



# COUNTY OF KENOSHA

OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Jim Kreuser, County Executive

1010 – 56<sup>th</sup> Street, Third Floor

Kenosha, Wisconsin 53140

(262) 653-2600

Fax: (262) 653-2817

March 3, 2015

## 2015 State of the County Address

Good evening Chairman Kubicki, Vice-chairwoman Breunig, ladies and gentlemen of the County Board, other elected officials, county employees and citizens of Kenosha County.

I am pleased and proud to stand before you tonight and say the State of Kenosha County is not just strong, it is robust and growing!

Kenosha County: “Red hot economic development area; Development boom expected to continue; Economic development magnet...” Our economic development renaissance has made local, regional and national headlines. We should be proud of our community’s success.

Even though we were dealt a bit of a bad hand when we learned the casino project would not be approved, we are not going to fold ‘em. We’ve been all in on economic development.

This board has made solid investments – not a gamble, not a wager – on building our county infrastructure – things like roads, broadband, public Wi-Fi – and good infrastructure leads to economic development, which has led to jobs, which we have been focused on since 2008.

Together, we have done our part and the private sector is responding.

We will continue to work with our economic development partner, the Kenosha Area Business Alliance, to ensure strong and strategic growth into the future.

This short video shows some of the results of those investments we’ve made that have led to a stronger Kenosha County:

Wasn’t that well done? You will all be emailed a copy for your use.

While other counties have been slower to act, this County Board has been strategic and forward-thinking by your continued support of KABA; by authorizing the High Impact Fund— which has proven to be a beneficial deal-closer, and has spurred economic development; and, by being proactive on infrastructure.

And, recently, your support and approval of the Salem Business Park will provide a different type of needed shovel-ready space, particularly in western Kenosha County.

Together with KABA, we will continue to make these strategic moves that will position Kenosha County for even stronger growth well into the future.

Kenosha County, compared to many of other Wisconsin counties, has been making its way out of the Great Recession with an eye toward being stronger than when we began in 2008-2009.

We still have a great deal of work to do.

I learned from my good friend Pleasant Prairie Village President John Steinbrink – make hay while the sun is shining.

Our Job Center has been working with determination to help the unemployed find work and to meet the needs of our employers.

We are working with our education partners – Gateway Technical College, UW-Parkside, Carthage College, and all of the county high schools – to do as much as possible to bridge the skills and education gaps.

Here are just some of the upcoming available jobs:

- Meijer, approximately 300 jobs, information session March 16-18, followed by workshops and a hiring fair the week of April 20<sup>th</sup>
- UNFI (United Natural Foods Inc.), in Sturtevant, 20-plus jobs, information sessions March 10<sup>th</sup>
- Amazon, approximately 1,000 jobs, with more than 50 percent of those slated to be full-time with benefits, hiring in mid to late April
- Costco, more than 100 jobs, hiring probably in May for opening slated for July
- FNA Group (a pressure washer manufacturer), more than 145 jobs from production level to executive level, hiring expected mid-year this year
- United Hospital Systems, ULINE, InSinkErator, Kenall are all in hiring mode
- For our high school students and those in their early 20s looking for work, there will be a Young Adult Job Fair on April 7<sup>th</sup> at the Boys and Girls Club.
- And, don't forget, Kenosha County will again sponsor the Summer Youth Employment Program, which employs more than 250 at-risk youth.

A separate event is held for those youth.

They earn a paycheck and school credit, as well as the valuable lesson of what it means to work.

Sheriff Dave Beth supports this as does City of Kenosha Police Chief John Morrissey, who said, “Since 2009 when we instated the youth employment program, there has been a 64% reduction in juvenile crime in Kenosha.”

That is the definition of a successful program.

There are some five thousand Kenosha County residents, according to our unemployment statistics, known to be looking for jobs and employers known to be looking for several thousands of employees.

That is a strong position to be in. I assure you – few counties can say the same thing.

This is the vision we have worked on collectively over the last number of years.

We will work to retain and help our current employers to grow.

We will work hard to attract new businesses.

We will work to find our unemployed the best possible jobs and work hard for area employers to find the best possible employees.

As we look at all of the new jobs coming to the area, I want to take a moment to recognize and thank all of our Kenosha County employees.

From the rank and file – the person you might not see very often who works a second or third shift – to the managers some of you interact with every day.

It is critical that we, as County Government, remain competitive and retain those good employees to safeguard a smooth delivery of services to taxpayers.

They do make a difference.

Thank you to our team of Kenosha County employees!

Attracting companies and new residents here is definitely enhanced by our fiscal health as a county.

2014 General fund reserves are expected to exceed \$12.6 million (unaudited) – the highest in the history of the County.

We expect to exceed 22% in the general fund, clearing the 17% policy by 5%. That’s what we have accomplished together.

2014 Sales tax is estimated to be \$12.7 million, the highest in the history of the County.

This exceeds 2013 collections by over a million dollars.

Our prudent fiscal custodianship and strategic planning with Finance and IT have helped Kenosha County emerge from the great recession and has put our community on a path towards greater prosperity.

I thank you for your leadership and support, which has played a key role in this continuing economic success.

Part of our fiscal responsibility is to be good stewards of our public facilities.

You have seen that as we restored the Courthouse and now the Kenosha County Administration Building.

Work on KCAB was substantially completed this past November.

There remain a number of small construction and cosmetic tasks and those should be completed by June.

This project represents another successful restoration of our county's historically significant assets that will be well preserved into the future.

Together, we have taken seriously our responsibility of addressing some significant deferred maintenance issues while interest rates are low.

The Brookside Care Center Project is not only restoration, but also expansion that will create financial sustainability for our county-owned nursing home well into the future.

Work is underway on the design phase and we anticipate having a full-set of bid-ready documents by year-end and a construction ground-breaking by Early 2016.

Meanwhile, the blocking and tackling of County Government goes on every day. Department and division heads are working hard to determine the full impact of the State biennial budget proposal.

We won't know the full details on the state budget for a few weeks yet.

One thing we do know is that we will do more with the same or less from the State of Wisconsin.

There appears to be some cost shifting to our courts, highway maintenance and human services, but, the devil is in the details.

It also appears that services to the most vulnerable populations in our state are getting reduced, which, in turn, will increase our county expenses.

We also know there is a proposal to have County-wide Assessing – essentially for the county to provide the assessing services to all the municipalities.

I am not enamored with the idea of bringing it back.

I have already expressed my displeasure for the idea to state officials. I will continue to do so.

I believe you will be looking at a resolution from Supervisor Terry Rose that tells the state, “thanks, but no thanks” – we are not interested in another unfunded mandate.

Thank you, Supervisor Rose, and I hope this body supports this resolution.

I appreciate and look forward to working with Chairman Kubicki, Vice-Chairwoman Breunig and all the committee chairpersons as we learn the details and the potential impacts on your areas.

Regardless of the state budget, great things go on in Kenosha County every day.

Our great employees work to provide services – most of them mandated – to our citizens. They are always working to be more efficient and effective.

Our proactive vision to move forward has been very clear.

We have come out of the Great Recession and are in strong financial shape.

We are putting more rooftops in the community, attracting both new residents and new businesses.

We continue to keep an eye on upgrading our services like parks at a modest to no cost, but with great benefits for the public.

- The future of Kenosha County is bright,
- The outlook of our county is strong,
- The state of our fund balance is the highest in our history
- The state of our economic development is off the charts.

I look forward to us working together on making Kenosha County even better.

God Bless America and God Bless Kenosha County.  
Thank you!

###