

**KVGB-AM NEWS & PUBLIC SERVICE ISSUES – 1<sup>ST</sup> QUARTER, 2024.**

**Broadcast times.... 7:07 a.m., 8:07 a.m., 12:07 a.m, and 5:07 p.m., Monday through Friday.**

**The following stories were broadcast and posted online during the reporting period listed above.**

**COUNTY EDITION... THURSDAY'S .....11:05 A.M. TO 11:30 P.M.  
KVGB AM 1st QUARTER REPORT, 2024**

1/4/24 – Guests included Barton County Sheriff Brian Bellendir who discussed how they acquired a new drug canine and the vehicle and equipment to add to the Sheriff's Office.

1/11/24 – Guests included Ryan Lichter, Community Case Manager in the 20<sup>th</sup> Judicial District who had an update on the agencies prevention programs for teens.

1/18/24 – No show due to blizzard

1/25/24 – Guests included the Director Juvenile Services in the 20<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Marissa Woodmansee who was joined by Community Case Manager Casey Rowland. They discussed the success of the Parent Project and announced dates for future classes that will begin in February.

2/1/24 – Guests included Barton County Sheriff Brian Bellendir who announced his plans to run for another term as Sheriff. He also discussed upcoming conceal carry classes and some recent drug busts his office has conducted.

2/8/24 – Guests included Barton County Clerk and Election Officer Bev Schmeidler who talked about plans for the upcoming Presidential Preference Primary that will take place in March. She explained how it is different than most other elections along with registration, voting dates and locations.

2/15/24 – Guests included Lindsey Insley and Kaitlyn Sigler from the Barton County Health Department who talked about the Human Papilloma Virus that has been linked to many different cancers in both men and women and specifically cervical cancer in women. They talked about the importance of being immunized at a young age for this deadly virus.

2/22/24 – Guests included Barton County Appraiser Wendy Prosser who talked about the new valuations that are about to be mailed out to property owners, and some things to look for on the statement.

2/29/24 – Guests included Barton County Register of Deeds Glenda French who announced that all documents have been placed on-line and are available to the public for a small charge. There are also plans to offer citizens an opportunity to sign up for notifications if someone is accessing certain personal files.

3/7/24 – Guests included Barton County Sheriff Brian Bellendir who discussed the interesting things that are brought into the Sheriff's Office including live ammo, radioactive material and UFO stories.

3/14/24 – Guests included Barton County Attorney Levi Morris who talked about staffing in his office, the resumption of jury trials and the upcoming move of offices back into the Barton County Courthouse.

3/21/24 – Guests included Registered Dieticians Bev Frizzell and Emily Foote from the Barton County Health Department who talked about the significance of March being designated as national Nutrition Month.

3/28/24 – Guests included Jack Bowman, Program Advocate and Tyler Morton, Prevention Advocate for Juvenile Services in the 20<sup>th</sup> Judicial District. They will be joined by Hoisington 6<sup>th</sup> grader Mya Brewer, along with Great Bend 8<sup>th</sup> Grader Brooklyn Cooley who will talk about their membership in "Youth Crew."

**CITY EDITION... WEDNESDAY'S .....11:33 A.M. TO 12:00 P.M.  
KVGB AM 1st QUARTER REPORT, 2024**

1/10/24 – Guests included Great Bend Community Coordinator and CVB Director Christina Hayes who discussed the highlights of 2023 and a look ahead at new events coming in 2024.

1/17/24 – No show due to blizzard

1/24/24 – Guests included Great Bend Human Resources Director Randy Keasling who discussed current job openings at the city and the best way for people to apply and get their career started.

1/31/24 – Guests included Great Bend City Administrator Brandon Anderson who talked about ongoing city projects including pot hole repairs and plans for the old police station building.

2/7/24 – Guests included Great Bend Community Coordinator and CVB Director Christina Hayes who laid out the events calendar for 2024 that includes a new parade being added to the Party in the Park event in June.

2/14/24 – Guests included Great Bend Public Lands Director Scott Keeler who talked about all the preparations being made in a departments under Public Lands for the Spring season that is approaching fast.

2/21/24 – Guests included Great Bend Police Chief Steve Haulmark who discussed the functionality of the new Justice Center. Haulmark, a former police officer in Kansas City, Kansas, also offered insight into the law enforcement reaction to the shooting that took place during the Kansas City Chiefs Super Bowl celebration.

