

Observer Reports for the November VOTER

Topeka City Council Meeting

September 3, 2024

Observer: Vicki Arnett

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

There was one infrastructure action item on the agenda. Most of the meeting was a discussion of proposed budget alternatives due to a current projected short fall in revenue of between 1 and 20 million dollars depending on possible budget cuts, deferred projects, hiring freezes or increased mil levy. No decisions will be made until council meeting Sept. 17.

An executive session was needed to discuss acquisition of real property.

Topeka City Council Meeting

September 17, 2024

Observer: Vicki Arnett

All city council members, including the mayor were present in chambers or on zoom. Council member Banks was absent.

The council approved the appointment of Aricles “Wulf” Roby and Joe Cheray to the Topeka Americans with Disabilities Act Advisory Council. The council also approved the appointment of Del-Metrius Herron and Joseph Mauk to the Topeka Planning Commission.

Following much discussion, the council approved two resolutions which negotiate a partial solution to the over priced special assessments at Lauren’s Bay. The resolutions resolve back taxes and partial settlement of the unpaid special assessments. The problem which has prevented the development of Lauren’s Bay as proposed, 13 yrs. ago, is that the special property tax assessments are too high for the market to bare on these properties. The resolutions passed tonight do not address the cost of the special assessments moving forward.

The council passed the 2025 operating budget with council member Hiller voting no.

Two people spoke about infant mortality rate and problems with development in Topeka during public comments.

There was a need for an executive session to discuss matters pertaining to one or more unions.

Council expressed concern for gun violence and school threats, lack of traffic enforcement and requested a presentation from EMS due to possible impact of road closures on emergency responses.

Topeka Sustainability Advisory Board

September 6, 2024

Observer: Vicki Arnett

All members of the advisory board were present.

The board recently met with the new city manager who told them that because of the projected budget short fall, he would not be including a Sustainability Coordinator in the upcoming budget.

The board discussed ways to continue their work through discussion with other boards throughout the state and by gathering data. Lindsay Freeman sent members a copy of the Kansas draft plan for climate mitigation and adaptation. She reported the city of Wichita drafted a Climate plan based on this state plan. The board thought it would be useful for them to attempt to draft their own plan, to the extent possible and identify the gaps in data that a coordinator would be able to research to take advantage of any state climate tax exemptions or climate subsidies.

USD #501 School Board Meeting

October 3, 2024

Observer – Annie Tietze

Whereas a principal's leadership is a crucial element needed to ensure the academic success of Topeka Public Schools students be is resolved the BOE proclaimed October 2024 as Nat'l Principals Month.

This month's outstanding senior, student of the month, is Ranae Easter of Highland Park High School. She is highly involved in sports including tennis, wrestling, band, softball and ROTC.

The following policy and regulation changes have been discussed, reviewed, and revised:

Lactation Accommodations, Personal Leave, Jury and legal leave, Evaluation of employees, Reimbursement for the loss of personal property, Physical examinations, Infectious diseases, Blood borne pathogen exposure control, Use of tobacco by employees.

Advisors Excel Charity Fund provided the following restricted donations:

\$40,427.88 for Highland Park High School

\$5,000 for Eisenhower Middle

\$9525.02 for Sheldon Head Start

\$10, 22718 for Family Peace Initiative

\$4,000 by Southwest Kiwanis Club for Shaner Early Learning Academy

\$260,573.10 to provide funding and resources to design and implement a testing strategy to reduce outbreaks, keep school open, minimize absenteeism, and reduce stress among faculty and parents

Subject to verification for accuracy, the tentative agreement with NEA-Topeka was ratified. A total salary and benefits package increase for members of the bargaining unit of approximately 4.5%

SHAWNEE COUNTY COMMISSION MEETING: SEPTEMBER 19, 2024

Observer: Paul Post (pacmanpost@icloud.com)

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

Please click on 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 member 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		Henry McClure, who appears at almost every meeting, and who is running against Kevin Cook in the November election.

Discussion of Issues:

Issue:	Action taken:	Relevance to LWV Positions	Recommended Follow-up if any
Finalization of 2025 Budget	Approval.	LWV is interested in good government, and the annual budget process is part of that oversight responsibility.	None needed, but see below for details

Public Comment: See above.

2025 county budget: Overall, commissioners approved a budget that increased nearly \$6 million from the 2024 budget. The five county departments: law enforcement, recreation, public works, public health and administrative services have increased funding since the year prior. The final approved budget for 2025 is \$145,575,339.00. However, the mill levy will drop .305, to just over 48.3 mils. Commissioners said the lower mill would minimize a higher tax bill property

owners might see if their valuations went up, and noted those with unchanged valuations could actually see lower taxes. On motion by Commissioner Mayes, \$500,000 was transferred from the contingency fund to the general fund, which resulted in a reduction in the mill levy of 0.01%. The motion was seconded, and approved unanimously.

