



COUNTY OF KENOSHA COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Jim Kreuser, County Executive

1010 – 56th Street, Third Floor
Kenosha, Wisconsin 53140
(262) 653-2600
Fax: (262) 653-2817

October 2, 2018

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

2019 Kenosha County Budget Address by County Executive Jim Kreuser:

Thank you, Chairman Esposito, Vice-Chairman O'Day, members of the County Board, elected officials, distinguished guests and fellow citizens of Kenosha County.

Every day is a great day in Kenosha County, and this has been a great year!

Equalized value has gone up above projections. The tax base is larger in some measure because of the work we have done together to increase economic development possibilities. We are seeing the infrastructure we built continue to pay off by attracting new companies to our area.

Anybody who wants a job, can get a job.

As a result, when the Citizens of Kenosha County look at their 2019 tax bill for Kenosha County purposes, they will see a decrease in the actual cash out-of-pocket.

Yes, taxes are going down in 2019.

Taxes on a home valued at \$200,000 in 2019, will decrease by \$8.26. Wallets will be fuller and this budget meets the needs of our community.

What's in this budget is the result of the work all of you do in your committees, the input of the citizen boards, and comments from residents in our community – and a few unfunded state mandates.

This budget is also the result of deep analysis and review.

- What is the Return on Investment?
- What is in the best interest of Kenosha County's future for the long haul?
- Many, many budget requests did end up on the cutting room floor.

In many respects, this is a maintenance budget that sustains essential operations AND builds on our long-range successes in economic development and infrastructure.

Before I get to the details, there are a few people I want to recognize:

Bob Riedl, human resource director for Kenosha County for 20 years. Bob loves Kenosha County and the people who work here. Bob has been a strong and fair advocate for employees, as well as a good representative for the administration. He's provided an excellent balance.

Whether it was contract negotiations, or helping find the best solutions for all in the post Act 10 world, Bob led the way with a positive attitude and a calm smile. We're going to miss that smile and his laugh.

He's the consummate professional, but he's looking forward to spending more time with his grandchildren and, hopefully, watching the Badgers, the Packers and National League Central Champion Brewers win national titles.

Bob will retire at the end of this year. Succession planning has been critical to pass along institutional knowledge and ease transition. Bob was generous to stay on to assist his successor, Clara Tappa. Her appointment is on your agenda tonight. She has big shoes to fill. Thank you, Bob!

Laurie Staves has been with Kenosha County for 18 years. She'll retire at the end of this year.

She brought together what had been financial silos in the Human Services area as the Chief Financial Officer. Her financial acumen has allowed Kenosha County to capture millions of dollars in federal reimbursement for human services programs.

She has come up with countless ways to leverage state, federal and local dollars to do the absolute best for the citizens of Kenosha County in the most cost-effective ways. Her guidance in developing and now overseeing the financial model for the Brookside Care Center expansion and the addition of Willowbrook Assisted Living Center has been priceless. She has been working with her successor, Tammy Capito, to ease the transition.

Thank you, Laurie, and we wish you the best on your next chapter! Mrs. Laurie Orendorff!

Dave Geertsen, the county's Chief Financial Officer, retired in August after 33 years with Kenosha County.

Dave brought the highest standards of professionalism to Kenosha County's finances. He advocated tirelessly for best practices and high ideals. He led Kenosha County through challenging fiscal times and we came out the other end far better for it.

Our robust financial position is due in large part to Dave's vision. He worked alongside, Finance Director Patty Merrill for about a year, as part of our succession planning. Thank you, Dave

Fran Petrick has been at Brookside and Kenosha County since 2008. She's planning to retire early next year. She transformed everything at Brookside so that we went from losing more than a million annually, to be self-supporting and returning money to the county budget annually.

When she came here, she immediately started advocating for a continuum of care. Now we have Willowbrook Assisted Living Center. She saw the need and had the vision for the much-improved rehabilitation services and a more home-like environment for Brookside residents.

She's not only a leader here, she's a recognized and sought-after leader in the region and across the nation. She has worked with Brookside Administrator Lynda Bogdala as part of our succession planning. Thank you, Fran!

These are highly competent and professional individuals and it's the people who make the difference in Kenosha County Government. Join me in thanking them for their years of service.

Their fingerprints are all over this budget because they have had vision. They've used best practices and looked for the most cost-effective and efficient ways for us to do business here in Kenosha County.

This budget recognizes a goal of the late Supervisor Greg Retzlaff, whom you'll see is honored on the cover of our budget book. His wife told me he really enjoyed the Petrifying Springs Biergarten, and the picture we used is of him tapping the first keg of the season there this year.

On the financial side, Supervisor Retzlaff asked many times if we could set aside money in a reserve fund for capital projects. Our CFO would respond that this was a possibility in the future, but the County wasn't there yet.

In keeping with these sentiments, we are proposing adding language to the reserve policy that general funds in excess of 31% will be placed in a reserve to be used for approved public works or public safety capital projects. Our Financial Advisor, Ehlers, is supportive of this policy change.

