

**Tennessee Town NIA General Membership Meeting**  
**6:30 p.m., Monday; March 14, 2022**  
**Buchanan Center, 1195 SW Buchanan**

*The wearing of facial masks will be encouraged for this meeting to help to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.*

TENTATIVE AGENDA:

- I. Welcome, Distribution of Free Smoke Detectors and Batteries, In Memoriam
- II. Teresa Baker, Executive Director, Housing and Credit Counseling, Inc.
- III. Community Policing Report; Contacts With Chief Wheelles Regarding Challenges of Low-Income Neighborhoods (pgs. 5-6 of this meeting packet)
- IV. Property Maintenance Report (Code Compliance), Property Maintenance Officer (pg. 6)
- V. Adoption of Agenda (vote)
- VI. Approval of January 10, 2022 General Membership Meeting Minutes (vote; pgs. 2-3)
- VII. Acceptance of Treasurer's Reports (vote; pg. 4)
- VIII. Old Business:
  - A. City Council Report (Including Changing the Culture Property Maintenance Report, Topeka ARPA COVID-19 Funds Vote, City Budget Work Groups, DREAMS Initiative): Karen Hiller (pgs. 6-8)
  - B. 2022 DREAMS Goals (Consults with the City of Topeka Starting in April 2022)
  - C. Tennessee Town Housing Nonprofit Partnerships; Stormont-Vail Donation of Vacant Lots to Habitat (pg. 8)
  - D. Central Topeka Grocery Store Update (pg. 9)
  - E. Lane Garden Update
  - F. Citizen Advisory Council Report: Don Fortin
  - G. International Academy Update: Sandy Lassiter
- IX. New Business:
  - A. Efforts to Save 1142 SW Washburn from Demolition: Pat DeLapp
- X. Kudos:
  - A. March is National Women's History Month
- XI. Announcements:
  - A. Neighborhood Relations Programs: (1) *Emergency Program*: Intended to help homeowners make repairs to immediate health or safety hazards, (2) *Accessibility Program*: Provides modifications to residential homes for owners or tenants with disabilities, (3) *Property Maintenance Repair Program*: Assists with repairs for low-income homeowners who need repairs to bring their homes up to code and make the home safe, livable, and healthy. All eligible households must have an active property maintenance violation and be on the deed of the property. For more info. or to apply, please call 785-368-3711.
  - B. TOTO first-time homebuyers' assistance program: The program helps low-income families purchase their first home through HUD funding. The program helps Topeka residents become homeowners by providing education, financing, and home rehabilitation by partnering with Housing and Credit Counseling Inc. For more info., please call 785-234-0217, ext. 317.
  - C. Habitat's Aging in Place Program: Available to individuals living in Shawnee County, age 60 or older, living at or below 60% of the area median income. Must be the home's owner and currently residing in the home. Addresses basic repairs on homes, which reduces the need for critical repairs and enables seniors to live autonomously and with dignity in their homes. Shawnee County Advocacy Council on Aging partnership, business partners and community donors make program possible. To apply, please call Habitat at 785-234-4322.
  - D. Next Meeting: 6:30 p.m., Mon., May 9, 2022, Buchanan Ctr., 1195 SW Buchanan
- XIII. Adjournment

Tennessee Town on the Internet! Website: <http://tenntownnia.weebly.com> (all NIA meetings, activities posted) ●  
Nextdoor Tennessee Town: [https://tennesseetown.nextdoor.com/news\\_feed/](https://tennesseetown.nextdoor.com/news_feed/) ● E-Mail: [tenntown@yahoo.com](mailto:tenntown@yahoo.com)

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Minutes of January 10, 2022 General Membership Meeting

Attendance: President Michael Bell, Vice President Pat Delapp, Secretary-Treasurer Sandra Lassiter, Emma Ray, Bob Cockerhan, Mark Gibbs, Stephen Gaehrig, Tyler Layton, TPD Ofc. Matt Wilson, Property Maintenance Inspector Carlos Hernandez, Keep America Beautiful Topeka and Shawnee County Exec. Dir. Cheryl Wright Kunard, Kyle Kunard.

President Bell called the meeting to order at 6:37 p.m.

