

Governing Body Minutes – March 28, 2023

CYRUS K. HOLLIDAY BUILDING, Topeka, Kansas, Tuesday, March 28, 2023.

The Governing Body members of the City of Topeka met in special session at 5:30 P.M. with the following Councilmembers present: Councilmembers Hiller, Valdivia- Alcala, Ortiz, Emerson, Kell, Duncan and Hoferer -7. Absent: Naeger and Dobler -2. Mayor Padilla presided -1.

Public Comment was not permitted at this special meeting (work session). The meeting was open to the public; however, seating was limited. Written public comment was also considered to the extent it was personally submitted at the meeting or to the City Clerk's Office located at 215 SE 7th Street, Room 166, Topeka, Kansas, 66603 or via email at cclerk@topeka.org on or before the date of the meeting for attachment to the meeting minutes.

DISCUSSION and POSSIBLE ACTION concerning the City's priority outcomes as determined by the Governing Body, was presented.

Stephen Wade, City Manager, stated this session would serve as the third step of the Strategic Planning process for the City of Topeka, and Staff will provide preliminary reports on the process.

Councilmembers Dobler and Naeger entered the room.

Patty Gentrup, University of Kansas (KU) Public Management Center, reported one of the main concerns expressed by Governing Body members in the small group discussions she conducted on January 24, 2023, was the need for a better understanding of how to communicate between Governing Body members and Staff; and how the values of the

Governing Body translate for one another for Topeka as a community. The goal is “High Performance Governance” based on the teachings of John Nalbandian, Professor Emeritus, KU School of Public Affairs and Administration. She noted as they move through the third step of the process they will conduct a case study as a group for the purpose of learning from another perspective. She asked Governing Body members to answer the question of “What I learned about serving as an elected official is _____?” and “What I contribute to effective governance is _____?”

Governing Body members provided the following responses:

- Councilmember Duncan (1) despite his best efforts he cannot solve everything (2) order and process for good governance
- Councilmember Hoferer (1) she has a lot more to learn as the newest Governing Body member, there is a lot of good Staff members that are willing to get answers to questions (2) curiosity and fresh perspective
- Mayor Padilla (1) what they do/or do not do as a Governing Body has a ripple effect in the community and is always very impactful while having an awareness of matching goals to capabilities (2) do not set unattainable goals for self or the Governing Body
- Councilmember Hiller (1) she accomplished a lot but it was hard work and took time (2) she has found that you must listen, listen, listen and learn – that is what really matters
- Councilmember Valdivia-Alcala (1) learning to find the balance of how to walk the fine line of having patience as she tends to approach things too hard because of her passion for her constituents (2) accountability to those I serve
- Councilmember Ortiz (1) to truly be a servant at any level (2) fair and honest
- Councilmember Emerson (1) have to be intentional about your time as you want to help everyone and be responsive to the needs of constituents (2) always consider what is good for the city not just his district
- Councilmember Kell (1) it is bigger than all of them as they try to be everywhere all the time, they run into a lot of brick walls as it relates to laws/regulations (2) must have open communication and be open minded to learn a lot and ask a lot of “why” questions
- Councilmember Naeger (1) how much Staff is primed and ready to help constituents and Governing Body members due to the City having the right people in place through careful planning and effective leadership she knows she is just a conduit (2) I offer a different perspective from a generational aspect than the majority of the Governing

Body so I am able to meet difficulties with different strategies even though she knows she is just a piece of the puzzle

- Councilmember Dobler (1) most change is really meaningful if its incremental because that is what sticks (2) trying to prioritize things

Patty Gentrup continued to facilitate the discussion on the characteristics of effective governing bodies; obstacles to success; how to work the communication gap as it relates to political acceptability and administrative sustainability as well as competing values.

At 6:40 p.m. the Governing Body and Staff members divided into six working groups to discuss “Crossing the Road” a case study scenario addressing the dynamics of problem solving as it relates to the political aspect verses the administrative aspect. Case study discussions ended at 7:05 p.m.