2/28/24 – Guests included Great Bend Brit Spaugh Zoo Director and Curator Ashley Burdick who talked about Earth Day activities that will be taking place at the Zoo in April. She also gave an update on the Lions, Cougars, and Bears.

3/6/24 – Guests included Great Bend Fire Chief Brent Smith who talked about the current fire danger in rural areas of Barton County due to the dry conditions, and ways in which you can help fireproof your property. He also talked about an addition going on at the burn building that is used for live training.

3/13/24 – Guests included Great Bend City Clerk Shawn Schafer who talked about adding an additional finance clerk to her office and how that will enhance efficiency. She also talked about how new IRS reporting requirements for municipalities is causing issues for cities.

3/20/24 – Guests included Great Bend Code Enforcement Officer Jaimie Wintholz who reviewed city code concerning overgrown vegetation heading into the growing season, as well as changes that have been made since last Spring.

3/27/24 – Guests included Great Bend Airport Manager Martin Miller who unveiled plans for 2024 Air Fest coming to the airport in September.

## **Researchers finding high levels of fertilizer in Barton Co. drinking water 1/2**

Matthew Kirk has an unpleasant task: breaking the news to families about fertilizer chemicals in their drinking water. The Kansas State University geology professor and his collaborators check for nitrogen pollution in the private wells that so many rural households depend on.

Researchers aim to test about 150 private wells in south-central Kansas in Barton, Stafford, Pawnee, Edwards, Rice, Pratt and Kiowa counties. Students and scientists from K-State and Barton and Dodge City community colleges have teamed up to test about 90 so far. Of those, half contain more nitrate than federal regulators allow in public water systems.

One well contained more than five times as much nitrate as the federal government tolerates in public water supplies. That household has started treating the water before drinking it. Drinking too much of these nitrogen compounds is dangerous for babies, and scientists are investigating suspected links to serious health conditions in children and adults, such as cancer.

Read more about the ongoing study at [Great Bend Post.com](http://GreatBendPost.com).

## **Walk-in vaccinations available at Barton Health Dept. as flu season peaks 1/2**

The holiday season was good for gifts and food. It was also an ideal time for transmissible viruses. The Centers for Disease Control reports outpatient respiratory illness is above the baseline nationally for a seventh consecutive week, and is above baseline in all 10 regions in the country.

Barton County Public Health Director Karen Winkelman says that trend is true locally as well, with an increase in medical visits due to the flue, RSV, and COVID. None of the diseases is reportable to the Kansas Department of Health and Environment unless a death is associated. Local health departments collect data for reports from designated surveillance sites at area health-service providers.

The Barton County Health Department continues to offer ways to combat the viruses. COVID vaccines are available with formulations available for anyone ages six months and older. RSV vaccine is available for babies, pregnant women 32-26 weeks into gestation, and for adults 60 years of age and older. The 2023-24 flu vaccine is available for anyone aged six months and older. Vaccinations are available on a walk-in basis during normal operational hours.

## **Great Bend with \$9 million in damages from summer storm**

**1/4**

The City of Great Bend took the next step Tuesday to make repairs from last July's hailstorm. The city council approved a contract with Roofmasters Roofing as the general contractor, in partnership with Brentwood Builders, to repair city property. The city's insurance company hired JS Held, a building consultant, to scope and price the loss. Roomasters President Luke Haines assisted with the estimated \$9 million in damage.

(HAINES – THOSE)                      26 Seconds

The storm, which included straight-line winds up to 80 miles per hour, triggered the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to declare the damage a designated disaster last October. The disaster declaration will allow Great Bend to receive reimbursement for part of their insurance deductible.

(HAINES – GET)                      22 Seconds

In order to get the FEMA assistance, repairs need to be completed 18 months following the declaration, giving Great Bend until April 2025.



## **Rosewood conducting blanket drive in Barton Co.**

**1/4**

Rosewood Miracle Workers AKTION Club is conducting a blanket drive as a way to help children in need. Now through Feb. 29, Rosewood Miracle Workers are accepting new blankets, quilts, and homemade blankets. They are also accepting monetary donations, which will be used to purchase additional blankets.

Once the drive is completed, Rosewood AKTION Club members will deliver donations to the Family Crisis Center and the Barton County Health Department.

All donated blankets and monetary donations can be delivered during regular business hours to one of two locations in downtown Great Bend: Rosewood Furniture Gallery, 1607 Main; or Rosewood Bargain Barn, 1215 Main.

