
OBSERVER REPORTS

SUBMITTED AUGUST 2026

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

Shawnee County Commission

July 30, 2026

Observer: Elvera Johnson

2 Commissioners present (Mays absent).

Commissioners approved the consent agenda, voucher payments and correction orders.

Bond Counsel Bob Perry requested a Public Hearing expressing the intent of the Board to issue Shawnee County Taxable Industrial Revenue Bonds with 4BSC LLC "Sports Center". The County is not obligated for payment. A Public Hearing was opened; no positive or negative comments were shared. The Hearing was closed and the resolution was approved. Commissioners also approved a Resolution to issue an estimated \$13,750,000.00 aggregate principal amount of County taxable senior housing revenue bonds for an independent living facility located NE of the intersection of SW 17th Street and Urish Road.

For the Health Department, the Commission approved acceptance of grant awards from the Kansas Department of Health and Environment and renewal of the SCHD Universal Agreement. They also approved a contract amendment from KDHE for the 2027 Fiscal Year Immunization Plan and a KDHE grant for Maternal Child Health for Fiscal Year 2027.

County Counselor Rich Eckert requested approval to hire qualified design and build team for remodeling the Maner Conference Center. The overall plan is that YBR Properties will oversee the construction as well as managing the facility when it is completed. The building is now being used daily by the Extension Office for office space and meetings. They are concerned that if that space is being taken away from them, adequate alternative space be provided. They want an agreement in writing. There are some issues to be worked out. A decision will be tabled until August 6.

Counselor Eckert moved on to discussing an application on August 24 from a company named Compass to build a data center in the County. Ten individuals shared concerns about this. Some had attended an "open house" sponsored by Compass last week and were not impressed. Folks speaking at today's meeting expressed concerns about extreme heat, noise and light pollution, fires, high use of electricity, plans to use the land if things don't work out. Land use and Development explained that at this point they are just reviewing the application to see if it meets all requirements. Counselor Eckert explained that all expenses for the application and building would have to be paid by the applicant. They would also need to hire an engineer to explain things that lawyers and commissioners don't necessarily understand.

Parks + Recreation requested and received approval of a contract for surfacing supplies and installation at Gage Park Play Land. They are looking at having it completed by the end of August. In Public Comment Dennis Bosley talked about Intersection to Care, a project sponsored by Rotary that works to combat human trafficking in Topeka.

In Administrative Communications, an Election Office staff member reported that many voters have been through the Office for early voting. Early voting ends at noon on Monday, August 3. Polls will be open 7 to 7 on August 4.

Budget hearings will happen in August.

Brian Cole announced a Grand Opening of Behavioral Health Housing Units on August 24 from 9:00 to 11:00 a.m.

No Executive Session was called.

Shawnee County Commission

August 6, 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?			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 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.

Discussion of Issues:

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

Remarks:

- The budget process continued, with the following action taken concerning the departments indicated: Corrections Department, \$43,559,308 requested. reduced by \$450,000; contingency fund maintained at \$1M; mental health, \$3,441,000, with \$2.9 M to Astra Mental Health, and \$300K to Breakthrough House; TARC, increase of 3%; Elderly support, increase of 2%; Social services which includes Doorstep and Let's Help, increase of 3%; Safe Streets, no increase or decrease; Emergency Management, increase of 1%; Drug Court, no increase or decrease; Community Corrections, increase of 1%; Human Resources, decrease of 5%; Sheriff, \$28,338,082 requested, decrease of \$100,000; Elections Office, increase of 8%; District Attorney, requesting a 9% increase, tabled to next meeting; Land Use Development, increase of 4%; District Court, increase of 7%; the remaining departments will be considered at the next regular meeting. Department budget requests can be found in The Voter as an attachment to the 7/16/26 County Commission Observer Report.
- Public comment: Kim Borchers appeared and stated that she was "agnostic" on data centers, but believed that there was generally a lack of trust, transparency, and communication on the issue. She argued for a one-year moratorium, encouraged the commission to request that the legislature modify SB 98 which allows for tax abatement on data center development, and that the issue of data centers should be on the ballot for vote by the citizenry.
- Public comment: Carol Marples asked about what plan existed for the 40 acres currently controlled by JEDO, the Joint Economic Development Organization. She believed that data centers would not provide many new jobs, estimating perhaps 20 jobs long term.
- Public comment: Amy Gillette talked about a proposal by Compass to build a data center. She thought there might be 30 new jobs resulting from such a development. She believed that most construction work would be off-site, pre-fabricated construction using modular buildings.
- 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

August 7, 2026

Observer: Vicki Arnett

The board had a quorum but they now have 3 vacancies of the 9-member board. The city received a KDHE solid waste grant. The board will next meet on Sept. 4.

