

I have a vision for Milwaukee County. It is a vision of hope for the future.

To get there, we must work together and set aside our political and personal differences. We must agree on a shared vision of hope for Milwaukee County.

My vision for greatness in Milwaukee County includes:

- People being able to afford to live in their own homes and to keep jobs here because we control taxes and the overall cost of living in our county.
- Safe neighborhoods, schools and parks where the community works with law enforcement to fight crime and the county is a supplement, not a substitute for local police departments.
- Our parks system being restored to greatness and access afforded to people in all parts of the county.
- Protection for those in need like the mentally ill, people with disabilities, the poor, our elders and veterans.
- Preservation of things that make our quality of life better like the zoo and other cultural attractions.
- An economy that grows – where jobs and opportunities increase – and county assets are used to promote this economic growth.
- A government that runs well with increased efficiencies and effectiveness – and an ability to restore fiscal responsibility by getting a handle on benefits and state mandates costs. In other words, a government that the people can be proud of.

Today, I present to you a budget that is a down payment on this making this vision a reality for all of the people of Milwaukee County.

First, we did it without raising the property tax levy from last year. Even the “Reforming Milwaukee County” report released two weeks ago notes that “if the cost of living and doing business in Milwaukee County exceeds the costs of surrounding counties, population and jobs are lost.” Too many of our retirees are being forced to move out of their homes and too many young families are moving out of the county because of high property taxes. This budget provides them relief in 2007.

Increasing taxes is not the answer. It would be kind of like having the CEOs of Ford or General Motors deciding to raise the price of their cars to cover their costs. If they did, it certainly would please a lot of customers – only they would be buying Chrysler or Honda or Toyota cars, but not Ford or GM. The same is true here in Milwaukee County. We need to tackle our costs of running government before we start asking for more revenue from the taxpayers.

This budget includes savings in health care costs negotiated with 8 of our 9 unions. Higher co-pays and a better understanding of health care costs by our employees are helping us save money. Enacting similar changes with our remaining union will lead to significant savings in 2007.

An ever-increasing pension liability is also a long-term challenge for the county. To tackle this issue, our budget proposes a 30-year Pension Obligation Bond with a significant stabilization fund to minimize risk. We will also ask the state to include language that prevents future benefit changes in the system.

This is a better alternative than the idea discussed publically by some members of this body that the county dramatically under fund the pension contribution for 2007. We are certain that such a change would have a negative impact on our bond rating – which would make it cost more for the county to borrow in the future. Without an alternative to the current system, we need to protect the taxpayers from a budget hole in 2008.

Speaking of protection, I support the Sheriff's efforts to put more deputies in the parks and on the lakefront through the Target Enforcement Units. This budget also reflects the reality that the various municipal police departments have access to many of the tools that are currently provided by the county and that these resources are better spent on protection in areas of traditional support by the Sheriff like the expressway, parks and other county properties.

I also rejected the turned back the original budget from the House of Corrections because I feel that offenders should not be released directly to electronic surveillance, but need a buffer before returning back to the community.

I also have a vision for our parks system.