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City of Topeka, Kansas Establishes an Affordable Housing Trust Fund

by Michael Anderson // [Summer](#)



More than 1200 Topeka JUMP members fill the Most Pure Heart of Mary for the 2019 Nehemiah Action Assembly

By Shanae' Holman, Lead Organizer, Topeka Jump

With 50 members of a grassroots organization Topeka JUMP standing in support, the Topeka City Council established an Affordable Housing Trust Fund with a unanimous 9-0 vote on July 23, 2019. The Affordable Housing Trust Fund is intended to increase the supply and quality of housing options affordable to Topeka families whose budgets are less than \$43,950 a year for a household of two. With the housing fund mechanism in place, the next move is to make it operational by allocating money into it.

Topeka JUMP leader Ann Gilliland's testimony framed the urgency for Council action to increase the supply of decent, affordable rentals: *"As a senior citizen, I am not looking to buy. I need an apartment just big enough for me that is safe and affordable. I currently live in public housing in the Tennessee Town neighborhood. While I deeply appreciate the Topeka Housing Authority public housing, I want to live somewhere that does not require frequent, random inspections, somewhere freer and more dignified"*.

The purpose of Topeka Housing Trust Fund is to encourage and support the acquisition, rehabilitation, and development of affordable rental and ownership homes, emergency shelter, and supportive services. The fund serves households at or below 80% AMI, with preferences for serving households below 50% AMI and below 30% AMI. The Director of Neighborhood Relations will administer the application and review process, and the Director of Financial Services will manage the housing trust fund account and funds. An Affordable Housing Review Committee will conduct a review of applications, and make recommendations of funding to the City Manager. Final funding decisions are made by City Council. Funding awards will align with the city's HUD Consolidated Plan and Topeka's approved neighborhood plans. The Department of Neighborhood Relations will establish written criteria for applicants that will include, but not be limited to, neighborhood plans, the neighborhood health map as published by the city planning department, and the comprehensive plan and any amendments thereto. The major emphasis of funding decisions will be to promote identifiable impacts and enhance neighborhood wealth.

Until City Council established the Topeka Affordable Housing Trust Fund, Lawrence was the only city in Kansas with an operational housing fund. In November 2017, voters in Lawrence approved reallocating 1/20th of a penny of city sales tax to an affordable housing trust fund, which is estimated to generate a million dollars annually through 2027. More than 580 cities with housing trust funds strategically direct public dollars to the priority housing needs of the city. Once funded, private and non-profit developers will apply for funds through a competitive process aligned with the city's housing goals. Organizations with a track-record of success developing and maintaining affordable housing, such as Pioneer Group, Cornerstone of Topeka, and Topeka Habitat for Humanity, will have the opportunity to significantly increase their impact in Topeka neighborhoods.

"With at least \$1 million dollars in the Trust Fund, we could see the number of families able to secure a decent place to live that is within their budget double each year," said Carol Babcock of Topeka JUMP. "We see the amazing transformation for families when they have that comfort and safety of a place they can afford and call home. We have developers poised to do more, and a trust fund in place so we can be most strategic. Now we have to put money in the fund, and get to work."

JUMP plans to pursue both public and private funding sources, with a goal of at least \$1 million dollars a year.

To learn more about the Topeka JUMP, go to www.topekajump.com



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