
OBSERVER REPORTS

SUBMITTED APRIL 2026

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

Topeka City Council Meeting

March 10, 2026

Observer: Vicki Arnett

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

The council heard a presentation from the Topeka Housing Authority. The council agenda was routine except for many questions on discussion agenda regarding proposed affordable housing at 21st and Urish at an expected rent of 2499.00 per month. Questions were also asked of the deputy city manager regarding very complicated funding plan for the renovation of 47 units of public housing. The funding would be a part of a tax increment financing district and taxes would be forgiven for an extended period of time for the developer. Council member McGee asked about the tax abatement being stair stepped down over time as is usual with this type of financing.

The council also approved the final step of finalizing a Community Improvement District at Hotel Topeka.

Public comment included someone who paid 400.00 to the city for an open record request. The council was very concerned to learn this. Another public comment included concerns for city contracting process.

No executive session was needed.

Topeka City Council Meeting

March 17, 2026

Observer: Vicki Arnett

All members of the council were present either in chambers or on line. Council members Miller and Hoferer were late and council member Ortiz had audio trouble participating.

The council heard a presentation regarding the 2025 4th quarter budget. Council members were concerned the budget did not include the CFO position as requested.

The council changed the funding plans for funding of NIA priorities. This will allow more flexibility both in the budget and by the NIAs.

The council also discussed changes to the ordinance allowing for the placement of property liens due to non-payment of water utility bills. Many council members spoke in opposition to this proposal.

Five members of the public spoke in opposition to the proposed rezoning in the 25th and Bellview area. They did not feel the planning commission heard or responded appropriately to their concerns and passed the ordinance anyway.

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

Shawnee County Commission

March 19, 2026

Observer: Paul Post

Please click on the link below for the agenda archive.

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

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

Feature evaluated	Yes	No	Comments
Did the meeting start on time?	X		
Reason for absent members?	X		
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		See below as to Public Hearing on request to vacate a portion of Hershell Road.

Continued: Shawnee County Commission

March 19, 2026
Observer: Paul Post

Discussion of Issues:

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

Remarks:

Public Hearing: during the meeting, a public hearing was called to discuss Resolution No. R2026034, which proposed the vacating of a portion of Hershell Road in Monmouth Township that passes through an existing quarry operated by Midwest Materials. The road is a low maintenance road, and safety issues apparently exist due to the road running through an active quarry site. Midwest Materials’ attorney, Lee Hendricks, appeared and argued for vacating the road. Brian Jacques, also a local attorney, appeared on behalf of his client, the Hulbert Trust, claiming that the client relied on the road for access to its property. Mr. Hendricks noted that there was another existing road which allowed access. Monmouth Township appeared by one of its trustees, and although it had first recommended approval of the vacating request, had changed its mind. The commission voted to continue the public hearing to April 16 to allow commissioners to actually visit the area to determine what would be the best course of action.

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

March 26, 2026

Observer: Elvera Johnson

Following routine beginning business, the Register of Deeds received approval for the purchase of 6 personal computers for the Land Use and Development Department.

The Department of Corrections received approval for a pilot program for youth in the Juvenile Intensive Supervised Probation program. Ten to eleven individuals will receive therapy from Taylor Consulting and Wellness.

Commissioners approved a contract for the purchase of 36 laptops and 11 docking stations. The plan is to get ahead of coming price increases in April.

In Public Comment, five individuals from Wakarusa expressed concerns about very loud music beginning at 7:00 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays and going to 2 or 3 a.m. It comes from a sale barn that calls itself an event venue. Sometimes the noise vibrates houses as far away as a half mile. There are also strobe lights coming out of open doors and windows. Joni from Land use and development said that there are several issues they are looking into it. It appears that they are in violation of zoning laws for one. County Counsel said that they might use the nuisance ordinance to file complaints. Officials are working on the problem, but changing the zoning takes some time. Neighbors being disturbed at night and early morning are encouraged to call the sheriff.

There was no Administrative Communication.

An Executive Session was called to consult with an attorney regarding County property and to discuss non-elected personnel.

Shawnee County Commission

April 2, 2026

Observer: Paul Post

Please click on the link below for the agenda archive.

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

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

Feature evaluated	Yes	No	Comments
Did the meeting start on time?	X		
Reason for absent members?	X		
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		See below.
Was there a public comment period? If so, who appeared and for what purpose?	X		See below.