Remarks: 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. There currently does not appear to be any written minutes of the meeting available.

Board of County Commissioners-9/26/24

Elvera Johnson, observer

All three commissioners present.

Consent agenda, voucher payments and correction orders were quickly approved.

A temporary malt beverage license was approved for a Tales and Ales event held at Lake Shawnee September 28.

District Attorney:

Received approval for a 10-year contract for the Case Management System, which locks in the cost for 10 years rather than 5 years.

Audit Finance:

The contracted auditor gave a report for 2023. It was a clean audit.

Commissioners also authorized a new contract with Underground Vaults & Storage for shredding and storage services until August of 2027 with no increase in yearly cost.

Human Resources:

Commissioners approved Health Savings Account Funding for the 2025 Benefits Plan.

Authorized a contract with Communications Workers of America for dispatchers for the Sheriff's office.

Authorized a Letter of Agreement with Communications Workers of America to provide a retention bonus of \$3,000 if the employees stay until the end of January, 2025. The same retention bonus will be paid to non-union communications workers in the sheriff's office

Public Works:

Commissioners acknowledged a final change order regarding the bridge replacement project on South Topeka Boulevard over the Wakarusa River. The construction cost was under budget.

Register of Deeds:

They accepted a transfer of \$150,000 in excess technology funds to the Land Records Fund for equipment and technological services in various county offices.

Approved a contract to extend an agreement with Fidar Technologies for software services for 4 years to be paid out of the Register of Deeds Technology fund.

Planning Department:

Approved filling the Planning and Zoning Administrator position with a candidate of extensive education and experience.

Parks & Recreation:

Acknowledged the certificate of substantial completion for the Oakland Pool project. It was completed within budget.

Approved execution of a contract between the County, the City of Topeka and the Neighborhood Improvement Association for the Nellie Hogan Park. They are building a new playground which should be complete by the end of 2025.

Solid Waste:

Approved a bid for the purchase of a one-ton pickup truck with funding from the 2024 Solid Waste Operational Fund.

Public comment:

Henry McClure made his usual appearance and announced that he had arranged for Panda Express to set up a restaurant at 25th and Rochester. He is pleased that no taxpayer money was spent.

Administrative Communication:

Human resources said that several time slots and locations are available for employees to sign up for benefits

Executive Session:

An executive session was called to discuss non-elected personnel.

SHAWNEE COUNTY COMMISSION MEETING: OCTOBER 3, 2024

Observer: Paul Post (pacmanpost@icloud.com)

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

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Was there a public comment period? If so who appeared and for what purpose?	X		Henry McClure, who appears at almost every meeting, and who is running against Kevin Cook in the November election.

Discussion of Issues:

Issue:	Action taken:	Relevance to LWV Positions	Recommended Follow-up if any
A new contract was reached between the County and the Fraternal Order of Police	The new contract covers sheriff deputies, and provides for a 13% salary increase for 2025, and a 5% increase for 2026 and 2027 respectively.	LWV is interested in good government and appropriate, fair pay for government employees. The new 3-year contract will ensure that experienced deputies are retained by paying a competitive salary.	None needed.

Public Comment: See above.

Remarks: 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. There currently does not appear to be any written minutes of the meeting available.

Board of County Commissioners- 10/10/24

Elvera Johnson, observer

All three commissioners present

In recognition of National 4-H Week, the 2024 4-H Queen and King were present to thank the Commissioners for their support. They spoke about leadership and teamwork skills gained through their 4-H participation.

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

Facilities Management:

Waived the purchasing contract with McElroy's Inc., to work with Johnson Controls who is providing the chilled water controls for the Courthouse HVAC system.

Public Works:

Authorized purchase of a dump truck with snow plow and sander through a government purchasing cooperative instead of the usual bidding system. This year this is the most cost- effective approach.

Authorized a contract to provide professional design services for a safety improvement project on NW Carlson and NW Rossville Road.

Information Technology

Authorized purchase of RingCentral services and phones with cost to be split between Technology budget and Election Office budget. It is a back-up system in case of a power outage.

Authorized a contract for networks hardware evaluation and monitoring.

County Appraiser:

Approved the hiring of a well-qualified candidate for the GIS manager.

Public Comment:

There was no public comment

Administrative communication:

Mr Howell, Election Commissioner, announced that Tuesday, October 15, is the last day to register for the general election on November 5. Early voting in person at the Election Office begins on Monday, October 21. For advance voting by mail, now is the time to apply for a ballot.

Employee Services

There are a number of opportunities to enroll for benefit programs. Mr. Riphahn spoke about the cooperation between the city, county, state and federal governments for Riverfront improvement.

Executive Session:

No Executive Session was called.