



# COMMUNITY VISION PLAN

## OUR VISION

In 20 years, we are...

A diverse community of **welcoming, engaged people** leading Great Bend to shine as a regional **economic, educational, and cultural center** offering an **energetic and inclusive** experience built on a unique community spirit.

# COMMUNITY VOICE

## What People Said



### CONNECTING PEOPLE

People are wired for human connection. It is as essential to our individual well-being as food, water, warmth, and security. There is a growing body of evidence that our brains actually work better to solve problems when we are interacting and experiencing togetherness. People who live in communities with strong social and physical connections are happier, live longer, and have a sense of pride, satisfaction, and accomplishment. To survive and thrive, Great Bend leaders must build a stronger sense of community and place. People of different cultures, generations, genders, and interests must be physically, socially, and emotionally connected. Strategies identified in this plan intend to strengthen and spread a sense of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the community, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through a commitment to be together.

*"When we connect people together physically, socially, and spiritually, our community is much more than the sum of its parts."*

Rebecca Ford, Catholic Charities of Southwest Kansas



### INSPIRING EACH OTHER

Communities stay static when the dialogue revolves around "our limitations," "we can't do that," and "we've always done it this way." Communities evolve when leaders emerge to inspire each other along the path to success. Inspiration awakens us to new possibilities by allowing us to think beyond our everyday experiences and limitations. Inspiration propels a person from apathy to possibility and transforms the way we perceive our capabilities for a brighter future. Strategies identified in this plan are intended to build a community culture of inspiration and innovation. Great Bend has a long history of people who implemented their ideas for the betterment of the community and the world! Who will be inspired next to innovate and make an impact?

*"Great Bend is a city of strong, intelligent, hard-working and high-performance people. All we need is the spirit of communication to build mountains."*

Doug Reiser, Central Kansas Oilfield Services, Inc.

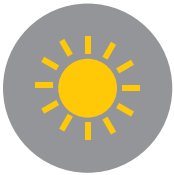


## TARGETING OUR INVESTMENTS

Communities with limited resources must decide where to spend their time and money to get the largest, long-term return on investment. Communities that understand how trends will create challenges and opportunities can focus on long-term investments that impact the ability to succeed in the future. Great Bend leaders choose to focus on specific initiatives that promote community well-being because they will contribute to local economic sustainability.

*"We can't be everything to everyone. Being strategic is about focusing on what we should do and what we should stop doing."*

Paul Snapp,  
First Kansas Bank



## GROWING OUR RESOURCES

Businesses locate and expand in a community because there are a strong demand and close proximity to the market; availability of raw materials and infrastructure a favorable economic policy of the government; demographics; and readily available talent/workforce that fills the need at low labor costs. The community would like to diversify the economy further. The plan includes practical business attraction strategies that target companies that fill a gap in meeting the needs of local residents, provide goods or services existing businesses or industries need to purchase, or complement our growing specialty markets. A significant emphasis is on growing our own businesses, whether through fostering entrepreneurship or helping existing businesses expand. The strategies focus on the education and creativity of the folks who already live in Great Bend and the surrounding area. When we support a locally owned business and help it improve and expand, we not only generate jobs, but also generate a return on investment that has a high likelihood of being spent with the community.

*"We need to shift the culture that Great Bend is 'mine' to Great Bend is 'ours'. It's best to invest in anyone in town that wants to do better - the more we help everyone, the better off we'll all be. Blessing one can bless us all."*

Quenla McGilber, Circles  
of Central Kansas and  
Barton County Health  
Department

# GOAL

## Diversify the Great Bend economy.

### BASELINE:

6,908 people are employed across 10 employment sectors in Great Bend.

(source: factfinder.census.gov, 2018)

Great Bend has 60 employers with 50 or more employees.

(source: Great Bend Chamber of Commerce & Economic Development, 2018)

By 2030 we will add one additional industry.

By 2040 we will add two more additional industries.

### CONTEXT:

Population is declining in both Great Bend and Barton County, which is consistent with most rural counties in Kansas and the greater Midwest. Economic factors such as jobs and housing have had an impact on population rates. The population in Barton County is forecasted to continue to decline between 0.5% and 1% over the next 50 years, while Kansas' total population is anticipated to increase by 22% over the next 50 years. Decreased population suggests limited workers in the future, which directly impacts the ability to attract new business.

