



COUNTY OF KENOSHA

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Kerkman emphasizes partnerships in 2023 budget address

Kenosha County Executive Samantha Kerkman presented her 2023 budget proposal to the County Board on Tuesday, stressing the importance of partnerships and fiscal responsibility.

Specifically, Kerkman noted partnerships that she and the county have worked to foster with local municipalities, first responders, county employees, and others.

“Working together is how we get things done in Kenosha County,” Kerkman said. “And working in partnership with you, we will adopt a budget that provides the services the people of our county need, moves us forward as the gateway to Wisconsin, and uses our taxpayer resources wisely.”

Kerkman’s proposed budget would reduce county taxes for the median-value home of \$271,000 by \$15.51 as compared with last year.

This comes as Kenosha County’s net new construction is the highest in Wisconsin for the second year in a row, widening the tax base to the benefit of individual homeowners.

Kerkman said these were among the factors in S&P Global Ratings’ recent continuation of the county’s top-level AAA bond rating, which also presents a savings for taxpayers as it allows the county to receive the lowest possible interest rates when securing funds for major projects.

“Working together — as a county, and with partners like the Kenosha Area Business Alliance — is how we got to be a triple-A county,” Kerkman said, adding, “This continued rating is a seal of approval, of the strong fiscal positioning of the county.”

Kerkman noted that Kenosha County remains a magnet for economic development in the region and the nation. Among the recent groundbreaking and ribbon cuttings that have been celebrated, she noted the expansion of Vonco Products — the first tenant in the Salem Business Park, now growing the operation that it moved here from Illinois in 2016 — and the state-of-the-art Kroger fulfillment center in Pleasant Prairie.

“And, of course, there’s Haribo — the sweet addition to our corporate landscape that’s been in the works for several years and is almost done with construction,” Kerkman said, of the German candymaker’s manufacturing facility in Pleasant Prairie. “That’s an example of Kenosha County as a worldwide player for economic development.”

In other partnerships, Kerkman noted:

- The continuation of the Council of Governments, an information-sharing gathering of local government leaders held twice annually, most recently on Sept. 17 at the Vonco headquarters.
- Kerkman’s recent work with the Sheriff’s Department and the County Board to appoint Sgt. Christopher Hannah as the county’s new director of emergency management.
- A commitment with the City of Kenosha for the county to contribute \$350,000 to an effort to redevelop a portion of the Uptown area that was destroyed during the August 2020 riots.
- An innovative, public-private partnership in which the county is developing a new Human Services facility to replace the outdated Job Center building at 8600 Sheridan Road. The new facility will be located in the Sun Plaza shopping center at 52nd Street and 35th Avenue, in the center of the communities most served.

As for the latter project, Kerkman thanked the County Board for recently approving the acceptance of a nearly \$10 million grant from the state.

“With that, the project is on track for construction to begin in 2023, with the goal of opening in spring 2024,” Kerkman said.

In her budget address, Kerkman announced a new initiative that went live on Tuesday, honoring and celebrating veterans.

The Kenosha County Veterans Honor Portal is an online, one-stop shop for veteran-related information, Kerkman said. It includes the Veterans Tribute Trail — a map-based application that takes users on a self-guided tour of veteran landmarks throughout the county — and an Honor Registry that allows veterans and their families to contribute to a living history of veterans in Kenosha County.

Users may access the portal from any device at <https://www.kenoshacounty.org/VeteransPortal>.

Additional features will be added to the portal in the coming months, Kerkman said.

Kerkman also announced the naming of the two roads that run through the Kenosha County Veterans Memorial Park.

“One thing we’ve found with the park as it’s taken shape is that visitors don’t always know how to get to their destination,” Kerkman said. “There’s the original park entrance off Highway KD, and there’s the new entrance off Highway F that leads to the Veterans Honor Plaza.”

Kerkman’s budget includes the designation of the Highway KD entrance and road as the “Porter Parkway,” in honor of former state Rep. Cloyd Porter, who worked to secure state funding for the county’s initial purchase of the parkland in the late 1990s.

The Highway F entrance and road is to be named “Karow Court” in commemoration of the Karow family, owners of Powers Lake Construction, which was located on what is now that portion of the park.

“It’s an honor to pay tribute to these great names, while also giving the public an easy way to navigate to park events and features,” Kerkman said.

Other budget highlights include:

- A commitment to public safety, including the addition of one detective and one data analyst position in the Sheriff’s Department, and the use of American Rescue Plan Act funding for support staff for the District Attorney’s Office to address a backlog of criminal cases.
- Funding for a study of Emergency Operations.
- Reclassifications of some county positions with staffing difficulties, including nursing assistants, environmental services workers, admission-and-release specialists, and social workers.
- Road projects aimed at enhancing safety, including the 2023 construction of a roundabout at highways A and Y in Somers and the reconstruction of Highway EM in Twin Lakes.
- Continuance of the county’s highway maintenance program, including 15 miles of repaving in 2023.
- A commitment to addressing the ecological issues that cause chronic flooding along the South Branch of the Pike River in the City of Kenosha’s west side and in Somers.
- A continued effort to raise private funds to support the restoration of the county’s historic Ceremonial Courtroom — a project that recently received a \$100,000 donation from the law firm of Habush Habush & Rottier.

The budget will now go to County Board committees for review throughout October, with a public hearing to be held Nov. 1 and full board adoption of the budget scheduled for Nov. 2.

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