Rosewood AKTION Club is an affiliate of the national Kiwanis organization that promotes service in action for people with developmental disabilities. The area club allows Rosewood members to be actively involved in the community and to positively impact the lives of others.

## **'Just hang up' – Pawnee Co. Sheriff's advice toward scams**

**1/8**

Pawnee County Sheriff Scott King took time to remind all citizens to be on the lookout for common scams. King said oftentimes an unknown person will contact a potential scam victim via telephone or email, claiming to be with law enforcement, Social Security, IRS or Sweepstakes. The sheriff suggests for residents to simply hang up the phone.

**(KING – HANG)            8 Seconds**

King recalled going to the post office in Larned and a woman standing in line was telling him how she had to send \$1,200 cash to someone that called her. King said sometimes the older generation's kindness hurts them, trying to help everyone.

**(KING – UP)            18 Seconds**

Never send money to others using online payment systems unless they are your friends or family. King encouraged citizens to contact law enforcement if they have been a victim of a scam.

## **Thexton: Never an easy decision to close Great Bend schools**

**1/17**

There's a decades-long joke for students who attend school in Great Bend: even if the snow piles up, they have to go to school. January has proved to be an exception. Classes were canceled because of snow on Jan. 9. They were canceled again Tuesday because of extreme cold. USD 428 Superintendent Khris Thexton said a lack of bus transportation for students usually makes the decision to cancel school or not easier, but not on Tuesday.

(THEXTON-FAST)

15 seconds

Snow and ice are typically the culprits that can cancel classes. In the event of snow, Thexton, Assistant Superintendent John Popp, Maintenance Director Dirk Davis, and Transportation and Grounds Director Cody Schmidt are driving the roads between 4 and 5 a.m. They try to meet by 5:30 to make a decision for the day by 6 a.m.

(THEXTON-SAFELY)

20 seconds

Between radio, television, social media, and direct messaging technology, the district usually has no problems communicating closures to students and staff. Parents may still use their discretion to keep their kids home when school is not canceled. They are simply asked to call the absence into their schools. Thexton said the district usually has no issues meeting state requirements for time in class, but extra days could be added to the end of the school calendar if necessary.

## **Valuation notices in Barton County on schedule for March 1 mailing 1/18**

Each year, the Barton County Appraiser's office sends out valuation notices to all property owners in the county. Per state statute, the deadline to mail those notices is March 1. Appraiser Wendy Prosser appeared before the Barton County Commission Tuesday morning to seek approval on a bulk-mail contract.

(PROSSER-SOLD) 23 seconds

Sales prices and expectations are expected to vary by no more than 10 percent. The county received four bids for the mailing. The commission approved the bid from Master's Touch for \$8,305.

(PROSSER-MAIL) 22 seconds

Last year, property valuations county-wide increased 20.2 percent on residential properties and 16.9 percent on commercial properties. Overall, the county saw a 14.6 percent increase.

## **Russell City Manager: Our community needs property tax relief**

**1/19**

City of Russell city manager Jon Quinday released a write-up this week stressing for a change in the state's assistance to provide property tax relief. Quinday highlighted the city's efforts to keep taxes down, but noted inflation has hurt the city's ability to adequately provide for its community.

In 2014, Russell's property tax revenue stood at \$1.6 million. By 2023, it increased to \$1.7 million, reflecting a 9.2 percent rise over a decade. However, this increase pales compared to the cumulative inflation rate of 27.9 percent during the same period.

To fight back on inflation over the years, Russell administration has undergone strategic staff alignment, cost-effective solutions and a pursuit of alternate funding sources, such as grants, which have brought over \$30 million to the City of Russell over the past decade.

Quinday stated recent legislative attempts to lower property taxes have proven ineffective. The city manager said it's time for action from the state legislature.

You can read Jon Quinday's full statement on Russell's tax squeeze on [greatbendpost.com](https://www.greatbendpost.com).

## **Rise Up Central Kansas continues to assist underserved in region 1/25**

Peer navigators are either planting a seed or watering a seed of recovery. That was the message Rise Up Central Kansas Coordinator Amy Ferguson had for the Barton County Commission Tuesday morning. Ferguson provided updates on the program and a recent Increase the Reach grant that was used to ensure underserved populations, especially those with substance use disorder in rural areas, had access to COVID-19 information and vaccines.

(FERGUSON-MEETINGS)

15 seconds

Rise Up also provided adverse childhood experience training to more than 200 parents and caregivers in 2023.