Following a 10-minute break, the open meeting resumed at 7:15 p.m. *(The following portion of the meeting was televised pursuant to Resolution No. 9334, approved by the Governing Body on March 21, 2023.)*

Stephen Wade, City Manager, thanked Adam Vaughn, Budget Manager, for his leadership during the Strategic process. He stated in an effort to efficiently proceed through Staff presentations where many of the goals being discussed interlock, he would ask Governing Body members to wait until all presentations have concluded to submit their written questions on the index cards provided to Staff for response.

Budget Manager Vaughn provided an overview of the process and how it would integrate with the City’s outcome-based budgeting. He highlighted the top three outcomes approved by the Governing Body on February 15, 2023, along with the four guiding principles and corresponding progress indicators.

Priority Outcomes

- 1. Housing:** Increase overall housing inventory equitably and elevate current housing stock. The process indicators included the number of inspections, permits, vacant homes and resolved code complaints per census of each council district.
- 2. Community Appearance:** Improve the appearance of the Capital City of Kansas. The process indicators included community satisfaction ratings, arterials/corridors visual appearance and reduction of blight.
- 3. Growth:** Increase the number of people who live and work in Topeka. The process indicators included population, economic growth and increased residential and commercial development.

Guiding Principles

- 1. Innovation:** A dedication to the art of collaborative creativity combined with critical analysis to deliver intentional positive transformations to meet the evolving needs of our community.
- 2. Sustainability:** A responsible stewardship of resources to balance the needs of the present while ensuring Topeka's prosperous future.
- 3. Equity:** Provide fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all. Understanding that not everyone starts from the same place, we must acknowledge, identify, and eliminate barriers to foster civic participation, belonging, and promote just outcomes.
- 4. Municipal Operations:** A commitment to our citizens, partners and colleagues to be knowledgeable, fair, consistent, and responsive in every interaction to provide accessible quality service, striving for excellence in all we do.

Rhiannon Friedman, Interim Planning and Development Director, provided a process overview of the City of Topeka Harvard-Bloomberg Economic Development initiative. She highlighted the learning sessions with Harvard-Bloomberg; the initial problem framing; community interviews that included developers, business owners and City Staff; how the information was themed from the interviews followed by the reframing of the problem statement; Key Insight Themes; and the next steps in the process timeline scheduled to conclude June 2023.

Reframed Problem Statement

“The focus of our project is to increase investment in commercial and residential development by creating a proactive environment with aligned systems and communication strategies that are efficient, equitable, and strengthen partnerships, improving the vibrancy and tax base of Topeka.”

Key Insight Themes

- (1) Make incentive opportunities more visible and cohesive in the Topeka community.
- (2) Streamline Topeka's development process.
- (3) Cultivate a sense of greater belonging in the Topeka community.
- (4) Invest in workforce diversity in Topeka.
- (5) Deepen the commitment to collaboration in our development process.

A PRESENTATION on the Housing Strategy was provided by Carrie Higgins, Interim Housing Services Division Director; Kristin Moorhead, City Manager’s Office and Alan Stahl, City of Topeka Fire Marshal. (*See Attachment A*)

A PRESENTATION on the Community Appearance Strategy was provided by Sylvia Davis, Utilities Director; Gretchen Spiker, Communications Division Director; Rachelle Mathews, Administrative and Financial Services Deputy Director; John Schardine, Property Maintenance Division Director and Brad DeMers, City Manager’s Office. (*See Attachment B*)

A PRESENTATION on the Growth Strategy was provided by Hannah Uhlrig, Director of Innovation and Special Projects. (*See Attachment C*)

City Manager Wade addressed a number of questions submitted by Governing Body members regarding how community partners will be engaged including collaboration with the Greater Topeka Partnership (GTP) and Momentum 2027; the cross-training of code compliance officers in housing programs and nuisance violation processes; how Community Appearance and Growth will be measured on a quarterly basis through data points such as surveys, pavement condition index, Census and economic trends. He noted the City plans to utilize economic tools

already in place such as neighborhood revitalization; however, Staff needs to improve accessibility and education of programs along with possible implementation of a City of Topeka Land Bank. He introduced Irma L. Faudoa, City of Topeka Housing Navigator, who will work as an advocate to find solutions to avoid court through the coordination of services, identifying appropriate housing options, and interacts with landlords and other organizations.

