Joint Economic Development Organization Board Minutes
Wednesday, February 11, 2026

City Council Chambers
214 SE 8th Street, 2nd Floor
Topeka, Kansas

The Joint Economic Development Organization (JEDO) Board members met at 6:00 p.m. in-person with the following Board members present: Shawnee County Commissioners Bill Riphahn, Kevin Cook and Aaron Mays; Mayor Spencer Duncan, Councilmember Brett Kell, proxy for Deputy Mayor Michelle Hoferer; City of Topeka Councilmembers David Banks, Karen Hiller, Sylvia Ortiz and Michelle Bradberry. Shawnee County Commissioner Bill Riphahn presided as JEDO Chair.

The following JEDO Board members were absent: Deputy Mayor Michelle Hoferer, City Councilmembers Christina Valdivia-Alcala, Marcus Miller and Murray McGee.

THE PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE was recited by meeting participants.

APPROVAL of December 10, 2025 JEDO Board Meeting Minutes was presented.

Commissioner Cook moved to approve the Minutes of December 10, 2025. The motion seconded by Mayor Duncan carried unanimously. (7-0)

APPROVAL of Incentive Funding for Project Omega was presented.

Ashley Lehman, GO Topeka VP of Business Development, presented. She gave a brief recap on JEDO's Incentive Guidelines. She then gave the outline of the Incentive Agreement for Project Omega, which included:

- Local financial services employer
- 175 new jobs over the next five years
- Average wages of $50,000 - $100,000+
- Qualified for employment and training incentives based on annual salary
- $1.37 Billion Economic Impact over the next 10 years
- 39% Return on Investments
- Total Requested Incentives of $1,430,000

Ms. Lehman announced that Project Omega will allow them to enhance their operations. They have already begun to expand their footprint and this will support their job growth.

Councilmember Banks moved to approve the Incentive Agreement for Project Omega. The motion seconded by Councilmember Hiller carried unanimously. (7-0)

APPROVAL of Incentive Agreement for Project Team was presented.

Ashley Lehman, GO Topeka VP of Business Development, presented. She gave the outline of the Incentive Agreement for Project Team, which included:

- Local food manufacturing plant
- Capital Investment of $17.8 Million; $2.7 Million in equipment
- Not adding new jobs at this time, but currently employ over 380 employees
- Average wages of $74,000
- Qualified for employment and training incentives based on annual salary
- $30.9 Billion Economic Impact over the next 10 years
- 30% Return on Investments
- Total Requested Incentives of $383,000

Ms. Lehman announced that Project Team was JM Smucker. She introduced Luke Livingston, the plant manager and director of operations who was present to speak.

Luke Livingston explained some of the different brand names that they manufacture and gave an overview of their company. He explained that they are very grateful for this opportunity and it really helps the company grow and helps their employees.

Councilmember Hiller asked for a broader overview of the products they sell.

Mr. Livingston named some more of their products and explained how they are one of the larges facilities in the company and produce the broadest amount of products.

Councilmember Kell moved to approve the Incentive Agreement for Project Team. The motion seconded by Commissioner Mays carried unanimously. (7-0)

APPROVAL of Incentive Agreement for Project Vulcan was presented.

Ashley Lehman, GO Topeka VP of Business Development, presented. She gave the outline of the Incentive Agreement for Project Vulcan, which included:

- Local manufacturing plant
- Capital Investment of $1 Million; $600,000 in equipment
- 19 new jobs over the next five years
- Average wages of $50,000 - $80,000
- $71 Million Economic Impact over the next 10 years
- 415% Return on Investments
- Total Requested Incentives of $147,000

Ms. Lehman announced that Project Vulcan was HF Rubber. She introduced John Adam, executive vice president who was present to speak.

John Adam, executive vice president of HF Rubber thanked the Board for investing in their company and to Topeka, Shawnee County. He explained that they make rubber mixing machines. He explained that this funding will allow them to offer more products and services.

Commissioner Cook inquired where their business is located.

Mr. Adam said they are located in North Topeka right across from The Pad.

Commissioner Cook moved to approve the Incentive Agreement for Project Vulcan. The motion seconded by Councilmember Banks carried unanimously. (7-0)

Commissioner Riphahn thanked the Team for getting these deals put together and to the companies for their commitment to Topeka.

A PRESENTATION on the 2025 Growth Organization of (GO) Topeka 4th Quarter Report was presented.

Rian Friedman, President of GO Topeka, provided a summary of 2025 economic activity and New Business Attraction referenced the Fourth Quarter Report included in the agenda packet dashboard to include:

- Activity: 184 projects tracked, 169 new jobs created, and $99 million in capital investment which includes the two projects that were announced tonight.
- Wages: The average wage for JEDO-approved projects in 2025 was approximately $81,000.
- Data Centers: There has been a significant uptick in data center interest, with eight projects currently in the pipeline, primarily focused on power availability from Evergy.

Stephanie Moran, GO Topeka Senior Vice President of Innovation and Link Innovation Labs, presented on Innovation & Entrepreneurship to include Link Innovation Labs. She announced the grand opening of the Link Innovation Center at 6th and Monroe was February 9, 2026. The $15 Million Dollar, 17,000 sq. ft. space includes a coffee shop (Sparrow Coffee Co.), eight (8) laboratory spaces, office spaces, executive boardroom, conference rooms and a pitch training event center.

Councilmember Kell inquired if they were going to be helping the entrepreneurs with copyrights, trademarks or patents.

Ms. Moran explained that yes, they will have connection points and partnerships to set up expertise in many different areas such as legal, business and funding.