Guest: Cheryl Wright Kunard, Executive Director, Keep America Beautiful Topeka and Shawnee County: Wright Kunard said she started in her new position on Nov. 1, 2021, succeeding long-time exec. dir. Philicia McKee. She asked attendees what KAB could do for them. She said KAB works in public spaces including graffiti abatement and litter control. She provided KAB's 2022 recycling directory. She talked about the "Extreme Team," volunteers who would meet April through September (first Saturday of each month) and work in public spaces. She applauded and pledged her continued support of NIA Vice President Pat DeLapp's efforts to collect abandoned tires in Tennessee Town and Central Topeka.

Property Maintenance Report: Inspector Carlos Hernandez gave the report. He spoke on the International Property Maintenance Code (IPMC) and said his department had recently hired one employee. He spoke on the efforts in the Central Park and Hi-Crest neighborhoods. Discussion occurred on 1119 SW Clay and the former school at 1601 SW Harrison. DeLapp said the tenant at the property he owns at 1214 SW Buchanan said Hernandez had been on private property there without permission. Hernandez said the tenant was lying. DeLapp asked Hernandez to stay off the property. Hernandez said he would no longer work with DeLapp.

Community Policing Report: Ofc. Wilson gave the report. He said there was 1 drug crime, 2 gun cases, a case involving protection from abuse and vandalism connected to the 12th Street project since the last NIA meeting in November 2021. He said that he recently had been named as a sergeant. He asked attendees to indicate their support of community policing.

2022 Election of NIA Officers: The 3 officers from 2021 all indicated that they were willing to continue in their positions for 2022.

*Emma Ray moved to keep the same officers from 2021 in their positions for 2022. Bob Cockerhan seconded the motion. The motion was approved.*

Adoption of Agenda: *DeLapp moved approval of the January 10, 2022 meeting agenda as presented. Ray seconded the motion. The motion was approved.*

Approval of Minutes: *DeLapp moved approval of the November 8, 2021 meeting minutes as presented. Ray seconded the motion. The motion was approved.*

Acceptance of Treasurer's Reports: *Ray moved acceptance of the support budget and Envista reports. Tyler Layton seconded the motion. The motion was approved.*

Old Business: Creating a Housing Nonprofit Specifically for Tennessee Town Discussion: Bell said he had reached out to the GraceMed Health Clinic to find out if it would be willing to be a partner to bring the housing nonprofit to fruition. GrsceMed is considering the request.

Old Business: Grocery Store Update: Bell said there soon would be an announcement about grant awards and partners.

Old Business: 12th Street Project Update: Bell provided information in the meeting packet.

Old Business: Lane Garden Update: Bell said he was working with the public works department regarding the new bus shelter and enabling the placement of a new park sign so it can be seen. Regarding ownership of the park, he said he had started looking for legal representation to make the county bring Lane Garden under its umbrella as it had the Aaron Douglas Art Park across the street.

Old Business: Pedestrian Mid-Block Lighting Update: Bell said he had followed up with public works and its offer of funds through an effort in the Ward Meade NIA but had not received a response.

Old Business: Topeka Alliance for Good Government: Bell provided information in meeting packets on the grass-roots effort to make local government decision making transparent and ethical, to hold elected and appointed officials accountable and to ensure the inclusiveness of Topeka's communities of color in decision making.

Old Business: City Council Report: City Council Member Karen Hiller was unable to attend the meeting due to a conflict. There was discussion on the process to hire a new city manager, the fire chief vacancy, and the new city council an mayor.

Old Business: Citizen Advisory Council: Bell gave the report. He said the group had held a gala at its December 2021 meeting and the January 2022 meeting featured discussion on ways for members to conduct themselves at meetings and setting 2022 priorities.

Old Business: Tax Sale Update: DeLapp gave the update. He reported on the NIA properties and said he was concerned about the county cherry picking the best properties.

Old Business: International Academy Update: Lassiter said things were going well with the International Academy and that no COVID cases had occurred. She said Judge Tim Dupree was a new Faith Temple pastor.

New Business: None.

Kudos: Faith Temple Church and Hosting NIA Meetings: Bell thanked the church for making its large multipurpose room available to the NIA for meetings during the pandemic.

Announcements: Neighborhood Relations Programs, TOTO first-time homebuyers' assistance program, and Habitat's Aging in Place Program.

Next Meeting: 6:30 p.m., Mon., Mar. 1, 2022, location to be announced.

Adjournment: *Ray moved adjournment. Layton seconded the motion. The motion was approved.*

The meeting adjourned at 8:34 p.m.