The board held a discussion with Mayor Duncan and City Manager Perez. The board's primary concerns have been how can the city best take advantage of the knowledge and resources available to this board.

The city has issued an RFP to hire an engineering firm to develop ordinances to regulate potential data centers in Topeka. Perez and Duncan are requesting the boards assistance in reviewing these proposed standards from an environmental perspective. The mayor specifically requested rezoning standards which include Battery Energy Storage Systems and solar installations. Dr. Perez indicated an interest in high standards similar to those set in Kansas City, Mo. They desire the standards to place community needs and interests first; e.g. Kill switches for emergency power and water situations. Thus far, the Shawnee County Land Use Department and the Shawnee County Planning Commission work has not included an environmental impact study. Any environmental impact study would need to include lasting impact and issues of environmental justice.

Responses to the RFP will be posted in the city procurement webpage. Due date is Aug. 19, 2026. Both the mayor and city manager agree this process far exceeds the capability of the conditional use permitting process. The county has not yet sent out the RFP for an engineering firm to review the Compass application.

Mayor Duncan also announced he has joined the Climate Mayors group nationwide.

Topeka City Council Meeting

August 11, 2026

Observer: Vicki Arnett

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

The mayor read a proclamation recognizing the 100th anniversary of the Jayhawk Theater.

The council heard a presentation from the Topeka Historic Cemetery and the Topeka Performing Arts Center.

The city council unanimously amended the data center ban moratorium to include a provision to suspend the ability to provide administrative exceptions to extend utility services outside the city limits to serve a data center. Any approval will be required to come before the city council for a public vote prior to the end of the moratorium Aug. 17, 2027.

Council approved with 3 no votes, the current Uniform Public Offense code. The no votes were a result of the 25-foot set back requirement for the public while filming law enforcement or emergency responders. The no votes were Valdivia Alcala, Bradberry and Kell. Council also adopted the most recent version of the Standard Traffic Ordinances.

Council approved, with Valdivia Alcala and Bradberry voting no, a resolution to allow the city to join the Kansas lottery lawsuit in Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation v. Stephen Durrell.

The council passed, 9-1 an amendment which establishes the governing body members, allowing the deputy mayor to act as chair of a Committee of the whole and the mayor to serve as a non-voting advisory member. The governing body will act in this capacity when meeting with Compass Data Centers in a work session Wed. Aug. 19 at 5:00 p.m.

The council voted to change the date for the public hearing to Aug. 25, 2026 for the Topeka Metro Transit Authority to exceed the revenue neutral rate.

The council held a discussion on the recommended utility rates. No action was taken. The proposal holds residential customers at no increase with increases going to businesses, large users and rural water districts.

The council heard a presentation regarding the police budget including the school resource officers proposal.

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

Shawnee County Commission

August 13, 2026

Observer: Elvera Johnson

All 3 Commissioners present

There was a Public Hearing regarding an amendment to an existing Conditional Use Permit for a property on SW Auburn Road. The owner wishes to expand the boundaries. No comments pro or con were offered. Resolution approved.

Corrections received approval for a Contract with Mirror Inc. to establish a Community Based Recovery Oriented Reentry Resource Center to serve individuals impacted by substance use disorders. This program will offer same day access, so the persons will receive the services the day they leave the jail.

Public Works received approval for relocation of an 8" waterline in conflict with a bridge replacement on 78th St over Halfday Creek; Commissioners also approved a request to solicit construction bids for this bridge. Commissioners then approved a road project along the county line between Shawnee and Jackson County. The 2 counties will share the cost.

At this point, a very long discussion ensued regarding the application by Compass for building a data center southwest of Montara. Ten people spoke about their concerns regarding cost to tax payers, sound and light pollution, use of water and electricity and more. Two people claimed to be "agnostic" about the deal. A common plea was to take more time before approving this or any data center. Commissioners approved a 6-month moratorium. The vote was 2 to 1. Commissioner Riphahn is not seeking reelection so he will probably not be around for a vote. The land use director explained that the application had a number of missing items and it has been sent back to Compass. Looking at the calendar she doubted that the committee could meet to discuss an amended application before February anyway.

Following this discussion, Commissioners moved on to completing the proposed budget. The total proposed budget is \$163,824,183. The anticipated mill levy increase would be 5%. On September 3 there will be 2 public hearings. One will be about the proposed budget; the other will be about revenue neutral.

In administrative communications, a representative from the Elections Office announced that on Monday, August 24, Commissioners will meet as the Elections Canvassing Board.

No Executive Session was called.