



COUNTY OF KENOSHA

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State of the County Address

Presented by County Executive Jim Kreuser

Good evening Chairwoman Breunig, Vice-chairman Esposito, ladies and gentlemen of the County Board, elected officials, county employees and citizens of Kenosha County.

I bet you know what I'm going to say:

The State of Kenosha County is very, very strong, and Kenosha County is leading the way in many, many areas.

We are in great financial shape at a AA+ bond rating, solid reserves and we continue to be the sweet spot in the state for economic development—just ask Haribo, the German candy maker that selected Kenosha County for its first North American manufacturing facility here!

That's 400 new jobs – manufacturing jobs – a quarter of a billion dollars to construct their facility in Pleasant Prairie. And, we are told, that's just the start. We welcome Haribo to the Kenosha County family as the most recent of many privately owned and operated companies and we all look forward to working with them. This win for Kenosha County is another great example of communities across Kenosha County working together to get things done.

The Village of Pleasant Prairie has been a wonderful partner, along with the Kenosha Area Business Alliance, to enhance the county's economic development gains. Village President John Steinbrink and Village Administrator Michael Pollocoff, and the people on their team have led the way in creating a great business climate here in Kenosha County. This project is also a win for the Village of Bristol, which will see various benefits from this development.

Across Kenosha County, communities are working together, from the Salem-Silver Lake consolidation – now known as Salem Lakes – to the Paris/Somers/City agreement – we all embrace good economic development for Kenosha County. 2017 is a year that will be very positive for all of the municipalities involved and for Kenosha County as a whole.

The county's High Impact Fund, administered by KABA, continues to make a difference. Todd Battle and his team at KABA work hard to help us attract and retain employers. Since its inception, the High Impact Fund has contributed to the creation of nearly 1,500 new jobs and \$168 million in new private investment.

The Salem Business Park, created through the cooperation of the former Town of Salem, KABA and Kenosha County, broke ground for Vonco Products, a leading manufacturer of flexible packaging and promotional products, which is moving its entire operations here.

Somers kicked off First Park 94 with its first tenant, Ariens, the snow blower company, in a 600,000 square foot distribution center for its outdoor power equipment, and, in the second building in Somers, I believe a tenant is close to leasing half of the 300,000 square-foot building at First Park.

Another big win in 2016, was the addition of Colbert Packaging Corp., for expansion of its production of folding cartons, rigid setup boxes and paperboard specialty products, to the Kenosha Business Park. Most recently, the Mayor is looking to expand the Kenosha Industrial Park, which I believe is a terrific idea.

The High Impact Fund, along with other incentive programs offered through KABA and the state of Wisconsin, have led to more than 8,500 jobs and more than one billion dollars of investments in Kenosha County since 2008. Large private investments are continually being made in our community, such as the \$13 million invested by Vale Resorts at Wilmot Mountain; Kitchen Cubes, a \$1.5 million project investment; HY Frontiers, doing business as Rustic Road Brewing, a \$525,000 investment; and all of the grocery investments, such as Good Foods, Fresh Thyme, Aldi, Festival Foods and Meijer has really been a shot in the arm for our local economy.

Mayor John Antaramian is also a great partner in economic development, and he is acquiring various properties for future development and is also working on many city roads and moving along on the Chrysler site.

In our own Planning and Development Division, our 2016 numbers are in; P&D issued 81 Single Family Permits, which is the most since 2008, and 440 total permits, which is the most since 2009. Our county's equalized value is expected to grow MORE than it did last year, and, our unemployment rate is now 4.7 % in our county!

Also, there have been great improvements in our school districts, which is important in attracting and retaining businesses and residents. Here, at Kenosha County, we are working with KUSD on the 10% of students who didn't graduate to get them job-ready.

We've come a long way and there is much more to do, to keep the economic development ball rolling in Kenosha County. There are major infrastructure projects that are in the queue to be done over the next decade:

- State Highway 50 to go to six lanes with construction starting in 2020.
- County Highway S, a/k/a Washington Road (or the old State Highway 142) to go to four lanes with completion in about 2022.

- State Highway 158 is on track with the state to be completed after State Highway 50 is completed.
- And, hopefully, the state Legislature will get I-94 back on track and completed in Kenosha and Racine counties. This just needs to get done and will only get more expensive as time marches on.

In the area of quality of life for our citizens, we have leveraged more than \$8 to \$10 million dollars in various state and federal grants, as well as received tremendous volunteer, and private business support and partnerships – projects like removing the Petrifying Springs dam and improving the roads there; bike trails and mountain biking; disc golf; and various ballfields – and those have been complimentary to enhancing our economic development investments within the various municipalities of Kenosha County. Improving the quality of life aspects of our community helps our economic development and retention of human capital.

As we constantly look to improve services in the most cost effective ways, our IT department is working closely with departments and divisions to work smarter with technology.