(FERGUSON-STATE)

17 seconds

Ferguson said as a task force of Central Kansas Partnership, Rise Up will continue to collaborate with professionals and community partners to improve identification and raise awareness of drug-endangered children. Having peer navigators with real-world experience helps in that effort.

**Barton Co. Planning Commission holding open meeting on Feb. 22  
1/26**

The Barton County Planning Commission will hold a public hearing to receive comments and consider the draft changes to the “Current” Barton County Zoning Regulations – Version II as they pertain to Solar Energy Conversion Systems and the future development of Large Scale Non-Commercial Systems or Commercial Scale Systems in Barton County.

This will affect Article III – District Regulations, Article VIII-B SECS and the Official Zoning Map. The public hearing is scheduled for Thursday, Feb. 22, 2024, at 9 a.m. in Room F-30 at the Barton Community College – Fine Arts Building.

There will be a “backup” date at the same location of Feb. 29, 2024, 9 a.m. in the event of inclement weather, lack of a quorum, or if it becomes necessary to continue the public hearing.

This public hearing is specifically to discuss the proposed regulations, so anyone interested in speaking or presenting will have to limit their discussion to this topic. Additionally, to be called to speak at the public hearing, you must register before the meeting. Check out the story at [Great Bend Post.com](https://www.greatbendpost.com) for registration details and links to the proposed changes.

## **Donations still needed for Vietnam veterans memorial in Great Bend 1/29**

Last December, the Great Bend City Council approved a spot for a new Vietnam veterans memorial to be placed at Veterans Memorial Park. Larry Parsons, a Vietnam veteran, was instrumental in bringing The Wall That Heals to Great Bend last May. He's also been a key figure in creating the new memorial.

(PARSONS-TALKED)

28 seconds

B&B Metal Arts out of Hoisington will complete the metalwork. All said, the memorial will cost approximately \$115,000. Parsons said approximately \$80,000 has already been raised.

(PARSONS-THAT)

8 seconds

The five-person committee, all veterans, working on the project plans to purchase the stainless steel for the memorial this week. The memorial will be located just west of the main entrance to the park on McKinley Street. The memorial will be 50 feet long and feature a 3-D stainless-steel Huey UH-1 helicopter and other imagery associated with the war. Find out how to donate at [Great Bend Post.com](http://Great Bend Post.com).



## **Barton college chooses Dr. Garstecki to become next president**

**1/31**

For the sixth time in more than 50 years of operation, Barton Community College will have a new president. Following a 15-minute executive session Tuesday afternoon, the Barton Board of Trustees voted in favor of Dr. Marcus Garstecki as the next president.

Garstecki has served as chief enrollment management officer at Northern State University in Aberdeen, South Dakota. Originally from Wisconsin, Garstecki started his career in athletics, spending seven years on the coaching staff at Dodge City Community College.

(GARSTECKI – ME)

30 Seconds

Garstecki, along with fellow finalist Dr. Seth Carter, went through the interview process that included a public forum on the Great Bend campus earlier this month.

(GARSTECKI – HAPPENING)

30 Seconds

After 17 years as Barton President, Dr. Carl Heilman is scheduled to retire following the close of the school year. Garstecki's contract will begin July 1, 2024.

## **B-29 Doc is returning to Great Bend Airfest this year**

**1/31**

As of now, there are eight stops in 2024 for the B-29 Superfortress named Doc. One of those stops is Great Bend, as the historic plane will perform at the Great Bend Airfest this upcoming September. The plane is one of 1,644 B-29s manufactured in Wichita during World War II. Great Bend Airport Manager Martin Miller was excited to have Doc return to the show for the first time since 2018.

(MILLER – SHOW)                      19 Seconds

Great Bend Airfest will include three day shows and a night show beginning the weekend of September 20<sup>th</sup>.

Miller said the airshow has nine acts currently confirmed. This fall will mark the fifth Airfest in Great Bend since starting in 2012. Organized every three years, the 2021 Airfest saw just over 9,000 spectators attend the three-day event.

## **Barton Co. Sheriff reports scammers selling fake jewelry**

**2/2**

The Barton County Sheriff's Office reported a pair of scammers moving through the area and warned citizens to be alert. On Wednesday, just after 4 p.m., Barton County Sheriff's Office deputies received a call of a theft that occurred on US 281 Highway, somewhere south of the City of Great Bend.

The victim was flagged down by a motorist who claimed to need assistance getting to New York. The motorist claimed he was broke and needed money for the trip. The motorist conned the victim into purchasing fake jewelry to fund his travels. The victim found out the jewelry was fake after the transaction.