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Treasurer's Report for March 14, 2022 General Membership Meeting:

<b>Tennessee Town NIA Final 2021 Operations and Communications Budget:</b>				
<b>Date</b>	<b>Piece Count</b>	<b>Transaction Type</b>	<b>Withdrawal</b>	<b>Balance</b>
1-1-22	▶	▶	▶	<b>\$983.02 (same as 2021)</b>
2-21-22	302	Printing of Meeting Notice Cards	\$28.10	<b>\$954.92</b>
2-21-22	302	Postage for Meeting Notice Cards	\$78.52	<b>\$876.40</b>
<b>TOTALS:</b>	▶	▶	<b>\$106.62</b>	<b>\$876.40</b>

Note: GoBlue, the printer contracted by the City of Topeka to print and mail the meeting notice cards, has decided to no longer do so. The figures for the next report regarding printing and mailing may be different.

Note: The Envista free-will donation account will be included in the May 2022 treasurer's report.

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Contacts With Chief Wheelles Regarding Challenges of Low-Income Neighborhoods:

Thank you Mr. Bell. I will review this information and share it with my command staff here at the police department for a group discussion.

Chief Wheelles

Hope all is going well. I'm providing here a link to a YouTube presentation created by Tennessee Town NIA resident and Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library historian Donna Rae Pearson on the history of redlining in Topeka, it's lasting effects on certain neighborhoods as reflected by the neighborhood health maps compiled by the City of Topeka's planning and development department for the last 15 or so years, and the need to address the challenges of city disinvestment since the redlining of the 1930s and '40s in the most challenged neighborhoods of our city through holistically identifying and solving those challenges, including those challenges related to crime and safety.

Law enforcement could be a powerful ally as low-income residents seek to improve their neighborhoods.

Here's the link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f5jCZdSdkrM>

Would like to follow up with you on this.

Thanks!  
Mike Bell

Mr. Bell,

This afternoon I completed my review of your provided power point. I found it to be informative and comprehensive.

Thank you for your time, effort and leadership in Tennessee Town. I have shared it with the Police Department's command staff and have sought their feedback/input on the covered topics.

I look forward to our continuing conversation and your next installment.  
Chief Bryan Wheelles

(Note: I have cc'd Tennessee Town NIA Vice President Pat DeLapp and NIA Secretary-Treasurer Sandy Lassiter to this email.)

Chief Wheelles:

My name is Michael Bell. I am the president of the Tennessee Town NIA, Topeka's first NIA founded in 1976. Below is a discussion I had some time ago with TPD Officer Matt Wilson, who is Tennessee Town's community police officer, on NIAs and the challenges and opportunities present with low- to moderate-income people and in LMI neighborhoods.

The TPD spends a lot of time in our neighborhoods. I want to start a discussion about the reasons why that often has little to do with individual actions and much to do with systemic challenges those neighborhoods face like the lack of investment; lack of quality, affordable housing; declining or dilapidated housing and vacant lots, declining educational resources due to a shrinking tax base, lack of viable greenspaces, food deserts/insecurity, and other factors. I also want to discuss with you how holistic solutions to those challenges, including law enforcement, promise to be the best ways to address them.

I have attached here a PDF of the PowerPoint presented at the NIA Recognition Event that I put together and staged at the Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library on Nov. 12, 2019. Officer Wilson graciously attended. This will be the first installment of information I'll share with you that you can share with your officers so that they understand and interact with us in ways that respect and benefit all involved.

I hope that this is a conversation that you would want to continue. Please let me know if you have any questions moving forward.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Michael Bell  
Tennessee Town NIA President

Property Maintenance Officer:

Ms. Russell, Mr. Haugen and Mr. Cochran:

This email comes to you both with a great deal of concern and disappointment. During discussions at our January 10, 2022 Tennessee Town NIA general membership meeting Property Maintenance Inspector Carlos Hernandez implied that a resident at 1214 SW Buchanan was a liar and said he would no longer work with Tennessee Town NIA Vice President Pat DeLapp.

As a member of the Tennessee Town NIA since 1996 and its president since 2014, I found Mr. Hernandez's comments to be not in keeping with the respect and service delivery city employees should be showing to and providing for the people for whom they work. In the 26 years I've been involved with the NIA, I have never witnessed another city employee disrespect a community volunteer in the way that Mr. Hernandez did that night. We had two NIA residents attending their first NIA meeting that night. I can't imagine what they think about the City of Topeka's customer service.

