

## Observer Reports for May Voter

### **Shawnee County Commission**

**April 11, 2024**

**Elvera Johnson, observer**

All 3 Commissioners present

Following approval of consent agenda, voucher payments and correction orders, Commissioners approved for the Department of Corrections an amended contract to monitor real-time tracking and monitoring of individuals under supervision in adult corrections.

Parks and Recreation: Approved funds for design of a new carousel and Train Depot at Gage Park. This is an initial plan that will need public input before final approval.

Approved a contract with Norseman Brewing Company for an adults only movie and refreshments event at Adventure Cove on May 24.

Considerable discussion regarding utilizing Capital Improvement Bond funds for Phase 1 and Phase 2 design and construction costs utilizing Schwerdt Design Group to design a Grange Hall. The Commission amended the request and approved only Phase 1.

Human Resources: Authorized a "request for proposals" for prescription safety eye glasses. Authorized a request for proposals for a vestibule remodel. They need to build a fire escape for safety and also need to add a cubical to have enough space for all employees.

Planning Department: Approved 3 related requests for use of property. They relate to plans to use the land for building a fire house for Shawnee Heights Fire District Subdivision. A water tower was built in the 1990s. An office building was added later which was then expanded to include a maintenance garage. All of this needs to be amended to meet legal requirements, including zoning.

Public Works: Approved accepting a bid for asphalt. Cost of asphalt has gone up since last year. Also approved a request for qualifications for design and construction engineering services related to the culvert replacement project on NW 94th Street. There was brief discussion regarding use of timber in bridges and culverts. The conclusion was that concrete is safer.

Public Comment: A citizen who shows up frequently talked about a group willing to purchase and remodel the hotel at Stormont Vail Event Center. Commissioner Cook commented later that the county does not own any hotels.

Administrative Communications: Parks and Recreation announced that Tulips at Twilight begins this evening at Old Prairie Town.

Planning Department: Some citizens have expressed objection to having wind farms and solar panels in the county. They have requested a hearing. A hearing has been scheduled for May 13 at 6:00 p.m. at Great Overland Station. It will be live streamed.

Larry Mah, treasurer: The 2nd half tax is due.

Riphahn commented on the eclipse.

Mays mentioned the groundbreaking for the Family Park.

A 2 1/3 hour executive session was called to review evaluations for non-elected personnel and to discuss with an attorney the purchase of real property.

## SHAWNEE COUNTY COMMISSION MEETING: APRIL 4, 2024

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Observer: Paul Post (pacmanpost@icloud.com)

Chair Kevin Cook	Present?	Yes
Commissioner Bill Riphan	Present?	Yes
Commissioner Aaron Mayes	Present?	Yes

Please click on the link below for the agenda archive.

Commission Agenda Website: <https://www.snco.us/commission/agendas.asp>

Feature evaluated	Yes	No	Comments
Did the meeting start on time?	X		
Reason for absent members?			N/A
Was the agenda available at the meeting?	X		
Were any non-agenda items discussed?		X	

Did it appear that any agenda items were discussed prior to the meeting?		X	
Were there any amendments to the agenda?		X	
Were members courteous to each other and the public?	X		
Were media representatives present?	X		
Did any member recuse?		X	
Was there an executive session? If so, for what reason and what length?	X		Three-part executive session for the stated purposes of (1) employer-employee negotiations with the Fraternal Order of the Police; (2) attorney-client privilege discussions regarding the opioid settlement, and (3) discussing personnel matters for a non-elected employee. Total time of 2 hours anticipated for all three
Was there a public comment period? If so who appeared and for what purpose	X		Henry McClure again voicing his ongoing complaints about the economic development contractor, Go Topeka.

