

The City of Towanda

City Council Regular Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, September 9, 2026, 7:00 PM, City Hall, 110 S 3rd, Towanda, KS

Regular Council Meeting

1. Call To Order

At 7 p.m., Mayor Mike Hayes called the meeting to order.

2. Roll Call

Present: Mike Hayes, Jennifer Watkins, Chris Hunt, Kit Williams, Drew Shaults, Angel Ramsey.

Staff present included City Administrator Sarah Gooding, Planning and Zoning Administrator Lisa Long-Hamilton, and City Attorney Rob Lane.

3. Adopt Agenda

Chris Hunt moved to adopt the agenda as presented, seconded by Kit Williams. Motion passed 5-0.

4. Consent Agenda – *Consent agenda items will be acted on by one motion unless a majority of the City Council votes to remove an item for discussion and separate action.*

A. August 2026 Reports

i. Minutes

1. August 12, 2026 Council Meeting

ii. TREASURERS' Information Reports

1. Statement of Activities
2. Fund Balance Report
3. Budget Execution Report
4. Water Loss Report

iii. Claims

1. Claims Reports and Statements
 - a. Appropriations Ordinance 07-2026

iv. Staff/Department Information Reports

1. Sheriff's Office Report
2. Court Clerk's Report
3. Planning and Zoning
4. Code Compliance Report
5. Towanda Maintenance Department
6. Towanda Public Library Report

Jennifer Watkins moved to adopt the Consent Agenda as presented, with one change to times in the library report, seconded by Drew Shaults. Motion passed 5-0.

5. Public Comment Time

Crystal Reed said with Towanda's budget situation she is concerned with regulations being proposed by Butler County for data centers. She asked if the petition being addressed later that evening would cost if a special election were required, and she recognized that the

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Council's role is to get consensus around issues. Crystal also said she hadn't had time to watch the budget hearing the day prior and wondered if everything has to be finalized this evening? She also shared that her child with her was a student taking notes for a current events class for homeschool.

Lane Volavka proposed an idea if the City is looking for revenue and recommended that residents could volunteer to witness dogs at large, generating citations and revenues. City Attorney Rob Lane noted that in his experience courts, and especially animal enforcement, tend to be a losing revenue game.

Clint Weyrauch shared that he received his water bill and a late notice both the Friday prior, and he said eh felt he shouldn't have to pay the delinquent notice when his original notice was delayed. Council expressed a willingness to work with this request, given the unusual circumstances.

A resident shared that a couple years ago she signed up for a Wichita Flag license plate, and she questioned whether Towanda could do a similar design and opportunity as a fundraiser to build community pride and resource.

Rudy Bollig shared that the past few months he has seen work on Clay Hill Road and he has concerns about heavy truck traffic traveling on the new surface, particularly those filled with sand and gravel going to the township. He asked if they could travel at night when it isn't so warm? He said normally he wouldn't say anything, but the surface cost a considerable amount of tax money and something ought to be done.

Val Hind, president of the Towanda Area Historical Museum Board, said she understood there was a question of cutting funding to the museum. She provided a document to the Mayor with a detailed accountability of spending and accomplishments, and advised that the board uses the City's \$5,000 annual donation for utilities and building repairs, including a new HVAC system, second story remodel, windows, and other major maintenance in recent years.

Tom Pyle, Fire Chief for Fire District No. 11, announced that Saturday, September 12, would be the annual BBQ, and he said there also will be a car show at the High School from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. that day.

Sarah Gooding, City Administrator, shared that the fall Garage Sale weekend has been scheduled for October 22-24. Gooding also shared that representatives for the City's Safe Streets for All project would be present at the Fire District's BBQ to collect feedback for the planning project.

6. 2027 Budget

- A. Public Hearing for Exceeding the Revenue Neutral Rate
No public comments were presented.

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Drew Shaults moved to adopt a Resolution to levy a property tax exceeding the Revenue Neutral Rate, seconded by Angel Ramsey.

