



COUNTY OF KENOSHA

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News Release

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Text of 2024 budget address by County Executive Samantha Kerkman

Good evening, Chairman Nudo, Vice Chair Decker, members of the County Board, and distinguished guests.

It is my honor to be here tonight to present you with my 2024 budget.

And it's my pleasure to tell you once again — we are a AAA county!

I know you've all been aware of that for some time now, but I also think it's something worth celebrating.

This year the bond rating process went a little different than usual. Instead of sending our Finance team to Chicago to present to S&P, they came to us. We gave them a tour that highlighted our economic development accomplishments to date, and the tremendous potential that lies ahead. And — as our renewed AAA rating shows — we didn't disappoint.

We held our meeting at HARIBO, in the beautiful new facility where they're now turning out gummy bears by the million. And we boarded a bus to give them a firsthand look at the at our county's remarkable economic transformation.

We saw the tremendous growth that Uline continues to make up and down the Interstate corridor — along with Amazon, Nexus Pharmaceuticals, Kroger, LMI Packaging, the Pritzker Military Archives — and more companies and developments than we have time to name right now.

Kudos to our Finance team of Patty, Barna and Matt for the work they've done to help continue our success as a county, and to Chairman Rose and the Finance Committee for their careful oversight. And to our economic development partners at KABA and their new leader, Nicole Ryf, for working closely with us.

The bond rating tour was a look at the great things we have done as a county. Now I'm looking at where we go next, to sustain and enhance the momentum that Kenosha County has enjoyed for several years.

In addition to continuing our AAA path, the budget before you tonight further enhances our commitment to public safety. Working together with Sheriff David Zoerner, we're looking at broadening our vision, so we can reallocate and redeploy resources to enhance crime-fighting efforts.

Last year, this board made a significant investment in growing the resources of the Sheriff's Department. A year later, those resources are fully deployed — and they're already paying dividends.

The detective positions you supported have enhanced our Drug Unit and have provided for night staffing in the Detective Bureau — something that hadn't existed for about 20 years. We know that the need to investigate sensitive crimes in a timely fashion doesn't stop at the end of the business day. And the budget before you tonight adds an additional detective to serve the K-DOG unit.

The data analyst that was added last year— something new to our Sheriff's Department — she has provided her first detailed crime analysis report for our sworn personnel. She's doing exactly what we thought she would do, and more.

Looking ahead to 2024, the budget before you shifts our vision to Detentions, where some staffing investments will help to improve the culture for our hard-working corrections staff. This will have a ripple-down effect to boost the efforts of our sworn officers fighting crime on the streets.

Earlier this year, we converted a sworn lieutenant position to a civilian administrator. Now we're adding an additional civilian administrator in the form of an additional FTE.

The lieutenant who was doing that work would become responsible for managing operation plans throughout the year, for major events like Country Thunder, the County Fair, and other festivals.

Meantime, the Joint Services budget that's a component of our county budget adds a Digital Evidence Technician position — a dedicated person to manage digital evidence, such as body camera footage. For the Sheriff's Department, this frees up the sworn sergeant who's been handling that, *getting that supervisor back to supervising deputies, not managing evidence.*

There are other Detentions enhancements that you will see as you all dive deeper into the budget. In short, by enhancing the Detentions Division, we're able to redeploy a sworn position to do other duties, we will optimize the sergeants who need to be out there leading deputies, managing scenes, working to make our county safer. It's a force multiplier.

The law enforcement budget also includes an innovative solution to a recruitment need. This budget provides a relatively modest sum to launch a paid internship program. This would give potential recruits a department overview while they attend the Law Enforcement Academy. And for those who thrive in the program, it would give us the opportunity to hire them before they seek opportunities elsewhere. It's a win-win for the students, and for the county.

And — along the lines of public safety — Supervisor Stock, I'm pleased to report that this budget includes replacing the 60th Street tornado siren that your constituents have been asking for.

Also, in Joint Services, the county continues to enjoy a productive relationship with the city. And we are applying for grant funding to keep needed upgrades for our 911 center off the tax levy. Thank you, Supervisor Yuhas, for your leadership on the Joint Services Board.

And in the District Attorney's Office, I'm pleased to report that we're funding two permanent positions to serve as support staff for the two Assistant DA positions that we were successful in receiving in the state budget. Thank you to Representative Nedweski and the rest of our local legislative delegation for your help with that!

Along with crime prevention and public safety, we're also continuing to focus on prevention in Human Services.

The Prevention Specialist Educator position that the board approved as one of the early recommendations of the Opioid Settlement Panel is now in place, with Levi Stevenson in the role. Levi will be working with our schools, implementing strategies to stop substance abuse before it starts in the youth of Kenosha County.

Sadly, the opioid crisis has not abated, and Kenosha County Behavioral Health and Public Health will continue working, together with law enforcement, to stem this crisis.

