

## February 2025 Observer Reports

### **Topeka City Council Meeting**

**December 17, 2024**

**Observer: Vicki Arnett**

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

The council heard a presentation from public works dept. regarding winter operations. The city is using a more “environmentally friendly” brine mixture which they are able to make in house reducing cost.

The council heard a presentation from Cox Communications regarding a recent federal grant application Cox made to enhance connectivity in Topeka.

Most of the agenda was passage of routine items. Council deferred until Jan. 2025 an item proposed by city manager to allow for the deputy city manager to sign specific contracts in lieu of city manager. Council members generally did not feel they had enough information.

After much discussion, council approved a resolution regarding Lauren’s Bay special assessments allowing for negotiated forgiveness with the developer. Council member Valdivia Alcala voted no.

Council members discussed the trash service failures at Lou McGinnis’ property. The council reported the new city governance review commission will begin meeting on Jan. 8, 10:00 a.m.-11:30 a.m. at the Holiday Bldg.

There was a need for an executive session to discuss legal liability matters.

### **Topeka City Council Meeting**

**January 14, 2025**

**Observer: Vicki Arnett**

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

The council heard a presentation from staff on progress toward minority, women and disadvantaged business enterprises utilization goals for 2025. Staff reported that minority businesses represented 43% of bids placed on city contracts, but this represented only 2% of project funds allotted. Staff reported minority business are often sub-contractors building capacity and they will focus on bringing that information forward.

The council heard a presentation which was a review of the ordinances governing the Joint Economic Development Organization (JEDO). It is a requirement of the ordinance that funding be considered per Go Topeka recommendations. Council member Duncan questioned when the contract agreement with Go Topeka was to be renegotiated as well as the interlocal agreement with Shawnee County for

governance of JEDO. City Attorney did not have the date, however, she committed to placing a discussion on the council agenda prior to the date.

The council heard a presentation by the Prevention and Resiliency Services (PARS) funding overview. PARS fulfill the Safe Streets contract to provide National Night Out Against Crime annually. PARS has reported they are unable to continue the work within their current capacity. The council input was to place this item on agenda for staff to report options to continue National Night Out Against Crime.

One action agenda item was withdrawn from the published agenda. The item related to Hotel Topeka.

The council approved by a 6-4 vote to expend funds to repair the elevator at Hotel Topeka. Council members Miller, Banks, Valdivia Alcala and Ortiz voted No.

Council member Kell was elected Deputy Mayor in 2025.

The only discussion item on the agenda was that the Boys and Girls Club of Topeka has asked that the Strategies Against Violence Everywhere (SAVE) program be reassigned to a different entity. The Finance dept. reported that a new non-profit SAVE, Inc. assume responsibility. Many council members had multiple questions and reported grave concerns about this action and proceeding to fund a program without evidence-based practices. No action was taken.

Multiple people were signed up for public comment. Only 6 people testified on topics which mostly included complaints and requests to the city to do something about the landlord Lew McGinnis. He owns 35 properties in Topeka. One person testified who was an attorney representing him. League member Danielle Tremlow reported information to the council on inequities in Topeka including high taxes on those who live here and that 40% of Topeka's work force does not live in Topeka or Shawnee County. Another public comment expressed concerns for how Topeka city council appropriates funds in favor of business and at the expense of residents. He recommended that citizens be added as voting members of JEDO and/or that a JEDO citizens advisory council be developed.

The city clerk responded to a question from Council member Duncan about the local governance council which was scheduled to meet during the snow storm week. The council did not meet and is rescheduled for Jan. 28.

City council members commented regarding the snow clean up and in response to so many housing complaints about trash. The mayor promised there would be continued discussion and after actions as a result.

There was a need for an executive session to discuss open records law with legal staff.

## **Board of County Commission**

**01-09-2025**

Elvera Johnson, observer

All 3 Commissioners present

Commissioners approved the consent agenda, voucher payments, correction orders and the annual renewal of Industrial Revenue Bond Tax Exemptions.

For Public Works, they approved a 5-year lease contract for three small 4X4 SUVs.

For Stormont Vail Events Center they approved awarding RFP for modular sport flooring surface and another RFP for resurfacing and repairing the existing basketball court to a different company. Both projects will use Capital Outlay Funds.

Commissioners acknowledged receipt of the official letter of resignation from Larry Mah, County Treasurer.

For the County Counselor, they approved amending a lease to include transfer of ownership of property.

No public comment was offered.

In Administrative Communications: Communications announced that they now have a podcast on the website. Commissioners thanked folks who worked during the snow storm to keep roads clean. They recognized Cindy Beck's many years of work as County Clerk and mentioned her retirement party this afternoon.

No Executive Session was called.