As you know, 2016 was a BIG year of change and 2017 keeps building on that progress. Here is some of what has been done and what is coming in 2017 as a result of our technological innovations you have supported:

- We are improving tax bill processing, and updating land information records.
- We have consolidated electronic medical record systems for the Division of Health.
- The county website is updated.
- We have made significant upgrades to Kronos, the payroll system, and enabled automated timecards for the parks seasonal staff, and Sheriff's Department scheduling and timecards.
- We also activated an online parks reservation system.
- And our team is continually improving our protection from Cyber threats.
- We have completed critical server and data storage upgrades, which increases capacity and encryption for compliance purposes.
- Again with your support, we are completing the process so that people can get permits online from Planning & Development.

- And a pretty big deal in Human Resources is the full implementation of Dayforce, that's the online application and human resources management tool— there are no more paper applications for county jobs, and no more paper timecards.

All of this is saving us time and money!

Many great things are going on in Kenosha County Government every day—in our departments and divisions.

I'm very proud of Workforce Development Director Nina Taylor and her Child Support team. Their pilot project, Supporting Parents Supporting Kids, has been so successful, Governor Walker mentioned it in his State Budget Address and he is bringing the program to other counties. Kenosha County is again leading the way.

That program helps many of the noncustodial fathers receive services that lead to higher paying jobs, helps them regain dignity and initiates new relationships with their children. The men who participated saw higher wages over those who did not participate. That's a terrific outcome.

Children & Family Services, led by Ron Rogers, continues to lead the state for its work in Child Protective Services. It had a rate of 98.8% in completing initial assessments within 60 days and achieved a 99.64% in seeing children who have had to be taken out of their homes. This is one of the most difficult jobs, particularly when they must separate children from their families, but we thank them for keeping our children safe.

Continuing on our mission not to leave any money on the table, two Human Services Finance employees, were able to recoup \$1.3 million in Medicaid reimbursements, dating back to 2014. Thank you for your initiative and dedication.

Thanks to the initiative of the County Board the City Council, work on the new KARE Center is progressing, thanks to the initiative of this County Board, and improvements continue to address mental health issues in our county in a financially smart way. It should be operational in early 2018. In other counties, they talk about mental health. Kenosha County again is leading the way.

We are also working with Sheriff David Beth and District Attorney Mike Graveley with the Vivitrol Program to address opioid addiction in our county. Other counties simply talk about it, while Kenosha County is leading the way.

In Public Works, the facilities division is saving the county more than \$50,000 per year in energy dollars through Focus on Energy plans converting lighting and they will continue to introduce more energy efficient practices that have a meaningful ROI. Facilities is also leading a LEAN project to develop a more efficient snow removal plan for county campuses that is quicker, efficient, safer and cost-effective.

The Parks Division will celebrate the 90th Anniversary of the Kenosha County Parks System with a big event at Petrifying Springs Park on August 5th. We have many generous community partners supporting our effort and it should be a terrific family event. Look for more information on that event and I know that our good friend and former Parks Director, Domenick Ventura, will be looking down on us that day with a smile.

Parks Director Matt Collins and Gang Intervention Supervisor Donna Rhodes received the Silver Star Award from the Wisconsin Park and Recreation Association in November for their work on Summer Youth Employment Program, now in its 9th year of changing lives of at-risk youth and reducing juvenile crime in our county. Congratulations and, again, Kenosha County is leading the way.

UW-Extension is celebrating 100 years in Kenosha County! Tedi Winnett, director of the Kenosha County UW-Extension, since 1991, has been working here since 1987. Sadly for us, she will retire in June. Tedi has made an incredible difference in our county. She could not be here tonight – she’s teaching, of course she is– so we will honor her properly in the future. She will be missed.

I am proud to be Kenosha County Executive and to work with such an outstanding team of dedicated professionals.

Our mantra in county government is: How do we make things better and how do we do it in the most cost-effective manner? Our employees are constantly striving to go above and beyond, and you see that in every committee meeting you attend. Thank you to all of our county employees.

The work our employees do, and the work you, the County Board does, is part of the positive business climate here. We’ve been persistent and we need to stay consistent – in providing top notch service in our county.

We all know what brings investment to Kenosha County because KABA asks the questions to businesses. Business leaders cite things like the stable economy, the low cost of doing business, buildings and/or shovel ready land and community leadership – the intergovernmental cooperation— and also the quality of life for their employees. All of this has an impact on our business climate.

Also, of course, we have also benefited from *Location*. We are ready, and we must continue to plan for tomorrow's opportunities. We must remain lean and nimble as we plan for our future growth AND for what changes lie ahead at the state and federal levels. And, we continue to advance our methods of halting any fraud and abuses in our system.

We must continue to build upon our infrastructure improvements and enhance quality of life amenities to attract and retain residents and new businesses. We must continue to look for

innovative ways to deliver professional services with integrity, and cost effectiveness, and to be a leader in technology-driven services.

Now, with a AA+ bond rating, we will continue on the track toward a AAA bond rating. We are fiscally on the correct course for moving all of Kenosha County forward. In fact, in many ways, we have leveled the playing field to our advantage.

The State of Kenosha County is very, very strong and Kenosha County is leading the way in economic development and jobs, fiscal strength, mental health and opioid issues, innovation, and, good county operations. I know we will continue to work together to keep Kenosha County growing and make Kenosha County even better tomorrow than it is today!

Thank you all so very much for what you do!

May God Bless Kenosha County and May God Bless America!

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