**Discussion of Issues:**

<b>Issue:</b>	<b>Action taken:</b>	<b>Relevance to LWV</b>	<b>Recommended</b>
		<b>Positions</b>	<b>Follow-up if any</b>

<p>The Kansas Children’s Discovery Center, located in Gage Park, is scheduled to expand its building, with an anticipated doubling of the size of the museum to 30,000 square feet. Along with new square footage, the building will feature such new exhibits as a new climbing wall for children, three learning laboratory classrooms and a new multimedia gallery. The laboratory classrooms will also provide the opportunity for out-of-school child care for children.</p>	<p>Approval by the Commission was necessary, since the Children’s Discovery Center is located in Gage Park, which is owned by the County. The expansion is funded by the new Gage Park tax which was approved by the taxpayers in 2022.</p>	<p>N/A.</p>	<p>N/A</p>

Remarks: Other matters were considered by the Commission, which did not have particular relevance to any LWV of Topeka-Shawnee County concerns or issues.

Commission meeting agendas are available online both before and after the meeting at the link shown above. There currently does not appear to be any written minutes of the meeting available.

## SHAWNEE COUNTY COMMISSION MEETING: MARCH 21, 2024

Observer: Paul Post (pacmanpost@icloud.com)

Chair Kevin Cook	Present?	Yes
Commissioner Bill Riphan	Present?	Yes
Commissioner Aaron Mayes	Present?	Yes

Please click on the link below for the agenda archive.

Commission Agenda Website: <https://www.snco.us/commission/agendas.asp>

Feature evaluated	Yes	No	Comments
Did the meeting start on time?	X		
Reason for absent members?			N/A
Was the agenda available at the meeting?	X		
Were any non-agenda items discussed?		X	
Did it appear that any agenda items were discussed prior to the meeting?		X	
Were there any amendments to the agenda?		X	
Were members courteous to each other and the public?	X		
Were media representatives present?	X		
Did any member recuse?		X	
Was there an executive session? If so, for what reason and what length?	X		20 minute executive session for the stated purpose of discussing personnel matters for a non-elected employee.
Was there a public comment period? If so who appeared and for what purpose	X		James Bolden, Jr., owner of Paradigm II, LLC, located in Topeka, and listed as a land development company on Linked In. Mr. Bolden complained that Go Topeka/Greater Topeka Partnership did not understand or support the needs of small businesses in Topeka.

**Discussion of Issues:**

<b>Issue:</b>	<b>Action taken:</b>	<b>Relevance to LWV Positions</b>	<b>Recommended Follow-up if any</b>
<p>Voucher payments totaling \$3,647,120.79, of which \$850,000 was the 7<sup>th</sup> out of 10 payments to the Kansas Department of Transportation to cover the rebuilding of the Willard Bridge</p>	<p>Approved.</p>	<p>N/A.</p>	
<p>Public hearing on Resolution No. 2024-20 authorizing the issuance of single family mortgage revenue bonds not to exceed \$20 million. The new issue was recommended by Bob Perry, bond counsel, to assist first time home buyers in obtaining a mortgage, and is the result, in part, of higher mortgage interest rates in the market.</p>	<p>Approved. Mr. Perry, bond counsel, noted that the county would never become liable in the event of default on the bonds, and that no taxpayer money is used to fund the bonds. These types of bonds have not been issued since 2008 due to low mortgage interest rates until the past year.</p>	<p>Does the issuance of these bonds assist in the current needs for low and middle income housing? Are there any studies or reports which support this concept?</p>	


Remarks: Other matters were considered by the Commission, which did not have particular relevance to any LWV of Topeka-Shawnee County concerns or issues.

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**USD 501 School Board Meeting**

**April 4, 2024**

**Observer: Annie Tietze**

Student of the Month: Jaydah Watson from Highland Park High School. The student is selected by the building principal based on academic scholarship and other criteria including community service and interscholastic accomplishments.

Paraprofessional Appreciation Day: Serves as a formal recognition of the contributions made by paraprofessionals to the education and well-being of students.

Executive Session

Strategic plan goal pillar: 2 boys and girls basketball teams and coaches recognized by the board and leadership for recent accomplishments and honors at the State Tournament.

Highland Park: Honored for submitting the most applications for testing ACT. HPHS what one of 27 schools nationwide and the only Kansas school named a School of Excellence.

## **Topeka City Council Meeting**

**March 19, 2024**

**Observer: Vicki Arnett**

All city council members, including the mayor, were present in chambers.