Sheriff Brian Bellendir said several similar incidents have occurred in nearby counties in Kansas with the same descriptions.

(BELLENDIR – AREA)

24 Seconds

The two suspects appear to be of Middle Eastern descent and one of them was wearing a blue sport coat. They were seen driving a late model, white Chevrolet Traverse with a Texas license plate.

Bellendir said there is a variety of scams and his office has seen it all, including online dating scams.

(BELLENDIR – MONEY)

23 Seconds

The public is cautioned to not interact with these people if encountered and call 911 immediately to report.

## **Local questions. Local answers. Ask GBK service helping citizens**

**2/5**

Oftentimes, a citizen has a question relating to a service or activity in the community and he or she is not sure where to find their answer. Three area groups came together to provide answers to all of those burning questions. The Great Bend Chamber of Commerce, City of Great Bend and Great Bend Economic Development collaborated to create Ask GBK. Chamber Director Megan Barfield said the service is just a way improve the community's experience. <sup>to</sup>

(BARFIELD – CALL)

16 Seconds

Residents can email questions to [askgbk@gmail.com](mailto:askgbk@gmail.com) to receive responses on a variety of topics. The goal is to provide citizens of Great Bend an informational hub and improve customer service.

(BARFIELD – ANOTHER)

15 Seconds

Barfield added there will soon be a website available to assist in informing the public.

## **Barton County adds \$344K to courthouse renovation**

**2/7**

There are always extra expenses uncovered during a big project. Most of the change orders surrounding the HVAC Renovation Project at the Barton County Courthouse have come under the \$50,000 threshold established in Resolution 2023-19 that do not require approval from the Barton County Commission. That was not the case for a series of change orders presented by County Administrator Matt Patzner during Tuesday morning's commission meeting.

(PATZNER-COMPLIANT)

13 seconds

The change orders address work for bathroom remodels on the first floor with a price tag of \$217,00, domestic water upgrades for \$48,000, and sanitary sewer upgrades for an additional \$78,000. The commission approved the change orders totaling \$344,000. Commission Chair Barb Esfeld said it could be worse.

(ESFELD-THINKING)

20 seconds

The commission originally approved the project at \$4.2 million in February 2023. Last November, change orders totaling \$188,000 were added to the project. In December, the county approved roof repairs after the July 16 storm with \$41,000 in out-of-pocket expenses after insurance. With the roof included, repairs to the courthouse now sit at \$4.77 million. The county is using \$2.8 million in federal American Rescue Plan Act funds to help pay for the project. The courthouse is expected to be fully functional by June 1.

## **City of Great Bend to get involved in solar farm discussion**

**2/9**

While Barton County and the Barton County Planning Commission has dealt with the majority of the potential solar farm addition in the county, the City of Great Bend will soon get involved in the conversation. Acciona (ax-SEE-own-UH) Energy approached the Barton County Commission in January 2023 about the solar farm to the northeast of Great Bend. The proposed location includes property within three miles of Great Bend, so City Administrator Brandon Anderson said Acciona will present to the city council during the February 20<sup>th</sup> meeting.

(ANDERSON – COUNTY)

20 Seconds

A moratorium on commercial solar development in the county has been extended through March 31<sup>st</sup> to give the Planning Commission time to craft solar regulations.

A Planning Commission public hearing will be held February 22<sup>nd</sup> at Barton Community College to receive comments on zoning regulations pertaining to solar energy. The meeting will begin at 9 a.m. in Room F-30 of the Fine Arts Building on campus.

## **Solar farm developer to address Great Bend council Monday**

**2/16**

An agenda item for Monday's Great Bend City Council meeting will include a discussion with Acciona Energy. Representative Adam Stratton will address the governing body about placing a solar farm northeast of Great Bend.

The proposed location includes property within three miles of Great Bend. City Administrator Brandon Anderson said earlier this month that the city will need to develop regulations pertaining to solar energy.

A moratorium on commercial solar development in the county has been extended through March 31 to give the Planning Commission time to craft solar regulations. While landowners have already leased ground to Acciona, the Planning Commission has hesitation allowing the development, wanting to protect the Cheyenne Bottoms wetlands nearby.

More discussion on the solar farm will occur February 22<sup>nd</sup> during a public hearing at Barton Community College.

Monday's Great Bend City Council meeting begins at 6:30 p.m. at City Hall.

