

Observer Reports for the August Voter

Topeka City Council Meeting-June 17, 2025

Observer: Vicki Arnett

Three members were absent, Council members Banks, Dobler and Valdivia Alcala.

The council heard two presentations updates:

They heard an update of the 2026 Downtown Business Improvement District.

The focus of the report was about progress but also on the cooperation between the police, downtown and the unhoused.

The council also heard an update from the new management staff at the Topeka Performing Arts Center. They will kick off new programming July 12.

The council accepted the report of the Citizen Government Review Committee's recommendations. There are seven recommended actions for the city council to consider. The council accepted the report and will assign the recommendations to the policy and finance committee to consider ordinances and policy change priorities. ***The LWVTSC was a conferee before the committee and played a large role in multiple recommendations before the council.***

The council approved changes to the anti-discrimination ordinances and policies as required by the federal administration. Council member Kell voted no. There were two speakers in opposition to these changes.

The agenda was mostly routine.

Public Comment:

Two persons spoke in opposition to the truck stop proposed for 6th and Fairlawn.

One speaker spoke in opposition to the anti-discrimination changes made and also about ICE raids.

One speaker spoke in support of the Citizen Government Review Committee's work.

Topeka City Council Meeting-July 1, 2025

Observer-Vicki Arnett

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

The mayor recognized the achievements of a Topeka West High School student's athletic accomplishments; Adrian Lehman.

The council heard a service update from Topeka Metropolitan Transit Authority specifically about the Metro on Demand Service. The service is being cut back to a reduced designated area, basically eliminating the 29th and Croco area. The out of area rate will be 15.00 compared to the current 6.00 rate. Many in a nearby apartment complex are reliant on the MOD. ***The TMTA director reported the agency and the board are focused on improving the ridership experience for those who ride the bus, not residents who are not reliant on the bus. The TMTA does not appear to define part of their role to reduce vehicle traffic and gas emissions.***

An additional presentation provided some information about the city's dependence on utility franchise fees as a source of revenue. This dependence creates a disincentive to support energy conservation. The more ratepayers pay for gas bills, the more franchise money the city collects.

After much discussion, the council sent the proposed truck stop development at 6th and Fairlawn back to the planning commission for further study, review and public input.

City council chambers were packed with those observing who are in opposition to this development.

Public Comment:

One was in opposition to Hotel Topeka and Go Topeka's plans for the AT&T building.

The other comment provided some clarification on the 6th and Fairlawn proposal.

Topeka City Council Meeting-July 8, 2025

Observer: Vicki Arnett

All council members, including the mayor, were present in chambers or on zoom, except for council member Kell.

The council appointed Lindsay Freeman to the Topeka Sustainability Advisory Board and Joy Grimes to the Shawnee County Juvenile Corrections Advisory Board.

The council heard a presentation from the Gage Park Improvement Authority. The authority president informed the council that the board had retained the services of a public accountant to maintain the finances due to the tax-based funding. The ordinances which created the authority did not speak to the professional responsibility and management of the funds. All members of the board are volunteer.

The council heard a presentation from the All Hands-on Deck Campaign to end chronic homelessness. Plans are being finalized to open a pilot low barrier shelter in Oct. at Let's Help.

The agenda was mostly routine with the exception of setting a public hearing on the ***creation of a Reinvestment Housing Incentive District to create low-and moderate-income housing.*** Although approved for public hearing, ***Council member Valdivia Alcalá requested the entry of Danielle Tremlow's email into the record next week in order to discuss public concerns for this method of financing through tax breaks housing which is not affordable to the average citizen of Topeka.***

The council recognized Dr. Perez's one year of service as city manager.

Public Comment:

One person spoke during public comments and summarized why he is running for mayor.

Mayor Padilla reminded the public that public comments which are campaign related are not allowed.

Executive Session:

There was a need for an executive session to discuss employer/employee health plan negotiations with one or more unions.

SEAMAN SCHOOL BOARD MEETING, JUNE 9, 2025

Patti Bishop pattibishop908@gmail.com

School Website <https://www.seamanschools.org/>

Under Board Docs

Superintendent Mr. Brad Wilson

School Board Members

President Michelle Caudill

Dianna Brodine

Donna McGinity

Kyle McNorton

Chris Travis

Christi Weiler

Braden Werner

Featured Evaluated	YES	NO	Comments
Did the meeting start on time?	x		
Was the agenda available	x		
Were any items not on agenda discussed?		X	
Did it appear that agenda items were discussed ahead of time?		X	
Were there any items amended?		X	
Were members courteous to each other and the public?	x		
Were media members present?		X	
Did any members recuse?		X	
Was there an executive session and for what reason? How long?	x		Negotiations for 10 minutes
Was there a public comment period? If so who appeared?	x	X	
Was this group relevance to LWV?			