Mr. Hernandez's comments also complicate the NIA's relationship with property maintenance as it is much less likely to want to work with Mr. Hernandez if he's unwilling to work with the NIA's elected vice president.

It was an unprofessional display by a city employee that should be acknowledged and for which a public apology should be offered at our next NIA meeting, to be held at 6:30 p.m. on Mon., March 14, 2022, tentatively at the Buchanan Center, 1195 SW Buchanan.

Please advise at your earliest convenience as to what you all will do about this situation. Nonaction or refusing to act on this complaint is NOT acceptable.

Michael Bell  
Tennessee Town NIA President

Topeka ARPA COVID-19 Funds Vote:

Topeka City Council asked to spend city COVID relief money for 'human infrastructure' purposes  
Tim Hrenchir  
Topeka Capital-Journal, Feb. 9, 2022

Before Tuesday, addressing problems with concrete infrastructure had been the focus of Topeka City Council discussion on how to use federal COVID relief funds.

But addressing "human infrastructure" needs in such areas as child care, affordable housing, job training and neighborhood improvement was instead the focus of most speakers who appeared before the council at a public hearing held Tuesday.

"This is the hour for our community to use our funds for our people," said Sandra Lassiter.

Lassiter was among 13 people who spoke as Topeka's mayor and city council heard comments about how the city should use more than \$45.67 million it has been awarded in federal COVID relief funding through the American Rescue Plan Act.

"I thought it was really good that we had so many people signed up tonight," Councilman Brett Kell said afterward. Councilwoman Christina Valdivia-Alcala said she thinks the mayor and council have an obligation to use the ARPA money for purposes "beyond concrete infrastructure."

Mayor Mike Padilla and the council plan to continue discussing the city's options for using the money in a work session set to take place at 9 a.m. Saturday in the city's Holliday Building at 620 S.E. Madison.

No public comment is to be heard at Saturday's session, where the agenda says the mayor and council might consider making a recommendation to interim city manager Bill Cochran "on what percentage of the ARPA funds should be specified for infrastructure."

Speakers were limited to four minutes each at Tuesday's hearing, where Lazone Grays told the mayor and the council that the ARPA money provides a "once-in-lifetime opportunity" to rescue the city's low- to moderate-income neighborhoods.

"Many of our residents have simply given up hope," said Laura Pederzani, president of the North Topeka West Neighborhood Improvement.(Association).

Michael Bell, president of the Tennessee Town NIA, said given the disparate effect the COVID-19 pandemic has had on low- to moderate-income individuals and neighborhoods and the way it has exacerbated those challenges, he thinks much of the ARPA funding should go to community efforts that specifically address those challenges.

Former Topeka Mayor Joan Wagon, who is president of the board of trustees for the Topeka Performing Arts Center, asked that some of the funds go to finance needed repairs and carry out deferred maintenance at that facility at 214 S.E. 8th.

A "whole lot of things" need to be fixed to make the building usable and desirable, Wagon said.

Topeka City Council allocates \$10M of ARPA funds for social services, \$36.6M for infrastructure  
Alexander Edwards  
Topeka Capital-Journal, Feb. 14, 2022

The Topeka City Council voted Saturday on how to spend the \$46.6 million the city will receive from the American Rescue Plan.

The council decided in an 8-2 vote, with councilwomen Sylvia Ortiz and Christina Valdivia-Alcala voting no, to allocate \$10 million for social services and the remaining \$36.6 million to fund Capital Improvement Projects.

"I would support the \$30 million with the caveat that if we have extra money it will go into the social services bucket," Ortiz said in the meeting. "Because there's just a lot of needs out there."

Ortiz went on to explain that small businesses are still struggling due to lack of workers and have begun cutting hours. She also called on the council to be mindful in where the CIP money is spent, wanting it to touch the entire city as opposed to just specific locations or neighborhoods.

### **City council grants minimum in requested ARPA social services funding**

This decision comes after the city council heard public comments regarding the ARPA funds in last week's meeting. At that meeting, emphasis was placed on "human infrastructure." That is, areas of funding that aren't roads and sidewalks but the people who walk them.

The vote on Saturday was made with city debt and mill levy also in mind. The \$36.6 million dedicated to CIP funding can be used as "cash on hand," said councilman Tony Emerson.

"What you want to do is pay cash for projects," he said. "And therefore get around the 20% and all the issuing fees that go into debt."

