenue surplus in 2020 to finance 288,000 of zoo revenue shortfall in order to begin to execute the public private partnership moving forward.

The council approved the proposed increase in free downtown parking from 2-4 hours through Jan. 4 in order to support small business during the holiday shopping season.

Following much discussion of the proposed imposition of a citywide curfew ordinance, the council recommended staff review current statutes with the county Emergency Management and determine what type, if any, ordinance is needed.

The council deferred to a Jan. meeting the adoption of revised ordinances to reflect recent staffing changes.

Topeka JUMP thanked the council for passing the implementation plan of the Housing Study.

After a 4.5 hours meeting, the council deferred until next week the planned executive session.

Council did remind the public of the hand sanitizer give away, the free COVID-19 testing at health department, Hummer Sports Park and New Mt. Zion, daily 9:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Dec. 17 is a committee meeting on public health and safety focused on fire service. 29<sup>th</sup> street and the Carnahan intersection are now open. Meeting adjourned at 10:38 p.m.

## **JEDO Meeting**

**December 9, 2020**

**Observer: Judy Moler**

The JEDO meeting was held via Zoom.

JEDO voted unanimously on Wednesday Sept. 9 to approve incentive packages totaling \$300,000 to Hayden Tower Service, Inc. and a local start up LifeTech Diagnostics for

expansion in Shawnee County. Combined this would bring 47 new jobs over the next five years. Hayden Tower Service installs telecommunication towers across the Midwest. They intend to make a capital investment of \$6.6 million to improve facilities as well as new equipment purchases.

The contracts are expected to result in multimillion-dollar investments as well as company expansion that would create 50 new jobs.

LifeTech Diagnostics began operation earlier this month and specializes in diagnostic testing. It has helped provide COVID -19 testing in northeast Kansas as well as the Kansas City area. LifeTech will make its own investment of \$1.5 million to be used for facility improvement and equipment purchases.

The expansion of both businesses is expected to have a combined economic impact of \$240.5 million in the Topeka/Shawnee County area in the next 10 years.

JEDO also approved a request to offer \$226,800 in incentive money to an unnamed business "Project Meadowlark". The business is an existing manufacturing technology company in Shawnee County. The business intends to create 41 new jobs and make a capital investment of \$45.4 million as it expands.

Another unnamed company "Project Central" was offered \$284,000 in incentives. This is a new business for Shawnee County. "Project Central" is a manufacturing company that would create up to 50 new jobs.

The JEDO also approved \$840,000 in incentives to an unnamed company "Project Gateway". This unnamed business is a technology company in the area that is planning to expand and create up to 168 new jobs.

Finally, JEDO board members approved a transportation initiative that is expected to replace a current pilot program that will be discontinued at the end of the year.

Under the new plan employers would offer "ala carte" transportation services with 50% of costs being covered by JEDO funds.

Employers who want to participate in the program apply for \$1,000 of JEDO funds and could apply for more after initial funds have been distributed.

The meeting was adjourned.