
OBSERVER REPORTS

SUBMITTED FEBRUARY 2026

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Thank you to this month's Observers: Vicki Arnett, Elvera Johnson, and Paul Post.

Topeka City Council Meeting

January 20, 2026

Observer: Vicki Arnett

All council members, including the mayor, were present either in chambers or on zoom, with the exception of council member Valdivia Alcala, who is on medical leave. Council district 8 seat is open. The council voted to approve council member Miller and Bradberry to serve on the Metropolitan Topeka

Planning Organization Policy Board. The mayor announced his appointee to the board will be council member Ortiz.

The council voted to approve council member Hiller and Banks to be voting representatives of the Joint Economic Development Organization.

Two members of the public spoke during public comments. One asked for the release of the name of the TPD officer who killed someone and the other spoke about council speaking to making Topeka a safe place for bureaucracy.

Administrative comments included announcing that a special budget meeting will be held next Tues. Jan. 27 from 5:00 pm to 8:00 pm, stay safe during the cold weather, including a request for more public information regarding the location of warming centers, congratulations for the wonderful MLK celebrations and a reminder that applications will close Mon. Jan. 28 for council district 8 vacancy.

There was a need for an executive session to discuss matters of attorney client privilege.

Intergovernmental Cooperation Council

January 21, 2026

Observer: Paul Post

The Intergovernmental Cooperation Council (ICC) met on Tuesday, January 21, 2026, at 7:20 a.m. at the Vogel Room at the Washburn University Student Union. The ICC consists of representatives from the following local entities: Unified School Districts (Seaman, Auburn-Washburn, Shawnee Heights, Silver Lake, Topeka), City of Topeka, Shawnee County, Topeka Metropolitan Transit Authority, Metropolitan Topeka Airport Authority, Topeka & Shawnee County Public Library, and Washburn University. Hosting of the meeting rotates annually among the members, with the host for 2026 being Mayor Spencer Duncan, representing the City. Meetings are monthly, on the third Tuesday. The stated purpose of the ICC is to promote cooperation between and share information among these entities.

The speaker for the January meeting was Molly Howley, selected last summer as the chief executive officer of the Greater Topeka Partnership. Ms. Howley explained that GTP is an umbrella organization for the Topeka Chamber of Commerce, Go Topeka which promotes local development, Visit Topeka which is the local visitors' bureau, and Downtown Topeka, Inc. She talked about how each of these organizations work together to promote and better Topeka and Shawnee County.

Shawnee County Commission Meeting

January 22, 2026

Observer: Paul Post

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

Please click 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 members recuse?		X	
Was there an executive session? If	X		See remarks below.

so, for what reason and what length?			
Was there a public comment period? If so, who appeared and for what purpose?		X	No one signed up to speak.

Discussion of Issues:

Issue:	Action taken:	Relevance to LWV Positions	Recommended Follow-up if any
See below as to Open Meeting discussion.	N/A	See below as to Open Meeting discussion.	Ongoing

Remarks:

For 2026, Bill Riphan was elected chair, with Kevin Cook as vice chair.

Regular meetings are now being held on Thursday, rather than Monday. Work sessions are now being held on Monday, rather than Thursday.

Executive session: For attorney-client consultation regarding litigation. There was no mention made of the litigation being discussed. The Kansas Open Meeting Act would appear to require at least this. The second item in the executive session was to discuss acquisition of real property. Any motion to recess for a closed or executive meeting shall include a statement of (1) the justification for closing the meeting, (2) the subjects to be discussed during the closed or executive meeting, and (3) the time and place at which the open meeting shall resume. A 2003 Kansas Attorney General opinion states that: "The justification for the executive session is an explanation of what is to be discussed (without revealing confidential information.)" Stating that a matter for executive session is covered by the attorney-client privilege does not state the subject to be discussed. It is this writer's opinion that the commission is not following the Open Meetings Act.

