



CITY OF TOPEKA

CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE

CITY COUNCIL
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Date: November 30, 2018

Time: 3:00 p.m.

Location: Holliday 1st Floor Conference Room, Holliday Bldg 620 SE Madison

Committee members present: Councilmembers Sandra Clear, Sylvia Ortiz (Chair) and Mike Padilla

City staff present: Luther Ganieany, Topeka Police Legal Advisor; Lisa Robertson, City Attorney; Brent Trout, City Manager; Sergeant Joshua Klamm, Topeka Police Department; Sasha Haehn and Corrie Wright, Neighborhood Relations; Councilmember Mike Lesser

Call to Order

Councilmember Ortiz called the meeting to order.

Approve Minutes from August 27, 2018 meeting

Councilmember Padilla moved to approve the minutes. The motion seconded by Councilmember Clear. The motion carried unanimously. (3-0)

Reports and Follow-Ups from Organizations

Tawny Stottlemeier, Community Action and Homeless Taskforce - addressed the Committee and presented on the visit to Riverhaven in Ventura, California to research their designated camping area. Following the presentation, Ms. Stottlemeier noted that Ventura recited the term "Our citywide homeless strategy includes..." In addition, there are eight community police officers, 12 Ambassadors who are employed by the City, four cleaning crew members, a shower pod and pop-up medical/services, medical respite beds, and the public campaign against Panhandling.

Donald, community member, inquired with Tawny Stottlemeier as to how rent could be paid for members like him who have a disability and cannot work. Councilmember Ortiz stated that the conditions of the place of California are not necessarily what Topeka will be doing.

Dr. Russell Burton, community member, inquired as to the proposed way that individuals would be paying rent should Topeka adopt that portion of Riverhaven's model. Ms. Stottlemeier noted that she was not necessarily encouraging Topeka to adopt this model, however was providing information from their visit. Ms. Stottlemeier

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noted that for the individuals in Riverhaven, many paid their rent by governmental subsidies.

Ms. Stottlemeier provided feedback on behalf of Mark DeGraff from the Topeka Rescue Mission who conducted surveys with the unsheltered population in Topeka. The Street Outreach team and Valeo spoke to unsheltered community members and asked the question “If a designated campsite for you to live was created with centralized resources, would you consider moving?”. Out of 21 citizens interviewed, 20 replied they would not consider moving. Some of the words provided as feedback were “segregated”, “concentration camp”, with several also voicing concern about crime. Councilmember Ortiz inquired as to where the interviews took place and where those individuals reside. Ms. Stottlemeier noted that she was not aware of the exact locations, however it took place across the whole city. Councilmember Clear inquired about the information provided previously about interviews that had been conducted with the homeless population that yielded an opposite response. SGT Klamm noted that at the time of his interviews, there was more of an interest in the topic from the unsheltered population rather than a strong opinion of being “for” or “against” the idea.

Corrie Wright provided an update to some of the questions presented by committee members at the August 27th meeting which included:

- A day center in the downtown area was proposed. Corrie confirmed that a few organizations within the Homeless Taskforce were interested in assisting with a day service program.
- Topeka Metro Bus Pass - Free passes were already provided. SGT Klamm has received those and will be getting them to unsheltered residents. Continued efforts will be done.
- Care Shelters & Respite Beds - Mary Tibbets (Stormont Vail) and Carrie Allen (Homeless Taskforce), visited these places. Mary Tibbets provided a report to the committee.
 - Mary Tibbets read a letter which was also provided to the committee members on behalf of the Homeless Taskforce. The taskforce does not recommend the placement of a blanket ban on sleeping and living on public property. Such a ban would be difficult and expensive to enforce, as well as the Constitutional restrictions that may arise with such a ban. Further, the taskforce has not found supported evidence that a designated camping area has been effective. Such areas found in other communities have actually had negative impacts. The Taskforce instead asks the committee to adopt and implement a formal, community-wide strategy to address homelessness. A recommendation of strategy to the Governing Body from the Taskforce include:
 - housing first approaches
 - supportive housing
 - temporary housing
 - individualized case management & advocate supports
 - mobile medical, food, and shower opportunities
 - medical respite
 - public awareness outreach

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- strong and communitywide use of the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) and Coordinated Entry Systems
- Other poverty-fighting measures such as addiction and recovery treatments, jobs and skills training, affordable and quality childcare, reliable transportation, crisis mitigation, and more.

Councilmember Clear inquired as to some of the items that the Taskforce mentioned and if those items were found to be successful in other communities. Ms. Tibbets as well as Rev. Barry Feaker (Topeka Rescue Mission), noted that most of the items were on target for showing success with re-establishing unsheltered individuals into the community.

Ms. Tibbets also provided the committee with information about medical respite.

- Chesney Park nursing resources - Ms. Wright will check into that option for street homeless.

Councilmember Ortiz noted that in past meetings, a number of these were addressed.

Councilmember Ortiz inquired with SGT Klamm as to the activity of the task force that was put into place by the TPD. SGT Klamm noted that the force is still only one officer, however more active.

SGT Klamm also provided follow up information regarding the ID program. The City ID card is moving forward. Day Labor services will help with employment if individual has ID card. In addition, many banks in the city will also accept the ID to set up an account. Some of the check cashing places are willing to cash a payroll check with this ID card. SGT Klamm has also reached out to a group of realtors for apartment complexes to see what other options for service might be available with this card. SGT Klamm also met with the Topeka Rescue Mission, Department of Revenue, Vital Statistics and will accept the City ID to issue a 1 year state of KS temporary ID. Once that is received, the Vital Statistics. Once the temporary card has been issued, individuals can go to Vital Statistics and receive their birth certificate. They have one year to do this. Once that is completed, individuals are then able to take the birth certificate back to the Department of Revenue where they will be issued the permanent state identification card that is valid for six years. SGT Klamm noted that to his knowledge, no other state has this type of partnership with an ID program.

