

Observer Reports

February 2023 Voter

USD 345 Board Meeting

January 9, 2023

Observer: Chris Huntsman

The Seaman 345 School Board met January 9, 2023, at 6 PM with all members present.

The District recognized second-year SHS teacher Mr. Wehr, as a Horizon Award Winner.

Willson recognized the Board during National School Board Month.

The agenda and handouts were followed exactly and of minimal consequence. The only exceptions were two “discussion items” that became action items because of the timeline. A Resource Room remodel and track renovation at the high school were both discussed; both items were given a “go” from the board for bidding, and then construction during the summer.

Future Cities Competition at Seaman Middle School

This year, SMS will be hosting the Future Cities Regional Competition on January 28th, 2023 from 8am to 4pm. (See Wikipedia description) This competition is open to any 6th grade through 8th grade students in the United States. The theme for this year’s competition is “Climate Change.” The teams chose a climate change topic (for example, flooding, drought, global warming, glacial melting, etc.) and created a plan that would have a positive impact on their city that is to exist 100 years in the future. SMS will be hosting 45+ teams from various schools in Kansas and Missouri. It is a national contest.

The Board spent the most time talking about an alternate date for their regularly scheduled Feb 13 meeting, as the superintendent has a conflict that day. If you are interested in attending, or watching video, please check website for date/time.

Topeka City Council Meeting

December 20, 2022

Observer: Vicki Arnett

All council members were present, including the mayor, either in chambers or on zoom.

The council made three appointments to the Topeka Landmarks Commission; Melina Stewart, Mark Burenheide and Dave Frederick.

Of note on the consent agenda, the council approved the addition of missing wards/precincts to the redistricting plan adopted by council November 1, 2022.

Council approved the 2023-2025 AFSCME labor agreement. Council approved the renewal of the agreement with American Medical Response to operate ambulance service.

Council approved the city manager to make application for several grant opportunities which may alleviate some need to raise water utility rates. The grants are Kansas Water Pollutions Control Loan Fund and Kansas Public Water Supply Loan Fund.

The council deferred to the Jan. 10 meeting the request to provide Brewster Place with the ability to apply for sales tax exemption for contractual services for the current expansion. The council requested additional financial impact information.

The council approved the establishment of a policy for Rural Housing Incentive Districts as recommended by the Public Infrastructure Committee. This functions as a tax increment financing district for housing. The discussion included information the city is deficit 3,000 units of affordable housing.

At the city manager's request, the council approved creating the office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion by placing the community engagement director and human resources director under the supervision of the DEI director. Also approved were name changes of positions from Director of Department of Administrative/Financial Services to the Chief Financial Officer and the Director of Information Technology to the Chief Information Officer. Council members Hoferer, Valdivia Alcala and Ortiz all voted No.

The council discussed but did not take action on the proposed water rate increases. Several council members expressed their concern for the dramatic rate increases proposed without notice or discussion during budget considerations. Council pointed out this is a 35.1% rate increase over three years following six years of rate increases. Council also considered that increasing the mil levy would be minimal per household, in addition to using ARPA funds or the new infrastructure money. Also, under discussion was the amount of tax incentives provided to businesses and business pays less for water utility than residential customers. At least one council member spoke of the disparity between rural and city water rates and how the city and county need to work together to consider tax rates and fees. This issue has never been on the agenda of the ICC during this observer's attendance at both. Two members of the public spoke in opposition to the proposed rate increases. The proposal includes offering emergency utility assistance to 1250 households. This is an increase since the city manager spoke at Tues. Topics.

One person spoke about the homeless problem on SE 23rd .

Council announcements included there is no meeting Dec. 27th, several comments about the winter weather moving in, reminders about trash pickup during the holidays, thanks for the inspiring Topeka United event, thanks for city crews working in the cold,

information about public meetings on the reconstruction on 17th Street between Wanamaker and Fairlawn to learn about the 11-foot wide sidewalks and Merry Christmas and Happy Festivus!

There was a need for an executive session to meet with the attorney regarding specific litigation and contractual obligations. No action was taken.

Topeka City Council Meeting
January 3, 2023
Observer: Vicki Arnett

All council members were present, including the mayor, either in chambers or on zoom. Council member Dobler was elected Deputy Mayor.