Continued: Shawnee County Commission

April 2, 2026
Observer: Paul Post

Discussion of Issues:

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

Remarks:

Public comment: Henry McClure, a local real estate agent and developer, was present to talk about “taxpayer abuse” in the way tax dollars were spent by the county. He was particularly critical of the Topeka Metropolitan Airport Authority, but did not otherwise have specific examples of how tax dollars were being wasted. Jack Halford, a Shawnee County resident and landowner, also spoke about future tax increases and that if legislation passed allowing a small percentage of taxpayers to protest tax increases, the Commission could expect there to be regular requests for such increases to be put to a vote by the county residents. (Note: Governor Laura Kelly vetoed House Bill 2745 on April 8, 2026, which would have allowed a 10% petition threshold for voters to challenge local government property tax increases. On April 10, 2026, the House did not move to reconsider the veto, meaning the bill did not pass.)

Executive session: the chair announced that there was a need for an executive session for (1) attorney-client discussions concerning the Maner Conference Center; (2) to discuss financial affairs that involved a trade secrets and/or corporate regulations; and (3) to discuss personnel matters regarding a non-elected official.

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 Council

April 3, 2026

Observer: Vicki Arnett

There was not a quorum present so no votes were taken.

The board heard a presentation from Jason Tryon, the newly appointed director of Public Works. He presented a summary of three recent reports of interest to the board. The first was the EV Pilot Study, initiated by the manager. The study reviewed the feasibility of replacing city fleet vehicles with alternative fuel source vehicles. The study did not include police vehicles due to the lack of charging time; e.g. always in use. The city has also been in discussion with Evergy to provide charging stations for city use as well as public use. The Topeka Shawnee County public library has requested to be a location. The city has budgeted to replace 6 vehicles in the next year; 2 trucks and 4 vehicles. One of the vehicles is expected to arrive in the next month. Using alternative fuels will save 2115 tons of greenhouse gas emissions.

The next report was the America in Bloom Report. This report was commissioned by the Bring Back the Boulevard group. The recommendations in the report focused on green spaces, native plants, that the city conduct an urban tree study and develop a climate action plan.

The next report is the KDHE grant which conducted an energy audit of the Law Enforcement Center, City Hall/TPAC, Holliday Bldg., TFD administration building and TFD fire stations 1-12. These are most of the buildings which are occupied during the day. The audit was detailed in recommending caulking, window replacement and roof top solar for buildings in need of roof replacement. Director Tryon reported the plan is to conduct roof support work during planning to replace older roofs and install solar panels.

Topeka City Council Meeting

April 4, 2026

Observer: Vicki Arnett

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

The council approved the appointment of Stephanie Lucatero to the Topeka Landmarks Commission and Diana Malott to the Topeka Americans with Disabilities Act. Advisory Board.

The council heard a presentation from the Topeka Metropolitan Transit Authority. The TMTA plans to integrate 7 new EV transit vans and 4 EV buses into their fleet of vehicles.

The council also heard a presentation from the Washburn University Student Government Association. The mayor mentioned his plans to implement a Youth Advisory Council.

The agenda was routine and included budget discussion. The council defeated a resolution authorizing commercial real estate sale of an identified brown zone at 204 SW 5th St. The council also approved renewal of the contract with Kansas Legal Services for eviction defense.

Shawnee County Commission

April 9, 2026

Observer: Elvera Johnson

Consent agenda, voucher payments and corrections were quickly approved.

Land Use & Development presented a request to change the zoning classification for a parcel of land from RR-1 (Residential Reserve) to L1 (Light Industrial). A new owner was not aware of the present zoning and is now requesting new classification to fit the way it is being used. The property is at 4848 SE Adams. Employees there are doing some light industrial work. Members of the public seldom come to the site. A Public hearing was opened. No negative comment was offered. The applicant was the only one who spoke in favor. Joni Thadani of Land Use suggested deferring a decision until next week so that she can do some research on what restrictions or guidelines should be recommended. Deferred.

Public Works requested and received approval for contracts for 2 bridges on NW Valencia Road. The contracts are managed and mostly funded by Kansas Department of Transportation. The 2 bridges have different contracts because one is participating in the funding arrangement and one is not. Both, however, are subject to the same inspections. Commissioners also approved a Transportation Specialist (Traffic Regulator) position. Finally, they acknowledged completion of a project involving the Lake Sherwood Sewage Treatment System. The project took several years because as they were working, they encountered unexpected issues. Some of the cost is being reimbursed by the city of Topeka.

The Treasurer's office requested and received approval for a resolution setting a refund policy for overpayment of taxes and fees paid to the County Treasurer. Also, they approved a resolution to set a policy on uncollected delinquent taxes after 20 years, pursuant to K.S.A 79-2101. They also approved her request to retain vacant positions within the Motor Vehicle Division. She said she needs more employees so people don't have to wait so long to be served, when coming in for a license renewal.

The Election Office requested and received approval to increase the compensation for County Election Workers.