Councilmember Valdivia-Alcala referenced the individuals that get caught up in a difficult or confusing situations within the legal system and expressed the importance of the City's Housing Navigator staying on top of the issues to better understand how to help the underserved population find the answers and at the same time, weed out the bad actors. She also referenced comparable cities, and asked if Staff has discussed addressing the "living wage" issue with other communities experiencing the same problems.

City Manager Wade stated the issue of increasing the living wage has been discussed; however, it was not an issue that rose to the top in regards to having the ability to be impactful. He reported Staff focused on three or four areas that they believe could truly make an impact. He asked City Attorney Amanda Stanley, to provide an update on House Bill (HB) 2083 establishing the "Vacant Property Act."

City Attorney Stanley reported the proposed legislative HB was passed through the Senate Committee and would preempt the requirement for a fee for a vacant housing registry. She noted even if the HB was approved in its current form, it would still allow the City of Topeka to have a registry; however, they would have to think of creative ways to enforce its use.

City Manager Wade continued to address questions concerning homeless issues as it relates to low barrier shelters and the high cost to remove trash from homeless camps. He stated he was very hopeful the City could have an impact on homeless issues.

- The homeless initiative will be addressed in the same manner as the Harvard-Bloomberg Economic Development Initiative by creating a core team of internal and external stakeholders with an open mind for solutions. He announced a Summit would be held April 5, 2023, consisting of approximately 36 areas agencies that touch homelessness, with the intent to understand what services are currently be offered in the city while identifying service gaps, and then determining the role of the City and how best to engage that defined role. After this is complete, a team of external and internal members will be created to address the homeless issue.
- The team that will be assigned to mental health will be a different team than those reviewing nutrition, housing and workforce redevelopment. He stated they are purposely not naming the individuals until they decide where it would be best for the City to engage.
- The city of Topeka does not have a low bearer shelter and that service has been identified as a gap; however, the Topeka Rescue Mission would be considered a medium barrier shelter with restrictions for participation.
- In regards to trash removal in and around homeless camps, Staff continues to discuss how to spend resources as it relates to the priorities of the Governing Body. Community Appearance has been identified as a priority, supporting a desire by the Governing Body to invest resources in improving this condition. Staff continues to do a lot of work in the area of trash removal including the coordination of blight crews.

Councilmember Valdivia-Alcala requested the Governing Body receive information on harm reduction as it relates to the creation of a low barrier shelter. She announced a public meeting on March 29, 2023, at the Lundgren Elementary School, located at 1020 NE Forest Avenue, Topeka, to discuss chronic homeless and mental health issues that continue to occur in northeast Topeka. She suggested City Staff interview meeting participants as part of the homeless initiative for the purpose of gathering input from average citizens.

City Manager Wade reported Strategic team members were chosen based on individuals who were involved in the process and/or considered subject matter experts as well as community organizations such as the Greater Topeka Partnership and Momentum 2027.

Councilmember Kell commended City Manager Wade for the structure of the work session and clear process regarding Staff presentations.

Councilmember Naeger commended Staff for the fantastic work and stated she was excited to be a part of the City as an organization.

Councilmember Ortiz thanked Staff for providing great presentations. She commended the City Manager for his work and stated she looks forward to getting organized and implementing the plan. She commented on the pride and excitement expressed by Staff and stated she supports the plan as presented.

Mayor Padilla thanked the City Manager for working with Staff to find a different approach to the problems the City has dealt with repeatedly. He thanked Budget Manager Vaughn for organizing the process and presentations.

Councilmember Hiller expressed her appreciation to Staff regarding the format of the presentations allowing them to see how the thought process cascaded through different issues. She stated she believes the process was very encouraging.

City Manager Wade stated the purpose of the special meeting work session was to seek affirmation from the Governing Body that Staff was on the correct path and working towards implementing the right strategies to support their priorities. He expressed the importance of understanding that Staff must have the ability to pivot on the important issues such as homelessness, due to rapid changing factors. He noted teams are set to meet on a regular basis to keep the Strategic plan a priority and thanked facilitators Patty Gentrup, KU Public Management Center and Tara Dimick, E2 Communications, for facilitating the Strategic Planning sessions. He expressed his gratitude and appreciation to the Governing Body for investing in the process.