The council held a public meeting on the 2023 Consolidated Action Plan. There were no comments. The presentation included information that most of the funds are used for homeless and assistance for seniors. The item will be scheduled for action later in the month.

The council discussed the proposed utility rate increases. There was one public comment about keeping the rates lower. One public hearing has been held and another is scheduled. The public was encouraged to engage in a public dialogue. The city manager remarked that he is not yet taking this matter for a vote because they are pursuing alternatives.

One person spoke during public comments. He spoke about doing economic development differently to help workers, not business owners.

During announcements the public was informed to apply for LIEAP funds, install and test smoke detectors, this is national mentoring month, this is national blood donation month, property maintenance discussion/work will begin the second year and thanks to the former Deputy Mayor Duncan.

There was a need for executive session to discuss acquisition of real property. No action was expected.

Topeka City Council Meeting
January 10, 2023
Observer: Vicki Arnett

Council members absent were Emerson, Valdivia-Alcala and Naeger. All other council members were present in chambers.

The council approved a district map zoning change in the 37th and Adams area, which allows for the development of affordable senior duplex residences with a clubhouse.

The council remanded back to the planning commission the request to allow a zoning change for One Gas, Inc. to develop the 4th and Gage area with the addition of a materials storage yard on the west side of the property. The remand includes the planning commission restart the public hearing protest petition time and include additional notice and public hearings on the matter.

The council denied a request by Brewster Place to proceed with filing for sales tax exemption on new construction costs. The amount of the sales tax was estimated at 135,183.

The council approved an ordinance concerning motor vehicle claims allowing the city to self-insure for motor vehicle liability. The city manager recommended due to the increase in third party insurance deductible.

The council moved to suspend the rules and following a brief discussion, adopted an ordinance which prohibits individuals from possessing an uninstalled catalytic converter without documentation of ownership.

There was one public comment involving opposition to the manner in which the city does economic development.

Announcements included beginning January 17 all council meetings will be at the Cyrus K. Holliday building due to the elevator being out in city hall. Meetings will be there until further notice. There were many thanks to Bill Fiander who is leaving as city planner to teach at Washburn. It was announced that today is Human Trafficking Awareness Day and Responsible Gun Ownership day. It was also announced that bowling tournaments in the city have started. Praise was given to David Wilson, the first Native American, United Methodist bishop of Kansas. Several council members encouraged participation in the MLK holiday activities.

An executive session was needed to discuss matters of attorney client privilege.

Shawnee County Commission Meeting

December 22, 2022

Observer: Elvera Johnson

All commissioners were present.

Consent Agenda was amended to delete an item regarding funds transfer and was approved. Commission approved authorizing two cereal malt beverage licenses—Sommerset Café and Buffalo Grille.

They agreed to allow the special Covid19 administrative leave policy to expire at the end of 2022. Covid leave will be treated the same as any other illness.

They approved the transfer of remaining unencumbered 2022 contingency funds to a fund ledger that can be used for unexpected costs that may arise during the Courthouse renovation.

They agreed to extend the contract authorizing the Amateur Baseball Association to continue managing and operating amateur baseball programs at county facilities.

They approved revised contracts that will allow Spectra to both manage and operate the food and beverage provision at Stormont Vail Events Center. Spectra is now a subsidiary of OVG. Some funds were approved for the transition from management only to management and provision. OVG representatives anticipate improvement in quality and service.

Commissioners agreed to allocation of grant funds for the elderly. The funds had been previously approved in the budget.

There was no public comment and no executive session.

There will be no meeting Monday, December 26. The next meeting will be December 29

Shawnee County Commission Meeting

December 19, 2022

Observer: Susan Quinn

Commissioners Riphahn and Cook held a public hearing today for the approval of “design-build” as an alternative delivery method for replacing the Oakland Aquatic Facility and constructing a new Shawnee South Community Park splash pad. Commissioner Mays was absent from today’s meeting.

Tim Laurent with Parks and Rec described his vision for the projects.

