

Chapter 3

THE ROELAND PARK CITY GOVERNMENT

The City of Roeland Park was first incorporated as a Third Class City. As such, it had a Mayor-Council form of government with a mayor and five council members. All were elected "at large." Former Councilman Jack Barry remembers that an effort was made to obtain representation from various parts of the City although no wards or districts were formed.

The original members of the City Council were:

Mayor	Walter Lambader
Councilman	Irvin Dyke
Councilman	Harold Moeller
Councilman	Paul Brown
Councilman	N. V. B. Hartman
Councilman	Jack E. Sproul
Treasurer	Carl R. Slater
Clerk	Ken Burdick
Police Judge	Thomas Beckham

The City had no City Hall and council members met, variously, at the Roesland School, in a restaurant at the Roe Bowl and at the home of City Clerk, Ken Burdick.

Since that first election there has been nine mayors and 91 council members. A listing of these members and their terms of office are shown in Appendix B and C.

The City's first Mayor, Walter Lambader, served for only nine months before resigning. His successor Irvin Dyke served for just a year, completing Lambader's term. In the 1953 elections, William Schaefer defeated both Mr. Lambader and Mr. Dyke. However, Mr. Schaefer served only three months before resigning. He was replaced by Willis G. Moore who served until April 1959.

The Mayor with the longest tenure was Milford Grassberger who served from April 1963 to April 1975, a total of 12 years. Mr. Grassberger also served on the City Council from January 1954 until elected Mayor, thus serving the City and its residents for more than 20 years.

The individual with the longest service to the residents of the City is Jack M. Carpenter. Mr. Carpenter, who is still on the City Council as this is written, has served on the Council and as Mayor for more than 28 years, six of which were as Mayor. Other individuals with long service include Robert M. Wendel, who served on the council for 14 years; and Marvin Katz who served in 1952 and 1953 and from 1954 to 1968.

Following long established practice, the Council meets every third and last Wednesday of each month. A majority, or five members, constitutes a quorum. In the absence of the Mayor, the Council President presides. The Mayor votes only to break ties. It is not known how often this has been required but the need for such a vote has been limited.

The City had been organized for less than six months when its first controversy arose. As part of the plan to incorporate, the City was to take over the trash and garbage collection function that the Roeland Park Homes Association had been providing.

When the City failed to receive suitable bids for this service, the Mayor, Walter Lambader, being a direct individual, formed a company to provide trash and garbage collection. He placed his father in charge of this company. Soon after a contract for the service was executed, the facts of the problem became known. The City Attorney advised the Council that this action was illegal and that the contract was null and void.

The second item to cause controversy was the sealing of streets in the Roeland Park area. Shortly after the work was completed, a bill was sent to home owners, arriving in early December 1951. Again the City Attorney advised that the assessment had been improperly imposed and was uncollectible. Few residents paid.

As a result of these two actions, a demand was made that Mayor Lambader resign, which he did on April 2, 1952. He was succeeded in office by the President of the City Council, Irvin S. Dyke. Mr. Dyke's position on the Council was filled by Ellis Shepard. There was an interesting sidelight of these controversies. When the next councilmanic and mayoral election was held, all the incumbents were defeated for reelection or chose not to run.

In the fall of 1953 an effort was made to merge the cities of Roeland Park and Mission. At that time the basis of a merger provided that the larger city would absorb the smaller. This meant that Roeland Park would absorb Mission, a concept not favorably received by the Mission residents.

In an open letter, the Roeland Park Mayor and City Council acknowledged that the pertinent issues related to the merger were:

1. The name of the city after the merger.
2. What would be the ultimate cost to property owners.
3. What benefits would be derived.

The letter stated that "Let it be understood, that this council wishes to go on record that a consolidation – must be beneficial, equitable and in the best interest of the citizens of both cities." The letter continues - "as concerns the name. This council – has gone on record as favoring the name Mission." The letter included a comparison of the sources of income and costs. The principal points being that Mission businesses paid a larger share of that City's budget than did Roeland Park businesses. On the other hand, other sources of funds were greater in Roeland Park than in Mission.

Regarding benefits, the letter stated that the major benefits and advantages to be derived from a merger would be a more efficient government and better services; better overall planning and development; maintenance of property values through a unified system of codes and ordinances; advantages at the state and local level; and greater autonomy over matters of a local nature.

Final action was to be a vote of the residents of Mission to approve or reject the proposed merger. When the matter came to a vote, the Mayor of Mission opposed the plan. He directed that the wording to be placed on the ballot would state, in effect, that the City of Mission be merged with the City of Roeland Park and known, thereafter, as Roeland Park, Kansas. The proposal was soundly rejected.