Board of County Commissioners-6/30/25

Elvera Johnson, observer

2 of 3 Commissioners present-Commissioner Cook was absent.

A representative from the Kansas Association of Mental Health Centers shared a brief summary of mental health services in Kansas and Shawnee County. The loss of Menninger Foundation and Topeka State Hospital greatly decreased mental health services in the county. A new facility is opening in Wichita. In Shawnee County, mental health services are being provided in the jail. Local communities are expected to provide the services once offered by state institutions. The County Commission is working toward that goal.

The consent agenda, voucher payments and correction orders were approved.

Commissioners acknowledged that Candis Stiles from the Extension Council will be planning on a budget hearing on July 7.

The Commission announced the resignation of Bev Masters, Treasurer of Williamsport Township and appointment of Kelby Robinson as her replacement.

Corrections:

Commissioners approved a contract between Family Service and Guidance Center and the Juvenile Detention Center for behavioral health and substance abuse and treatment.

They also acknowledged the purchase of ballistic vests for officers.

Parks + Recreation:

Commissioners approved a contract with the Topeka Blues Society for a concert on July 4 as part of the all-day celebration at Lake Shawnee. T

hey also agreed to the filling of the Marketing/Communications supervisor position by a well-qualified candidate.

Solid Waste:

Noted the holiday on Friday, July 4 and doubling up of pickups on Wednesday, July 2.

Public Comment: No public comment was offered.

Commissioners announced budget hearings beginning July 3.

Executive Session:

No Executive Session was called.

Board of County Commissioners-6/23/25

Elvera Johnson, observer

2 of 3 Commissioners present-Commissioner Riphahn was not present. No explanation.

Consent agenda, voucher payments and correction orders approved.

Corrections:

Commissioners approved a contract for the continued maintenance of the body scan system for the Adult Detention Center.

Approved continuation of contracts with the following community partners:

- Topeka Center for Peace and Justice mediation and restorative leadership circles
- One Heart Project for youth mentorship
- Comprehensive youth development
- Boys & Girls Club of Topeka Teen Center Program and Graduated Sanctions
- Kansas Children's Service League Oasis Program and Juvenile Intake and Assessment
- Mirror Care Clinician services
- RADAC Assessment, Care Coordination and Recovery Coaching services

Information Technology:

Approved the request to pay for the fiber relocations for the Courthouse Data Center move.

Approved hiring of an exceptionally qualified candidate for the Information Technology Application Support/Project Manager position.

Public Works:

Approved a change order for the final street paving project in Chase Subdivision No. 5 reflecting a decrease in the cost.

Sheriff's office:

Agreed to consolidate 5 contracts with Axon Enterprises for more efficiency in management.

Parks & Recreation:

Agreed to a request for proposal for construction services related to the replacement of the sewer line at Shawnee North Ballpark.

Also approved a contract and resolution for an outdoor concert at Great Overland Station on July 26.

Election Office:

Agreed to let Andrew Howell reject the previous quote for securing services to safely and securely transport election equipment. He wants to look for a better price. He reported that the state has increased the security requirements for such transports.

Public comment:

No public comment was offered.

Administrative Communications:

Parks and Recreation announced that they are still working on replacing the Spray Pad at Jackson Park and the Wave Pool at Midwest Health Aquatic Center.

Commissioner Cook announced that he will not be present at the June 30 meeting.

Executive Session:

No Executive Session was called.

Board of County Commissioners-7/28/25

Elvera Johnson, observer

All 3 Commissioners were present.

Routines were quickly completed: Approval of consent agenda, voucher payments and correction orders.

Public Works:

Commissioners approved request to refill the maintenance position that had been held vacant for a year. The other 2 vacant positions will continue vacant another year as a budget saving measure.

Register of Deeds:

Requested and received permission to keep the vacant electronic archiving specialist open for another year.

Health Department:

Received approval for a memorandum of understanding with United Way to serve as fiscal agent for the Early Childhood Block Grant.

Sheriff's Office:

Announced that they had accepted the only appropriate bid for use of the ARPA SLFRF Interest Funds to pay for the new 911 Console Project.