Commissioner Riphahn asked what other Cities have Innovation Labs?

Ms. Moran explained that KU Innovation Park, Manhattan has small university spaces, some in Kansas City and Wichita. However, most of our work has been done with our partner in Lincoln Nebraska.

Councilmember Hiller asked what was going on with the building as a whole.

Ms. Moran explained that we are master leasing the first floor and are currently the only occupants in the building.

Councilmember Kell inquired what would be the best level of business to start there, what different types of spaces are there and what will the business hours be.

Ms. Moran explained that the Business Concierge Desk will assess what the business's needs are and what they will need for their spaces. There are many different spaces and uses within the building space. The hours are 8:00 – 5:00 Monday through Thursday and 8:00 – 3:00 on Fridays. There will also be availability to book times in the evenings.

Commissioner Riphahn inquired more about what Washburn University's role in the Innovation Lab is.

Ms. Moran explained that Washburn is a primary partner for Link Innovation Labs, including:

- Sponsorship: The university sponsors the pitch room space within the labs, which is used for training and competitions.
- Business Support: The Washburn Small Business Development Center (SBDC) has officially moved its offices into the Link facility to provide direct guidance to entrepreneurs.
- Student Engagement: Six Washburn students majoring in entrepreneurship and business currently staff the reception and "business concierge" desk, helping to manage referrals for small business owners.

Councilmember asked how they are promoting and advertising the lab.

Ms. Moran explained that they have many partners that they will be working with for advertising. As well as targeting specific markets at different events.

Commissioner Mays stated that he is excited to have this up and running now. He asked how are we measuring success?

Ms. Moran explained that the success is measured through several key performance indicators (KPIs) standard to university research parks and economic development to include:

Economic Impact Metrics

- Job Growth: Tracking the number of new jobs created by startups and businesses that launch or grow within the facility.
- Revenue Generation: Monitoring the total revenue produced by businesses associated with the innovation labs to gauge their market viability.
- Capital Investment: Measuring the amount of private and public funding flowing into the community as a result of these projects. For example, small business incentives in 2025 saw a return of approximately $167 in capital investment for every $1 invested by the board.

Facility and Program Utilization

- Occupancy Rates: Assessing how much of the laboratory and office space is currently leased and used by active tenants.
- Business Launches: Counting the number of companies that successfully "graduate" from the lab space and move into their own dedicated facilities within the community.
- Engagement Levels: Tracking the number of community members and entrepreneurs utilizing "hot desks," booking conference rooms, or attending

Ashley Lehman, GO Topeka Vice President of Business Development, gave a project recap for 2025. She reported there are 42 active projects in the pipeline to include 22 manufacturing, 2 aviation and aerospace, 8 data center and tech, 2 logistics and distribution, 4 office and 4 other. Of those 42, they were able to submit 27 of them.

Commissioner Mays asked what is the timeline for those in the pipeline? Also, do these companies disclose when they come to us what electrical/water consumers they will be?

Ms. Lehman advised that it is all going to be based on power. She explained that we do not always know right away what the full scope of their operations look like. They are trying to learn as they go.

Commissioner Cook inquired about data centers.

Ms. Lehman advised that GO Topeka is not looking to incentivize data centers at this point. However they are trying to learn more about what a project like that would look like.

Ms. Friedman explained that they are working to figure out ways how data centers could become a good partner to the community if we allowed them to develop here.

Trina Goss, Vice President of Business and Talent Initiatives presented on Small Business Incentive Programs to include:

- Choose Topeka: The relocation program has brought 89 families to Shawnee County since 2023, with an average salary of over $100,000.
- Top City FAME: A new employer-driven apprenticeship program in industrial maintenance technology has launched with 10 sponsoring companies. Students earn an associate degree from Washburn Tech while working, graduating debt-free. They have also discussed taking the Fame model and using it for other industries.

Stephanie Norwood, GO Topeka Vice President of Entrepreneurship & Small Business, provided an update on projects, programs and approved incentives, including Economic Mobility metrics and awarded funds for 2025. She explained how funds were allocated across specific support categories to bolster the local economy, such as:

- Entrepreneurial Support Services: These funds were directed toward "intangible" but critical business needs, such as marketing and accounting support, rather than physical equipment.
- Targeted Neighborhoods: A portion of the mobility funds included small business incentives specifically targeted at designated neighborhoods to ensure equitable growth.
- Key Pillars: The program focuses on three main areas:
    - Youth Workforce and Entrepreneurship: Investing in the next generation of local talent.
    - Redevelopment: Supporting the physical improvement of business areas.
    - Small Business Growth: Providing the "health and growth" services mentioned above.

Ms. Norwood noted that while significant awards were made in 2025, the program remained within budget, with some funds still remaining for future initiatives.

A DISCUSSION on the 2026 JEDO Board Meeting Times was discussed.

Commissioner Riphahn inquired if anyone was interested in holding the JEDO meetings during business hours as opposed to in the evenings.

The consensus was to leave the meetings at 6:00 pm.

PUBLIC COMMENT was provided by the following:

Real estate developer Henry McClure presented a proposal regarding a potential new manufacturing company interested in moving to Topeka, which could bring 150 jobs with a starting wage of $42/hour.

The Clerk announced the next JEDO Board meeting dates for 2026, which are:

Wednesday, May 13, 2026
Wednesday, September 9, 2026
Wednesday, December 9, 2026

NO FURTHER BUSINESS appearing the meeting was adjourned at 7:15 p.m.