Following the first four annexations, described in the previous chapter, the City of Roeland Park became a Second Class City on October 20, 1953. This required that the City be formed into four wards with two representatives from each ward. An election for this purpose was held January 8, 1954 with one council member from each ward to serve for one year, and one to serve for two years.

Thereafter elections were held annually with half the council elected each year for a two year period. The Mayor was elected every two years. This method continued through the election on April 17, 1968. On December 30, 1968, a Charter Ordinance was enacted which provided

that council members and the Mayor would be elected for four year terms. The members who were elected in 1968 were to serve through the election of 1971. Those elected in 1969 served through 1973. This method continues today.

Most elections have been straight forward. However on at least two occasions a tie for a council position has occurred. One was resolved by a "toss of a coin." In the 1959 election, both Thomas Grey and Walter Lambader received the same number of votes for the council seat from the Third Ward. Mr. Grey was the winner of the "coin toss." The loser, Walter Lambader, sued to have the results set aside. After a court hearing, it was ruled that a new election would be held. Thomas Grey was the overwhelming winner in the run off election.

The administration of the City by the Mayor and Council has included the routine and the extraordinary. Generally, the City has conducted its business in an orderly and efficient manner. This is evidenced by the lack of complaint by the residents of the City in most matters. However, on occasion, citizen intervention has occurred.

The first matter of consequence was a referendum to authorize the construction of a City swimming pool. This referendum was held April 5, 1956 and was approved by a 3 to 2 majority. The swimming pool was completed and ready for use by July 4, 1957.

A second referendum was held on April 7, 1961, at the time of councilmanic elections. This referendum, passed by a vote of 777 to 399, established a dog leash law for the City.

The third referendum was a county-wide vote on whether voting machines should be purchased and used. Roeland Park residents, as well as other Johnson County residents, soundly defeated this proposal. It is interesting to note that five years later the matter was again proposed, passed, and voting machines were first used in the City in the Presidential elections of 1972.

Two other referendums were defeated by the residents of Roeland Park. In November 1979 a proposal to renovate the swimming pool was defeated 310 to 584. In January 1981, proposed street improvement to Roe Lane and Venture Lane was defeated 651 to 761.

In addition to the first and second referendum, three other referendums were passed. The first was a vote to authorize the construction of sidewalks which squeezed through by 35 votes. The next two were in 1982 and 1983 authorizing the imposition of sales taxes. These proposals were passed with virtually no opposition.

Much earlier, in the 1953 election, a proposal was presented to authorize the expenditure of \$25,000 to purchase or construct a City Hall. This proposal was defeated. In 1956, a metal structure with a brick facing was installed at 4600 West 51st Streets at a cost of about \$50,000.

In 1985, the City acquired the Skyline School building and a plan was proposed to use part of this building as a new City Hall. The plan was not adopted. The metal building at 4600 West 51st Street continued to serve as the City of Roeland Park City Hall until July 1994. At that time the building located at 4550 West 51st Street was acquired at a cost of about \$800,000. The building was remodeled and, as this report is being prepared, is now in use as the Roeland Park City Hall.

Over the years there have been various controversies on matters that did not require a referendum. On many occasions the problems of drainage have been considered by the Council. Most of the time there has been citizen resistance to the installation of storm sewers to resolve these problems. One of the first instances involved the disposition of surface water that was channeled to the City from the City of Mission. This was corrected by a project that basically followed Roeland Drive from 55th Street to the south City boundary.

On two occasions storm water drainage through the center of the Roeland Park subdivision was rejected because of citizen complaints. Never-the-less, storm sewers have been installed at

various locations from time to time. The most recent is work in the northern part of the City, east of Roe Avenue and in a drainage area from near 55th and Juniper, southeasterly to 58th and Roe.

An early problem arose in 1959 when the 18th Street Expressway was being completed. The Kansas Turnpike Authority, which was responsible for this construction, proposed that Roe Avenue would become the south extension of the Expressway. As part of this program, the Authority specified that Roe Avenue would become a limited access street with no crossing between the north City limits and Johnson Drive. Mayor Willis Moore and Councilman Melvin Ostenberg objected to this plan. Working with the Authority, they eventually arranged for street crossings at 51st, Sycamore, and 55th Streets, and Rosewood and Johnson Drive. To achieve this settlement, Mr. Ostenberg recalls that they threatened to reduce speed limits and to install stop signs that would have impeded traffic if crossings were not provided.