NO FURTHER BUSINESS appearing the meeting adjourned at 8:29 p.m.

(SEAL)

Brenda Younger City Clerk

03-28-23

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HOUSING

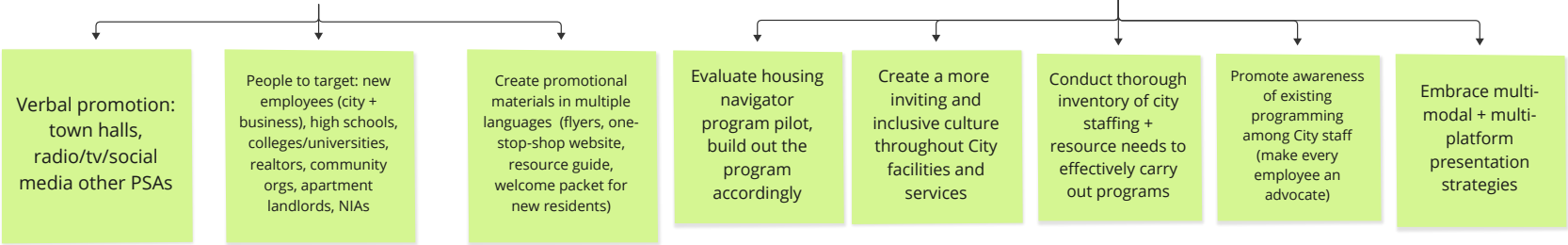


Housing Strategy: Education & Activation

Education + Activation

Increase awareness of available programs, ordinances, policies, and incentives throughout the community

Prioritize accessibility + personalized support for utilization of programs



Housing Strategy: Education & Activation

Education
+
Activation

Increase training
partnerships to
reintegrate
individuals into
the workforce

1-on-1
interviews w/
key
stakeholders to
identify gaps

Partner with educational
institutions on
development projects to
provide sustain supply of
trained workforce and do
construction/renovation
work

Lobby for
legislative change
to create and
promote
reintegration/trai
ning partnerships

Housing Strategy: Implement Bloomberg/Harvard Study Recommendations

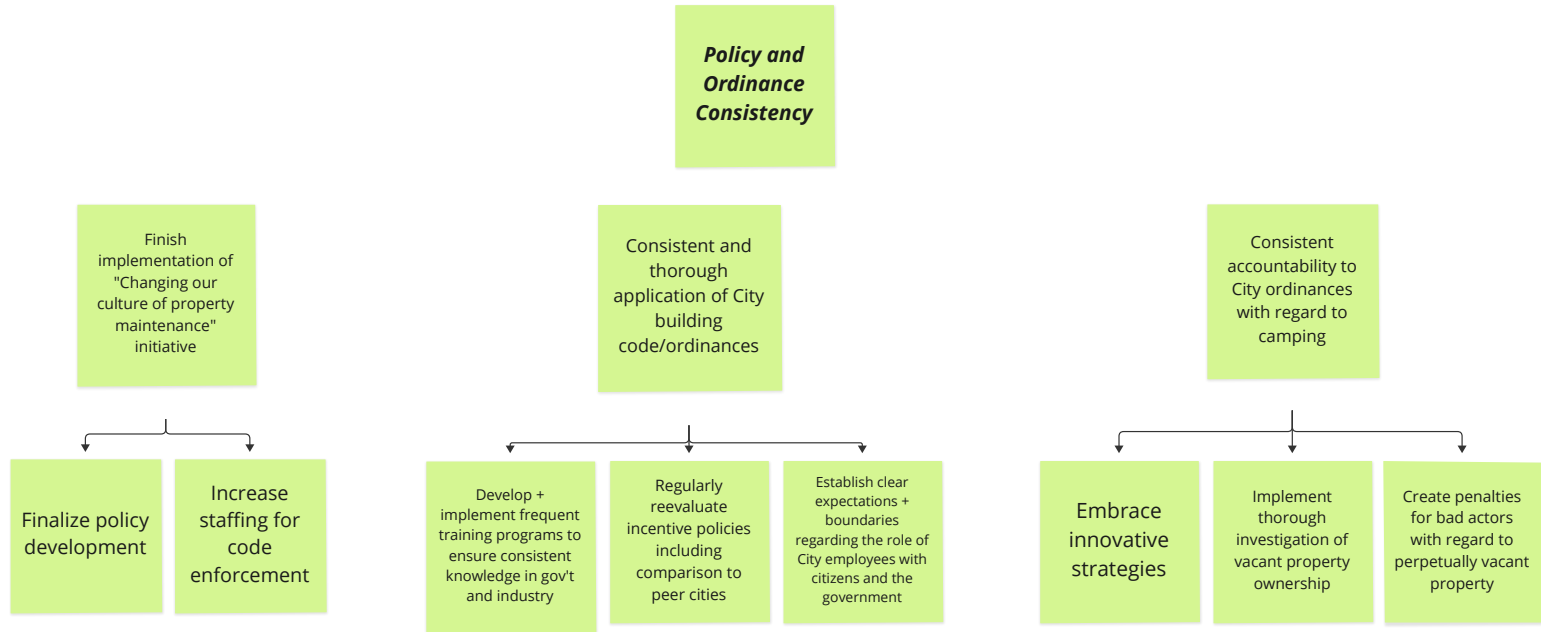
*Implement
Bloomberg/Harvard
Study
Recommendations*

