



COUNTY OF KENOSHA

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

2022 Kenosha County Budget Address by County Executive Jim Kreuser:

Good evening, Chairman O'Day, Vice-Chair Yuhas, members of the County Board, elected officials and fellow citizens of Kenosha County.

The County Board, the county employees, our county residents, the state, nation and world have been through, and continue to go through unprecedented times. We are strong and resilient in Kenosha County. And, that is evident by our robust economic indicators, the highlight of which was OUR COUNTY achieving a Triple A bond rating!

We have joined the elite group of counties that have reached financial management excellence. Join me in a round of applause for Patty Merrill, Barna Bencs, Matt Leys, Jim Kupfer, Chris Walton and the rest of our county finance team!

That's right — Triple A!

For years, we've strived to attain that goal — the highest rating that the bond agencies award. And now we can say it: *Kenosha County is a Triple A county.*

And it is because of the fiscally responsible policies that this County Board has endorsed and followed for the past 13 years that has made our Triple A bond rating a reality.

Triple A was possible because of our focused discipline on adding value to the strong economic facts about Kenosha County, such as:

- Our five-year job growth from 2015 to 2020 is the highest in the State of Wisconsin, at 11.1%
- Net new construction is the third highest in the state.
- The county's Sales Tax collections have broken records in all but one month this year.
- Equalized Value went up 47% in the past 8 years.
- The county's Unassigned Reserves as a percentage of the General Fund Expense is above 30%.

- This budget is a property tax decrease for the average homeowner.
- This budget when compared to 2008, lowers the dependency of property tax to 68% from 73%. And to top that, our overall long-term obligations are still almost \$25 million less than they were in 2008.
- This lean budget keeps us on the path to keep our Triple AAA bond rating intact.
- And, our amount we are under the statutory levy limit is almost \$19 million.

This budget continues our strong commitment to enhancing our infrastructure, which leads to economic development, which leads to jobs. And it starts our planned decline of our annual borrowing for infrastructure for the next number of years.

This budget also leverages a considerable amount of outside funding to help protect and improve our environment for generations to come — creating a springboard for economic development and improved quality of life.

And this budget maintains our strong support for law enforcement and public safety, while also laying a path for the long-term, sustainable delivery of human services to our most vulnerable residents.

As you all know, the American Rescue Plan Act — known as ARPA — signed into law by the president earlier this year, is providing nearly \$33 million in funding to Kenosha County. This infusion of revenues comes with requirements on how it can be used, and this budget sets a plan in motion to maximize these funds over the next three years. Because these are one-time funds, care must be taken when it comes to using these funds.

This budget sets aside ARPA dollars to support Public Health and Behavioral Health over the next 3 years. Cases are continuing to ebb and flow, and we need to be ready for the effects — and the long-term effects — of the pandemic on businesses, our community, and our county workforce. The funds that this budget begins to set aside for Behavioral Health — a focus of several members of this board — will help us and the community to address the anticipated increase in behavioral health needs in upcoming years.

This budget sets aside ARPA funds to offset direct COVID-related expenses at Brookside Care Center — including, but not limited to, PPE, cleaning supplies and additional staff needed for testing, screening and care of residents who may test positive for the virus.

Part of our ARPA plan for 2021 — which you will consider separately from this budget — also includes proposed additional funds for county staff who have gone above and beyond, time and time again, during this pandemic. This includes command staff in the Sheriff's Department, correctional officers, staff at Brookside, and, of course, our Public Health staff that continues to

lead our COVID-19 response. I agree with Supervisor Terry Rose that these employees earned some recognition for their efforts, for all the extra hours they've put in.

A separate item for you to vote on in the coming weeks is being presented to you tonight to give this board the opportunity to recognize staff's hard work during this pandemic. To let our employees know how much we appreciate them, we value them, and we are counting on them to see this through. This item will include financial recognition for all employees, from staff figuring out how to do their work from home at a moment's notice, to our exempt employees who worked many additional hours without additional compensation, to Public Health staffing seven days a week, and to a variety of employees staffing the mass vaccination clinics.

Supervisor Rose, you and I again agree in principle on the need to acknowledge and compensate our law enforcement supervisors for the extra work they put in in our community's greatest times of need. Our ARPA plan that will be discussed with you later tonight and this budget provide us with a sustainable way to get there.

ARPA also provides us with an opportunity to support capital projects, and to support efforts to provide broadband internet service to underserved, rural areas of our county. This budget lays the groundwork for that, taking advantage of grants to fund some much-needed projects sooner than we had anticipated, thereby decreasing our need to borrow in future years.

