

NEWS/SPORTS

QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS? Contact Jason Jump at (620) 886-5654 or email ghp@gyphillpremiere.com

County Commissioners Meet With Google Reps During Special Meeting

BY JASON JUMP
Editor

Google representatives met with the Barber County commissioners remotely in a special meeting Thursday morning to release more information to the public regarding a potential data center the company is looking to build just north of Sharon, as well as private information to the commissioners only.

Commissioners met with five different people, including Google representatives, an architect/civil engineer and an attorney representing the company based out of Kansas City. The public discussion lasted roughly 20 minutes before the meeting was recessed into multiple executive sessions for the trade secret exemption allowed by the Kansas Open Meetings Act. That private conversation lasted 25 minutes.

Google representative Andrew Harnish asked for clarification as to whether the meeting was a “closed session” before the original discussion took place.

Barber County Commission Chairman Bryan Quick said the meeting was going to need to remain open for as much information presented as possible.

“We want to do everything that we can in open session as far as the location (and) the type of plan you’re looking at,” Quick said. “If there’s anything – trade secrets or financial that we need to go into executive

session we can.” Trystine Payfor opened the meeting, saying Google wanted to meet with the commissioners to “go over the site plan, which has to be done in executive session.”

Quick then asked if Google has a location for the proposed project.

Harnish said he would start with the location and shared his screen so that everyone could see the map that had outlined the proposed site, which is immediately north of Highway 160 and west of Tri City Rd.

The Google representative also went into the history of why Barber County and this particular site within the county was selected. Harnish told commissioners Google made the decision to select this area due to “power opportunities.”

“The Thistle substation is a modern, robust substation that Sunflower (Electric Power Corp) told us would be a prime target for capacity expansion,” he said. “So, it (the substation) needs very little upgrades even though we are going to upgrade it at our expense.”

“In terms of transmission coming to the substation, it’s already mainly set up for a large load.”

Thistle is one of a handful of substations like this in the state of Kansas, according to Harnish.

Supply of power was then worked out with Southern Pioneer. Harnish said Google will also be bringing “their own energy resources

as well.”

The next step was finding land near the substation that would work not only for Google, but for the community as well. The land just north of Sharon was some of the “flatter” land in the area, according to Harnish. He said the company has secured roughly 2,100 acres of land for this project.

“We’re still working on routing to the substation and an easement to the substation, because that’s critical of course,” he said.

Google will not be utilizing the entire plot of land. “We like to create our own buffers with the site,” Harnish said. “We like to have expansion land – I should say breathing room for construction.”

The data center project would only be pulling power from Southern Pioneer and not from the Alfalfa Electric Cooperative, which also supplies power to the area.

“So that takes the northern portion off the table related to the data center load,” Harnish said.

He said some components of the project could bleed into that coverage area, but the data center load has to be in the Southern Pioneer area.

Harnish also told commissioners the company was trying to be considerate of the community for the “light industrial project” being proposed.

Google’s site plan is a “first of its kind,” according to Harnish. He said it’s not that Barber County will be

the first to get this particular site plan, but the type of building being proposed has not been built as of yet by the company.

“It’s a new, larger format project for us,” he said. “And we have some restrictions with the site plan.”

The facility will be “two large, rectangular buildings” that need to stay next to each other due to latency issues.

“They’re connected like two giant computers being connected,” Harnish said.

The buildings will run north and south on the land.

Quick asked for some clarification and that’s when Payfor said more details could be shared in executive session.

The two parties went back and forth for a few moments on whether or not to recess into executive session.

Prior to that Harnish said the section of land just north of Highway 160 would not contain the two large rectangular buildings, but it could house a storm water retention area, according to the company’s civil engineer.

Harnish said he thought Google could “quickly” get to a site plan that would be available for the public to see “we should just review it with you first one executive session.”

County Attorney Hannah Molz told the representatives if they just wanted to share the plan with the commissioners first, she did not feel that would “rise to the level of a trade secret.”

Payfor said parts of the

site design would be made public, but after feedback from the commissioners certain proprietary portions of the site plan would be removed prior to the public release.

“We want to get the county’s feedback to understand what we’re looking at,” Payfor said. “Until we go through the initial design and share our trade secrets with you, it’s a bit difficult to do that – to present it to the public.”

Payfor said the way the timeline has worked in this project information is getting released earlier in the process, which has made making information to the public more cumbersome.

Quick said the commissioners were “not trying to be difficult.”

“But the only ones that can get in trouble in doing this is us,” the chairman said. “We’re trying to make sure that we do the appropriate action.”

