
OBSERVER REPORTS

SUBMITTED MAY 2026

Contents:

- Page 2 Topeka City Council
 April 21, 2026 | Vicki Arnett

- Page 3 Shawnee County Commission
 April 23, 2026 | Elvera Johnson

- Page 5 Topeka Sustainability Advisory Board
 May 1, 2026 | Vicki Arnett

- Page 6 Topeka City Council
 May 5, 2026 | Vicki Arnett

- Page 7 Topeka City Council
 May 12, 2026 | Vicki Arnett

- Page 9 Shawnee County Commission
 May 14 | Elvera Johnson

Thank you to this month's Observers: Vicki Arnett and Elvera Johnson

Topeka City Council Meeting

April 21, 2026

Observer: Vicki Arnett

All members of council, including the mayor were present either in chambers or on zoom, except for council member Valdivia Alcala.

The mayor read a proclamation recognizing Law Day and National Drug Endangered Children Awareness Day.

The council heard the annual presentation of the Topeka Sustainability Advisory Board. The board requested a staff person devoted to achieving the sustainability goals of the council. Council member Hiller recommended the board "look at" allowing for open storm water run-off. Although there was a great deal of support present for the board, the council did not vote on the request. The mayor commented to the media after the meeting that he supported the Sustainability Board, however, the budget was not there to support a staff person at this time. The League of Women Voters Topeka Shawnee County presented written testimony in support of the board, however, due to a recent change in when public comments are accepted, no oral testimony was allowed.

The agenda consisted of routine housing development and municipal planning ordinances. One item which would establish multi-family residential development at 2450 SE 25th was deferred until May 5.

A resolution was passed to develop housing at 45th and California at market rate rental of 1500. To 1700 per month. Although the resolution passed, council was concerned for support housing development incentives at such high rates.

There was one public comment regarding making housing incentives a priority. The city manager announced that one EV is ready for city use and will be deployed when the EV charging station is installed at the Holiday Bldg.

There was a need for an executive session to discuss issues related to non-elected personnel matters.

Shawnee County Commission

April 23, 2026

Observer: Elvera Johnson

Two Commissioner present (Commissioner Mays absent)

After approving consent agenda, Bond Counsel opened a discussion regarding Shawnee County Taxable Industrial Revenue Bonds and authorizing the execution and delivery of a bond trust indenture, a base lease and lease agreement with Resource Housing Group, Inc. at a site north west of 37th and Gage. Complicating the issue is that the construction has already begun. They are out of compliance and a waiver would be needed from the BOCC. This needs to be done very quickly so that the project would qualify for low-income housing tax credit. Commissioners called a brief recess to consider this. On return, Bond Counselor Perry recommended the Commission open a hearing today and postpone a decision until Monday to enable necessary compliance procedures. A decision will be made on April 27.

Solid Waste requested and received approval to accept a bid from Berry Material Handling for a truck with an electric fork lift.

Corrections received approval for a year of maintenance for HVAC controls at the adult detention center. For the Juvenile Detention Center, they approved a contract with Astra Mental Health and Recovery services for consultations, assessments and treatment services. These are required services and are funded through State Grants. They are also applying for funds for a peer mentor on site to address substance-use disorder programing. This is a new program.

For Public Works, the Commissioners approved a bid for annual purchase of road oil. They also approved a contract for construction engineering on KDOT improvement project on NW 42nd at NW Rossville and NW Carlson Roads. This is a joint agreement between KDOT and Shawnee County.

For Parks + Recreation They approve a contract with Aspire 2 Play for play equipment at Boswell Park. This contract includes removal of old equipment and surface preparation for the new equipment. The Commission also approved a Contract with Poligon for the purchase of an open-air shelter at Playland in Gage Park. Finally they approved reclassification from an Accountant I position to an Accountant II position.

The County Counselor presented a 1st reading considering approval of establishing policies and procedures for the issuance of industrial revenue bonds pursuant to K.S.A., raising fees. The present fees were established in the 1980s. Commissioner Mays had suggested an amendment also and he was not present to explain his reasoning. The 2nd reading will occur at a later date when Commissioner Mays is present.