First, he said that the Oakland Aquatic Facility is about 55 years old and is in desperate need of replacement. They have been working with the [Oakland NIA](#) as well as surveying the community. The Oakland NIA was described as very much in favor of a new pool, like the one at Garfield Park. However, the results of the community survey were just slightly in favor of a pool, with several surveyed in favor of a splash pad. Mr. Laurent noted that there are benefits to a splash pad over a pool. It’s cheaper to build and maintain. It requires less staff for lifeguards specifically. It can be opened earlier in the year and remain open longer than a pool. Nothing has been decided yet.

A separate project is to install a new splash pad in Shawnee South Community Park, possibly replacing one of the ball diamonds for the new splash pad. They kept mentioning that this would be “for the residents in Montara” and anybody who would like to drive to the splash pad who might not live in the neighborhood. A little internet search helped me find [this article](#) from the Topeka Capital Journal about a food and resource pantry for the Montara neighborhood that opened up earlier this year. The article

describes the Montara community as having once served as base housing for Forbes Field when the US Air Force owned the land. Now it is home to Shawnee County residents of about 430 households. [Montara is located](#) just north of the Mars Wrigley plant and just west of the Forbes Field golf course. Highway 75 is directly west of Montara and SW Topeka Boulevard is directly east.

Commissioner Cook helped lay out the funding. These projects would be funded from Parks and Recreation's share of the \$20 million bonding approved by the Commission recently. Of the \$20 million, \$10 million was to go to the Department of Corrections for mental health services and another \$10 million was to go to Parks and Rec for the development of [Family Park](#) and other facilities. These are among those other facilities. Commissioner Riphahn's concern is that the \$10 million was to go to the Family Park development and "it seems as though it is getting watered down" he said, "and so, now we're not able to do all that we wanted to do with Family Park." Tim Laurent said that Family Park would be over \$7 million and so it will be built in phases. The first phase will potentially include a pickleball court, a large playground, and an open-air shelter with restrooms. Phase I would run between \$3.5 and \$4 million. That would allow several million more for the other three or four projects that Parks and Recreation wanted to do next year. Replacing Oakland Aquatic Facility and putting in a new splash pad somewhere in South Shawnee County was among the projects that they also wanted to do next year.

The bottom line is that the public hearing and approval today was for Shawnee County Parks and Rec to move forward with getting help on a design-build concept for these two projects. The Commissioners approved this request. Once the plans are drawn up, the Commissioners will have to approve the actual spending of the money to move the projects forward or not. No one from the public spoke in favor or in opposition on this topic.

All the other things on the [agenda](#) were pretty routine.

No public comments were made today and no executive session needed.

Shawnee County Commission Meeting
December 29, 2022
Observer: Elvera Johnson

All 3 Commissioners present

The consent agenda included renewal of contracts for various recreational activities (Parks and Recreation) and social service programs. It was approved.

A presentation from the County Clerk and Willis Towers Watson Midwest, Inc., an insurance brokerage company, generated considerable discussion. The cost of insurance for real property and vehicles is going up by 1 million dollars. Commissioner

Cook expressed concern that this is the last meeting of the year and they will start out 1 million dollars over budget. Property insurance deductible is going up from 10,000 to 100,000. The brokerage representative said that few insurance companies want to provide insurance for municipalities. Commissioners can renegotiate any time they want to, but will likely not find a better deal, he said. The company they were using last year went bankrupt. Commissioners reluctantly approved the contract and requested that the representative return in February to present options. They would like to know what insurance options similar size counties/cities use.

Commissioners approved reclassification of a vacant Recreation Program Supervisor position to describe duties more accurately. For Information Technology they approved updating technology and some internal department transfers. For the Planning Department, they approved the transfer of unencumbered 2022 budget to a Special Project Fund for Zoning Regulation Updates. For Facilities Management they approved execution of a contract for pest control services. For Corrections, they approved transfer of funds from 2022 to 2023 budget to repair a failing HVAC system at the Adult Detention Center.

No public comment was offered. There will be no meeting on Monday, January 2. The Commission will reorganize on January 9. No Executive Session was called.

**Shawnee County Commission Meeting
January 5, 2023
Observer: Vicki Arnett**

All commissioners were present. Commissioner Riphahn attended virtually.