Economic diversification is critical to sustaining a community. The agriculture and oil industries are currently important economic drivers for both Great Bend and the greater Barton County region,

with Barton County being home to the second largest cattle producer in the country. However, changes in weather patterns, forecasted water depletion in the neighboring Ogallala Aquifer and the local Great Bend Prairie Aquifer, changes in agricultural technology and economics that have increased the number of large corporate farms that require fewer farmers, and shallow oil fields that are not suitable for fracking are all factors that will result in significant changes to both the agriculture and oil industries, especially in Great Bend.

In the future, most jobs will require strong technical skills, something that Great Bend is already very familiar with. Great Bend is home to Jack Kilby – an electrical engineer who realized the first integrated circuit for Texas Instruments which led to his invention of the handheld calculator and the thermal printer, and later received the Nobel Prize in Physics in 2000. Great Bend is also



home to Skip Yowell, another innovator who put his technical and outdoor

skills to use to help co-found JanSport, the nation's largest maker of backpacks.

**GREAT BEND HAS 60 EMPLOYERS  
WITH 50 OR MORE EMPLOYEES**

# GOAL

## Increase the pull factor.

### BASELINE:

Barton County has a pull factor of 1.12 and Great Bend has a pull factor of 1.49.

(source: [www.ksrevenue.org/ppullfactor.html](http://www.ksrevenue.org/ppullfactor.html), 2018)

By 2030 we will increase the pull factor to 1.75.

By 2040 we will increase the pull factor to 1.9

### CONTEXT:

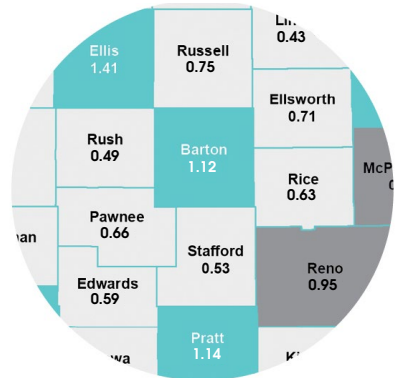
Retail is changing across America as customers reshape retail trends in ways that benefit our most innovative and local independent stores. Big box retail is on the decline as customers are switching to online shopping and small retailers. It is projected that in five years, the trend to buy local will surpass buying online, which would benefit retailers selling online from places with lower rents.

Great Bend is a regional retail center for the surrounding area with a pull factor of 1.49, which compares to Barton County's pull factor of 1.12. A pull factor higher than 1.0 indicates the city or county is attracting retail sales. The day time population of Great Bend grows because it is a regional employment center, which means there are potentially more people to

buy local goods and services in Great Bend each day. Continuing the recent efforts to revitalize downtown will emphasize Great Bend as a draw for both local residents and surrounding communities.

**Barton County - 1.12**

**Great Bend - 1.49**



**BARTON COUNTY**

# 1.12

**A pull factor higher than 1.0 indicates a county is attracting business.**

County per capita sales tax divided by the state per capita sales tax.



# GOAL

## Increase the number of living wage jobs.

### BASELINE:

As of June 2019, Barton County had an unemployment rate of 3.0%.

(source: fred.stlouisfed.org, 2019)

The median household income in 2018 was \$44,397 with a per capita income of \$23,897, compared to Barton County numbers of \$46,959 and \$24,555, respectively.

(source: factfinder.census.gov, 2018)

By 2030 we will increase the average annual earnings per capita to \$30,000 by supporting local employers to offer more jobs at higher wages.

By 2040 we will increase the average annual earnings per capita to \$35,000, to meet the average for rural workers in America, by supporting our local employers to offer more jobs at higher wages.

### CONTEXT:

While there is good news in a low unemployment rate in Barton County, the problem is that there are limited workers for existing employers.

Additionally, earnings are declining, and wages are stagnate across America, especially in rural areas. The average rural worker earns \$35,000 per year, compared to the average worker earnings in Great Bend of \$23,897. The fact that the median household income in Great Bend is \$44,397 suggests that most households are two-income households.

The national minimum wage is \$7.25/hour. For a family of four (2 working adults + 2 children), it is calculated that the living wage is \$14.34/hour/working adult. Conversely, for a family of four with only 1 working adult, it is calculated that the living wage is \$23.73/ hour/ working adult.



### AVERAGE SCENARIO:

$$2 + 2 =$$

WORKING ADULTS      CHILDREN

LIVING WAGE

**\$14.34/HR** per working adult

$$1 + 1 + 2 =$$

WORKING ADULT      NON-WORKING ADULT      CHILDREN

LIVING WAGE

**\$23.73/HR** per working adult

# GOAL

## Increase the education and training attainment level.

### BASELINE:

Great Bend has a high school graduation rate of 83%.

(source: [www.usnews.com](http://www.usnews.com), 2018)

35.9% of the Great Bend population 25 years and over possesses some college or Associate's degree, compared to 37.4% for Barton County.