For the Health Department, they approved reclassifying a registered Dietitian position to a WIC Nutritionist. Registered Dietitians are hard to find.

For Corrections, the Commission approved a bid for the repair and activation of the Fire Line for the department's Work Crew building

Continued: Shawnee County Commission

April 9, 2026

Observer: Elvera Johnson

For Parks + Recreation, Commissioners approved a contract with Professional Engineering Consultants to perform a structural assessment of the original Gage Park Greenhouse. They approved a contract for purchasing benches for Gage Park Playland. They approved guaranteed Maximum Price for the Site Package portion of the Gage Park Carousel Renovation Project. This is the beginning earthwork, drainage and site preparation.

In Public Comment, a woman spoke to the commission about being charged for a portion of taxes that she didn't know she owed because they were owed before the property belonged to her. The County attorney said he would talk to her about it after the meeting.

In Administrative Communications, the Treasurer said that it is time to pay the 2nd half of real estate taxes, due by May 11. A Commissioner said that employees had a Bingo night to raise money for Helping Hands. Parks + Rec said the annual Tulip Festival is going on.

Monday, a Public Hearing on Solar Energy will be a part of the work session.

An Executive Session was called to discuss non-elected personnel.

Shawnee County Commission

April 13, 2026

Observer: Paul Post

Special Meeting To Consider the Proposed Solar Energy Conversion Systems Ordinance

**Addendum at end of report*

Please click on the link below for the agenda archive.

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

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

Feature evaluated	Yes	No	Comments
Did the meeting start on time?	X		
Reason for absent members?	X		
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		

Continued: Shawnee County Commission

April 13, 2026

Observer: Paul Post

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		See below concerning the proposed Solar Energy Conversions Systems Ordinance, which was the purpose of the special meeting.

Discussion of Issues:

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

Remarks:

Public comment: See addendum

Commissioner Mayes moved to reduce the acreage in the proposed ordinance as approved by the Planning Commission from 1000 acres to 640 acres. Commissioner Cook seconded the motion. The motion passed without apparent opposition from any commissioner, although this is difficult to discern as commissioners NEVER say anything when it is time to vote unless someone is voting no.

There will be announcement by the chair that a motion was approved without any audible vote. At least 39 people were present in support of the ordinance as originally approved by the Planning Commission. 17 spoke in favor. There were 4 people who provided statements in opposition.

The ordinance approved by the Planning Commission is attached as is the staff report and the signatures that our organization obtained in support of the ordinance. [Too large to attached but can be provided by email upon request.]

Paul Post presented testimony of behalf of the League, which is attached (see addendum).

Topeka City Council Meeting

April 14, 2026

Observer: Vicki Arnett

All members of council, including the mayor, were present either in chambers or on zoom. The mayor issued two proclamations, one recognizing Fraud Prevention Month and the second recognizing Take Action for Autism.

Council approved the appointment of Tony Emerson to the Metropolitan Topeka Airport Authority Board.

The council heard three presentations. The first was the annual report of the ADA Advisory Council. During this presentation council asked questions of staff regarding the Energy and Accessibility Audit funded by KDHE grant. The public works director reported the reports were not yet final.

Council heard the annual Friends of the Zoo update. This report is well worth watching the recording. The zoo sustainability and animal conservation programs are well recognized.

The council also heard a presentation from the public works and utilities director. They reviewed the issues regarding the Oakland Waste Water Treatment Plan and remediation steps. This past winter, there was a sewage spill and the buildings were closed.

The rest of the agenda was routine including discussion of the agenda.

There was no need for an executive session per the report of the Deputy Mayor. Apparently, one was under consideration however, Deputy Mayor stated she would send everyone an email and make decisions from there. This announcement does not appear to comply with open meetings requirements; however, no session was announced.

Shawnee County Commission

April 16, 2026

Observer: Paul Post

Please click on the link below for the agenda archive.

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

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

Feature evaluated	Yes	No	Comments
Did the meeting start on time?	X		
Reason for absent members?	X		
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		See below.
Was there a public comment period? If so, who appeared and for what purpose?	X		See below.

Continued: Shawnee County Commission

April 16, 2026

Observer: Paul Post

Discussion of Issues:

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

Remarks:

Public comment: A person who would only give his first name, Michael, was present to complain about what he perceived to be unconstitutional and abusive treatment while a prisoner at the jail. He said he would be filing a lawsuit against the county. He complained that he had improperly been placed on suicide watch. Justin Spiehs also spoke with similar complaints, which included alleged illegal use of force. He apparently has already filed a lawsuit against the county.

Executive session: the chair announced that there was a need for an executive session for (1) attorney-client discussions concerning the Maner Conference Center; and (2) to discuss ongoing contract negotiations on Maner Conference Center and the Metropolitan Topeka Airport Authority.