Per requirement, a roll call vote was taken, with the following votes placed verbally and signed:

Mayor Mike Hayes – does not vote

Jennifer Watkins – Yes

Chris Hunt – Yes

Kit Williams – No

Drew Shaults – Yes

Angel Ramsey – Yes

Resolution 2026-12, to exceed the Revenue Neutral Rate, passed 4-1.

B. Public Hearing to Adopt the 2027 City of Towanda Budget

Loyd Group assisted City of Towanda staff with preparation of the 2027 budget, and Scot Loyd was present to discuss the budget process, considerations, and recommendations for the City. Loyd said in Towanda each mill levied generates \$10,578. This number is low because the City is primarily residential, and commercial properties make a huge difference in the value of a mill. Loyd explained that the decision to exceed Revenue Neutral Rate (RNR) helps the City keep up with paying for services. He said a decision not to exceed RNR would take the prior year's budget dollars and locks the next year's budget at the same dollar value, so cities that have tried to maintain RNR for several years have often found themselves trying to deliver services without increased revenue to support them. This often leads to drawing down of reserves. Loyd noted that Towanda entered 2026 with less than three days of cash on hand in its General Fund, which is far less than the three to six months of cash on hand he recommends for healthy reserves.

Loyd noted that Towanda originally published a potential mill levy increase of up to 20 mills, and he said cities cannot exceed the published mill levy, but they can decrease their final number.

Loyd answered several questions members of the public shared earlier and also provided information on potential resources for the City to consider.

Council members expressed concern with trying to whittle the budget down to a minimum increase, knowing that reserves have dwindled and it is not where the City needs to be. They recommended following advice Loyd presented on building a healthy cushion in the budget in the coming years and asked the Administrator to adjust the budget for a total proposed increase of eight mills.

Chris Hunt made a motion to recess the budget hearing until 7 p.m. September 23, seconded by Kit Williams. The motion passed 5-0.

7. Old Business

A. 309 Main – Next Steps

Planning and Zoning Administrator Lisa Long-Hamilton said that Brad Shore with JEO inspected the building at 309 Main. His review found that shoring was missing from

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columns and that construction had not been completed according to the agreed-up design. An email sent the Friday prior to the meeting asking when the construction would be completed received no response.

Building Owner Perry Jones was present and invited to provide brief comments. Jones said he tried to comply with grant requirements and toward the end of an application process for a grant to restore the building he decided he didn't want to do what the City required. He said he is doing everything he can to put a deal together.

Roberto Baeza, the project's contractor, said the building passed inspections by the City's inspector, and then the City Council argued about "stable" versus "safe".

Lisa said the City's building inspector said the building appears stable, but he is not an engineer.

Chris Hunt asked when the building's owner or contractor plans to respond to the email from the engineer, and Roberto said everything is backlogged 2-3 weeks.

Jennifer Watkins made a motion to table the item, seconded by Drew Shaults. Motion passed 5-0.

8. New Business

A. Hometown Action – Proposed Park Installation

Linda Pyle shared updates from the Towanda Hometown Action Commission, including presenting a sign purchased to identify the Blessing Box recently installed outside of City Hall. She said the goal of Hometown Action is to complete small projects that enhance quality of place.

The next proposed project is a mural that would be installed outside the library in Norman Park. The mural would feature monarch wings that could become a photo backdrop, and Hometown Action would install the mural and ground cover plants in an area outside of the library that has been underutilized and difficult to grow grass.

Chris Hunt made a motion to authorize Towanda Hometown Action Commission to proceed with installation of the butterfly structure, as designed, in Norman Park, seconded by Kit. Motion passed 4-0 with Jennifer Watkins abstaining.

B. Open Records Fee Ordinance Update

Sarah Gooding presented proposed updates to open records fees to more accurately reflect the expense of providing these services. Most records request involve nominal staff time and would not be charged, but more complex or time-consuming records could pull staff away from serving taxpayers as a whole. In these instances, she advised, it is appropriate to recoup real and reasonable costs.