Commissioners approved a new request to construct site preparations for the Gage Park Play Land and Sky Trail. They had previously attempted to find a contractor for the whole project, but received no bids. The alternate plan is for Parks and Recreation to manage the site preparations on their own, contracting out for materials and construction related to site preparation. Then they will move on with the Play Land and Sky Trail equipment.

The Commission agreed to cancel the July 31 Work Session due to a scheduling conflict.

The remainder of the meeting consisted of long deliberations regarding the 2026 budget. The goal is to come up with a budget neutral number, avoiding, if possible, an increase in taxes. Most departments have submitted their plans to cut back on their initial requests. Few are actually flat. The proposed budget must be ready for a public hearing by October 1.

Corrections:

Planning to open the new Mental Health Crisis Center at Valeo by April or May of 2026. They had planned to hire 30 mental health technicians for the new facility, but are cutting it back to 20. Some will be transferred from other locations and are already being trained. Some will be hired new. Delaying the hiring of new staff by 3 months would save over \$500,000.

Law enforcement :

Reported they cannot cut back on staff or use of vehicles without compromising response time to calls. Officers who live in Shawnee County drive their vehicles home. Those who live outside of the county have to drive their own vehicles home.

Community Corrections Office:

They are required to match any grant money by 100%.

Parks and Recreation:

Could look into releasing Rossville pool to the city of Rossville.

Public Works:

They submitted a flat budget. Appraising needs to hire at least one person.

Weed Control :

Reported they need to buy chemicals.

Public Health:

Needs to hire a nurse navigator. Their costs will increase because federal and state grants have been reduced.

Technology:

Discussed the implications of changing the licensing of data use. Some users/computers have to be licensed to protect private information.

Commissioners took no action. They requested that all departments and partners have a representative present next Monday. They are to be prepared to think about cutting across the board by 4-5%. Could they cut programs, projects or people? What would be the result?

No Public comment was offered.

Administrative Communications:

The Election office announced that their costs have gone up because the governor's race and senate race are coming up. They also reminded the Commission that they will meet as the Board of Canvassers on August 18 in the election office.

Board of County Commissioners-7/14/2025

Elvera Johnson, observer

All 3 Commissioners present

Consent agenda, voucher payments and correction orders were approved.

Planning Department:

Commissioners opened a public hearing on a zoning change request to allow a small family business office to be built. No comment was offered at a previous hearing. None was offered at this public hearing. The Commission closed the hearing and approved the request.

Bond Counsel:

Commissioners approved a resolution to create Timber Ridge Subdivision Street Benefit District to authorize the construction of streets. There are 18 lots, all owned by the same person. The owner will pay the costs.

Health Department:

Commissioners approved a contract with Kansas Children's Service League to provide access to funds for Outreach, Prevention and Early Intervention Services through June 30, 2026.

They also acknowledged the budget revisions to the Kansas Department of Health and Environment grant, as the county was not awarded as much as was requested.

Parks + Recreation:

Approved a contract agreement with Green Care Lawn & Landscape for the Family Park Trail construction project. Partial funding comes from a KDWP recreational trail Program.

Approved Advertising/Sponsorship agreements with Mercury Broadband and with Jimmy John's.

Approved several contracts for Gage Park improvements—a new sand volleyball court and equipment for the Gage Park Playland Improvements project.

Emergency Management:

Approved the purchase order for an upgraded Tactical Communications Vehicle and acknowledged the receipt of the annual First Responder Grant awards.

Human Resources:

Welcomed the new Shawnee County Director of Facilities Management.

Corrections:

Approved a third amendment to the contract with KBS construction for construction of the mental health living units within the Adult Detention Center.

Solid Waste:

Approved a request for quotations for Solid Waste Management Technology Systems.

Elections Office:

Approved a contract for election equipment moving and delivery services with increased security.

Administrative Communications:

The Election Commissioner announced that the only primary elections are within Topeka City limits. They are for a city council district and the mayor. Early voting begins Monday, July 21.

Health Department:

Accepting nominations for person who has made contributions to public health.

The Commissioners spent considerable time considering and discussing a report from Audit Finance. The ideal goal would be to present a Revenue Neutral Rate.

Because of increased costs and staff raises, they would have find a place to cut 5 to 7 million dollars. Do they want to cut that much as opposed to raising taxes 1 mil? The public hearing was postponed until September 8.

No Public Comment was offered.

No Executive Session was called.