
OBSERVER REPORTS

SUBMITTED SEPTEMBER 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

August 20, 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:

- Public comment: Jeffrey Kuzbell, president of the Federal Home Loan Bank of Topeka, showed up with Molly Howey, President of the Greater Topeka. Jeff was there to talk about data centers and how he supported them. He described how his former hometown of McLean Virginia had embraced data centers, with a large one, perhaps more, being built, and all the wonderful results that accrued from its presence there, including better schools and streets and a happy workforce. Ms. Howey did not speak but signaled to the commission that Mr. Kuzbell wanted to comment even though he hadn't signed up to do so. The more interesting part was Bill Riphan's response, wherein he profusely thanked Mr. Kuzbell and stated that it was "good to hear from the other side." He mentioned that other people appearing to comment during prior meetings were essentially spouting nonsense from the Internet and had not done appropriate research. Having been at several of those meetings, I can say that the citizens who showed up were very knowledgeable, and had prepared to present their arguments in a coherent fashion. The further interesting fact is that on every occasion for these commentators at prior meetings, they were cut off immediately upon the expiration of the four-minute time limit for speakers. At this meeting, the clock ran down, but Mr. Riphan continued to allow Mr. Kuzbell to give his spiel.
- The public hearing on the 2027 budget is set for September 3 at 9:00 a.m.
- 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

August 27, 2026

Observer: Elvera Johnson

All 3 commissioners were present.

Commissioner Riphahn read a proclamation recognizing the importance of breastfeeding for the health of infants and mothers. Breast milk is recommended as the only nutrition for the first 6 months and encouraged as a supplement for the first 2 years. Members of the Community Breastfeeding Coalition posed for a photo with Commissioners.

Following approval of the consent agenda and voucher payments, Corrections requested and received approval for an amendment to the Smart Communications Services Agreement. The amendment extends the agreement for 5 years and makes modifications to comply with new FCC rules. This includes having prisoners at risk for medical emergencies or suicide, wearing anklets or bracelets to improve monitoring.

Public Works had 4 requests that were approved. The first was a contract for de-icing salt. The next was a contract for design and construction engineering relating to concrete pavement and sidewalk replacement at the Adult Detention Center. Next was a final change order to reflect as Bid versus as Constructed for a repair project to the North Annex's east parking lot. The 4th was also a final change order reflecting as bid versus as constructed for a bridge replacement on NE Calhoun Bluff Road. The last 2 items reflected a lower cost than estimated.

Facilities Management received approval for a request for Proposal for services to replace flooring at J.P. Lewis Health Department. Commissioners approved a Contract with Key Staffing to hire temp staff for custodial services as needed. They approved repair of flood damage at the 707 Admin building.

Commissioners approved the 2026 First Responder Grant Awards.

For Parks+ Recreation, Commissioners approved a bid for the design services of the Cypress Ridge Clubhouse. The present building is hardly usable. Funding will be nearly ½ funded through private foundations.

In Public Comment, a candidate for County Commission stated that golf is not a priority. He said we need to find a way not to increase taxes.

In administrative communication, Audit and Finance shared a reminder that September 3 is a Revenue neutral hearing as well as a Proposed budget hearing. Commissioner Cook said that the proposed budget is available to look at and the public is free to share their comments prior to the hearing too.

A county employee announced that a scavenger hunt to benefit Doorstep will be held September 4 to October 9. A \$10 donation is suggested for each team.

The Health Department is accepting nominations for a group or individual that promotes community health.

Public Works Director announced that he had attempted to find the materials he usually uses for maintaining roads. They were not available. He reluctantly purchased trap rock as a last resort. There have been complaints that the rock flies and chips their windshields. The only suggestion he has is to slow down to protect your car and your neighbors'.

Corrections shared that 200 people showed up for the Grand Opening of the Behavioral Health Units. Other facilities are interested and are observing. Congressman Schmidt and Senator Moran are looking for grants to help cover costs.

An Executive Session was called to consult with an attorney regarding litigation.

Topeka City Council

September 1, 2026

Observer: Vicki Arnett

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

The council amended the consent agenda and mover the contract for professional services to upgrade services and HVAC to the Law Enforcement Building to an action item. Concerns expressed by council members included discussion of the county Treasurer moving out of the court house, leaving on court business and how this project would be shared with the county, including rumors that the sheriff office was intending to move out of the location. The design build contract resolution was later passed.