The mayor read recognition proclamations recognizing Theatre in Our Schools Month. Both Topeka High School theatre and Topeka West High school theatre were recognized.

The council passed two resolutions. The first was a conditional use permit to allow for the extension of a short-term rental lodging. The second was a conditional use permit to allow the city to replace the sanitary sewer pump station at Billard airport.

The council also approved a final plat at Southland subdivision to allow for right-of-way and easement.

The council heard a presentation from the Utilities Dept. on the 2025-2034 Capital Improvement Plan and 2025-2027 Capital Improvement Budget.

Budget discussion will continue through April.

The council heard a presentation by Deputy Mayor Dobler to establish a reserve fund of unassigned general fund monies of 20% of the budget expenditures. More discussion will continue throughout the budget process.

Three members of the public spoke during public comments:

A representative from Topeka JUMP requested the council utilize the affordable housing trust fund by appointing a committee.

A social work student from Washburn testified about how the Topeka bus system is failing her clients. She spoke to the difficulty of clients and agencies providing free or reduced priced fares due to the requirement that the rider obtain a certified statement from a physician they are disabled. She also requested expansion of the service into the evening for both WU students and others. She has also testified before the Topeka Metropolitan Transit Authority Board.

The third person spoke about high real estate taxes and the need to revise the JEDO interlocal agreement.

Council remarks included the Harlem Globe Trotters return to Topeka, the retirement at the Fire Department, the big St. Patrick's Day parade, concerns with emergency

management tornado sirens going off on Wednesday, one council member was on vacation during a boil water advisory in the city he was visiting.

The mayor made remarks about the law enforcement presence during the parade and how that keeps us safe from a possible mass shooting at events like the parade.

There was a need for an executive session to discuss city manager applicants.

## **Topeka City Council Meeting**

**April 9, 2024**

**Observer: Vicki Arnett**

All city council members, including the mayor, were present in city council chambers.

The mayor made a proclamation declaring May 1 Law Day in Topeka.

The council heard a presentation from the Topeka Sustainability Advisory Board. The board for the fifth year requested a full-time sustainability coordinator. The response to the request was very disappointing. Only Council member Valdivia Alcala commented and she asked the board to come back in “six months” with “more tangible information” on what a coordinator could do for the city. A Boy Scout troop appeared and testified in support of the Sustainability coordinator.

The council approved a vacation of a landscaped island in McFarland Farms division at the request of the homeowner’s association.

The council approved a resolution to repair the 21<sup>st</sup> and Topeka Blvd. intersection. This will close the intersection for about 4-6 months. Topeka Blvd. between 21<sup>st</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> will also be repaired. This is one of the detours due to construction on Burlingame Rd. which is also closed.

The council approved curb and gutter and other road repair in Hi-Crest area.

The council approved \$500,000 in additional funding for Hotel Topeka. The vote was 7-3 with council members Banks, Ortiz and Valdivia Alcala voting no.

The council suspended the rules and voted to approve the non-action item to purchase a backhoe for the Topeka Cemetery.

The council continued the discussion of the 2025-2034 Capital Improvement Plan and 2025-2027 Capital Improvement Budget. Council member Duncan indicated he would

be proposing an amendment to add Topeka Performing Arts Center to the CIP plan and budget.

Four people spoke during public comments:

-Two spoke about living conditions at the north Topeka trailer park where they live.

-The Topeka Sierra Club spoke in support of the Topeka Sustainability Advisory Board's request.

-Another person spoke about Hotel Topeka financing.

The city manager announced he has received two grants to support assisting diverse communities apply to do business with the city.

It was announced that 1<sup>st</sup> and Kansas Ave. along with 2<sup>nd</sup> will be closing soon. Detours will be marked but truck traffic will increase downtown.

River Road is closed for over a year.

There were many thank you to staff and the public about the interest shown in a city manager candidates.

Council member Valdivia Alcala remarked about the effort to assist the trailer park residents.

Council member Miller announced that June 1 is learn to row event and he intends to participate.

April 15, common consumption begins in downtown and NOTO.

The mayor and council member Miller remarked about the scouts that appeared to testify in support of Topeka Sustainability Advisory Board and how participating in youth sports is so important.