This budget also includes funding for the restoration and protection of the Kemper Center shoreline.

It also includes a project that will be a gamechanger in Somers and the west side of the City of Kenosha, now and for generations to come. The South Branch of the Pike River is an important part of the Pike River system that was compromised by agricultural ditching early in the 20th century. Many of us have probably driven over it countless times, not even realizing it is there. But in reality, the current condition of this drainage way that flows up to the main Pike River in Petrifying Springs Park is a high contributing factor for flooding that affects the entire Pike system, and diminishing the potential for economic development in the area.

Thanks to a recent award of \$10 million from the Army Corps of Engineers, this budget begins the process of a restoration that will put the South Pike back on the map — and off the flood maps. Along the way, with this outside funding, we'll be able to add a multiuse trail alongside the river that will connect several neighborhoods on the west side of the city and through Somers to UW-Parkside and hook up on the existing trail to Carthage College, and ultimately to downtown Kenosha.

Supervisor Maurer, this project will be a great enhancement to your district, in particular. And it has the support of Carthage College, UW-Parkside, Gateway Technical College, the Kenosha Sportfishing and Conservation Association, Ducks Unlimited, and several others. This is the most important environmental quality-of-life project before Kenosha County right now, and

dates back to the 1983 SEWRPC plan. This game changer of a project will help the Town and Village of Somers, the City of Kenosha, and Kenosha County.

As I said earlier, this budget continues our commitment to building the infrastructure needed to create economic development.

In the coming weeks, we will cut the ribbon on the largest county trunk highway project in Kenosha County's history, the Highway S expansion. I thank this board for its support of that much-needed project, and for its support of the continuing maintenance of our county highways.

Since 2008, we've repaved just under 200 miles of county trunk highway, out of the 253 total miles that we have. We've set firm goals of 15 miles of paving and maintenance each year, and being able to address issues before they become bigger problems. This budget continues that program. And yes, Supervisor Decker, this budget includes funding to fix the bridge deck over the Fox River on Highway JB.

More traffic in the county is a direct result of infrastructure development leading to economic development and resulting in jobs, and several road projects in this and past budgets are tied directly to economic development needs. I'm asking this board to continue that momentum.

And it has most certainly been another strong year for economic development in Kenosha County. Our partners at the Kenosha Area Business Alliance report:

- 4 million square feet of new developments recently completed or under construction in Kenosha County
- And 2.8 million square feet of speculative industrial development currently under construction
- And an additional 3.5 million square feet of industrial developments now being planned or permitted.

Balcan Plastics is a Canadian company that recently chose Pleasant Prairie for its first North American operations, moving into a vacant building in LakeView Corporate Park.

Up the road, work continues on the 330,000-square-foot Kroger Fulfillment Center, where we recently secured a \$1 million dollar TEA Grant from the State of Wisconsin to build out Highway H with turn lanes to accommodate the traffic going in and out.

Nexus Pharmaceuticals cut the ribbon in July on its 84,000-square-foot manufacturing facility in the Prairie Highlands Corporate Park, bringing 77 jobs to Kenosha County now and an expected 400+ in the long term.

A grand opening is coming soon at Nosco, a 175,000 square-foot packaging innovation center in Pleasant Prairie that will be home to nearly 300 of the company's 700+ employee owners.

On the west end, Geneva Supply celebrated the grand opening of its 385,000 square-foot building in Randall, and R and D Custom Automation is now up and running in its 62,000-square-foot manufacturing and corporate headquarters facility in the Salem Business Park.

Make no mistake — All of Kenosha County remains the hot spot for economic development in our region, and this board has played a key role in our success. Your support for our High Impact Fund with KABA since 2011 has contributed to the creation of:

- 1,567 new jobs
- And \$298 million in new private investment.

It's helped to secure 14 projects over the years, with 3 pending at this time. I ask for your continued support for this valuable economic development tool.

This board is also in the position to decide how Kenosha County will address a long-term need that ties directly to how we're serving our most vulnerable citizens.

The Job Center building is in need of significant investment to maintain it as a viable facility beyond the next few years. And as those of you who serve on the Public Works and Human Services committees heard a few weeks ago, we are at a crossroads where we can decide how and where to make that investment, to ensure that services are delivered efficiently, effectively, and in the communities that need them most.

This budget gives the County Board the choice — you can do nothing and let the current facility continue to deteriorate; you can keep the Job Center where it is and invest in repairs; or you can make a similar investment to relocate to a more central location in our core service area, in Wilson Heights, which adds the most value.