**Barton Co. Clerk answering election questions at Thursday event  
2/13**

Without a lot of historical reference, there are many unknowns heading into the upcoming Presidential Preference Primary on March 19. High turnout or low, Barton County Clerk Bev Schmeidler said her office will handle it just like any other election.

(SCHMEIDLER-KANSAS)

16 seconds

Kansas last held a Presidential Preference Primary in 1992, and 1980 is the only other year such an election has occurred in the state. The parties each had until Dec. 1 to opt out of the primary. Clerks offices around the state were officially told it would happen on Dec. 21. The Kansas Secretary of State's office held a live drawing to determine the order in which the candidates would be listed.

(SCHMEIDLER-SAME)

21 seconds

The League of Women Voters is hosting a "Lunch and Learn" in the lower-level meeting room at the Great Bend Public Library from noon to 1 p.m. on Thursday, Feb. 15. Schmeidler will answer questions about the upcoming election.



**Barton Co. Health Department offers services to reduce cervical cancer risks**  
**2/16**

In 2020, more than 11,000 new cases of cervical cancer were diagnosed in the United States. More than 4,000 women died of cervical cancer. The even greater tragedy is cervical cancer is preventable. January was Cervical Cancer Awareness Month and Lindsey Ensley, RN at the Barton County Health Department, said there are plenty of local options available to keep cervical cancer in check.

(ENSLEY-THAT)

15 seconds

Pap smears are the primary way to screen for cervical cancer. Those can be done by local providers, OB/GYNs, or at the Barton County Health Department. The primary cause of cervical cancer is the human papillomavirus (HPV), a sexually transmitted disease. Ensley said there are ways to minimize risks from HPV.

(ENSLEY-VACCINE)

18 seconds

The vaccine can be given to young women as young as 11 years of age. No boosters are required, and those 16 and under who receive a first dose require just one additional dose to be fully vaccinated. Those with a first dose after the age of 16 require two additional doses. Ensley said both males and females should get vaccinated for HPV.

## **After school or no school...Great Bend Rec has an activity for your child**

**2/20**

Days off from school are usually welcomed occasions for students, but parents can sometimes feel the pressure of having to keep their children entertained throughout the day. Insert the Great Bend Recreation Commission. Not only providing afterschool programming, Great Bend Rec Enrichment Director Garet Fitzpatrick said the Rec attempts to set up longer programs when school is not in session.

(FITZPATRICK – REC)

17 Seconds

The Rec Commission is hosting a Kids Day Out activity on Friday called "Sun Power." Students will learn how the sun provides energy through activities at Barton Community College and the Kansas Wetlands Education Center. A wide variety of programs offered through the Rec provide a list to hopefully interest everyone.

(FITZPATRICK – THINGS)

22 Seconds

This Friday's program is from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. and children will be bussed to the college from the Activity Center on 18<sup>th</sup> Street. Pre-registration is required by 5 p.m. today (Tuesday). Visit the story on [greatbendpost.com](http://greatbendpost.com) on how to register.

## **Barton's college approves tuition and fee increases for next semester**

**2/29**

The Barton Community College Board of Trustees approved tuition and fee increases for the 2024-2025 school year that is expected to generate more than \$400,000 in revenue to the college. Unlike their in-person courses, Barton online classes offer a flat rate regardless if you reside in Barton County or you are taking the class in a different country. Barton Vice President of Administration Mark Dean said many other junior colleges in the state have fluctuating online fees depending on where the student lives.

(DEAN – RATE)                      30 Seconds

Barton's new rates will include \$115 per credit hour for students that live in Barton County, an increase of \$2. In order to stay competitive, Barton will keep their tuition and fees at \$50 per credit hour for high school students taking college courses.

(DEAN – STUDENTS)              17 Seconds

More than 74% of the additional tuition revenue is expected to come from the online increase.

## **Barton Planning Commission meeting on solar regs March 4**

**3/4**

The Barton County Planning Commission will hold a meeting to begin working through the feedback that has been received on the draft changes to the “current” Barton County Zoning Regulations – Version II as they pertain to Solar Energy Conversion Systems (SECS) and the future development of Large Scale Non-Commercial SECS or Commercial Scale SECS in Barton County.

The meeting is scheduled for today (Monday) at 6 p.m. in the upstairs meeting room at the Hoisington Activity Center, located at 1200 Susank Road in Hoisington.

The public is invited to attend. Copies of the draft zoning articles can be found in the links in the story on [greatbendpost.com](http://greatbendpost.com) or upon request by contacting the Barton County Environmental Management Division.

