

Contact: Nick Hernandez
Phone: (620) 441-4415
Fax: (620) 441-0869
nhernandez@arkansascityks.gov

City Manager's Office
City of Arkansas City
118 W. Central Ave.
Arkansas City, KS 67005



News Release

Town hall meeting scheduled for Thursday night at Senior Center

Officials seek open dialogue with citizens on beautification, code enforcement

ARKANSAS CITY, Kan. (October 3, 2016) — The City Commission of Arkansas City voted 5-0 on Sept. 20 to schedule a special town hall meeting to discuss beautification and code enforcement.

The meeting will be at 7 p.m. Thursday at the Arkansas City Senior Citizens Center, 320 South A St. The City Commission and the Beautification and Tree Advisory Board both will be in attendance.

The goal of the meeting is to listen to private citizens on how best to help to jumpstart efforts to clean up and beautify properties before they have to be cited and ultimately condemned.

City Manager Nick Hernandez's goal is to reduce tax dollars spent on the demolition of buildings by allocating smaller amounts on a case-by-case basis to beautify a larger number of properties by preventative maintenance through citizen initiatives in order to prevent dilapidation.

Part of the meeting will be to educate the public about these efforts and the code enforcement process. The rest will consist of an open dialogue with interested individuals and nonprofit organizations.

A recently approved charter ordinance that goes into effect at the end of the month will allow code enforcement officials to issue notices to appear in municipal court. But that is a method of last resort.

"Issuing a ticket and ultimately abating the property ourselves is the last thing we want to do, as it typically does not address the underlying issue for how the property got in that condition," Hernandez said.

"Ark City is a beautiful community and some homeowners just need a helping hand," he added.

"We really need to encourage neighborhoods — churches, youth groups, whatever it may be — to try to identify areas where they can clean up. Maybe it's cleaning yards out for an elderly or disabled citizen, painting a house, or trimming trees. Every little bit helps."

For immediate release

more

Fall Cleanup Week will be Oct. 10-14, the week after the town hall meeting. It is midway between the Last Run Car Show and the Arkalalah Festival, and City officials hope to get a lot of positive work done in that short period of time prior to the annual fall festival.

Hernandez described a model in which the City, under the direction and recommendation of the Beautification and Tree Advisory Board, could award groups with micro-grants to perform proposed work.

“Maybe we pay for paint or paintbrushes,” he said. “Maybe we haul off the trash for the volunteers.

“We want to try to encourage those local groups to provide assistance through voluntary work, rather than us just going out and ticketing the property owner right away, which rarely solves the problem.”

He also suggested the idea of the City purchasing several small mowers and loaning them out.

Hernandez said the advantage of relying on neighborhood groups is that they are familiar with their neighbors — they know who really needs the help and who doesn’t need it.

“(Citizens) come to us and want us to do something,” said Mayor Duane Oestmann. “I think it’s a good idea to get neighborhoods to get involved with it. I think that does more good than what we do.”

City officials have had preliminary discussion with representatives some local organizations, but an open dialogue is desired at the meeting with all interested groups to maximize feedback and cooperation.

Any individual or group interested in being a part of this beautification effort is encouraged to attend Thursday’s meeting and join the discussion. The public also is welcome to attend the information portion.

Citizens may watch a replay of the Sept. 20 City Commission meeting at youtu.be/uWsR9lsg1HM.

In other business Sept. 20, the City Commission:

- Witnessed the swearing in of new Arkansas City Police Department Officer Phil White.
- Heard an update from South Central Kansas Medical Center chief executive officer Virgil Watson.
- Witnessed Oestmann issuing a proclamation that Oct. 3 is National Night Out in Arkansas City.
- Voted unanimously to table until a future meeting a resolution authorizing the purchase of a new detachable gooseneck 35-ton lowboy trailer from Holden Industries, Inc., for an amount not to exceed \$41,276, and approve the following consent agenda items: approval of the Sept. 6 regular meeting minutes as written; approval of a certificate of special assessment for a

dangerous structure demolition at 606 S. Summit St.; directing City staff to file said certificate with the Cowley County Clerk's Office for inclusion on the 2016 property tax rolls.

- Heard a first reading of and decided to table until Oct. 18 an ordinance modifying Municipal Code Part II, Chapters 2, 14 and 38, concerning general provisions for City organizations, including boards, commissions, committees, councils and task forces.
- Heard a first reading of and voted unanimously to approve a charter ordinance exempting the City from the provisions of K.S.A. 14-10a02, relating to lost or mislaid property, and providing substitute and additional provisions relating thereto. This charter ordinance, which will go into effect at the beginning of December, will allow the City to more easily dispose of found property by giving it to individuals or charitable organizations, rather than disposing of it by auction or holding on to it indefinitely as currently required by state statute. This particularly will alleviate space concerns in the Arkansas City Police Department's storage garages at City Hall.
- Discussed potentially trying to acquire property west of Riverview Cemetery that could be used in the future to expand the cemetery grounds. The commissioners requested that Hernandez, Parks and Facilities Director Tony Tapia, and cemetery sexton Marcus Lynn gather some more information about current plot limitations and the amount of projected new plots that the land could hold, and bring that data back for discussion at Tuesday night's City Commission meeting.
- Heard updates from Hernandez on the Last Run Car Show, the Burford Theatre's grand opening celebration events, the resumption of the 2016 Fall Friday Family Movie Series and his participation in the International City/County Management Association's annual conference in Kansas City, Mo.

###