

"We Have Tomorrow – Bright Before Us, Like A Flame." *Langston Hughes*



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In 2024, we re-launched our Affordable Housing & Homelessness E-Newsletter, the go-to source for the latest updates, insights, and stories about Affordable Housing and Homelessness in Lawrence.

In each edition, we share valuable data around homelessness, movement on affordable housing in our community, and more. The goal of this newsletter is not only to share the challenges our community faces but to shine a light on the progress we're making together.

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OUR MISSION

We create a community where all enjoy life and feel at home.

City information is available at lawrenceks.org and on cable Channel 25.

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New partnership between Haskell Indian Nations University and Prairie Park Nature Center

Located near the Haskell campus, the Prairie Park Nature Center is a 100-acre preserve that includes a seven-acre lake, woodland, prairie areas, and an educational facility.

With this partnership, Haskell staff and student interns will have the opportunity to give an Indigenous perspective and knowledge of the land, culture and methodologies through their work, including events, on-site research and classes funded through the university's U.S. Department of Agriculture Extension program.

Indigenous Knowledge is recognized by the Department of the Interior as one of the many important knowledge systems that contribute to the well-being of the United States and the collective understanding of the natural world

"Haskell students and staff have a responsibility to Lawrence and the greater community and vested interests in them," said Mackie Moore, head of the extension program and the dean of the School of Business.

Haskell students have completed internships at Prairie Park Nature Center, working up to 20 hours per week to conduct summer youth

programs, research, and help with prairie restoration. Haskell students also work with Prairie Park Nature Center staff to research native grasses.

"This collaboration will enable us to intensify our efforts in promoting environmental awareness, sustainability and respect for nature," said Parks, Recreation and Culture Director Luis Ruiz. "It will also allow us to enrich environmental education at the nature center and offer valuable insights into the cultures of Indigenous people and their relationship with the environment."

Student research on prairie flora and fauna provides them valuable real-world experience before entering the job market or graduate-level classes. They also meet students from varying fields of study and work together to restore the area and attract others to it as a local destination. The university pays the students for their work, providing them with what may be their first opportunity to make money using their degree.

Share your budget feedback!

The City of Lawrence is kicking off the 2026 budget season – and we want your input! For the third year in a row, we're using A Balancing Act, which is an online budget simulation tool, to gather community feedback on funding priorities for the upcoming year.

The City budget affects our entire community – every single person – which is why it's important to our organization that we're hearing from Lawrence residents about what they prioritize.

With A Balancing Act, community members are able to make decisions and reallocate funds among departments. But keep in mind, anyone using the tool will need to balance their interests and priorities against competing priorities from other community members as they determine how to work with the available funds to create a budget that fits the needs of the entire community.

"Our community is facing significant financial pressure, and some tough choices must be made for the 2026 budget," said City Manager Craig Owens.

"Our process is better when informed community members work together on solutions that account for what our fellow neighbors want and need. Collaboration and compromise will be necessary."

This is the first of several opportunities for community input as City staff works to develop the 2026 budget. A Balancing Act will be live and available for community input throughout the month of February.

Community members can access A Balancing Act and find more information on the 2026 budget process, including information on in-person community input sessions, online at lawrenceks.org/budget. The website will be updated with the latest opportunities over the next several months.

Severe Weather Awareness Week is March 3-7

Kansas is known for its severe spring weather. While tornadoes usually take the spotlight, other hazards such as damaging winds, hail, and flooding can leave you without power, damage your home or business, and threaten your safety.

Severe Weather Awareness Week is about making sure we're all prepared for when and if these dangerous weather situations arise. This year, Severe Weather Awareness Week will be March 3-7.

During this week we want you to learn about the weather hazards we face, how to be prepared for them, and how to be notified when severe weather is anticipated. Remember to Be Ready in 3:

1. Be Informed
2. Make A Plan
3. Build A Kit

Be informed by learning about the hazards in our area and how to receive alerts. Sign up for the Northeast Kansas Regional Notification System to get severe weather alerts to your phone by call, text, or email.

Make a plan by deciding where you will take shelter and where you can go when it's time to leave.

And **build a kit** with things you need to stay safe and care for yourself during and after an emergency. You can find more information about these topics and more on the Douglas County Emergency Management website: dgcoks.gov/em.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Douglas County will sound the outdoor warning sirens as part of the Statewide Tornado Drill at 10 a.m. on March 5.

The following week on Thursday, March 13, from 7-8:30 p.m., Douglas County Emergency Management will host their annual Severe Weather Night at KU's Capitol Federal Hall (1654 Naismith Dr.)

At Severe Weather Night, you can learn about thunderstorms from experts at the National Weather Service, and you can hear about volunteer opportunities with Douglas County Emergency Management.

Follow Douglas County Emergency Management on Facebook and X to stay in the know!

Lawrence earns perfect score on Municipal Equality Index

For the third year in a row, the City of Lawrence earned a perfect score of 100 points for the Human Rights Campaign's Municipal Equality Index (MEI). This is a national benchmarking tool designed to inform municipal officials, policy makers and business leaders on how well cities across the nation embody LGBTQ+ inclusion in their laws, policies and services.

"Achieving a perfect score on the Municipal Equality Index for a third year in a row is a testament to the priorities and work of our organization in advancing equity," said Dr. Farris Muhammad, Director of Equity and Inclusion for the City of Lawrence.

"We're committed to creating a community where every individual feels valued, respected, and included – and this score reflects that commitment."

The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) is a national education and advocacy organization working to achieve equality for LGBTQ+ people. Since 2012, the HRC has issued the annual Municipal Equality Index (MEI), ranking cities on a scale from zero to 100 based on criteria covering non-discrimination laws, the municipality as an employer, municipal services, law enforcement, and leadership on LGBTQ+ equality.

Lawrence earned 100% of the standard points available in all five categories: non-discrimination laws, municipality as an employer, municipal services, law enforcement and leadership on LGBTQ+

equality. The City received bonus/flex points for the following:

- Protection of Youth from Conversion Therapy
- City Employee Domestic Partner benefits
- Services to LGBTQ+ Older Adults
- Services to LGBTQ+ Youth
- Services to People Living with HIV or AIDS
- Services to LGBTQ+ people experiencing homelessness
- Services to the transgender community
- Openly LGBTQ+ Elected or Appointed Leaders
- Testing the limits of restrictive state law

The MEI rated 506 cities, with a national average of 72 points per municipality, which includes the 50 state capitals, the 200 largest cities in the United States, the five largest cities or municipalities in each state, the cities home to the state's two largest public universities, and others as selected by the HRC. For Kansas cities, Lawrence tied with Topeka for the highest ranking.

The full report, including detailed scorecards for every city, as well as a searchable database, is available online at: <https://reports.hrc.org/municipal-equality-index-2024>