Accelerate
economic and
residential
development
in the City

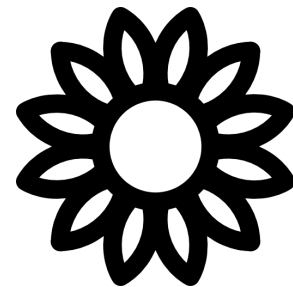
Collect data

Develop plan
of action with
community
engagement

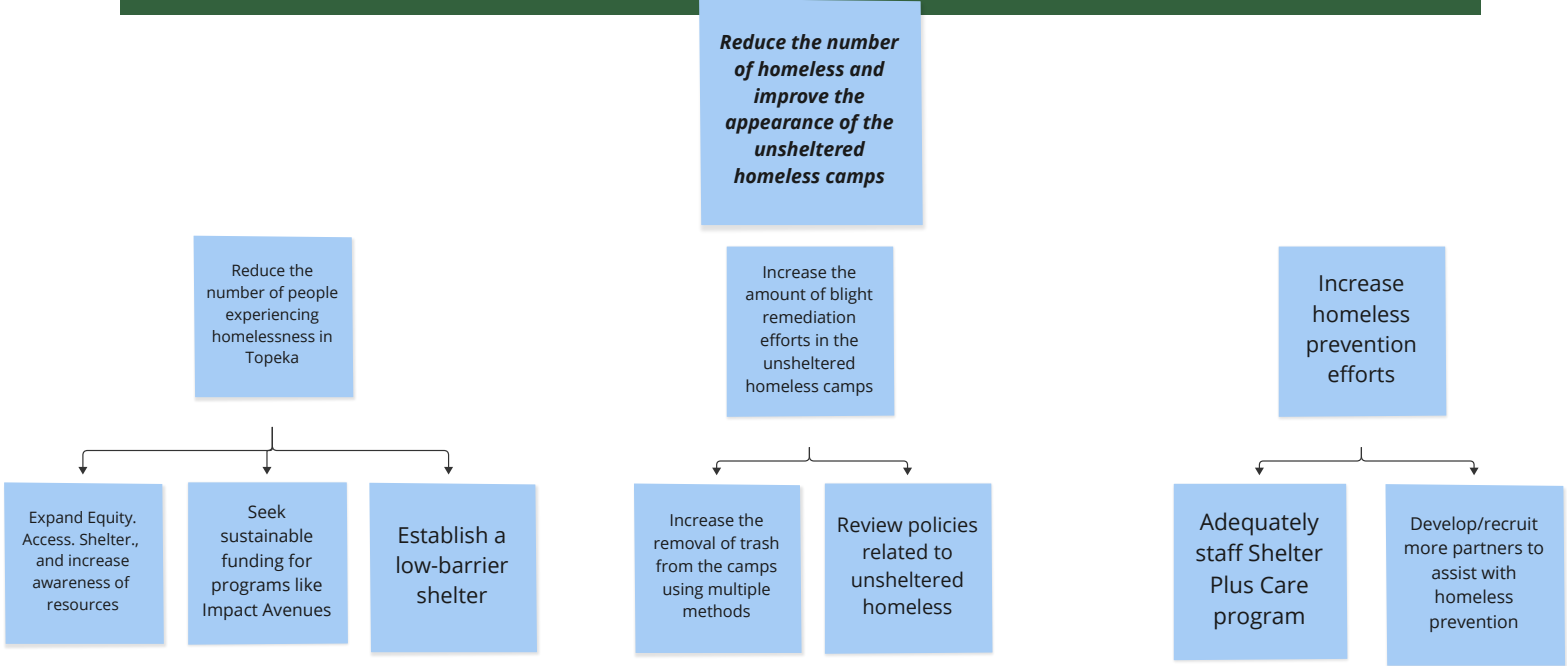
Housing Strategy: Policy & Ordinance Consistency