17.6% of the Great Bend population 25 years and over possesses a Bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 17.8% for Barton County.

(source: [factfinder.census.gov](http://factfinder.census.gov), 2018)

Barton Community College awarded 349 certificates in the 2017-2018 academic year, compared to the 539 Associate's degrees awarded.

(source: National Center for Education Statistics, 2019)

By 2030 we will

- increase our high school graduation rate to 90%.
- increase the percent of population possessing some college or Associate's degree to 40%.
- increase the percent of population possessing a Bachelor's degree or higher to 20%.
- increase the number of students completing certificate programs at BCC by 25%.

By 2040 we will

- increase our high school graduation rate to 95% to match the state goal.
- increase the percent of population possessing some college or Associate's degree to 45%.
- increase the percent of population possessing a Bachelor's degree or higher to 25%.
- increase the number of students completing certificate programs at BCC by 50%.

### CONTEXT:

Great Bend has a strong education system with excellent public and private schools. Despite this, the number of school-aged children is declining. Over the past 18 years, the number of school-aged children in Great Bend is down by 9%.

Of the community's population, 36% have some college or an Associate's degree, which is higher than the national average for rural America (30%). However, Great Bend, like much of rural America, has experienced 'Brain Drain' as a result of young people moving away for education opportunities and not returning for employment

after completion. Creating a sense of place, providing a high quality of life, and offering affordable housing can reverse this trend and create 'Brain Gain,' bringing in highly educated and trained young people.

Barton Community College (BCC) is a major asset for Great Bend. As more students are enrolling in four-year degree programs throughout the country, the nation is experiencing a steep decline in available workforce for our trade industries (HVAC, electricians, mechanics, etc.). Fortunately, BCC offers training and certificate programs in 26 areas of study.

# GOAL

## Reduce the percentage of population living below the poverty level.

### BASELINE:

In 2016, 19.3% of the Great Bend population lived below the poverty line, 28.1% were under 18 years old and 15.6% were over the age of 65.

(source: factfinder.census.gov, 2016)

By 2030 we will reduce our population living below the poverty line to 15%.

By 2040 we will reduce our population living below the poverty line to 10%.

### CONTEXT:

Poverty refers to a deficit in any number of life circumstances whether it be financial, physical health, transportation, education, or social capital. Those living in poverty don't have access to many of the services or opportunities that many Americans take for granted. Federal and state workforce and services are declining despite the increased demand for social services.

Unemployment in Great Bend is low. People are employed, but the number of people in poverty is still growing. Businesses cannot expand because there are no workers to fill jobs and it is difficult to attract new businesses if there is no available workforce. The challenge in this economy is not too few jobs, but too few jobs with wages and benefits that provide a path out of poverty. People in low paying jobs don't have the job skills needed for higher paying jobs, and child care is not readily available or

affordable in many instances.

In Great Bend, of those in poverty, 1,844 are White, 1,045 are Hispanic or Latino, 57 are Black or African American, and 57 are Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander. Much of the poverty in the community is concentrated in the eastern part of Great Bend, east of Washington Street, west of Frey Street, south of 17th Street and north of Railroad Avenue. Compared nationally, this area is in the 90th percentile of population for low income households, children under 17, and people without a high school diploma, while ranking in the 80th percentile for speaking English less than well and not having a vehicle. In other words, this section of Great Bend is highly susceptible to these social vulnerabilities.

Compared to the living wage of \$14.34/hour/ working adult in a household of 4 (2 working adults + 2 children), a wage of \$6.03/hour/ working adult is considered to be at the poverty level. And, to ensure a family of 4 with only one working adult is above the poverty level, the working adult must make a wage above \$12.07/hour.

### 2016 Percent below poverty line

**19.3%** **28.1%** **15.6%**  
**ALL** **UNDER 18** **65+**



# GOAL

## Improve the health and safety of the community.

### BASELINE:

Barton County ranked #67 out of 105 counties for health outcomes.

Barton County ranked #84 out of 105 counties for health factors.

(source: [www.countyhealthrankings.org](http://www.countyhealthrankings.org), 2018)

Great Bend has a crime index rate of 48.8 per 1,000 residents – compared to the Kansas crime index rate of 32.14 per 1,000 residents.

(source: [www.accesskansas.org](http://www.accesskansas.org), 2018)

By 2030 we will

- improve our health outcome ranking to #62 out of 105 counties.
- improve our health factor ranking to #79 out of 105 counties.
- reduce our crime index rate to 40 per 1,000 residents.