This budget also adds three Social Workers and a Social Worker supervisor, using very little in tax levy because of revenue through a federal, state and county partnership. This will allow the social worker caseloads to be reduced. Our social workers help children reach permanent homes more quickly and keep them safe, reducing the average number of children living in foster care.

This budget gives additional help to Veterans Services to improve communication with our Military Veterans and their families as they continue to outreach to Veterans across the county, and have extended office hours in Salem Lakes and at the Sharing Center. There will be a Veterans Event at the Job Center on Nov. 3. Look for more information on that event soon.

This budget provides more funds to the Shalom Center to assist them in addressing the chronically homeless population.

This budget continues support of The Sharing Center, Twin Lakes Food Pantry and Women and Children's Horizons.

This budget adds depth to our behavioral health services staff. Over the past 10 years, our behavioral health services have grown by 85%. Calls to our Crisis Center continue to increase, and we don't expect that to decline. In the past two years alone, we have secured five new grants to address mental health shortages and the opioid crisis.

This budget provides additional funding to the Bridges Program, a center that assists people with behavior and mental health issues.

This budget increases beds at the KARE Center to provide more opportunities for people in behavioral health crisis situations. This has a direct impact on keeping our state institution costs down.

This budget makes an upgrade to some testing equipment in the Health Department lab to allow for faster and better drug and alcohol analysis to help law enforcement, the courts and the public.

This budget makes a change in the drug formulary for county employees that will result in a \$300,000 to \$500,000 savings while still providing the needed medications and services.

This budget provides the county's portion of the funding to replace the 911 radio console system that is now at the end of its useful life. The Mayor and I, along with the Joint Services Board, know this is the critical system that allows dispatchers to broadcast and receive radio transmissions from law enforcement, EMS and firefighters in the field, and activates the emergency outdoor warning systems.

This budget also develops a robust Simulcast System by adding two communication towers and radio equipment. This addresses communication gaps for law enforcement, fire and rescue services. When completed, it will provide a level of coverage consistent with Federal targets of 95% of the community's area covered 95% of the time. Special thanks to all of the local Fire Chiefs and Ray Arbet for the extensive work on this critical public safety project.

This budget continues our effort to try to catch up still from the previous administration, more than a decade ago, delaying purchase of highway equipment. Highway division mechanics do an excellent job keeping equipment on the road or in use, but there comes a time when it must be replaced.

This budget also will upgrade and transition our Job Center to provide much better training in the Gig Economy, to better acclimate individuals with technology and job apps that are in place, but underutilized. The goal is to match people's skill sets to increase the overall wage levels of families. We need to be more proactive, whether it is someone looking for their first job or someone who has had their job for years and wants more.

This budget studies what it will take to bring the Ceremonial Courtroom in the Historic County Courthouse back to its original beauty. We believe we can get historic preservation grants for some of the restoration work. It's a shame 1920s-era murals have been hidden beneath a drop ceiling. Judge Bruce Schroeder, who occupies that courtroom, is pleased we will be looking at this.

This budget strengthens our cybersecurity and overall IT infrastructure from threats both foreign and domestic, and makes enhancements to critical business applications, including the very successful delinquent tax application introduced last year.

This budget continues the bike trail signage project that has been several years in planning and was awarded a significant state grant.

I met with other county executives and administrators in La Crosse recently and I can tell you they are envious of our economic development boom. Now is NOT the time to put the brakes on that.

These economic development achievements are a direct result of our focused attention to our county highways and infrastructure. Significant, quality development is knocking at our door and we don't want it to drive past us.

The most significant part of this budget is infrastructure.

This budget lives up to our commitment to the State of Wisconsin, which is investing \$30 million to \$40 million dollars to expand County Trunk Highway KR, from I-94 to Old Green Bay Road. Our commitment was \$3.3 million and this board supported that proposal last year.

Other road projects:

- County Highway K: Many of you drive into the city on K and you can see its rural profile is no longer adequate for the traffic volume. In working with the Mayor, the City of Kenosha will expand the road to four lanes between the two sets of railroad tracks. The County will complete it to the intersection at County Highway H. The road, to that point, will be jurisdictionally transferred to the city from 88th Avenue east when it is completed.
- County Highway S: Acquisition for the right-of-way and design work continue. We will get this done in the 2019 project cycle.

- We will continue our usual annual paving projects as well. In 2018, I am happy to report, Kenosha County repaved 18 miles of county highways.

I urge ALL of you to support this strong infrastructure development for Kenosha County. Staying ahead of the curve today secures the future of jobs and safety of our community.

In 2019, Kenosha County taxes are going down. They are about at the same amount as they were in 2015.

This budget employs best practices to lay a solid foundation for the future growth and stability of our community.

This budget addresses needs in our community for the most vulnerable, including strengthening our mental health services. And, it provides for the needs of law enforcement, public works and the courts.

And, again, it does all that with lower county taxes.

I look forward to working with each of you as you review the 2019 Kenosha County budget. I believe this budget serves our community now and cements a strong foundation for the future!

May God bless America and may God bless Kenosha County.

###