

City Council covers remote access to meetings, trees, city spending

BY PETER SEGALL
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Bakersfield City Council meetings will have to incorporate remote participation options by July 1, thanks to changes made to the state's public meetings law.

Recent changes to the Brown Act require certain public meetings to provide the ability of members of the public to listen and speak to the council from afar.

That includes allocating equal time for in-person public comments and people making comments remotely, according to Deputy City Attorney Ashley Zambrano. Zambrano is drafting an update to

the city's meeting policies to reflect the new requirements and at the council's 3:30 p.m. meeting, she asked members for direction.

"The policy has to address procedures for how you will handle potential interruption or disruption of that telephonic or internet service during the meeting," Zambrano said.

"Why is that? Well, because now the public has a right to participate via two-way audio option and so if there's a disruption to service, then you have a potential Brown Act violation."

The changes don't currently apply to other council committees, civil service boards, the Planning Commission or other meetings,

Zambrano said, though she expects that with time changes will apply to all legislative bodies equally.

The council has the option of reordering its current meeting format — options include moving portions of the meeting to later or to the 3:30 p.m. meeting. Members said Wednesday they'd like to see meetings stay as close to their current form as possible.

"I think we should keep it as close as we can from what we're used to and what our colleagues and constituents are used to so it's not so cumbersome," said Ward 3 Councilman Ken Weir.

"And it may be a little cumbersome as we initiate it," he added.

City Attorney Virginia Gennaro noted the policy can be altered in the future depending on need.

"These are baby steps, right? We want to do something, and if it works, great, and if it needs to be tweaked, then we'll come back and we'll alter the resolution again," Gennaro said.

"But it's going to require a little bit of adjustment from all staff, the public, mayor and the council."

Staff are expected to bring an ordinance with proposed revisions to the meeting policy to the council's March 11 meeting.

TREE INVENTORY

Council members voted down

an \$180,000 contract to create an inventory of the city's trees and said they'd rather see that money spent on tree planting.

That was welcome news to members of the city's tree advisory group, which includes members of the Kern-Kaweah chapter of the Sierra Club, who regularly come before the council to advocate for better management of the city's tree canopy.

But the group has also been critical of the city for not following its own planning regarding trees and not responding to the group's concerns.

On Wednesday, several council

Please see **COUNCIL | A4**



ROD THORNBERG / FOR THE CALIFORNIAN

Wearing a Garces jacket, the Rev. Mike Schmitz runs onto Sam Tobias Field at Garces Memorial High School on Wednesday.

Celebrity priest Mike Schmitz draws thousands of faithful to Garces Memorial event

BY STEVEN MAYER
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Central California Catholics came by the thousands Wednesday to Garces Memorial High School in Bakersfield to see one of the most sought-after Catholic speakers in the United States.

The Rev. Mike Schmitz, host of the No. 1 religion podcast "The Bible in a Year," has long served as a priest at the University of Minnesota-Duluth.

But it was when he started exploring the digital arena that his popularity soared as he reached millions with his blend of humor, humanity, conviction and fearlessness.

Held at Sam Tobias Field, the Garces Rams' football field, the event started at noon with praise music by the band Alob, along with plenty of prayer and some Garces school pride thrown in, too.

A pair of Garces

Please see **SCHMITZ | A3**



Roman Catholic Diocese of Fresno Bishop Joseph Brennan, left, at the altar for Eucharistic Adoration on Wednesday at Sam Tobias Field at Garces Memorial High School.

BCSD trustees blasted for giving selves large raise while offering classified workers 1% increase

BY JOHN COX
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Speakers at a trustees meeting Tuesday took Bakersfield City School District board members to task for approving a raise for themselves that was far larger than the one being offered to classified staff.

During the meeting's public comment period, two BCSD teachers and a human resources specialist criticized the board for approving a more than 280% pay increase even as the district is offering a 1% raise to employees represented by the California School Employees Association.

"I can't personally see that as anything other than insulting," teacher Kayla Ferguson said. She added that the district should be investing more substantially in people who "empty themselves" daily in support of students.

State legislation passed last year allows school district board members to raise

Please see **BCSD | A2**

Schools with low vaccination rates lose millions

BY DIANA LAMBERT
EdSource

California schools lost more than \$2.2 million in state funding over two years because some students did not have all the vaccinations required by state law, according to data obtained by EdSource from the California State Controller's Office.

The loss of average daily attendance funding was the result of state audits of more than 1,000 public schools, where more than 10% of kindergartners or seventh grade students were not fully vaccinated in 2023 and 2024. After the state investigated, schools in 72 of those districts lost some funding.

Los Angeles Unified, the state's largest school district, with over 400,000 students, lost \$324,055 in average daily attendance funding in 2023 and 2024,

Please see **VACCINES | A3**

CRC earns top certification for methane reductions

BY JOHN COX
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California's largest oil producer announced Wednesday its efforts to control methane emissions at company operations in Kern and Fresno counties have garnered a top rating that supports its reputation and revenue as a low-carbon energy provider.

Long Beach-based California Resources Corp. said the certification by London-based nonprofit MiQ represents its third such ranking after it received "A" grades for its operations in Long Beach and Ventura. It estimated more than 90% of its work in the state meets



THE CALIFORNIAN, FILE

Please see **CRC | A2**

This file photo shows pumping units at work in Kern County.

STATE OF THE UNION

Trump's effort to convince Americans of midterm message underway

NATION & WORLD | A5

GO & DO

Shafter Colours Festival allows residents to again celebrate art in many forms

EYE STREET | D1

BVARSITY

CIF state wrestling tournament for boys and girls begins today

SPORTS | B1

7 52575 00003 8
PRICE: \$1.25

OUTSIDE TODAY

YOUR COMPLETE FORECAST | **B6**

HIGH **72** LOW **56**
AIR QUALITY **66** | Moderate

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