## **Barton CC trustees directing college not to raise taxes again**

**3/5**

Last August, the Barton Community College Board of Trustees approved a budget that anticipated collecting \$500,000 in additional tax dollars in the 2024 fiscal year compared to the year prior.

During the 2023 General Election, Dale Maneth received the most votes to take seat on the Board of Trustees. At last week's board meeting, the board approved tuition and fee increases for the upcoming school year. Maneth noted his overall concern is the bottom line on the budget, making sure there are not additional taxes to the citizens.

(MANETH – THIS)                      26 Seconds

Estimated to collect more than \$10 million in local tax dollars this year, Barton approved a budget for the 2023-2024 school year anticipating a \$1.1 million deficit. Any shortfall comes from the college's cash reserves, which are expected to be around \$18 million by this summer.

Barton trustee chairman, Mike Johnson, said there are a lot of unknowns when it comes to formulating a budget but echoes Maneth's comment of not increasing tax dollars again.

(JOHNSON – RNR)                      17 Seconds

Barton Community College operates with a budget of nearly \$35 million.

## **U.S. Senator Moran weighs in on Barton Co. solar farm discussion**

**3/5**

Right now, planning commissions and governing bodies within Barton County are receiving plenty of public input regarding commercial solar development in the county. Acciona Energy has proposed the construction of two solar-powered electric generation facilities using panels to produce 150 megawatts from each project. The location of the project is northeast of Great Bend, near Cheyenne Bottoms, the wetlands home to millions of birds during their migratory trips.

U.S. Senator Jerry Moran was in Great Bend last Friday and supports the utilization of solar or wind energy but location should play a role in decisions.

(MORAN – AGRICULTURE)      24 Seconds

Over a 40-year lifetime, the solar farm is expected to pay an average of \$1.6 million in property tax back to Barton County each year.

(MORAN – EFFECTED)      21 Seconds

Local planning commissions are working on solar zoning regulations to present to their respective councils for approval.

## **EPA demolishes building at contaminated site in Great Bend**

**3/8**

The former Plating Inc. building, on west 6<sup>th</sup> Street near the Great Bend Municipal Airport, has been demolished and work continues to clean up the contamination site. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) noted cleanup on the former chromium and zinc plating facility began in 2008. Great Bend City Administrator Brandon Anderson said crews continue the cleanup at the site.

(ANDERSON – BEGUN)

17 Seconds

Since filing for bankruptcy in 2006, Plating Inc. left all the tanks full of solutions. With the demolition of the building, EPA will treat and remove the soil.

Last November, EPA Remedial Project Manager Clint Sperry said Great Bend's water table is around 12 to 13 feet below ground surface. One of the tanks at Plating Inc. was 22 feet deep, creating a concern with steel tanks and water over the years.

The EPA is hopeful to have the project finished by the spring 2025 and have the property available in the future.

## **Barton Co. Appraiser: Property valuations up two percent in 2024**

### **3/13**

The latest round of property valuations are making their way into mailboxes across Barton County. Appraiser Wendy Prosser presented figures from this year's valuation at Tuesday's county commission meeting. After last year's county-wide increase of 14.6 percent, numbers have leveled off to a 2.16 percent increase in 2024.

(PROSSER-VALUES)

19 seconds

Among the major cities in the county, total real estate valuation in Great Bend increased three percent. Hoisington saw a five-percent increase, Ellinwood jumped 10.5 percent, and Claflin saw a nine-percent increase. Commissioners were quick to point out that an increase in valuation does not correlate to an increase in taxes. Barton County saw a \$28 million increase in valuations last year but the county as a taxing entity continued its trend of dropping the mill levy to not collect more dollars. Commissioner Donna Zimmerman reiterated the county has not raised taxes since 2021.

(ZIMMERMAN-HAPPEN)

18 seconds

Commissioners also praised Prosser and staff for their customer service and willingness to encourage residents to contact the office with questions. Read more about the 2024 valuations at [Great Bend Post.com](https://www.greatbendpost.com).



## **UPS Store, police work to return \$44K to Rush Co. woman 3/14**

A Rush County woman has a local business and law enforcement officers to thank for finding and returning the \$44,900 in cash she could have easily lost to a scam. In addition, she was prevented from sending off another \$20,000 in cash.

Great Bend Police Dept. Detective John Reynolds said staff at the UPS Store in Great Bend became suspicious of a package because something was loose inside. They decided to inspect the package and discovered a large amount of cash and called police.