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.

ADDENDUM: Public Testimony
Shawnee County Commission Special Meeting
April 13, 2026

**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF TOPEKA AND SHAWNEE COUNTY POSITION IN SUPPORT OF
THE SOLAR ENERGY CONVERSION SYSTEMS ORDINANCE**

Good morning commissioners. My name is Paul Post, and I have been a Topeka resident for more than 50 years, not counting my four years of service in the Air Force.

I am currently serving as the vice president of the league of Women Voters of Topeka and Shawnee County Kansas. You have also seen me here at Commission meetings on a regular basis, as I am one of our designated observers at Commission meetings, in order to report back to our membership what is happening in Shawnee County government. I am pleased to speak to you briefly this morning on our support of the pending solar energy conversion ordinance which is now before you for consideration.

The League is a political grassroots network and membership organization that believes the freedom to vote is a nonpartisan issue. For more than a century, we've worked to empower voters and defend democracy, and we encourage everyone to take part in our democracy. That is why I am here today on behalf of our local league chapter, to participate in the democratic process of providing support and advocacy for this pending ordinance.

You might ask why an organization dedicated to good government and ensuring voting rights would have a position on this particular ordinance. Here is the answer. The preservation of the physical, chemical, and biological integrity of the earth's ecosystem is essential for the maximum protection of public health and the environment. The interrelationships of air, water, and land resources should be recognized in designing environmental safeguards. Beyond that, this proposed ordinance has to do with the protection of private property rights for land owners who desire to develop their land for use for what are sometimes known as "solar farms," to provide for conversion of unlimited free energy from the sun for use in our homes and businesses, and to create a stream of revenue for Shawnee County in the form of tax revenue from the solar farm owners.

Before I go further, I want to thank our Shawnee County Land Use and Development Department and its excellent director, Joni Thadani, as well as the Planning Commission and its all-volunteer membership, for their tireless and extensive work during the past two years to go about the business of developing the ordinance now before you. Together they have undertaken in-depth study of the issue, considered the pros and cons, looked at what other Kansas counties have done in this area, and prepared for your consideration the proposed ordinance now before you. They have done the necessary heavy lifting, and our league is grateful for their efforts.

Solar energy conversion systems are proven and reliable. This is a mature industry. Solar energy technology has been developing for over 180 years, starting with the discovery of the photovoltaic effect in 1839 and the first solar engines in the 1860s. Modern silicon-based solar panels were invented in 1954, and solar has been used to power satellites since 1958, evolving into a major

ADDENDUM: Public Testimony Shawnee County Commission Special Meeting April 13, 2026

renewable energy source today. In fact, on the recently completed Artimus II moon mission, the Orion crew module was powered by four large solar panels.

Considering the ever-increasing cost of fossil fuel energy sources, who would not want free energy? Who would not want an inexhaustible energy supply? The sun has been powering life systems on our planet since the beginning, and now humans are able to capture that source for our personal and social needs.

Who can be against reasonable land use decisions by private property owners? This is the essential basis of our economy. This proposed ordinance balances the rights of private property owners to develop their land as they see fit under the umbrella of an ordinance that takes into account other community interests. Some will argue that there is not sufficient rural land in Shawnee County to allow for such development, but please remember that these solar farms can be dispersed on smaller tracts of land that may not be contiguous, but can be connected to each other by the developer. In this regard, the proposed ordinance also provides reasonable setbacks for these developments to protect adjacent landowners. Of interest is the fact that very urban Johnson County has a solar ordinance with limits of 2000 acres, while next door, Douglas County has a 1000-acre limit in its ordinance.

Finally, who can be opposed to the additional tax revenues which will flow to the county and other taxing units from solar farm developers? It is true that for the first 10 years of operation, under Kansas law, a solar farm does not pay property taxes, but most developers enter into agreements with local governments for so-called payment in lieu of tax agreements, or PILOT agreements. And since most solar farms have a useful life expectancy of 30 to 40 years, that means 20 to 30 years of tax revenue flowing to the county and other governmental units within the county for that useful life. A recent solar farm development near Ft. Scott anticipates paying \$93 million to Bourbon County during the first ten years of operation. A proposed Jackson County development has charted \$130 million in payment in lieu of taxes during the first 10 years.

The ordinance now before you should not be controversial, for it does those things citizens expect of good government: Protection of property rights and the reasonable allowance of private land use decisions; protecting the environment by using proven and cost-effective energy systems; and creating a future stream of tax revenue that is not burdensome to county residents. I encourage you to pass this ordinance.

I am happy to stand for questions.
Respectfully submitted,

Paul Post
April 13, 2026