COMMUNITY APPEARANCE



Community Appearance Strategy: Reducing Homelessness



Reduce the number of homeless and improve the appearance of the unsheltered homeless camps

Reduce the number of people experiencing homelessness in Topeka

Increase the amount of blight remediation efforts in the unsheltered homeless camps

Increase homeless prevention efforts

Expand Equity, Access, Shelter, and increase awareness of resources

Seek sustainable funding for programs like Impact Avenues

Establish a low-barrier shelter

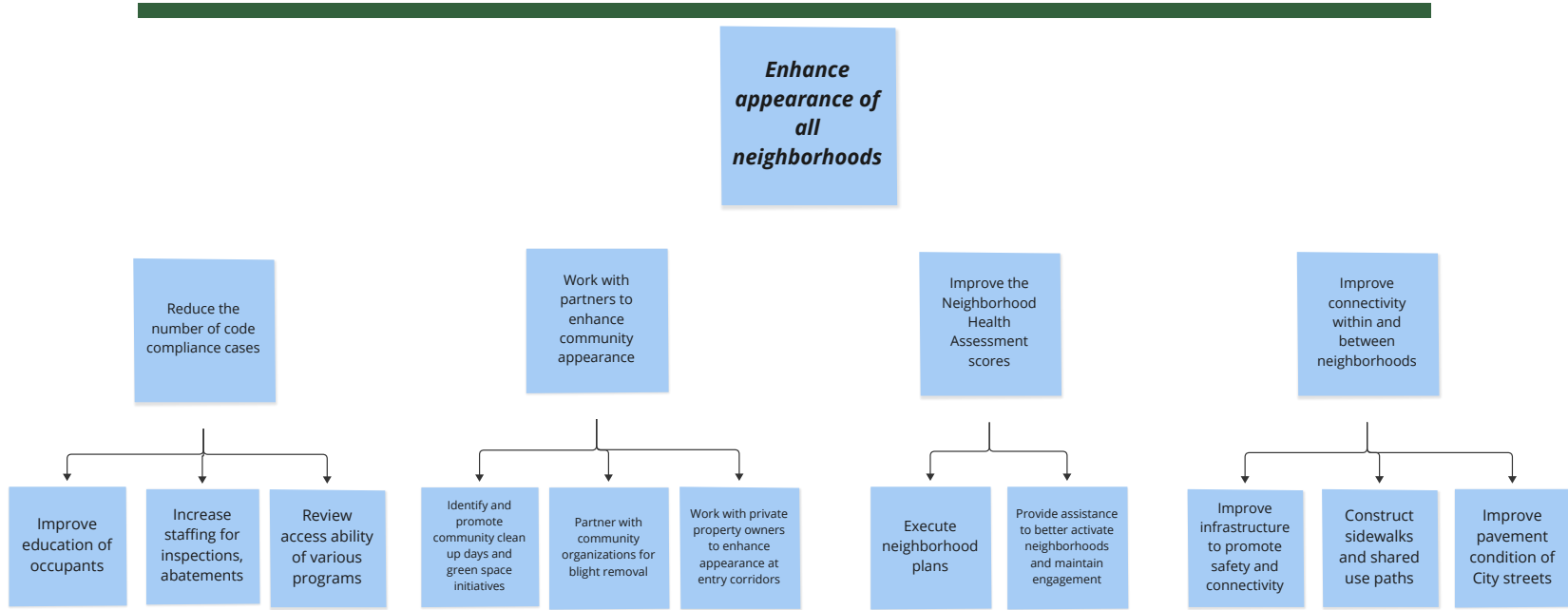
Increase the removal of trash from the camps using multiple methods