This budget also addresses another future county facilities need, adding an elevator to make the second story of the Kenosha County Center completely accessible to address future space needs there. This adds 3,400 square feet of additional, usable, accessible space in KCC, and gives us more options as we align space needs with the logical places to locate departments and services.

Planning for the future isn't only about bricks and mortar. It's also about the people who work for Kenosha County — the people who come in every day and make sure the services are delivered, the public is protected, and the community's needs are met.

I would like to thank this board for supporting our IT department. We have seen what they can accomplish. When the pandemic hit, we were able to mobilize a remote workforce in a matter of days. When the civil unrest happened, they ensured our operations continued, supported the emergency command center around the clock and set up a secure remote command post. They transitioned our Courts to operate virtually and laid the foundation for our Health Division to conduct the mass vaccination clinics.

Our law enforcement personnel continue to do a yeoman's job under sometimes-difficult circumstances. I know this board understands the need to support those who protect and serve our community.

Our employees in Human Services are helping the most vulnerable among us.

Kenosha County government's greatest resource is its employees. Competition for employees is tighter than ever, especially here. As I mentioned earlier, Kenosha County has the highest employment growth in the state. We are competing against some outstanding local companies. So we are taking steps to ensure that our employees have a solid wage and benefit schedule. It's the people on the Kenosha County team that make a difference every day out in our community.

As part of our benefit schedule, we are also including two additional holidays for our staff: Martin Luther King Jr. Day and Juneteenth. It's time Kenosha County recognizes these two very important holidays, celebrating a great American and a significant event in our nation's history.

This is the kind of acknowledgment, recognition and celebration of our nation's history that employees in our Diversity Task Force suggested.

There are other initiatives in this budget to continue our racial equity work, which is now kicking into high gear with the recent launch of the Racial and Ethnic Equity Commission.

We've been listening and taking measures on equity efforts, both internally and externally, and this budget addresses that as well. We are continuously working to make sure our workforce reflects the full diversity of our community.

We recently completed a Racial Equity Audit Assessment of our employees so that we can fully understand the types of training and programs that would be most beneficial. This budget includes adding a Diversity Equity and Inclusion Coordinator to better target the county's efforts, both internally and externally, so that we:

- Make sure we reprioritize what services we provide, and how we provide them, as we better understand our external and internal customer needs; and
- That we are showing continuous improvement in our services to improve the quality of life for all of those we serve.

We continue to support Building Our Future and the important work it is doing to improve student outcomes for all in Kenosha County. Internally, we're continuing to plan for racial equity training for all Kenosha County Employees, we are looking to start Affinity Groups for our employees, and we're reviewing our procedures through an equity lens. We must not slow down on the momentum we as a county have made over the last year and a half.

Two years ago, this board supported a great, quality-of-life project that has now taken shape on the west end of our county.

When I took office, the county owned an old gravel pit on Highway KD with a gate that was locked and a sign that said, “No Trespassing.” With this board’s support, we transformed that land and expanded it into what came to be known as KD Park. And, finally, with the adoption of our 2020 budget, we appropriately named it the Kenosha County Veterans Memorial Park. This initiative would maintain the serene, sustainability-focused nature of the park, while also providing a long-overdue place to honor all veterans in and from Kenosha County.

Tonight, I’m happy to report that the first amenities of that park enhancement — a Veterans Honor Plaza and parking lot overlooking the park, and an additional park entrance off of Highway F — are substantially complete, and we will celebrate with a ribbon cutting at noon next Tuesday, Oct. 12.

The veterans from our community who make up a workgroup that helped to design the park are very pleased with the progress we’ve made, and I believe you will be impressed as well.

This budget includes future enhancements to the Kenosha County Veterans Memorial Park, as we continue to build out a tribute to veterans. With 335 acres of land and miles of hiking available, this is an area for the whole community to gather, reflect, and recreate. This is well on its way to becoming a beautiful place for meditation or a walk to unwind... for everyone in our county.

This is a tight budget and has a number of moving parts that secure funding from many places other than the property tax. All of these projects are moving Kenosha County forward in:

- Our infrastructure
- Business and job creation
- Quality of life improvement
- And a continued commitment to our Veterans

And this budget does all this and lowers county property taxes on the average home.

The past budgets that I’ve delivered to this board and you’ve adopted have gotten us to Triple A status, and this budget works toward keeping us there, while continuing to make Kenosha County an even better place to live, work, play, and raise a family.

I look forward to working with each and every one of you on OUR 2022 Kenosha County budget.

May God bless America, and may God bless Kenosha County.

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