A major controversy occurred in the spring of 1979. At the request of the Municipal Judge, the City Attorney prepared a confidential memorandum covering proposed treatment of minority groups found guilty of shoplifting and other crimes. The memorandum was leaked to various members of the City Council and to the Kansas City Star newspaper. The Star printed a part of the memorandum. This became known as the Fred Cross controversy.

The part of the memorandum that created the controversy stated that the Roeland Park prosecutor should have authority to recommend that foreigners and members of minorities be excluded from a program to keep shoplifting convictions off the records of first time offenders. These defendants were described as - "persons who are foreigners or where the ethnic background of the defendant is such that theft is readily tolerated."

Reaction from area civil rights groups was immediate and strong. Racism charges were leveled at Cross when it was learned that Mexican American women and Asian and African students were cited by him as among those who comprised a disproportionate percentage of shoplifting cases in the City. The reaction included marches, picketing of the City Hall, picketing of the Mayor's home and place of work, and considerable comment in local newspapers. Demands were made for Cross' resignation. However he resisted these demands and continued as City Attorney until the end of his contract.

In addition to the demands made for the Cross resignation, a movement was started to recall the Mayor, Mr. Jack Carpenter. The recall movement was based on an allegation that the Mayor was not taking proper action to dismiss Mr. Cross. However it was ruled that the recall was improperly prepared and eventually the effort was dropped. Similarly legal fees incurred by Mr. Cross were paid by the City.

In recent years, a plan was adopted by the City Council, to control traffic on Ash Drive between Johnson Drive and 55th Street. The solution was to install stop signs at one block intervals at 57th and Ash Drive and at 58th and Ash Drive. This elicited considerable opposition and the plan was eliminated.