The Commission acknowledged the resignation of Doug Mays from the position of Clerk of the Mission Township Board. Applicants for the open position will be accepted until the end of May.

No general Public Comment was offered.

In Administrative Communications, County Treasurer Duffy reminded the public that Real Estate taxes are due May 11. Parks + Recreation announced that they are planting trees in several parks in honor of Arbor Day. Public Works announced that Calhoun Bluff Road will be closed for replacement of a culvert.

No Executive Session was called.

Topeka Sustainability Advisory Council

May 1, 2026

Observer: Vicki Arnett

The board heard from Mary Kuckelman Spinelli with the city attorney's office to review the board bylaws and the ordinances.

The sustainability board has struggled to follow the bylaws due to lack of city support. The bylaws do allow for the appointment of non-voting members, such as city staff. This could also require a change to the ordinance. The board has not had a secretary and Kelly and Michaela have alternated. Some discussion included how to align the goals of the three recent reports; KDHE energy audit, America in Bloom and the EV pilot study with the goals of SAB in the ordinance as well as mapped to city departments.

Topeka City Council Meeting

May 5, 2026

Observer: Vicki Arnett

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

The mayor made two proclamations, one recognizing Letter Carriers' Food Drive Day and presenting a certificate of recognition to Rhett Flood for his leadership with Forge.

The agenda was routine. Council approved an increase in the transient guest tax to 8.5% effective Jan. 2027. The council also narrowly approved the imposition of real estate liens in order to collect past due utility fees. The objection to this ordinance was that most of the properties are vacant and continue to be billed monthly for a "readiness to serve" charge. This charge is for having a water utility connection on the property. The public has asked for an audit of the water department prior to any consideration of increase in residential water utility service.

There was a need for an executive session to discuss acquisition of property.

Topeka City Council Meeting

May 12, 2026

Observer: Vicki Arnett

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

The mayor issued a proclamation recognizing May as Community Action Month.

The council heard a presentation from the Topeka Tourism Business Improvement District.

The agenda was routine. The council approved the first step toward development of a Kansas Turnpike Exit on 29th street east of California. This was a non-action item which will be voted on at a future date.

11 members of the public spoke during public comment. The comments included support for a ¼ cent sales tax to support youth activities and the eastern corridor sales tax incentive, a complaint regarding the sidewalk planned for 13th and McAlister and requests for a line item forensic audit of the water department prior to an increase in fees.

There was a need for an executive session to discuss non-elected employee issues.

Shawnee County Commission

May 14, 2026

Observer: Elvera Johnson

All 3 Commissioners present

Following the opening routines, Corrections had 2 requests approved: one was purchase of a specially designed transport vehicle for Juvenile Detention; the other was two Peer Navigator positions for adult inmates to assess and arrange substance use treatment upon release from custody. This is paid for by state grant funds.

The Health Department received approval to hire a registered dietitian to lead the Women, Infant, Children (WIC) program.

Public Works received approval for professional engineering design services to replace broken concrete pavement at the Adult Detention Facility. They also received approval to change a 2-way STOP to an All-Way STOP at NW 86th and NW Wilson Road. The township will take care of maintenance.

For Parks + Recreation, Commissioners approved a Guaranteed Maximum Price Amendment for the Structural Package of the Gage Park Carousel Renovation Project.

There was no Public Comment

In Administrative Communications, The Treasurer announced that the official deadline for real estate taxes has passed. There is still a considerable amount unpaid. The office will be sending letters to the delinquent payors.

The Noxious Weed department announced that honeysuckle has been added to the list and it is growing profusely around the county. They will be concentrating on educating the public, not on enforcement.

Parks + Recreation announced that the splash pads are open. They also announced that in June and July there will be a series of Tuesday evening concerts in Ensley Gardens from 6:30-8:00.

No Executive Session was called.