Valeo is also donating efforts to this program.

Councilmember Ortiz inquired as to the length of time that the City ID cards are valid for. SGT Klamm noted that on the card, it states a one year expiration date. That date is simply to help with updating information and photo. SGT Klamm is taking latitude and longitude as the location of the camp where an individual is staying. The idea is that pins can be dropped onto a map to see where individuals are at.

Councilmember Padilla inquired as to if the other local law enforcement entities (Shawnee County Sheriff's Office, TPD, KHP) will recognize this as an identification. SGT Klamm noted that a press release will be going out Tuesday, December 4th to explain the program. All officers at roll calls, and Power DMS training will be able to find out about it.

Councilmember Clear congratulated SGT Klamm on the program and the ID.

Councilmember Ortiz asked SGT Klamm to send information to the other entities prior to the press release on Tuesday.

Shipping Containers - SGT Klamm has looked into the cost of a shipping container. TPD will cover the cost of that and the Impound Lot will find a place to put the container upon direction. Used shipping containers that have been overseas twice and are in good condition run around \$4,000. If custom work needs to be done, that will raise the cost a bit more. Nothing has been purchased yet. Waiting to see what the Governing Body decision is before continuing to move forward on that.

Councilmember Ortiz called Rev Barry Feaker to address the committee and inquired about property that was owned by TRM to use as a designated site. Rev Feaker stated that property is available, however he does not feel personally that it would be a good fit. With that, he would be open to discussing more if the city really wanted to move forward with this opportunity. Rev Feaker also congratulated SGT Klamm and the Police Department on the ID program noting this is the exact type of innovative solution that is needed to continue moving forward. Councilmember Ortiz stated that the committee had been discussing this topic for months and there are 49 organizations, including the Topeka Rescue Mission, that have come forward to help with finding the right solution for our unsheltered population. Rev. Feaker also noted that Topeka is a giving community and feels that the community is at the right place now to continue moving forward but suggested looking for something more sustainable as a solution rather than a camp site.

Councilmember Ortiz inquired about the MOU. SGT Klamm noted that it is signed and ready to go, but he did not bring it to the meeting today. Councilmember Ortiz asked Luther Gainey to bring the copy to the next meeting.

Councilmember Ortiz inquired with City Manager Trout as to the possibility to set up an account to accept private sector funds. Mr. Trout noted that it is a possibility. Lisa Robertson, Legal, will speak with Nick Hawkins in Finance to set something up. Councilmember Ortiz would like to see that move forward and become active as soon as possible.

Public Input

Councilmember Ortiz opened the floor for individuals to come up and speak.

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Pat Houghton, or Cowboy - Addressed the committee. He does not feel a designated camp site should be established and does not want more rules dictating how the homeless should live. Councilmember Clear inquired with Mr. Houghton as to how to remove those members who are causing problems with the businesses. Mr. Houghton noted that most of those individuals who are causing problems are likely going to get themselves into trouble with PD. Councilmember Clear inquired if Mr. Houghton would take a house and move off of the street if it was offered to him to which Mr. Houghton stated that he would. He provided some of his life testament. He also suggested that the concrete pad located in Little Russia would make a great place for a campsite, however it is currently owned by the railroad.

Donald O. - Addressed the committee and noted that his is labeled as street homeless. He feels as though this is an unfair label. He did not choose to live in a tent, however has to stay somewhere and the shelter living lifestyle does not work for him. Donald is appreciative of individuals such as SGT Klamm who come to check on him and provide simple assistance. He prefers to be left alone. Councilmember Clear inquired if Donald would accept help if it was offered to him. Donald prefers to be left alone and does not want to be bothered. Donald stated that the businesses that are having problems with homeless individuals need to call the police. Councilmember Padilla spoke with Donald to let him know that goal of the members of this committee and group is to not make individuals feel labeled or judged, but to provide assistance. Donald suggested a housing program using the abandoned houses around the city.

Robert Rangel Jr. - Provided his testimony to the committee. He would like to see the committee follow through with some of these plans to help the homeless. He noted that all of the people have a story and it is important.

Richard Harrison, also known as sick Rick - Communicated that he does not feel NOTO is treating the unsheltered fairly, and noted that many of the homeless individuals are not causing problems.

Jennifer Couch - Addressed the committee and provided her testimony. She does not have any other options if the tents are taken away.

Luther Lohff - Is a veteran and came to Topeka because there are no laws against being homeless. He provided his testimony, and feels that there are many members of the community that are not able to be helped by the Rescue Mission. Mr. Lohff likes the idea of a regulated campground. Councilmember Ortiz inquired if Mr. Lohff would accept help if it was provided. He responded that he would.

Diana Bloom - Spoke to the committee. She noted that she has gone by the river to see what they need help with and noted that many are needing assistance with basic contacting of services, an ID, etc. Many of the people who she spoke to also noted that they were unhappy with the Rescue Mission and the number of rules that are required to be followed in order to receive services. Ms. Bloom suggested having trash receptacles and water available in the time between working out a decision.

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Dr. Russell Burton addressed the committee and provided testimony. He showed some photographs to the committee about where encampments currently are.

Councilmember Lesser stated he would like to allow Rev Feaker respond.

Rev Feaker addressed the committee. One note he made was that regardless of the situation, if the weather is below 40 degrees, any individual is allowed to enter the Rescue Mission.

Adjourn

Councilmember Ortiz adjourned the meeting.

Meeting video can be viewed at: <https://youtu.be/8hb3-kWNenY>