Walter Lambader
1951-1952



Melvin Ostenberg
1959-1961



Jack M. Carpenter
1975-1981



Irvin S. Dyke
1952-1953



Michael Shartzner
1981-1989



Milford Grassberger
1963-1975



Mrs. Judy Katz
1989-1993



Willis G. Moore
1953-1959
1961-1963



Mrs. Joan Wendel
1993-date



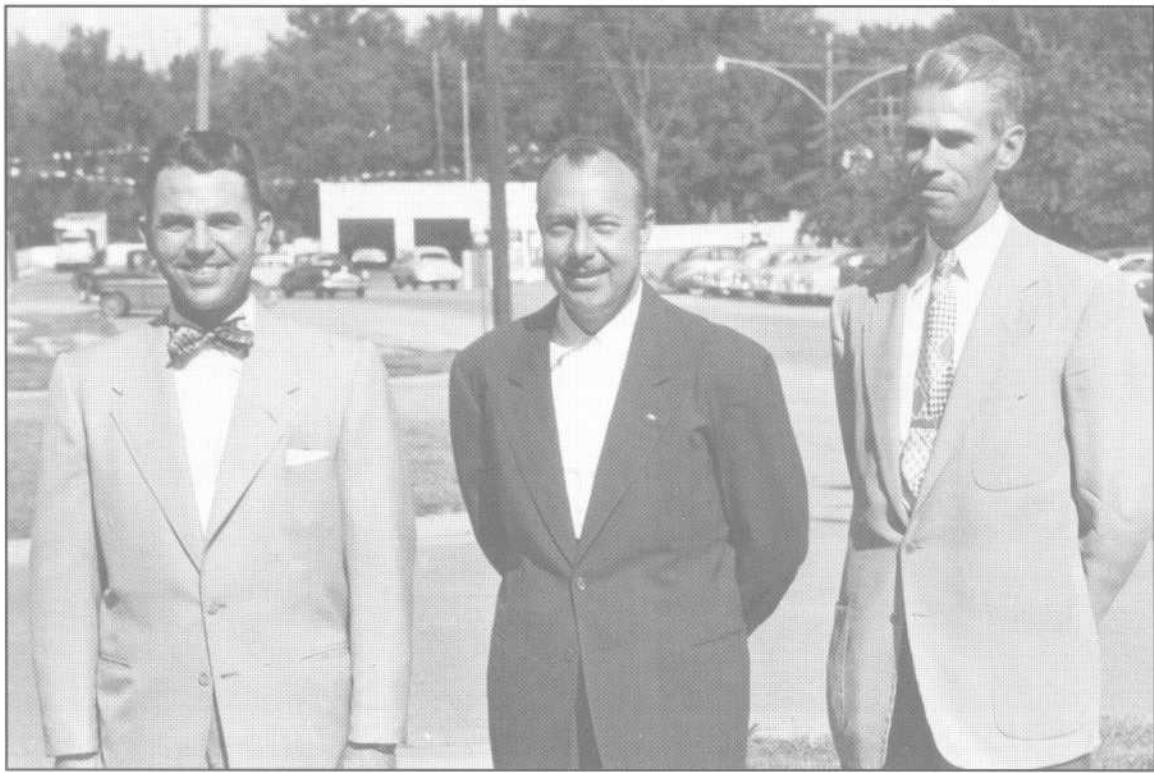
The first City Hall of Roeland Park

In service 1957 to 1995



The new City Hall Building

Occupied, July 1995



Former Mayors of Roeland Park

Willis G. Moore - Walter Lambader - Irvin S. Dyke



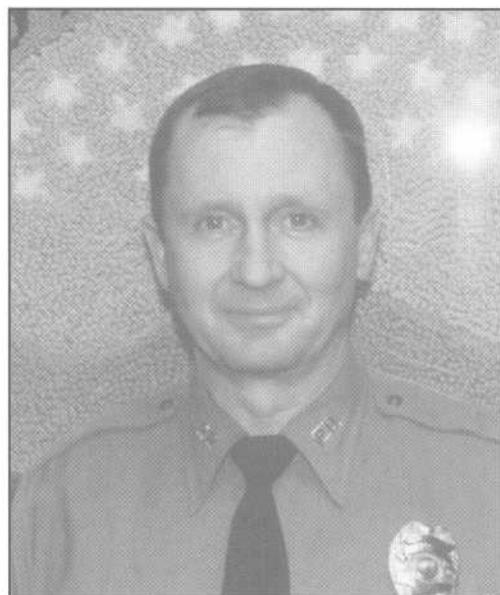
1959 City Council

Left to right - Police Chief N. O. Moody, James D. Moffatt, Marvin Katz, Mayor Melvin Ostenberg, John R. Cargill, City Treasurer Ersel Gordon, Carl R. Hampton, Milton Grassberger, Wilbert S. Bales, Thomas G. Grey, City Judge Francis Smith. Not shown, Walter B. Hodge.

1996 City Administrative Staff



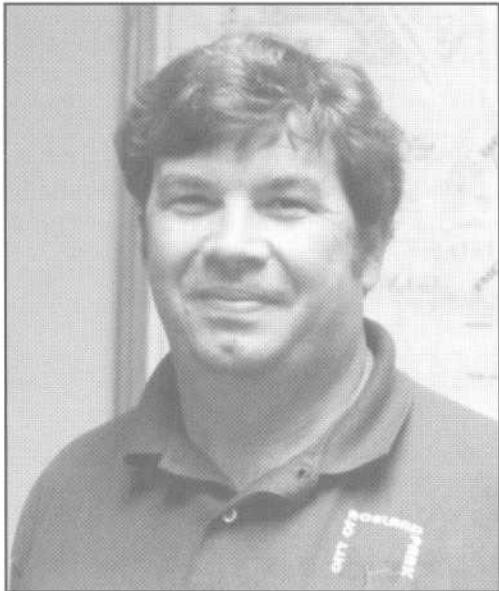
John Carter
City Administrator



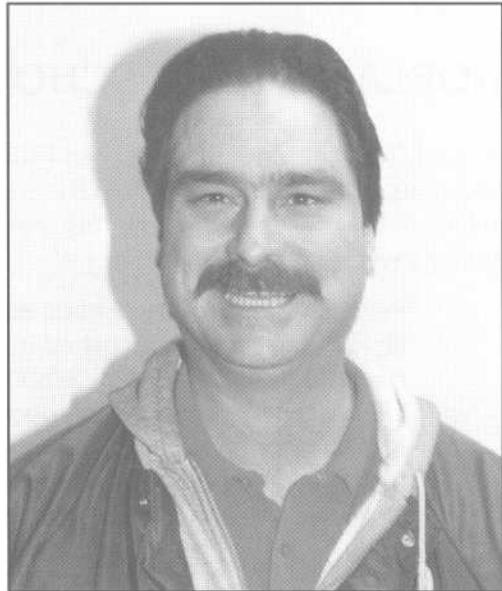
Chief Kenneth Carpenter
Chief of Police



Gary Heine and Anthony Pluta
Deputy City Clerk and City Clerk/Finance Officer



Rolland Grigsby
City Inspector



Patrick R. Mundis
Director of Public Works



Harvey M. Blakelly
Code Enforcement Officer