Report Out from Concern Gathering 04/01/21 – Framing Team – Work Session #1

Additional concerns will be added from community submissions
https://forms.office.com/r/SnijbcuZY5

These concerns will inform the work in the Topeka issue guide for deliberation described at https://tscpl.org/conversations

What are we doing to improve Topeka and how is it improving Topeka right now?

▪ Dynamic core and what it means for vitality of Topeka
▪ Downtown area – was wasted space before and now it’s something we can be proud of – by extension NOTO area – we don’t have to expand out, we’re not growing so fast to justify a lot of outside expansion, it’s good to see internal improvement
▪ Downtown area is just waiting to explode – can be a fabulous drawing area
▪ Twelfth Street project – shift that we’re not building beyond our means, not building for expansion, supporting families where they are
▪ Pivoting in the midst of the pandemic – finding resources and innovative ways to meet the needs of people that need it the most
▪ Mobile access partnership - Partnerships to promote wellness across the community
▪ Lively food reputation – retaining people who are young and want to stay here because it’s not just about business and finding a job
▪ Energy for cultural life in Topeka – a lot of positive energy
▪ People care – advocate for each other and help people having challenges
▪ Strong health care system which improves quality of life
▪ Conversations happening in this community about equity and place that have not happened before – it’s slowly bringing voices to the table that may not have been there before
▪ Concerned about lack of diversity, but glad to see that is coming up and being discussed
▪ Great with equity and fix what’s happening systemically – looking at ways to best help people
▪ Seat at the Table – open discussion on holistic community with harmonious race relations
▪ Partnerships – working together with outside communities – ex: SNCO Emergency Management – we’re helping smaller communities with employment, training, and working with other smaller communities to help them grow but also strengthen us

What concerns you about how we are improving Topeka? What concerns you about how we are not improving Topeka? What concerns you about the community projects you haven’t gotten done? What annoys you about what’s happening in Topeka with community improvement?

▪ Growing gap in viewpoints, equal access (internet) – as we’re trying to improve communication
▪ Not sure where it fits in, but I am concerned about the growth in the gap in mutually-exclusive ideologies
▪ Lack of quality housing in our community – parts that have been the same for generations and we’ve done very little to improve those areas
▪ What we’re doing or not doing to retain people aged 18-27 – we’re doing a lot for people who are already established and there are a lot of people that age that are here and planning to stay here
- East side – as we grow businesses making sure that the east side can keep up – it’s looking outdated – the more we grow certain areas the more it exacerbates the older areas – how can we make sure all areas are modernized
- Some ways it feels like the same people doing the same things in the same way – can feel like box checking –
- When we talk about attracting new talent – we have people who are never going to leave Topeka – sometimes it’s easier to say we’ll attract new people instead of growing talent pool that’s here – for many people they’ve had the doors of opportunity slammed in their faces and their voices are supplanted
- Violence that we continue to experience in our community – all of the things we talk about that will improve our community, it can feel like taking so many steps forward and other steps backward – some of it is people not taking advantage of services available (such as mental health services)
- We all have one goal but we’re all in our separate places – ex: Black community and White community without togetherness – trying to meet and reach the people we need to help because there’s a gap in trust
- Jobs – since 2008 in Topeka we’ve lost many jobs – they’re professional jobs (management/administration in business [2,000] and state government [2,500]) – in the meantime we’ve developed industrial park in the wrong area (river side took great farmland but poor land for building), industrial area in south side wound up being direct line to Lawrence, so people live in Lawrence and work here – 37% of workers in Shawnee County live outside of Shawnee County; also violence and crime rate but often that’s tied to jobs
- re: commuting rate: That is very high. And economically draining to Topeka.
- We fail to engage the people that need to be engaged when we’re making community decisions – whether it’s envisioning future of Topeka or down to the neighborhood level – door to door work really could improve public perception of projects and getting feedback from neighborhoods would improve projects
- Big fan of small locally owned businesses – annoys me when we bring in a large company and give a big tax break for 500 jobs while there are 10-20 small businesses who hire and provide jobs for 500 people and don’t get a tax break – not the way to grow the city or even to bring in new jobs
- People can feel stuck in careers – we have low-paying entry-level jobs to get people to come in and work – people who work in Topeka also spend money in Topeka
- Issue with choosing to live here is quality of housing, availability of housing – don’t have middle-ground rentals (low- and high-) – can’t afford nicer houses – middle ground people are moving to Lawrence and other places where they can afford houses and have small town feel
- Young people can feel entitled to have higher paying jobs
- Hard to advance because people stay in positions for so long
- How can we make sure we’re inclusive of our entire community – talk to people initially and make sure they’re involved in it and that once we make improvement make sure they can access it
- We have some amazing health resources that people who need it don’t know about it (could be they can’t get access due to other reasons ex: insurance)
- Health in community: housing, transportation, jobs, etc.
- Reputation that Topeka has in other surrounding areas – number of people that don’t live in Topeka, but live in Lawrence or Kansas City and are not helping to improve Topeka – if we could elevate the reputation, that Topeka isn’t a dangerous place
- Need to be willing to have difficult conversations about why certain neighborhoods aren’t getting what they need and have meaningful discussions about how we can improve that

*More voices and perspectives must be included: Who’s not here that should be?*

- Latino/a/x voices
- Asian voices
- Top leadership of the very large for-profit corporations