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I was asked 7 months ago to form a Downtown Topeka Safe and Clean Task Force to deal with the homeless issues and cleanup downtown Topeka. The main issues we were having in Downtown Topeka:

- 1) Misdemeanor Crime – Broken Windows, Vandalism, Theft.
- 2) Business Disruption – Homeless bursting into business throwing items at employees, yelling at employees, sitting at tables, defecation, eating food off tables. A couple of incidents of indecent exposure as well.
- 3) Homeless camping at downtown plaza.
- 4) A cleaner downtown.

My committee of 7 made these our goals:

- 1) Clean Up Downtown Topeka Alleys - My employees at AIM spent 2 calendar days cleaning up downtown alleys and vacant buildings. We removed 3,800 pounds of trash from the alleys and removed areas where homeless people were living in the alleys. Continuous work to be done here.
- 2) Partner with TPD and listen - We had members of TPD on our task force. They listened to the problems we were having, and we listened to the problems they were having. TPD upped their game and got us more patrols downtown. They are parking police vehicles at the plaza multiple days a week to deter camping. We listened to their enforcement problems and found that they were having troubles enforcing because the no camping ordinance signs were not present. We went out and worked with the city and procured 100 No Camping ordinance signs. They are all over downtown Topeka.
- 3) Identifying the offenders downtown – Members of my committee lived downtown and saw these repeat offenders again and again. We talked to them, identified them and submitted them to TPD and met with city prosecutors. We asked them to get these repeat offenders, misdemeanor criminals – that’s what they are off the streets and keep them in jail longer. A proven formula even in places like Seattle. It has worked.
- 4) Homeless Camping – Downtown Plaza – we removed electrical outlets throughout the plaza in certain locations and posted no camping signs by areas which were points people camped.
- 5) We started tracking. We started tracking every incident of homeless disruption or vandalism. We discussed this with police and constructed heat maps. We talked to business owners who were promoting behaviors which brought people to downtown and addressed the flow of people into the area.
- 6) Cameras – This is an ongoing project. We are allowing TPD with access to private cameras to help promote a real time crime solving agenda.

- 7) Meeting with city council members – discussing issues. We were able to get a new ‘no camping’ ordinance brought to the forefront which prohibits camping anywhere in the city limits this was inspired in part by the Safe Cities Act that was introduced in 2023.
- 8) Getting everyone involved. We have sent out an email that is unique for everyone to report downtown incidents to – vandalism, camping, disturbances. This is a community issue and private businesses need to get involved.
- 9) Continuous improvement – still working on funds for ambassadors and other safety measures to improve downtown.

Results – Over the last 30-45 days it has been peaceful in downtown Topeka. Our restaurants used to see daily incidents. We have had 1 incident in weeks. Less camping downtown, more police presence, and ZERO vandalism reports. Everyone can make a difference if they roll up their sleeves and do work.