



COUNTY OF KENOSHA

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Kenosha County Executive Jim Kreuser
State of the County Address
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Good evening, Chairman Esposito, Vice Chairman O’Day, ladies and gentlemen of the County Board, elected officials, county employees and citizens of Kenosha County.

Since the last time we met in this Chamber, Kenosha has lost one past County Board chairman and another one is under Hospice care. They served a combined total of over 60 years of public service. They saw prosperous times and plant shutdowns where they worked. And, both saw the County Executive form of government introduced to Kenosha County in 1982.

This year, we also lost former Supervisor Maureen Reed, one of the pioneering women on the Kenosha County Board. Maureen Reed, Ron Johnson and Dick Kessler shared a deep love and commitment to County Government. Tonight, we should celebrate their accomplishments and give their families and friends thanks for their service to Kenosha County.

Since 1983, or for the past 36 years, it’s been the duty of the County Executive to report to you on The State of the County. For the past 10 years, it has been my honor to do so.

Today, I am proud to tell you that the State of Kenosha County is:

Robust. Resilient. Solid. Heavy-duty. Exceptional. Outstanding.

Quite frankly, there just aren’t enough adjectives to accurately describe our current condition. Saying the State of Kenosha County is “strong” just doesn’t quite do it justice.

We now have the highest employment in new jobs, the lowest unemployment in 19 years. Income is rising. The overall crime rate has declined and is lower than the national average.

In this region and across the state of Wisconsin, Kenosha County is leading the way in key areas:

It’s the economy

Over the past four years, more than 8,000 new jobs have been created and \$1 billion in capital investment has been made in Kenosha County.

We are the hotspot. We are bursting with opportunity and possibilities as we continue to attract and retain new businesses, from the new Business Park in Salem Lakes, which Kenosha County has helped develop as a key partner with the Village and the Kenosha Area Business Alliance, to the new Industrial Park in the Village of Somers – First Park 94, to the still-bustling areas in and around WisPark and the Village of Pleasant Prairie.

There are also discussions of developments in the works in the Villages of Bristol and Twin Lakes.

Kenosha County and our economic development partner, KABA, through the High Impact Fund, which has been supported by the Kenosha County Board, has, since its inception, contributed \$3.5 million of High Impact Funds, awarded to 9 companies or developments, producing just under 1,500 jobs and creating \$168 million in capital investment

The Salem Business Park, with its first tenant, Vonco Products, has already resulted in \$12 million in investment in the building and equipment, and 120 jobs.

In Kenosha County, there are and continue to be major expansions of current businesses. Uline, for example, completed a 2.1 million-square-foot expansion, making a \$150 million investment and adding 975 jobs. And more may be in the works.

In 2017, Kenosha County landed two of Wisconsin's largest economic development projects – Haribo and Gold Standard Baking. Haribo, the German candy manufacturer, will be building a 500,000-square-foot manufacturing facility, making a \$242 million investment, and adding 400 new jobs.

How sweet is that??!!

It's our strategic investment in infrastructure

These economic development gains are made possible because of our commitment to improving our infrastructure. Good infrastructure leads to economic development, which leads to jobs. Infrastructure was important in developing WisPark 30 years ago and it's even more important today.

As every commuter who travels north knows, the State of Wisconsin is working on completing the I-94 project from Kenosha County to the Milwaukee County line. That will dramatically boost our already-growing economic development opportunities.

Of course, you're aware of the state's work on Highway KR, as well as Highway A and part of Highway H due to a development you might have heard of called Foxconn just north of our border.

And, finally, planning continues for the County Highway S project to go to four lanes with completion in about 2022.

It's about the completion of Brookside Care Center and CBRF, Willowbrook

Congratulations to the Brookside Care Center staff for the wonderful care provided to residents under ever-changing conditions during the construction and renovation of our county's nursing home.

You are all invited to the ribbon cutting for this outstanding project at 3 p.m. on Tuesday, May 15th to celebrate the tremendous support most of you gave for this project.

The \$20 million project and staffing will be paid for and covered by revenues at the nursing home and CBRF over the life of the note.

It's our high-quality programs, commitment to cost-effectiveness and efficiency

We made a commitment to address and improve mental health services in a number of ways and we have done that recently with supporting the KARE Center, which is now up and running. I concur with Chairman Esposito that we have more work to do with mental health and opioids and that continues to be a focus for LaVerne Jaros and her Aging and Disability Resource Center Team, and for John Jansen and all of Human Services.