Council member Miller abstained from voting on the use of transient guest tax funds for Sunflower Sports Association due to his involvement with the association.

Council members approved the resolution for capital improvement project to SW Huntoon St. Council member Kell and Mayor Duncan voted No. Although no reason for the no vote was given tonight, both had expressed objection to the design on the part of residents, emergency management, Topeka Public Schools and the overall cost.

The council amended the agenda to move Setting Utility Rates as an action item to a discussion item. The water department has proposed yet another new rate structure. This one would remove the base charge from vacant property and stair step up the business utility rates over the course of 2027 to 2030. Residential customers would be stair stepped down but not as much as previously reported. Many businesses and Topeka Chamber spoke in support of this proposal stating they wanted to pay "their fair share". Residential customers will continue to pay the greater share if this proposal is eventually adopted.

The council discussed the 2027 Legislative Agenda resolution. Items discussed included concerns for completing the FEMA flood plain maps and insurance rate maps, continued support for transportation infrastructure, protection of municipal right of way and the past legislators push to eliminate business franchise fees.

Two people spoke during public comments.

There was a need for an executive session to discuss confidential data resulting from a recent RFP. The city manager recently issued an RFP for an engineering firm to assist the planning department to develop environmentally friendly regulations of data centers.

Topeka City Council

September 8, 2026

Observer: Vicki Arnett

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

The council approved the appointment of Candis Stiles to the Topeka Metropolitan Transit Board.

The council heard a presentation on communications by the city and an update to the Housing Study.

The council approved an increase in residential water rates and a graduated increase in business and commercial water rates. This ordinance was a compromise to balance the increase between the resident and business sector, with business receiving a greater overall increase.

Council held a public hearing on the 2027 budget. Several members of the public spoke in opposition to tax increases.

The council discussed the 2027 operating budget. There was much discussion which relied on supporting a budget increase through a ½ cent sales tax.

The council also discussed the proposed utility lien ordinance in addition to the Fire Station Relocation Plan.

Several members of the public spoke regarding the budget and in opposition to data centers.

There was no need for an executive session.

Shawnee County Commission

September 10, 2026

Observer: Elvera Johnson

All 3 commissioners were present.

The Consent Agenda was approved with the deletion of Item L. A couple of interesting items in the consent agenda: Several hard drives and laptops that are no longer valuable for Shawnee County will be donated to PCs for People. The legal name of the former Valeo Behavioral Health is now Astra Mental Health & Recovery, Inc. Department of Corrections is applying for a \$1,300,000.00 grant over 3 years for Adult Detention work with inmates suffering from severe mental illness and substance use disorder getting released to community.

For Land use & Development, Commissioners approved an amendment to a home/veterinary clinic on SE 45th St, so that the name of the veterinarian does not need to be included.

For the Health Department, Commissioners approved a renewal of the contract with United Way of Kaw Valley to serve as fiscal agent for the Early Childhood Block Grant.

For the County Counselor, a contract with CFS Engineers for services related to proposed data centers. Six community individuals shared their concerns about data centers. One said that Compass is making false claims in their proposal. One commented that Evergy has already raised rates anticipating the construction of data centers. One person mentioned the 1964 tornado as a consideration, and said data centers desecrate the land. Commissioners acknowledge their concerns and pointed out that the engineering services are needed to make sure all protections are in place before any proposal is approved. They approved the contract.

Audit Finance then stood up to lead a continuing effort to lower the proposed budget. Commissioners suggested reducing various departments budgets by cutting out the amount they requested for overtime. IT, Facilities Management, and Public Works agreed to do that. The Sheriff's office said that most of their overtime was in the 911 calls department. They need to have more trained employees before they can eliminate overtime. Parks + Rec will explore the possibility of reducing the size of parking lots and delay the building of a new shelter house. Corrections will delay the purchase of a new elevator. Stormont Vail Events Center can defer the "party platform" for a year. Court Services will work with IT to consider having the IT service done in house, rather than by contract. Discussions to be continued.

Parks + Red announced a Founders' Day at Gage Park October 2-3.

Commissioners announced that there will be no Work Session on September 14.

No Executive Session was called.