



COUNTY OF KENOSHA

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News release

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Kreuser proposes 2022 budget aimed at continuation of Kenosha County's AAA success

KENOSHA — Kenosha County Executive Jim Kreuser presented his 2022 budget proposal to the County Board on Tuesday, celebrating the county's recent upgrade to top-tier AAA bond status while laying a path to continue this success.

The proposed budget for next year places a continued emphasis on infrastructure, business and job creation, and quality-of-life improvements, while lowering county property taxes on the average home, Kreuser said.

“The past budgets that I’ve delivered to this board and you’ve adopted have gotten us to AAA status, and this budget works toward keeping us there,” Kreuser said.

In issuing the AAA rating in August, S&P Global Ratings praised Kenosha County's financial management and noted the area's strong economy. Kreuser said a higher bond rating assures a savings to taxpayers as a result of lower interest rates for major projects.

In his budget address, Kreuser noted that Kenosha County's five-year job growth from 2015 to 2020 is the highest in the state at 11.1 percent, while new construction in 2020 was the third highest in Wisconsin. The county's equalized value increased by 47 percent over the past eight years.

The county's long-term obligations — funds borrowed for public works projects and other capital expenses — are nearly \$25 million less than in 2008 when he took office, Kreuser said.

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

The latter point is due in part to the nearly \$33 million in funding that the county is receiving through the American Rescue Plan Act, the COVID-19 stimulus package that the president

signed into law earlier this year. A portion of these funds will be set aside to support eligible capital projects, decreasing the need to borrow in future years.

Kreuser's budget also sets aside ARPA funds to support Public Health and Behavioral Health over the next three years, to fund immediate and anticipated needs in the community due to the pandemic.

A proposed ARPA plan, part of which the County Board will act upon yet this year, also includes additional funds for county staff who have worked extra hours during the pandemic. This includes Public Health employees, staff at Brookside Care Center, command staff in the Sheriff's Department and correctional workers.

The proposed budget also includes funding to address the deteriorating state of the Kenosha County Job Center building. Kreuser said the County Board will have the choice of whether to invest in significant repairs to the current building at 8600 Sheridan Road, or to make a similar investment on a more centrally located facility at Sun Plaza in the 3500 block of 52nd Street.

Outside funding in the form of a recent \$10 million award from the Army Corps of Engineers is budgeted to begin the process of a major public works project that Kreuser called "a gamechanger" for the Town and Village of Somers and the west side of the City of Kenosha.

This project, the restoration of the South Branch of the Pike River, would address a waterway that was compromised by agricultural ditching in the early 1900s.

"Many of us have probably driven over it countless times, not even realizing it's there," Kreuser said. "But in reality, the current condition of this drainageway 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 diminishes the potential for economic development in the area."

The project would also leverage outside funding to construct a multiuse trail alongside the river that would connect several west-side city and Somers neighborhoods to the University of Wisconsin-Parkside, Carthage College and downtown Kenosha.

Other budget highlights include:

- Support for further buildout of the Kenosha County Veterans Memorial Park, where a new Veterans Honor Plaza will be dedicated soon.
- Funds for restoration and protection of the Kemper Center shoreline.
- A continued commitment to repave roughly 15 miles of county trunk highway each year.
- The addition of Martin Luther King Jr. Day and Juneteenth as paid holidays for county employees.
- Continuing work on racial equity issues, including the addition of a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Coordinator position to help target efforts internally and externally.

Under the proposed budget, county taxes on the median-value home would decrease by \$4.61.

“This is a tight budget that keeps Kenosha County moving forward, and keeps us on track to stay at AAA,” Kreuser said.

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