Review policies related to unsheltered homeless

Adequately staff Shelter Plus Care program

Develop/recruit more partners to assist with homeless prevention

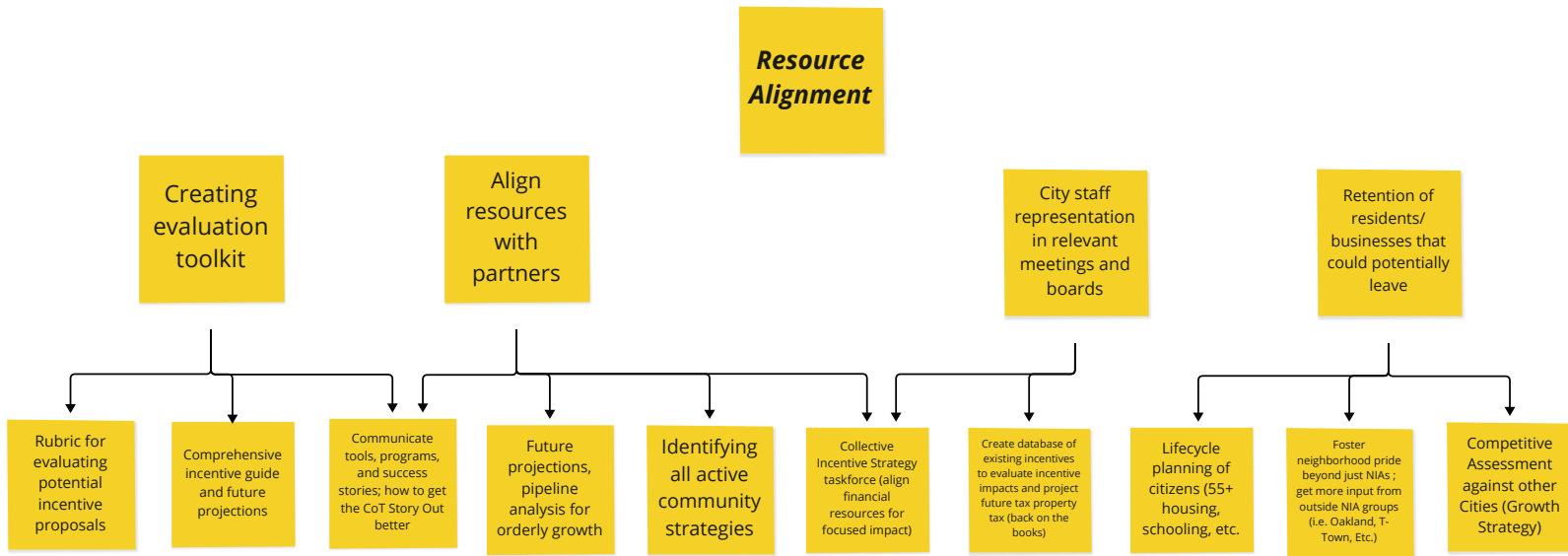
Community Appearance Strategy: Enhancing Neighborhoods



GROWTH



Growth Strategy: Resource Alignment



Growth Strategy: Promote & Foster Development

Promote and Foster Development

Proactive approach to development; target growth

Follow through on Harvard-Bloomberg strategic outcomes

Ensure appropriate time from concept to completion

Ensure developer satisfaction (along all the stages)

Prime development lot monitoring and inventory based on market demand

Customizing incentive packages to attract targeted industry

Proactive, helpful FAQ for businesses before issues occur

On-demand, accessible, and consistent education and communication with developers, contractors, professional services

Efficient city processes (turnaround time)

Removing redundancies in processes and approvals across agencies

Conduct net promoter survey for development process

Internal training on the development process and resources for a consistent experience