I want to recognize the work of the Opioid Task Force, the new Family Treatment Court, led by Chief Judge Jason Rossell, the continued successes of the county's Vivtrol Program, the DA's First Offender program, and the Health Department's Narcan training. Our goal is to be proactive and help people address their addictions.

The Summer Youth Employment Program that puts to work 200 to 250 at-risk youth has been described as our most successful summer crime reduction program by law enforcement, it continues to attract national attention. Communities across the nation want to know, "How Does Kenosha County Do It?!"

Thank you to the Children and Family Services Division for leading the way once again! And, you should know, many of these young people are getting private sector jobs that last long after the summer youth program concludes.

It's our quality-of-life investments

We find the smart, cost-effective ways to do more with our county Parks. We collaborate and have partnerships. Our goal for the past 10 years has been to wear out the grass through public use. Each park is unique and has its own character.

I just ran in to a gentleman this weekend and he was pleased that we have stocked fish at KD Park, and he and his wife love the trails.

We have disc golf and pickle ball at Fox River Park, our three dog parks, the new bike trail that will soon be completed through Petrifying Springs to County Highway KR, connecting to the Racine County path system— these are the dynamic opportunities that will attract, intrigue and retain residents. And, our golf courses continue to be in the black!

It's our collective *drive* to be financially strong and be fiscally responsible to safeguard our county's present and be planful and proactive for our community's future

I, along with Chairman Esposito and Finance Chairman Terry Rose, am committed for our county's bond rating to reach AAA.

Why does it matter?

A mile of road costs roughly a quarter of a million dollars to rebuild. For an AAA County, the interest will be about the rate of inflation over 20 years before you rebuild it again. That's the smart way to do business.

The rating agencies have said the path to AAA requires that we need to check two of four boxes. Some are in our control and some are not. The boxes are:

1. Operating Performance.
 - In this category, we have already received a AAA rating as a reflection of our management practices. Thank you to Dave Geertsen, Patty Merrill, Barna Bencs and the entire Finance Team for their leadership.
2. Revenue Framework, and
3. Expenditure Framework
 - In these two areas, bond rating agencies contend we will hit these marks if our rate of growth continues at our current pace
4. Long-Term Liability Burden

- This is impacted by personal income growth in the county, our debt and the debt of other taxing bodies in our county – city, other municipalities and school districts.
- As long as our—and our neighbors—long-term obligations continue to be modest increases – as they have been – and personal income continues to grow at a rapid pace – we will check this box.

Again, we only need to check *one* more box to achieve AAA.

As interest rates continue to climb, an AAA rating gives us flexibility and saves the county money now and secures the county’s fiscal future for our children and grandchildren. It is the smart and the best way to do business and that’s what we always try to do in Kenosha County.

Under my administration, we have taken seriously the charge to be fiscally responsible to the taxpayers of Kenosha County. That includes keeping a tight rein on our overall General Obligation Debt and not pushing deferred maintenance to future generations.

The county’s general obligation (GO) debt went up from \$99.5 million in 1999 to \$118.9 in 2016—you subtract the Brookside Project (\$20 million) and our borrowing is relatively the same compared to 19 years ago.

I repeat, excluding the added Brookside debt, which is paid for through operating revenues, such as Medicare, Medicaid and residents’ self-pay, the GO debt is currently basically the same as it was in 1999.

Our OPEB (Other Post Employment Benefit) obligation has been reduced significantly going from a high of \$132.6 million in 2008 to \$72.4 million in 2016. Our vacation/casual time off obligation went from a high of \$4.1 million in 2008 to about \$100,000 in 2016.

All of these material positive trends are a result of the current Administration’s policies and initiatives that have been supported by the County Board. We are all in this together.

The State of Kenosha County is exceptionally strong, and we continue to lead the way in many areas because:

- Kenosha County is a leader in economic development,
- We are strategic in our investment in infrastructure,
- We are committed to cost-effective and efficient high-quality programs,
- We are willing to make quality-of-life improvements to attract and retain residents, and
- We are deliberate in our goals to be even more fiscally strong, sound and secure.
- And, in these good times, it’s even more important to work together in utilizing the best of all of our ideas to optimize the potential of our County.

I look forward to working with each of you as we work toward our common goal of continuing to make Kenosha County the best place to live, work and raise a family.

May God Bless America and may God Bless Kenosha County!
Thank you.

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