By 2040 we will

- improve our health outcome ranking to #57 out of 105 counties.
- improve our health factor ranking to #75 out of 105 counties.
- reduce our crime index rate to be below the state average.

### CONTEXT:

The generation born today will most likely have a shorter lifespan than previous generations. Many health factors can be attributed to this – obesity, inactivity, mental health and substance abuse. Barton County has historically ranked lower than state averages for many of these health factors.

The rise in the use of methamphetamine and marijuana contributes to much of today's substance abuse and overdoses, especially in rural America, in addition to those individuals reportedly struggling with alcohol addiction.

The lack of insurance coverage and declining access to medical professionals, services and treatment facilities greatly impact much of rural America, including Barton County.



# CHANGING THE CONVERSATION

## Gather Community Together

### CONTEXT

Great Bend is a friendly town, but we find we are often a community of communities – there is little structure in place to welcome newcomers to Great Bend, little interaction between our distinct cultural communities, and many of our services, activities, and events operate in silos. We are also a community of many highly-involved and passionate participants. We want a unified community that brings to the table all individuals and organizations to facilitate conversations, shares in the many positive characteristics Great Bend offers, and has a centralized location for community cohesion to take place.

### COMMUNITY VOICE



#### Connecting People of

different cultures, geographies, and generations together to celebrate each other.



#### Inspiring Each Other

by celebrating a sense of community pride and identity.



#### Targeting Our Investments

by activating one location for people to gather regularly.



#### Growing Our Resources

by engaging people from all cultures and generations to lead the community.

Our vision is for Great Bend to be a diverse community of  
**WELCOMING, ENGAGED PEOPLE.**

### COMMUNITY CATALYST

Continue to energize Jack Kilby Square with leisure, recreation, and cultural activities and events to bring people together from across our community and energize our downtown.



# CHANGING THE CONVERSATION

## Improve Communication

### CONTEXT

We are a community that provides a great quality of life – Great Bend is a safe place to raise a family, we have wonderful schools for our children, our community offers low-cost living, and we have a strong culture of recreation. It is important to our success and future that we share the story of Great Bend both internally to our own residents, as well as externally to those outside our community; and that all residents serve as stewards of our community through positive communication, even of our smallest achievements.

### COMMUNITY VOICE



#### Connecting People

by sharing information.



#### Inspiring Each Other

to be stewards of Great Bend by speaking positively about the community and being conscious of what we say.



#### Targeting Our Investments

by centralizing information.



#### Growing Our Resources

by reducing obstacles that limit economic development.

### COMMUNITY CATALYST

Cultivate a culture of positive Great Bend stewardship to promote and celebrate all of the wonderful community attributes.

### TOP 10 STRATEGY

#### WE IMPROVE COMMUNICATION...



by marketing the strengths and opportunities in Great Bend.



by promoting the activities and positive news about Great Bend.



by helping encourage small business entrepreneurs.

# CHANGING THE CONVERSATION

## Overcome Cultural Barriers

### CONTEXT

Great Bend is truly two communities within one, specifically in regard to the division that exists between the English-speaking and Spanish-speaking residents. The divide between these two communities impacts all aspects of Great Bend life. Embracing and celebrating the diversity of our residents will drive growth and provide prosperity, while supporting our vision for a welcoming community to all residents and visitors alike.

### COMMUNITY VOICE



**Connecting People** by reducing the language barrier.



**Inspiring Each Other** by learning from each other.



**Targeting Our Investments** by including the unheard voice to grow entrepreneurs and improve economic diversity and prosperity.



**Growing Our Resources** by understanding each other's common interests.

### COMMUNITY CATALYST

Bring two cultures together to be more than the sum of the parts.



### TOP 10 STRATEGY

#### WE OVERCOME CULTURAL BARRIERS...



by actively and intentionally including people from all sectors of the community in leadership roles.

# CHANGING THE CONVERSATION

## Close the Generation Gap

### CONTEXT

We know that about half of Great Bend's population is under the age of 24 or over the age of 65, and the population only continues to age. On the other hand, we also witness a growing number of residents ready to retire, and perhaps just as many young professionals making a start in the community. We recognize there is a large gap between these disparate groups regarding their interests, activities, and level of community involvement. However, there is much these various generational groups can offer one another; by providing a conduit to leverage common interests and to share knowledge and experiences, there is opportunity to bridge the generation gap, maintain continuity in business ownership, and keep Great Bend alive.

### COMMUNITY VOICE



**Connecting People** through intergenerational activities to create opportunities for all generations to interact.



**Inspiring Each Other** by sharing stories with each other.



**Targeting Our Investments** by capitalizing on the assets that each generation offers.



**Growing Our Resources** by identifying and nurturing future leaders.

### COMMUNITY CATALYST

Raise leaders of the future to be effective successors of our business community and cultural agencies.



