



COUNTY OF KENOSHA

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Kenosha County Executive Jim Kreuser State of the County Address May 7, 2019

Good evening, Chairman Esposito, Vice Chairman O’Day, ladies and gentlemen of the County Board, elected officials, county employees and citizens of Kenosha County.

Every day is a great day in Kenosha County, and tonight, I am happy to report the State of Kenosha County is strong – ahead of the curve on our infrastructure plan, and an innovator in many areas, especially when it comes to providing cost-effective services for our most vulnerable residents.

Here in Kenosha County, we are financially strong; we are planful. We make smart and strategic decisions related to our budget operations so people can live here with the necessary and mandated support services the county provides.

Our fiscal strength is evidenced by the fact that:

- We maintain a very strong bond rating at AA+, which puts us among the most fiscally strong Wisconsin counties!
- In 2018, tax delinquencies decreased by \$2.2 million, for a total reduction over the past two years of \$4.1 million.
- Our Unassigned General Fund balance is at its highest dollar amount.
- Our Equalized Value is at its highest ever, at \$15.6 billion dollars (TID in) in 2018.

Here’s what Fitch said in 2018 about Kenosha County’s financial competency:

- It rates our Operating Performance at “AAA”
 - “Fitch regards the county’s operating performance as exceptionally strong. Its financial resilience derives from broad revenue-raising flexibility, solid control over employee and benefit costs and substantial fund balances. The county has steadily augmented its general fund reserve and cash during the current economic expansion.
 - “Fitch expects the county will maintain substantial reserves through economic cycles, ensuring financial flexibility. Consistently strong fiscal resilience is aided by the county’s historically stable stream of property and sales tax revenues.”

Standard & Poors says:

- The AA+ rating reflects our view of the county’s:
 - Strong economy with access to a broad and diverse metropolitan statistical area

- Very strong management, with strong financial policies and practices under our Financial Management Assessment methodology; and
- Very strong budgetary flexibility.

Most of you have heard me speak on the importance of infrastructure. Good infrastructure, leads to economic development which leads to jobs.

Now is NOT the time to take our foot off the gas pedal when it comes to planning ahead and keeping pace with our highway projects.

State Highway 165, Highway N, and now County Trunk Highways S and KR have been and will be economic drivers.

Approximately 72% of our 2019 bonding was for the Sheriff's Department – including the second phase of a major security upgrade at the jail/detention center, a cube truck, a utility vehicle, and the simulcast project that will also help the Kenosha County Fire and Rescue departments – and for all of the Highway Division uses, including paving and equipment.

I'm going to repeat that: 72% of our bonding goes to two departments – Highways and the Sheriff's Department – with the remaining 24 departments, including Facilities, Courts, Parks and IT, receiving the rest.

Good highways and solid public safety is at the heart of county government.

One could argue that law enforcement is infrastructure also. Keeping the public safe and secure is the backbone of any community. Law enforcement, and protective services in general, have become more complex in the past 10 years than almost any other public-sector job.

We need to support our deputies with good equipment and vehicles – and we have. But it doesn't end there. We need to keep up with salary and benefits to be competitive as our county grows and becomes even busier.

So, you can bet there will be a catchup increase in the Sheriff's Department next budget because it's also our safe streets and neighborhoods that makes Kenosha County the best place to live, work, play and raise a family.

Back to our highway program:

We plan and build for our anticipated growth in strategic areas so that our citizens, commerce and protective services do not end up in the perpetual traffic gridlock that plagues communities over the border to our south.

Traffic congestion, the pension fund mess, education, public safety and quality of place are key reasons Illinois companies continue to choose Kenosha County.

Together, we, as the representatives of local government, are working every day to make Kenosha County a great place to live, work, play and raise a family.

We know our economic development here is strong.

We're a beacon for businesses – from across our southern border to across the oceans, as we are attracting international companies.

It is the result of us – all of you on this board, our economic development partner, the Kenosha Area Business Alliance, our state officials, along with our local municipal leaders making smart and strategic decisions.

According to the latest KABA Annual Report, Kenosha County had another robust year of economic development in 2018. Looking forward, this shows no signs of slowing down.

- There are several major projects currently in development across, or recently completed, in all sectors of the economy, including industrial, health care, housing and retail. Those include:
 - Fresenius Kabi, a global health care company based in Germany.
 - Froedtert South is adding a new outpatient surgical wing and a new medical office building.
 - Advocate Aurora Health Care is building an ambulatory surgery center in Pleasant Prairie.
 - Children's Hospital of Wisconsin now has two locations here.
 - A variety of housing developments across the county, like Market Square Apartments, Breeze Terrace, Springs at Kenosha and The Apartments at the Falls at Pike Creek.
 - And, another brewery is making Kenosha County home with a new building in Pleasant Prairie, Kings and Convicts Brewery and event space.
- Several new business parks were announced, or continue to thrive in 2018 and 2019, creating additional capacity for new development.
 - Prairie Highlands Corporate Park
 - Stateline 94 Corporate Park
 - 94 Logistics Park
 - Kenosha Corporate Park
 - First Park 94
 - Salem Business Park
 - And, more are in the works

Kenosha County is perfectly centered to be the premier destination for new investment and talent in the Chicago-Milwaukee corridor. We are growing businesses. And, we continue to grow in population.

Our commitment to getting people to WORK in Kenosha County is evidenced by our economic development wins. And, those continue to grow.

People want to play and raise their families in communities that put a premium on quality of life and quality of place.

In Kenosha County, we enjoy strong public-private partnerships, like those that brought us the Petrifying Springs Biergarten, a family-friendly venue – you go there on the weekend and see the multi-generations watching children in the bounce houses, and young adults playing ball, while the dogs pick up the dropped pretzels.

Our partnership with Boundless Adventures will result in the state-of-the-art ropes course currently not available in the Midwest. It will be an attraction for families and also for businesses looking for team-building activities.

Another family-supporting partnership is the one we've built since 2009 with the Boys & Girls Club of Kenosha, Community Impact Programs and many, many area private businesses – the Summer Youth Employment Program.

It's been a phenomenal success.

I'm excited about our partnership with the University of Wisconsin-Parkside that will allow the county to manage 139 acres of natural land alongside Petrifying Springs Park.

This collaboration will enhance research opportunities for Parkside students, it will protect environmentally sensitive areas, and improve recreational access to appropriate areas. It's a great addition to the 50th Birthday celebration for UW-Parkside!

Living, working, playing and raising a family and the role of Kenosha County in supporting those objectives is all tied together through our social media presence.

People are learning about how to access services and seek assistance for opioid addictions, how to get vaccinations at the Health Department, where to go for Veterans Services, what highway is closed for paving and what the activities are at Pringle Nature Center.

Kenosha County is strong because of our commitment to fiscal strength, efficient budgeting and cost-effective programs.

We are helping people work in Kenosha County as we are planning for and maintaining our highways; we are committed to strong and effective law enforcement and public safety efforts; and we are looking ahead at where our economic growth opportunities are and will be.

Citizens can play and raise a family in Kenosha County because we find ways to give them a cost-efficient park system and educational opportunities in our parks.

In 2019, the State of Kenosha County is strong!

We all try to ensure that every day is a great day in Kenosha County; and, working collaboratively, we can make our community even better.

May God Bless America and may God Bless Kenosha County.

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