Message from the Mayor

Greetings Topeka! School has started! Let’s celebrate a brand-new year of schooling for our children and ensure we are doing our best to keep them safe and provide the support they need to be happy and successful. It takes seven adults in a child’s life for them to have a true balance of support. Think about the four to six people in your life who are supporting your kids, and if you don’t have them, start looking for them. I promise you that your children will greatly benefit from having great people in their lives investing in their character, education, and future. Also, school zone speed limits have dropped to 20 m.p.h., so please be sure to slow down when you are driving through areas with schools because we want all our children to get to school safely.

I would like to thank our Harvard City Leadership intern, Rodrigo Dorador. He made Topeka his home for ten weeks, and quickly became a part of the fabric of our community. Rodrigo worked with the Greater Topeka Partnership and with the Mayor’s office on the promotion of Momentum 2022, so that we can go back into the communities and discuss how we are making Topeka a better place for every one of you. Thank you for your contributions, Rodrigo. You will always have a home in Topeka. I would also like to thank Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Bloomberg Foundation CEO Patti Harris for putting together a program to fortify mayors across the country. Without their foresight and vision, we would not have access to the wonderful resources that we have through Harvard University, and through the Bloomberg organization, which has been phenomenal to work with.

Finally, I would like to discuss the Rescue Mission. As many of you know, the Rescue Mission is currently experiencing a period of financial hardship, and a lot of people are asking what happened. For the last several years, the Rescue Mission has focused on how to eliminate the root causes of homelessness. In that process, NET Reach was formed in Hi-Crest to invest in the neighborhood and learn about the needs of our children. From that, the Children’s Palace emerged with the goal of providing additional support to at-risk children at an early age so they could go to school ready to learn and access to better opportunities for their future. While we had many community partners in this process, the Rescue Mission bore the lion’s share financially and was forced to start spending down some of its reserves. In addition to that, we started to accept the pervasive reality of human trafficking in our community. For way to long, we didn’t want to face the fact that human trafficking is happening right here in Topeka, especially with the intersection of I-70 and I-35 close by. From that, the Rescue Mission’s newest program—Freedom Now, began.

The focus of the Rescue Mission remains eliminating the causes of homelessness, but the Mission does not accept government funding, which is beautiful because they can do their mission without restrictions. Unfortunately, corporate giving has declined under some of the new federal tax code provisions—but it takes all of us to support the Mission. Please consider what you can do for the Rescue Mission: try something as simple as skipping a coffee once a month so that you can donate five dollars to the Mission instead, or volunteering your time to serve meals, or donate food and clothing. Just remember the Mission is our mission. The Mission supports our community and gives
our support to the least of us so that we do not have other chronic issues that could plague our community. I am confident that Topeka will rise to the occasion and answer the call.

City Council Recap (August 13, 20)

On August 13, the City Council approved $35 million in bonds for various capital improvement projects, and $1 million for zoo projects. They also passed temporary notes to fund 15 utility projects. The governing body also held a public hearing and ultimately voted to pass the proposed $292.6 million city budget for 2020 without any increase in taxes. Because the budget was passed without an increase to the city's mill levy, the property tax levy will remain at 39.73 mills, or $456.90 annually for the owner of a $100,000 home. To help retain a flat budget, the city is expecting to eliminate one vacant job each from the finance, executive, and public works departments.

On August 20, the City Council heard presentations from the Finance Department, Planning and Development Department, and received an update on the Momentum 2022 initiative. The council approved an ordinance combining utility revenue bonds. $33 million in bonds were approved by the body. The City Council also approved a three-year agreement for the city's health care plan, and permitted Blue Cross and Blue Shield to expand their parking lot.

We have already started conversations about the 2021 budget. As I have mentioned before, the 2021 budget will be a challenging one. Make sure that you communicate with us and with your council members so that we can continue to do the work that you want us to do. This year, we increased the amount of money the city is allowed to borrow by $2 million so that we could allocate additional funds for road projects. We want to make sure that we follow through on our promise of ensuring that you have better infrastructure and better roads.

Silicon Valley Comes Home to Topeka

A few months ago, Plug and Play, an accelerator company from Silicon Valley, visited several cities across the United States looking for the home of their next expansion location. They came to visit Topeka. Plug and Play has 30 sites globally, and Topeka has now officially become site number 31.
They are focusing on the animal health corridor and it’s going to entice startups that have to do with animal care and food technology that will be able to start creating roots here in the city of Topeka. We are very excited to welcome our partners from the Silicon Valley, and we have encouraged them to go back home and tell them how great Topeka is.

**Hill’s Pet Nutrition Announces Expansion**

On August 15th, Hill’s Pet Nutrition announced a $20 million expansion project to build a pet nutrition and professional engagement center in Topeka. The new facility, which is expected to be 25,000 sq. ft., will focus on research and development for small dog nutrition. The pet nutrition center, which will be called “The Small Paws Center,” will house 80 dogs who weigh less than 12 lbs. and will include an outdoor bark park, while the Engagement Center will focus on providing educational programs for veterinary professionals and students.

We’re very proud that Topeka is the headquarters of Hill's Pet Nutrition and that they continue expanding and investing in our community. During the ceremony, Hill’s talked about how the CEO of Colgate stayed at the Cyrus Hotel and how much he loved walking to work. It was a moment of great pride that all the investments we are making in our quality of place are starting to reap the benefits. They also talked about how beautiful downtown is looking and how proud they are to call Topeka their home. Thank you, Hill's Pet Nutrition, for choosing Topeka!

**Topeka Sees Increase in Community Pride**

Earlier this month, the Greater Topeka Partnership announced that community pride is on the rise. As part of the Momentum 2022 initiative, members of the strategy have surveyed the pulse of the community over the last few years by asking a series of questions, including, “How likely are you to recommend living in Topeka or Shawnee County?” In 2018, that answer received a score that was 13 points higher than the survey results obtained in 2017. In other words, significantly more people gave a positive response to living in Topeka or Shawnee County than during previous years. Given all that Momentum 2022 in trying to achieve—namely helping Topeka become a prime destination for people to live, work, and play, these were encouraging results. To learn more about Momentum 2022 or to volunteer, visit [https://www.gotopeka.com/momentum2022/](https://www.gotopeka.com/momentum2022/).

Sincerely,

Michelle De La Isla
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PAID FOR BY MICHELLE FOR TOPEKA, MARK KOSSLER, TREASURER