Emerson said the money spent on CIPs will directly affect everyone living in the community, not just those organizations and groups who would be directly funded by the social services allocation. There is also a lengthy application process associated with the social services funding, said Deputy Mayor Spencer Duncan.

"We can't allocate those funds today," Duncan said. "We've already discussed that the community bucket process is going to take a little time."

The application would require city council discussion and approval or denial.

After around one hour of discussion, Councilman Neil Dobler brought forth a motion seeking to approve the finalized distribution of funding. Originally, Dobler wanted to allocate \$37.5 million to CIP, but was negotiated down to 36.6 million.

This would allow for the \$10 million to go to civil services, a minimum requirement for many council members.

Stormont-Vail Donation of Vacant Lots to Habitat:

Hi (to Tracy O'Rourke, Stormont Vail),

Thank you very much for keeping us in the loop. I can't say that I'm surprised by what Habitat has decided to do. However, I'm disappointed given the fact that the agreement in place between the NIA, Stormont Vail and Habitat goes back to 2017 and predates the projects that Habitat has signed off on since then.

Having said that, we greatly appreciate your continued commitment to keeping and maintaining the parcels in question until we can identify a suitable organization to accept their donation. We currently are working on forming our own housing nonprofit. When that comes to fruition, then we can accept your donation that way.

Again, thank you for keeping us informed and for being a good steward of the properties.

Michael Bell  
Tennessee Town NIA President

Michael-

Thank you for your patience as we revisited Stormont's potential property donation with Habitat. I was able to connect with Janice Watkins this week to discuss. Janice shared that while they had considered the Stormont property as a potential site, the pandemic's impact on supply chain, funding and human resources required them to delay and reprioritize their projects. Their build schedule has them committed to other sites for the next 2-3 years. Since Habitat does not have an immediate need or a plan for Stormont's property, Janice and I agreed it would not be prudent for them to accept the donation and become responsible for the maintenance, etc. of a vacant lot.

Stormont continues to maintain the property and remains open to donating to another interested party that meets the affordable housing efforts of the NIA.

Regards,  
Tracy



## Central Topeka Grocery Store Update:

The Central Topeka Grocery Oasis (CTGO), a group of neighbors organized four years ago to reestablish a full-service grocery store in Central Topeka, is proud and excited to announce that it has been awarded two grants to continue its work.

The Topeka Community Foundation (TCF) and the Sunflower Foundation (SF) have both recently awarded money to the CTGO to help in its efforts after the Dillon's store that formerly served Central Topeka closed in February 2016. That closure made Central Topeka a food desert with food insecurity issues and led to the formation of the CTGO.

The TCF grant is for \$95,000 and will enable the CTGO to fund attorney's fees as related to the lease from GraceMed for the land to construct the new grocery store at 1200 SW Washburn, salaries and related benefits for a project manager/grant writer, and fees related to engaging a grocery consultant.

The SF grant is a discretionary grant for \$10,000 and will enable the CTGO to fund a broad scope of work including grant writing assistance, primary research and other needs as they emerge.

The two grants will empower the CTGO to serve the nine Central Topeka neighborhoods most directly affected by the Dillons' closure: Tennessee Town, Central Park, Chesney Park, Historic Old Town, Historic Holiday Park, Quinton Heights-Steele, Monroe, Ward Meade and Elmhurst. There had been a grocery store presence at SW Huntoon and Lane Streets going back to 1927 (Dibble's through 1975 and then Dillons from 1976-2016). Two market studies conducted by Dakota International already have established that a new grocery store in Central Topeka is viable.

Those nine neighborhoods comprise nearly 13,000 people and are primarily low- to moderate-income featuring challenges that have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, including an average family yearly income of \$31,000, 30 percent of households are below the federal poverty line, 25 percent don't have access to a vehicle, almost 50 percent lack personal internet access, 35 percent have at least one disabled person in the household, many are seniors, many don't have bank accounts or credit cards, and about half are people of color. Yet people like them supported a Central Topeka grocery store for 89 years. The CTGO's mission is not only to provide healthy food alternatives for underserved people but also to provide economic justice as having a grocery store should not be limited to our city's periphery. The CTGO also seeks the inclusion of check cashing, bill payment, money order, and postal services, just as the former Dillons provided.

During the past four years the CTGO has met with and engaged area residents, the City of Topeka, the Shawnee County Health Department, local and state nonprofits, and other individuals and entities to achieve its mission.