A presentation was provided by Information Technology. The department appeared to question the accuracy of the Ks. Dept of Commerce survey of access and speed of internet in Shawnee County. The federal Infrastructure Act appropriated funds to develop the broadband availability map by states. The presenter encouraged residents to challenge the accuracy of the locality and service availability. No website was provided. This writer encourages you to contact your commissioner to get additional information regarding reviewing this map.

Repair of the sprinkler system at Stormont Vail Event Center was approved. Also approved was the replacement of items stolen from Domer Arena which were not covered by insurance deductible. Commissioner Cook reminded the public that the insurance deductible has gone from \$10,000 per year to \$100,000 per year.

The commission approved wage increases for research attorneys, law clerks and law student interns for the Court Administration. These positions are part time intermittent.

There was no public comment. Administrative comments included comments from Stormont Vail Event Center management that the first big food and beverage event is

this weekend with the Governor's Inauguration followed by the Farm Show. The public was reminded that the County Newsletter for Jan. is posted.

There was a need for an executive session for employer/employee relations negotiations with the Teamsters involving matters of attorney client privilege. No action is expected.

Shawnee County Commission Meeting

January 9, 2023

Observer: Susan Quinn

Today's meeting started with the election of Bill Riphahn for the Shawnee County Commission chairman and Kevin Cook as the new vice chair for 2023.

Along with that, they also adopted a new rule where Monday morning meetings will no longer be regular approval meetings. They are now going to be designated for working sessions only. Because of this they will not be recording nor will they be live streaming these Monday morning meetings. Monday meetings will continue to begin at 9:00 a.m. but may not be at a consistent location due to work session needs. If you would like to be informed about the location of Monday morning meetings, please contact County Clerk Cynthia Beck. She can put you on the contact list for those updates regularly. Although these meetings will be open to the public, the public will now have to actually be in attendance in person in order to hear what has said during those working sessions. They also said that minutes would be scribed for these meetings so those would be available for the public as well.

Public works plans major construction maintenance on SW Nottingham Road from SW 33rd Street to SW 37th Street. This will be completed during the summer of 2023. The construction should take between 30 and 45 days to complete.

Much of the rest of the meeting was routine. Parks and Rec had a number of vehicles they wanted to change leases on as well as three contracts for different construction projects. Court Administration brought forth a contract with CASA to provide child in need of care case coordination through the court appointed special advocates for 2023.

No public comments were made today and no executive session needed.

**Shawnee County Commission Meeting
January 12, 2023
Observer: Elvera Johnson**

All 3 Commissioners present

Commissioners approved the existing Industrial Revenue Bond Tax Exemptions. They are approved for 10 years unless paid off earlier. All 6 were approved in one vote. They range from 1st year to 7th year of the 10-year period.

For solid waste, they approved reclassification of a vacant position from a welder position to a collector position. No more welders are needed. They also approved the purchase of 7 rear-load refuse trucks to be paid by revenue from solid waste customers. Some discussion preceded the approval. It was not the lowest bid, but the one that met the qualifications for the department.

For information technology, they approved funds to send 2 employees to a training conference. They approved renewal of a security monitoring platform and renewal of MFA licenses.

For the appraiser's office, they approved a contract for consulting services for the Geographic Information System (GIS) department. They also approved sending the county GIS manager to a conference.

For the election office, they approved destruction of qualifying ballots, supplies, etc. per state law in 2023.

For the County Commission they acknowledged the resignation of Doug Mays as director of the Sherwood Improvement District. He has taken another position. They also approved reappointment of Brian Armstrong to the MTAA Board. Mr. Armstrong explained what the board does. He talked about uses of Billard Airport and Forbes Airport for industrial purposes and the need to replace and upgrade some buildings and equipment.

In Public Comment, a real estate developer named Henry McClure talked for some time about the exclusion of retail development from the present County and JEDO definition of "economic development." He said that retail brings in sales taxes. Making development funds available for retail could build infrastructure for water lines, sewers, etc., and could attract additional retailers to the county/city. Commissioners made no comment.

The health department director announced a retirement party for a 17-year nurse employee. A solid waste representative said that the solid waste web page has a way for recycling customers to opt out. He also reminded the public that next Monday is a holiday and Monday and Tuesday customers will have a different schedule.

An executive session was called for employee/employer consultation and negotiation with Teamsters.