- During administrative communications, Treasurer Susan Duffy noted that there are now fees for electric vehicles in 2026, passed by the Legislature in 2025, which are designed to replace the highway gas tax that are paid by gas and diesel vehicles. The amount of the tax is determined by the type of vehicle, i.e., automobile, SUV, or truck.
- 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. Currently there does not appear to be any written minutes of the meeting available.

Shawnee County Commission Meeting

January 22, 2026

Observer: Elvera Johnson

All 3 Commissioners Present

Following the routine beginning items, the Commission approved the annual renewal of Industrial Revenue Bond Tax Exemptions for seven properties.

Solid Waste: Commissioners approved bids for purchase of commercial containers and roll-off containers, funded by user fees.

Human Resources: Commissioners approved the Memorandum of Understanding with the union representing Solid Waste workers to be in effect from 2026-2028. They also approved the appointment of a Grievance Committee.

Information Technology: Approved renewal of a security monitoring platform for employee computers, a 2-year renewal of Cloudflare, the public website, and the computer platform that is used for Tax Administration.

The County Counselor reported that Reser's Fine Foods is planning to expand and they are requesting a tax exemption.

A Public Hearing is being set for February 12 to consider the request.

The Election Office is applying for a state grant to implement security requirements for elections. The state will refund 90% of the cost to implement the requirements if the grant is approved.

Parks and Recreation: Commissioners approved two contracts for constructing a new building for the Gage Park Carousel. The carousel will be closed for approximately a year. The new facility will allow the carousel to be used all year. Revamping of the carousel itself will be a part of the project. The plan is to have the carousel ready to go again sometime in 2027.

No Public Comment was offered.

Administrative Communication: The County Treasurer announced that the amount of personal property tax on certain vehicles will be raised this year. She also announced that special license plates for FFA members, hunters, and supporters of Route 66 will be available for a fee. Let the office know if you wish to apply for a special license plate.

Parks and Recreation: Announced that Topeka will be hosting Parks and Recreation professionals from around Kansas next week. Also, Topeka Parks and Recreation is working on their Master Plan and will be ready to present it to the Commission soon.

Planning: Announced they met with the planning committee for solar energy and no action was taken. They will meet again in February and may present it to the Commission in March.

An Executive session was called to meet with the county attorney on two matters: One involves litigation and the other involves the acquisition of real property.

Shawnee County Commission Meeting

January 29, 2026

Observer: Elvera Johnson

All 3 Commissioners present

In unfinished business, Commissioners heard a (required) second reading of joint Resolutions to exchange Boswell Park and certain gymnasiums at Central Park for use by USD 501. Approved.

After approving consent agenda, voucher payments and correction orders, they approved renewals for tax exemption incentives for 10 companies, including: Torgeson Electric, Two Reser's plants, Mars, Hill's Pet, Global Grain, Frito Lay, Fairview Pet Food, Fairview Corn, and Big Heart Pet Brands. Commissioner Cook observed that some of these companies are nearing the end of the 10-year tax-exemption incentive.

Authorized a 2026 Cereal Malt Beverage License to Gastrip Store at 550 SE Croco.

Information Technology: Authorized the purchase of four Ruckus switches.

Corrections: Renewed an agreement with the City of Topeka to provide an inmate work crew and supervisor through the calendar year 2026 with the city paying all expenses.

Human Resources: Approved price list adjustments for testing rate increases, the first increase since 2003.

No public comment.

Administrative Communication: Human Resources reported they will begin taking applications for summer employment.

Commissioners noted that this is Kansas Day. Kansas joined the union 165 years ago. Local Government Day was observed recently.

No Executive Session was called.

Topeka City Council Meeting

February 3, 2026

Observer: Vicki Arnett

All members of the council were present either in person or on zoom, including the mayor. Council member Valdivia Alcala continues on medical leave.

The council approved several development agreements at California Crossing 29 th and California and Project View at 6 th and Van Buren. The council approved amending parking garage fee rates to include alternative rates at business and tenant request.