“I know it may be troublesome or cumbersome for you.”

Payfor relayed to the board that the company did not have a public version of the site plan to share during the meeting. After the executive sessions were over, Quick narrowed Google down on when the county could expect that to be released. Harnish said he felt like a public site plan would be available on Wednesday, Feb. 18.

That deadline was not met as of 2 p.m. on Wednesday. Google’s attorney Matt

Long said it was not that the company was trying to avoid releasing information and assured the commissioners that if the representatives started to sway from non-privileged material the executive session could be shut down immediately.

Molz said, in her opinion, if the company felt like they had nothing else to share other than trade secrets an executive session could be utilized, but she also told commissioners the company was aware of the consequences of misuse.

“They’re all aware that if it veers into something that’s not, we will shut it down,” Molz said. “And we also have to self report any violations, so they understand that the risk is on them that it (the information) might become public if it is improperly shared.”

Before the meeting was adjourned, Payfor said the company hosted three representatives of the Sharon City Council, who toured the data center in Mesa, Ariz.

“It’s not the exact same design, but they were able to attend and be up close to our facility and check out the noise and be able to speak to neighbors,” she said.

Payfor told the county commissioners they were more than welcome to visit the facility as well.

Quick said he appreciated the offer, but he wanted to see more “concrete” information about what the Barber County site would look like for comparison purposes.



SOUTH BARBER USD 255

INVITES CANDIDATES TO APPLY FOR THE POSITION OF

Superintendent of Schools

The Position

The South Barber USD 255, Board of Education is seeking a highly qualified and fully licensed superintendent. South Barber School District is accredited by the Kansas Department of Education.

Length of contract to be negotiated with salary based on qualifications and experience. A comprehensive benefit package is also included. USD 255 is an Equal Opportunity Employer.






District Information

PreK - 12 Enrollment:	
Elementary School (PreK - 6th).....	119
Jr./Sr. High School (7th - 12th).....	91
District Personnel:	
Administration.....	2
Certified staff.....	21
Classified Staff.....	19
Financial/Budget:	
Operating Budget.....	\$6.2 million
Mill Levies - LOB Mill Levy.....	22.4 mills
Capital Outlay Levy.....	8 mills
General Fund Levy.....	20 mills
Total Levy.....	50.4 mills
Total Assessed Valuation (General Fund)....	\$31,992,797
Total Assessed Valuation (Other).....	\$35,074,664

How to Apply:

Letters of inquiry, requests for applications or other questions about the process should be directed to

Alma Henry
Kansas Association of School Boards
6342 SW 21st Street | Topeka, KS 66615
ahenry@kasb.org | 620-794-5188

Selection Timeline

Applications Due.....	March 23, 2026
Screening Begins.....	March 30, 2026
Anticipated Hire Date.....	April 2026
Contract Begins.....	July 1, 2026



KASB
Lead - Serve - Advocate
Kansas Association of School Boards

SOUTH BARBER USD 255
SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS | SEARCH 2026

Comeback Falls Short for SBHS

STAFF REPORT

The South Barber boy’s basketball team trailed Attica 37-18 through three quarters of Monday’s game at Attica, rallied in the fourth but fell short in a 44-41 loss.

The Chieftains struggled to hit shots early on, not making a field goal in the first quarter and going 3-for-7 at the free-throw line.

South Barber got six points off three field goals in the second quarter but went 0-for-4 at the free-throw line. At halftime, Attica led the Chieftains 23-9.

It wasn’t until the fourth quarter that the Chieftains got the offense going, with Austin Swonger scoring 15 of his team-high 19 points in the final period.

Along with Swonger, Urijah Cruz added 10 points. Garen Cantrell had 5, while Wyatt Behee posted 4. Chance Howland chipped in with 2, and Isaac Angle had 1.

For Attica, RJ Newberry led the team in scoring with 16 points, while Jordy Torres had 11. Mason Jans finished with 9, and Krew Abbott had 4. Jack Alexander and Max Deviney each had 2.

The South Barber girls lost Monday night at Attica 47-29.

On Tuesday night, the South Barber boys grabbed a 58-41 win at Fairfield, while the girls lost a close game, 38-32.

The Chieftains finished as the sixth seed in Caldwell Sub-State and will host 11th-seeded Rolla (3-11) on Monday for the first round.

The Lady Chieftains finished as the 10th seed in the Caldwell Sub-State and will head to seventh-seeded Cunningham on Tuesday, Feb. 24 for the first round. SBHS owns two wins over CHS this season.