



COUNTY OF KENOSHA COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Jim Kreuser, County Executive

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Kreuser's 2021 budget plan lays groundwork for positive change, brighter future for Kenosha County

KENOSHA — Kenosha County Executive Jim Kreuser presented his 2021 budget proposal to the County Board on Tuesday, emphasizing the positive change to come after what has been a difficult year for the community.

Included in the proposal are measures to promote community healing, recovery and revitalization.

Kreuser said the budget resolution that the County Board will act upon next month will include a commitment to launch a Racial Equity Commission in 2021 — a group to be made up of members of the community, working together on the process of tackling systemic racism.

The proposed budget also follows through on a pledge that Kreuser made to honor the County Board's request for funding to purchase and administer body camera equipment for members of the Kenosha County Sheriff's Department.

Additionally, Kreuser's budget plan includes funding to begin the process of relocating the county's Human Services Department offices to a yet-undetermined site in Kenosha's Uptown area, hit hard by the civil unrest that followed the officer-involved shooting of Jacob Blake on Aug. 23.

"This budget looks forward from those bleak days, and continues us on a path to healing, recovery, action, justice and peace," Kreuser said.

The creation of a Racial Equity Commission follows up on work the county is already doing to advance the process of dismantling racism, the executive said.

Kenosha County is undergoing an internal examination of systemic inequities within county government, through a Kenosha County Diversity Task Force of county employees led by Adelene Greene, retired director of the county Division of Workforce Development. The county

is also committing to instituting racial equity training for all of its employees in 2021, and Kreuser said there are plans to engage in an external examination of county policies and procedures.

As for the Racial Equity Commission, Kreuser said, “We’ve all heard calls for public input in the process of tackling systemic racism. This commission will be a place to focus that energy and deliver meaningful results.”

Regarding body cameras, Kreuser said county administration will work with the Sheriff’s Department to ensure that the equipment is implemented in a way that ensures positive results. Kreuser said best practices elsewhere will be reviewed to ensure that Kenosha County’s policies and procedures yield accountability for law enforcement and the public.

“We’re spending a lot of money on this equipment,” Kreuser said. “We want to make sure it’s money well spent.”

As City of Kenosha neighborhoods begin the process of recovering from the destruction caused during the unrest in late August, Kreuser’s budget advances the concept of relocating the Human Services Department to the Uptown area.

This, Kreuser said, is about bringing investment and people to the neighborhood while also placing the services closer to the areas where they are most needed.

The 2021 budget proposal includes funding for project planning and design. Kreuser said the county is continuing to pursue potential partnerships with the City of Kenosha and the State of Wisconsin to help fund land acquisition and construction.

This new facility, which Kreuser said could open as soon as 2022, would replace the Kenosha County Job Center, located at 8600 Sheridan Road and now near the end of its usable life. That facility is now home to roughly 425 government employees and contractors and attracts thousands of individuals accessing services each week.

“This will bring Human Services to where it belongs — in the heart of the community, where the services are needed,” Kreuser said.

Kreuser said the county is also working in conjunction with the Kenosha Area Business Alliance, in support of an effort to address the food desert situation in Uptown and surrounding areas.

Other highlights of the county executive’s 2021 budget proposal include:

- Continued investments in infrastructure, which Kreuser cites as a catalyst for economic development. Specifically, the budget includes funding to complete the Highway S expansion project in 2021, as well as other road improvements.

- A \$250,000 allocation to the county’s High Impact Fund, administered by KABA and used to incentivize businesses to locate or expand within the county. This fund was tapped recently to help attract R+D Custom Automation, an Illinois company that will soon become the newest tenant in the Salem Business Park.
- Support for parks improvements, including the ongoing development of the Kenosha County Veterans Memorial Park on Highway KD in the towns of Randall and Wheatland. Kreuser said a veterans’ workgroup that was formed as part of the 2020 budget will soon present the County Board with recommendations for Phase 1 development of the park, which will honor all veterans, past and present.
- Enhancements to security of the county’s downtown Civic Center government campus, including the Courthouse, Administration Building and Public Safety Building.

For a median home, valued at \$193,000, up from \$186,200 last year, taxes for county services would increase by \$1.39 (less than 12 cents per month), under the proposed 2021 budget.

“Now is the time for our community to come together,” Kreuser said, “to make Kenosha County an even better place to live, work, play and raise a family — for everyone.”

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