



## District 2 Citizens Advisory Board Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, Aug. 8, 2023 | 6 p.m.  
Haysville Community Library  
210 S. Hays Ave. Haysville, KS 67060

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**Board Members in Attendance:** Martha Pint, Tabitha Lehman (on Zoom), Ashlie Brockleman (on Zoom), Jessica Atherton, Tony Martinez, Gage Hunt, Lupe Montes, Jeff Hersh, Dr. William Hammers, Cheryl Hill

**County Representatives:** Commissioner Sarah Lopez, County Manager Tom Stolz

1. Call to Order:
  - a. Martha Pints called the meeting to order at 5:59 pm.
2. Roll Call Vote:
  - a. Board members identified themselves by saying, "Here."
3. Approval of Minutes:
  - a. Gage Hunt made a motion to approve the July 11 meeting minutes. Dr. Hammers seconded the motion. It carried unanimously.
4. Public Agenda:
  - a. No public comment here.
5. New Business:
  - a. 2024 County Overview & Budget Review by Tom Stolz, County Manager
    1. Many Sedgwick County offices are direct conduits to a state office, including:
      - Elections: Secretary of State
      - Appraiser: Property Valuation Department
      - Treasurer: Dept. of Revenue
      - Dept. of Aging: Kansas Department of Aging and Disability Services
      - Health Department: Kansas Department of Health and Environment
      - Community Corrections: Corrections
      - Public Works: Kansas Dept. of Transportation
    2. Several County departments are not related to a state office, including:
      - EMS
      - 9-1-1
      - Sedgwick County Fire Department #1
      - Metropolitan Area Building and Construction Department
      - Metropolitan Area Planning Commission
      - Regional Forensic Science Center
    3. Goals of 2024 Recommended Budget for Sedgwick County:
      - Balanced budget
      - Stabilize the workforce
      - Emphasize mental health
        - a. Jeff Hersh asked: Do you have to go through the Revenue Neutral process?

Tom Stolz said yes. On July 11, when the County Commission accepted the recommended budget, the County had to issue notice that we intend to exceed the Revenue Neutral Rate.

b. Tony Martinez asked: What has caused your workforce problems?

Tom Stolz said this issue started many years ago, when County compensation did not keep pace with the job market. In 2019, the then-County Manager realized County employees were drastically underpaid: 14-28% as determined by a third-party market analysis in 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic put plans to increase pay on hold, and now County Commissioners are playing catch-up. They're also addressing other workforce issues including benefits, workplace environment and culture.

4. Recommended adjustments:
  - 2% raises, plus step increases for Sheriff, EMS and SCFD #1
  - 3% raises for all other County employees
  - Adding 10 FTEs in Election Office, Appraiser's Office, SCFD #1, 9-1-1, Sedgwick County Regional Forensic Science Center, EMS (back to 2 paramedics on an ambulance crew)
5. The County faces several challenges when deciding budget priorities:
  - Public safety costs (Sheriff's staffing was less than half in 2022)
  - Increased mental health issues
  - Workforce shortages
  - Consolidating city and county government
6. The proposed 2024 budget is \$518,464,784 (29.37 mills) for Sedgwick County and \$27,735,225 (17.989 mills) for Sedgwick County Fire District #1.
7. The majority of the budget goes to General Government expenses, which account for 30% of the budget. Public safety takes 38% of the budget, and public services 17%.
  - a. Jeff Hersh asked: What are the total property taxes collected? Tom Stolz estimated about \$200 million, about 40% of the budget.
  - b. Martha Pint asked for a clarification on the Local Ad Valorem Tax Reduction (LAVTR) fund. Tom Stolz explained that by law, the state is supposed to give Sedgwick County money to lower property taxes, but has not since 2004.
  - c. Gage Hunt asked if ad valorem taxes include mortgage taxes? Tom Stolz said mortgage taxes will likely never come back.
  - d. Cheryl Hill asked who's watching the state and holds them accountable for their spending? Tom Stolz said no one. The state is exempt from the Revenue Neutral Rate.
8. Tom Stolz asked CAB members to think about core services, what can be cut in the budget, what cannot, and let Commissioner Lopez know their priorities.
  - a. Some people think the zoo and Exploration Place are extras, but those attractions greatly affect the economy through tourism dollars and jobs.