Human Services was on the go again this year. At neighborhood events and the County Fair, staff interacted with hundreds of people. At the fair alone, nearly 250 people were trained in the use of Narcan.

And, now, soon, Human Services will be on the move!

Last week, we broke ground on our new human services building. And now we're watching an innovative, public-private partnership come to fruition. And, if all goes to plan, staff will be in the building by mid-year 2025, providing services people count on, in the heart of the community.

Thank you to this board — and particularly to Chairman Stock and former Chairperson Belsky and the Human Services Committee, and to Chairman Nordigian, former Chairman Grady and the Public Works Committee — for providing the leadership to bring us to where we are with this landmark project.

At Brookside, we had a serious fiscal challenge on our hands, and this board took the steps necessary to shore up the staffing issues that left too many beds left empty since the pandemic.

Through your adoption of the class and comp recommendations, you brought Brookside and all of the county where it needs to be to retain and compete for high-quality employees — to be an employer of choice. And, now, we're filling those vacant beds, and looking to bring Brookside back into the black!

I must also mention Brookside's recent deficiency-free review from the state — front-page news last week, and continuing a perfect streak that began in April of 2022. Chairman Nudo and Supervisor O'Day, thank you for your leadership as members of the Brookside Board of Trustees!

Along the lines of Brookside's past staffing shortages, we faced another significant challenge this year... with Humana's decision to exit the employer group health insurance market next year. We had some work to do, figuring out how to replace our employee health insurance program, with the least amount of disruption possible.

Tonight, I'm pleased to report that the insurance outlook for our employees — and the fiscal outlook for our county — is bright. *This is a win-win for our employees, and for our finances!*

Another win for our finances came in the state budget. Thanks to the work of Governor Evers and legislators on both sides of the aisle, counties and municipalities are receiving a long-overdue boost in shared revenue from the state, and the positive effect is reflected in the budget before you tonight. Kenosha County is receiving nearly \$1.3 million in additional revenue.

My thanks go to Representative Nedweski and everyone in the Kenosha County delegation who supported this significant state investment.

We've continued to make necessary, strategic investments in our infrastructure, including the reconstruction of Highway EM on the east side of Twin Lakes. Thank you, Supervisor Karow, for your involvement in this partnership with the Village of Twin Lakes. As a result, we now have a safer, smoother roadway — with storm sewer improvements that the village had been seeking.

We completed the roundabout at highways A and Y in Somers, making for a safer intersection. I know Supervisor Geertsen and his neighbors appreciate that.

And we completed the Phase 1 Highway K expansion west of Indian Trail, enhancing traffic capacity in that key corridor. Thank you, Supervisor Franco, for your patience and that of your constituents during that process.

In the budget before you tonight, we're focusing on maintaining and improving our infrastructure.

This budget keeps up with our long-time program of repaving at least 13 miles of county trunk roads each year.

We're also making investments in other aspects of our infrastructure, including access to high-speed internet service. Earlier this year, I convened the Broadband Advisory Committee, and I'm excited to report that their work is already making a difference.

Recently, I concurred with the committee's recommendation to allocate ARPA funds to bring high-speed, wireless service to Kemper Center, Old Settlers and Silver Lake Park — further building out our Parks Wi-Fi infrastructure, and providing for security camera systems that will help to protect the public, as well as our Parks assets.

I look forward to more good work to come out of that committee in the coming months. And I look forward to working with Savannah Meyers — our recently hired Community Development Educator — who will help us to coordinate the county's broadband strategy going forward.

The cover of your budget book shows one of my favorite projects that the county has completed this year — and one that shows what we can accomplish when we work together.

The Old Settlers Park band shelter was a vision of the late Heidi Scheuerstedt when she and others started Old Settlers Oktoberfest in 2011. They worked together — with the county, with the Village of Paddock Lake, and with the community members who raised funds for the project — and this year we made it a reality. Thank you, Supervisor Poole for your support — I know the community appreciates it.

I've made it a priority to work together with you, the County Board, to drive where our county is headed.

Earlier this year, we got together at the Job Center for our first-ever budget vision session. Last month, we met again at Brookside for a preview of the CIP that's in your budget books tonight.

In recent weeks, I met with Chairman Nudo and the chairs of many of the board's standing committees, to share some of our challenges and hear your concerns before the ink dried on this budget.

Now the budget is in your hands, and I look forward to working with you on it over the coming weeks.

This budget is fiscally responsible — and one that puts us in a position to continue our AAA momentum.

This proposal comes to you with a 2.95 percent levy increase — which happens to be the same percentage that the county's equalized value increased this year. Of that 2.95 percent, a little over 2 percent is due to the class and comp changes.

Under this budget, the owner of a median-value home in Kenosha County will pay \$1.81 more to support county government and the essential services that our teams provide — a 0.21 percent increase.

I encourage you to support it.

We have already done a great deal of good work together... and I look forward to continuing to work with in 2024 — and beyond.

May God Bless America, and May God Bless Kenosha County. Thank you, and good night!

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