The council interviewed three candidates to complete the term in council district 8. Murray McGee was selected unanimously.

There was one public comment regarding economic development.

There was no need for an executive session.

Shawnee County Commission Meeting

February 5, 2026

Observer: Paul Post

Chair Bill Riphan	Present?	Yes
Commissioner Aaron Mayes	Present?	No
Commissioner Kevin Cook	Present?	Yes

Please click 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?		X	No explanation of Mayes' absence
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 members recuse?		X	
Was there an executive session? If so, for what reason and what length?		X	
Was there a public comment period? If so, who appeared and for what purpose?	X		Carol Marples, a frequent public commenter, appeared to complain about proposed expenditures for the Topeka Regional Airport.

Discussion of Issues:

Issue:	Action taken:	Relevance to LWV Positions	Recommended Follow-up if any
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Remarks:

- During administrative communications, a representative from the Shawnee County Extension Office advised that tax preparation assistance was being provided at the Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library and other sites.
- 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. Currently there does not appear to be any written minutes of the meeting available.

Topeka Sustainability Advisory Board

February 6, 2026

Observer: Vicki Arnett

The board did have a quorum present for decision making. Michaela Saunders and Kelly Magerkurth are serving as co-chairs this year.

The board discussed plans to best use the consultant grant. General consensus was to work directly with the city manager.

The board will present their annual report to city council on April 21.

The board discussed with the Topeka League of Women Voters advocacy for large scale solar installations in Shawnee County.

Topeka City Council Meeting

February 10, 2026

Observer: Vicki Arnett

All members of city council, including the mayor were present either in chambers or on line, except council member Valdivia Alcala who is on medical leave. Council district 8 position is vacant until the candidate is sworn in next week.

The agenda was very routine including development agreements and proposed street maintenance projects. There were several public comments which referenced the support of housing development downtown that is unaffordable for the average Topeka resident.

There was a need for an executive session to discuss matters of litigation.

Shawnee County Commission Meeting

February 12, 2026

Observer: Elvera Johnson

All 3 Commissioners present

A member of TARC gave a report on 2025 Winter Wonderland at Lake Shawnee Campground. Income was up from 2024. She thanked Parks and Recreation and the Commission for their cooperation in this annual effort. The Commissioners thanked TARC for their work in this event, and especially for their work in the community.

The Consent Agenda included an amendment to the construction contract for the behavioral health unit for Department of Corrections to increase the maximum price. Consent Agenda approved, as well as voucher payments and correction orders.

A public hearing was held to offer Reser's Fine Foods exemption from taxation for economic development. They are expanding a warehouse and expect to add 30 new jobs. No pro or con public comment was offered. Approved.

For Department of Corrections, Commissioners approved renewal of a contract with Halley Counseling Services at the Juvenile Detention Center. They also agreed to the need to request proposals for connecting the Work Crew Building to the city water system for fire suppression.

For Noxious Weeds, they approved the request to fill a vacant Applicator II position with an experienced candidate.

For Information Technology, they approved the purchase of 100 personal computers with commercial license capacity.

There has been some shuffling of duties between the Planning Department and the Health Department. The Planning Department is now the Land Use & Development Department. For the Land Use & Development Department a position has been reclassified from a Planning & Development Coordinator to an Environmental Health & Program Coordinator. The Health Department has reclassified an Account Clerk II position to an Administrative Assistant. The Commission approved these changes.

Commissioner Riphahn appointed Jack Calcutt to the Shawnee County Parks + Recreation Advisory Board. Commissioner Cook appointed Trevor Burdett to the Stormont Vail Events Center Advisory Board. Commissioner Riphahn announced that there would be no work session on 2-16.

No Public Comment was offered.

An Executive Session was called for consultation with an attorney. Among issues to be discussed are mental health services for correctios, AMR contract, and a conflict contract.