### TOP 10 STRATEGY

#### WE CLOSE THE GENERATION GAP..



by establishing mentors for small business owners and developing the next generation of ownership for existing businesses.

# CHANGING THE CONVERSATION

## Grow the Workforce of the Future

### CONTEXT

In order to grow existing businesses and attract new business, we must recognize the importance of offering an early start and a helping hand – whether it be financially, through services, or mere encouragement – to those in our community who are most in need. Unemployment is low in Great Bend, but we must ensure that we maintain and grow a well-qualified workforce and focus on our youth, the underemployed, and the impoverished. It is our responsibility as a community to enrich these neighbors through a variety of resources – education, mentoring, or employment – so they have the opportunity to become model citizens and positive contributors to Great Bend.

### COMMUNITY VOICE



**Connecting People** to training and incentives offered to support business owners and job seekers.



**Inspiring Each Other** by nurturing entrepreneurs, business ideas and opportunities.



**Targeting Our Investments** by creating a healthy, safe community with a high quality of life to attract and retain workers and by preparing people to compete in our technological society.



**Growing Our Resources** by creating opportunities for all people to allow them to reach their full potential.

### COMMUNITY CATALYST

Prepare people that already live in Great Bend to be successful contributors to the workforce of the future.

### TOP 10 STRATEGY

#### WE GROW THE WORKFORCE OF THE FUTURE...



by recruiting qualified workers, specifically people who grew up in Barton County and enticing them to move back.



by increasing the local workforce capacity.



by connecting employers with qualified workers.

# CHANGING THE CONVERSATION

## Improve Mobility & Accessibility

### CONTEXT

We value the importance of universal mobility and accessibility for all ages and abilities. There is a very real need within Great Bend to make improvements to our infrastructure, so we have the necessary connections in place to meet the needs of our residents and visitors to get them where they're going and to improve the transport of goods. Additionally, there is a need to provide equitable opportunities to those with disabilities and those without cars in our community. Technological service and connectivity are also a critical piece to the community infrastructure conversation, and we are committed to making the necessary investments to keep up with the latest advancements. These improvements can only contribute to the economic benefit and improved quality of life for Great Bend.

### COMMUNITY VOICE



**Connecting People** through a complete transportation system.



**Inspiring Each Other** to include all ages and abilities.



**Targeting Our Investments** to capitalize on our existing transportation network.



**Growing Our Resources** through the attraction of more frequent visits to existing businesses from customers already in Great Bend.

### COMMUNITY CATALYST

Take better advantage of Great Bend's central U.S. location by modernizing existing transportation and communication infrastructure to enhance mobility and accessibility of goods and people, and to meet the demands of rapidly changing market needs.

### TOP 10 STRATEGY

#### WE IMPROVE MOBILITY & ACCESSIBILITY...



by taking advantage of the transload facility to grow our manufacturing businesses.

# CHANGING THE CONVERSATION

## Explore New Opportunities

### CONTEXT

Growth within any community is not possible without looking to new opportunities. We reflect on our strengths and successes that have made us the Great Bend of today. However, there is opportunity to fill gaps to meet the needs of our local residents, provide goods or services that our existing businesses and industries need to purchase, and complement our growing specialty markets now and into the future. Our community is fortunate to have a significant amount of private capital available, as is evident in our cash- flush bank deposit records, which can be utilized for investment in community projects and economic development initiatives. We are committed to pursuing innovation and creativity in the realms of community projects, events, business opportunities, public spaces, and technology so we may capitalize on the potential that exists to make Great Bend - Better than Great!

### COMMUNITY VOICE



#### Connecting People

by connecting knowledgeable business people together.



#### Inspiring Each Other

by including a culture of healthy competition and support for each other.



#### Targeting Our Investments

by identifying and building upon the strengths of Great Bend.



#### Growing Our Resources

by creating a pro-business environment.

### COMMUNITY CATALYST

Build on the legacy of former Great Bend innovators to maintain a position at the leading edge of change - identify market needs, embrace diversification, and nurture creativity. Leverage the local agricultural conditions and transload facility to develop an industry around hemp growth, fiber production, and export.

### TOP 10 STRATEGY

#### WE IMPROVE MOBILITY & ACCESSIBILITY...



by recruiting companies that: fill a gap in meeting the needs of local residents; provide goods or services existing businesses or industries need to purchase; and/ or complement our growing specialty markets now and as they transform due to future trends.