9. The state is looking at capping property valuations at 4% next year. If that passes, Sedgwick County would have to make big cuts.
  - a. Gage Hunt asked: What would be the first to go, in your mind? Tom said some of the most drastic ideas include:
    - Privatize EMS
    - Sell the County parks
    - Divest COMCARE
10. Tom Stolz talked about state mandated services that are no longer funded, like Community Corrections and the burial of indigent people. Currently Sedgwick County deals with about 100 deceased people each year with no family or means for burial.
11. Dr. Bill Hammers recounted a recent incident with his family that required 9-1-1 and EMS. He was very pleased with the response time and service from both agencies.
12. Dr. Hammers also voiced his concern over the rising property taxes on agricultural land. This year wheat farmers made a third of what their crop would normally earn, but they are paying higher property taxes. Tom Stolz understood, saying the County might consider taking catastrophic damage into account when figuring property taxes.
13. Tom Stolz explained Sedgwick County's plans to improve mental health services in the future:
  - Expanded COMCARE Crisis Center. County officials are looking for property close to the KU/WSU Biomedical Campus.
  - Building a regional state-run mental health hospital. \$25 million in SPARK funding + \$15 million in state funding will start construction.
  - Improved services to move people out of the prison system into treatment. Sedgwick County has Drug Court and Veterans Treatment Court, and the City of Wichita is working to build a social services hub downtown.
14. Tom Stolz said it's harder now to find people who want to work as public servants. There is too much stress and not enough money, and the younger generation doesn't seem to have a heart for public service, like EMS, corrections, etc.
15. Tabitha Lehman (on Zoom) said she and the next election commissioner had both asked for replacement batteries for the voting equipment to be included in the budget, but they weren't. Are batteries in the 2024 proposed budget? Tom Stolz said yes, he thought so.
  - a. Martha Pint asked if a cost analysis had been done to determine if it's worth adding polling sites? She asked Tabitha Lehman what it used to cost when she was election commissioner to mail out advance ballot applications? Tabitha said it was more than \$100k. She said the bigger issue was finding enough poll workers to staff additional polling sites. Even with a mailer, Tabitha believes more polling sites are needed to accommodate more registered voters.
  - b. Tom Stolz and Tabitha Lehman confirmed it was more cost effective to do a mailer and have fewer polling places. Tabitha said voters were

used to getting advance ballot applications in the mail until 2020 when election fraud became a concern.

16. Tony Martinez said he's impressed with County leadership. Every department head who has spoken to the CAB seems smart and dedicated to serving the public.

17. Gage Hunt asked what the big asks were this year from different departments in this budget? Tom Stolz said departments submitted \$26 million in requests. COMCARE, Sheriff and Appraiser's offices need fleet vehicles so employees are not using their personal vehicles, which increases County liability.

a. Tony Martinez asked if the County has considered leasing? Tom Stolz said yes, and they buy used cars, even though they can be expensive, too.

6. Discussion of Future Agenda Items by Stephanie Birmingham, Strategic Communications
  - a. A tour of the COMCARE Community Crisis Center was scheduled for the Sept. 12 meeting, but it will be rescheduled to allow for a hearing on a zoning case for property at 63<sup>rd</sup> and Hydraulic. Stephanie will check with MAPC a couple weeks before the hearing to find out if we should expect several citizens to speak at the meeting. If not, Commissioner Lopez suggested having Dr. Susan Norton talk about the Haysville Education Foundation.
  - b. A tour of Sedgwick County Fire District 1 station #32 is scheduled for Oct. 10.
  - c. A tour of the Sedgwick County Zoo is set for Nov. 14 during the "Wild Lights," Asian lantern festival. Steve Onken from SCZ said he'll try to incorporate that event, plus show our group a few different parts of the zoo.
  - d. For the Dec. 12 meeting, Stephanie will try to reschedule the COMCARE tour. She will ask Sedgwick County Election Commissioner, Laura Rainwater, to speak in January.
  - e. Stephanie showed an example of the Citizens Advisory Board book each member should have and asked who needs one. Tabitha Lehman suggested everyone get a new book, since the one she has now is outdated. Stephanie will bring those to the next meeting.
7. Other Business
  - a. Commissioner Lopez had no further updates.
8. Adjournment
  - a. The meeting adjourned at 7:35 p.m.