Drew Shaults made a motion to accept Resolution 2026-13 to update fees charged for Open Records requests, seconded by Kit Williams. Motion passed 5-0.

C. Code Enforcement Ordinance Update

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Lisa Long-Hamilton presented a proposed ordinance to allow a designee of the City to process code compliance on behalf of the City. This is an update that aligns with the City's selection of Pierce Code Compliance to provide these services.

Chris Hunt made a motion to approve Ordinance 738 to amend Towanda City Code Chapter 8 Health and Welfare, seconded by Drew Shaults. Motion passed 5-0.

D. Proposed Data Center Ordinance

Sarah Gooding shared that the City of Towanda had received a citizen petition seeking adoption of an Ordinance Prohibiting High Impact Data Centers and Tier 2 and Tier 3 Battery Energy Storage Systems in the City of Towanda, Kansas. The petition seeks that the Council would adopt the draft ordinance without alteration or submit the same for a vote of the electors.

As of the meeting, the petition had been submitted to the Butler County Clerk for validation and remained under review.

Crystal Reed spearheaded the petition and was invited to share more about the effort. She said a large group have dealt with proposed data centers in El Dorado and do not believe Butler County Regulations are tight enough around this type of operation. She noted that with financial challenges, data centers can look like shiny financial solutions. In coordination with Protect the Heartland, residents Crystal Reed and Lane Volavka worked to champion a petition to bring a safety net to Towanda and the 3.5 miles surrounding the City.

City Attorney Rob Lane asked about the group's specific concerns and whether they are seeking to ban all data centers or only large-scale operations. Crystal said they are trying to be realistic and seeking to ban larger operations. Rob said the petition as presented requests adoption verbatim, and the proposed language doesn't square with verbal statements. Rob said the proposed language is vague and has loopholes that would be difficult to uphold, as well as problematic inconsistencies that don't align with Towanda City Code. He said his concern is that the proposed ordinance likely is unable to achieve the desired goals due to problems that include asking the governing body to pass something that has copy/paste errors from its use in El Dorado.

Crystal said she had tried to reach out to the City Administrator for conversation, but she was busy and unavailable. Crystal said what she wants to do is protect and inform, including telling people what could be happening.

Council Members who had signed the petition commended the efforts but expressed concern over whether the petition potentially could require adoption of something that doesn't make legal sense.

Rob Lane said the Council may not be able to act until the petition is certified and asked Crystal if she, as a representative for the petition signers, would have any desire to withdraw and amend the petition? Either way, he said the Council would have no answer tonight as the petition had not yet been certified.

In light of the budget presentation earlier and the recognition of the City's financial position, Lane Volavka asked if the petition were withdrawn and reviewed if the City would incur costly attorney fees for additional assistance. Rob Lane anticipates that this assistance would be part of his contracted scope of services.

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No action was taken.

E. Contract for Assistance

Chris Hunt made a motion to table the proposed contract for assistance to the September 23 Council Meeting, seconded by Kit Williams. Motion carried 5-0.

9. Other Business & Announcements

Sarah Gooding notified Council of a series of upcoming community events including street closures, including:

Fire District No. 11 Barbecue and Street Dance on September 12

Homecoming Parade on October 2

Community Garage Sales on October

Trunk or Treat on October 31

Christmas Party on November 29

10. Executive Session

A. Non-Elected Personnel

Jennifer Watkins moved that the Council recess into executive session for 10 minutes to discuss matters of non-elected personnel, pursuant to the justification listed in KSA 75-4319(b)1 with attendance to include the Mayor, City Council, City Attorney, and City Administrator, with the open meeting set to resume in the Towanda City Hall Council Room at 10:30 p.m. The motion was seconded by Drew Shauls and carried 5-0.

At 10:30, Jennifer Watkins made a motion to re-enter general session, seconded by Kit Williams. Motion passed 5-0.

11. Adjourn

Drew Shauls made a motion to adjourn at 10:41 p.m., seconded by Kit Williams. Motion carried 5-0.

Respectfully Submitted,



Sarah Gooding, City Administrator/Clerk