

American Rescue Plan Act millions could go a long way toward addressing affordable housing in Topeka

The Editorial Advisory Board

Published 7:30AM CT Jan 21, 2022 | updated 9:11am CT Jan. 21, 2022



Thanks to a program with the city of Topeka, Kristin Miller's loans taken out to make major home repairs will be forgiven if she stays in her home through the end of the year. *Evert Nelson/The Capital-Journal*

The city of Topeka will receive more than \$45.6 million from the American Rescue Plan Act. The Topeka City Council in coming months will determine how to best spend the money.

We'd like to see the city make some headway on fair and affordable housing.

A draft plan for spending the funds calls for \$500,000 for the MAP program, which provides homeless assistant for adults, the housing trust fund and an additional \$500,000 for a land bank program.

Topeka leaders need a smart, well-designed plan targeting specific areas of focus to best spend the \$45.6 million in federal funding. A plan aimed at addressing housing needs could turn the tide for the working poor in this community.

The Topeka Capital-Journal's Tim Hrenchir reports the city created a lien release program in November that's already showing some promise and relief for Topeka homeowners. To date, the city has done more than 80 releases, which has helped put nearly \$300,000 back into low-income households.

As one recipient of lien forgiveness put it, the program provides assistance to working people who were "on the cusp" and were making "enough to survive but not to thrive."

Topeka has taken a big step with the establishment of the housing trust fund, but it could be years before it can attain measurable outcomes.

The pandemic-related federal funding could jumpstart investment in community housing needs. And [don't forget the housing study](#) Topeka had done just two years ago. This should paint a solid picture for Topeka's needs.

City leaders should involve community partners — such as Topeka JUMP, Habitat for Humanity and Cornerstone of Topeka, among others — in the discussion. Obviously, the more people involved the more sprawling the ideas could become, but these community stakeholders know the issues and will be valuable resources as we tackle the need for fair and affordable housing.

And yes, \$45.6 million is a lot of money. Let's not just throw it at the problem. Let's ensure it's implemented in a fashion that will benefit Topeka and its residents for years to come.