Using surveillance video, detectives were able to determine the identity of the woman, who is in her 70s, and determine that she had visited three local banks to withdraw the money. She was sending the package to a business in Orange, California, and was preparing to send another \$20,000.

Reynolds said the scam originated with a call that appeared to be from Washington, D.C. The callers informed the woman they knew she was part of a scam and needed to send the \$44,000 to stay out of trouble. She was also informed to advise bank employees the money was to purchase a vehicle.

Reynolds reminds residents that no legitimate business or government agency will call and demand cash. He suggests verifying callers are legitimate or contacting police if the call seems suspicious.

## **Barton Community College prepared to help with FAFSA frustrations**

**3/18**

The U.S. Department of Education is rolling out changes to the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) as part of the Simplification Act for the 2024-25 academic year, and the Barton Community College financial aid office is trained and can help families through the transition of this piece of the enrollment process.

The Department of Education has provided status updates and resources to help train financial aid officers nationwide so officers were ready to assist students once the application became available this past December. Barton's financial aid staff has participated in several trainings to ensure they are prepared to help students and process applications as quickly as possible.

Barton is also working alongside their student information software vendor to learn and process the new data rules and fields. Once Barton receives student data, they will work with their vendor to adjust procedures in hopes of reaching full processing status quickly.

## **Barton Commission hears solar reg updates; vote expected April 2 3/20**

No vote was taken during Tuesday's Barton County Commission study session on the proposed large-scale commercial solar regulations recommended by the planning commission last Thursday. Zoning Administrator Judy Goreham used the time to outline changes to the commissioners ahead of the April 2 meeting in which the commission may vote.

(GOREHAM-CHANGES)

25 seconds

Goreham discussed all the changes presented during last Thursday's planning commission meeting, and introduced the new proposed zoning map that includes a two-mile no-build zone around Cheyenne Bottoms. The board of commissioners cannot vote on the recommendation until a 14-day protest period beginning last Thursday passes. County Commissioner Shawn Hutchinson took note of some of the details in the regulations.

(HUTCHINSON-WELL)

19 seconds

The county's moratorium on commercial solar development is set to expire on March 31, just days ahead of the board of commissioners' first eligible date to vote on the regulations. Goreham proposed asking for a 30-day extension on the moratorium at the March 26 commission meeting. Even if the commission votes against the proposed regulations, Goreham said she can likely have another recommendation before the board by April 16. The commission agreed to vote on an extension of the moratorium at its next meeting on March 26.

**Driver's ed enrollment at GBHS scheduled for April 3  
3/20**

Getting behind the wheel is one of the great passages into adulthood. USD 428 is again gearing up for its driver's education program this summer. District Public Information Director Andrea Bauer said enrollment will take place on Wednesday, April 3 at Great Bend High School.

(BAUER-SKILLS) 20 seconds

Cost of enrollment is \$150 and the district will accept cash, checks, or money orders. No enrollment will be accepted after Friday, May 10. Along with payment in full, participants need to bring the student's original birth certificate and their learner's permit if they already have one. Anyone with questions can contact Ana Zuniga at Great Bend High School by calling (620) 793-1521. *(01-04)*

(BAUER-EDUCATION) 11 seconds

Other information needed for enrollment includes approximate height and weight and the student's eye color.

## **Barton Co. wheat crops not impacted by Monday's freeze**

**3/27**

It's called winter wheat for a reason. One of the primary crops in Kansas, winter wheat is planted in the fall, grows slowly throughout the winter, and actually needs some cold weather to go through the vernalization phase before it enters the reproductive phase in the spring and produces seeds. Alicia Boor, agriculture and natural resources agent in the Cottonwood District for K-State Research and Extension, said the snow and ice from Monday should have no impact on this year's crop.

**(BOOR-HEAD)            20 seconds**

As long as the wheat head is still underground or barely showing, the cold weather should not harm the plant. In the Barton County region, the wheat is still young enough to survive the cold, and the snow actually provides insulation. Other plant species are not as fortunate. Those that bloom early likely were impacted by Monday's hard freeze.

**(BOOR-BLOOMING)            14 seconds**

Boor said the contrasting weather may also impact trees. With recent spring-like temperatures, sap was running heavy through tree trunks and may have frozen earlier this week. Giving trees 8-18 inches of water from the trunk to the drip line once every 4-6 weeks can help the trees heal and recover from any freeze-related wounds.