

Vision for the Future

Our plan fits into three different parts:

- Continue to Restore Trust in County Government
- Become Better Stewards of the Taxpayers' Resources
- Retain and Create Jobs in Milwaukee County

Continue to Restore Trust in County Government

One of the most important lessons learned during the past year is that the best way to restore trust in government is to put our trust in the people. Unfortunately, too many (at all levels of government) had forgotten that government should serve the people and not the other way around.

Thankfully, the masses stayed interested in county government over the past year. When we announced Interactive Budget Briefings at various locations around the county, skeptics suggested that few would attend. Instead, we had to set up overflow seating at several locations. During the budget debates, county board supervisors received more contacts than many had seen in years.

The best way to continue to build trust is to keep the public involved in the process. Our government must be transparent so that all know our process and our vision.

Better Stewards of Taxpayers' Resources

The recent request for each department and division to present budget overviews that assume one-third fewer employees in 2004 is a good example of how I want to engage the public on key policy decisions.

In addition to working with our department and division heads, our union leaders and our county employees, I released the details on this budget request to the media so members of the general public can also weigh in – early in the process – on how we should handle our financial woes. Knowledge is power and we want to give the power to the people.

It should be no surprise that the majority of our 2004 shortfall comes from the financial decisions of the past. Looking ahead to the next year, our actuary states that the county must add \$25 million to the pension fund (on top of the \$15 million added this year) to fully fund the retirement system. In the 2001 and 2002 budgets, the County Executive recommended no contribution from the tax levy – a decision that starts us in the whole.

Next, increases in wages and health care benefits are projected to cost \$15 million each. Any changes to the salary schedule or to the benefits package will require the county to reopen the contracts (most expire at the end of 2004) with our collective bargaining units. While new contracts may not be likely, we are working to do more to control our health care costs in the new year. We will take action to move more employees and retirees into lower cost health care systems.

Next, we must put our financial house back in order. To this end, I asked all of our department heads to immediately notify me of concerns in their current budgets so we can prepare and implement corrective action plans.

Next, we are already planning for the 2004 budget. With X,XXX employees eligible for retirement in 2004, we face a significant burden in sick leave payments. This can, however, be an opportunity for the county if we properly plan for succession and consolidate the duties of positions as employees retire.

Our 2003 budget includes \$2 million within the contingency fund for sick leave payments. Prior to this year, departments were expected to go into their operating budgets to fund sick leave. Our next budget will set even money aside for sick leave.

Since the large wave of retirements took place in 2002 and will again in 2004, we are exploring ways to cover our high pension contribution levels during the next few years by stretching our payments out over time. In our 2003 budget, I recommended a steady contribution level of \$15 million per year over the next five years – regardless of the state of the economy.

Once the state budget is released on February 18, we will propose a series of reductions to cover the cuts proposed by Governor Doyle. The board was wise to act last spring on a series of reductions in preparation for proposed cuts in state aid. We must be prepared to do the same this spring.

In addition, we will continue to look to ways that we can share costs with surrounding governments and with the private sector. We will also look to consolidate services within county government. As an example, I asked our parks and public works departments to look at sharing plowing and mowing services.

Retain and Create Jobs in Milwaukee County

Finally, the best way to get things moving forward is to work to retain and create more jobs in Milwaukee County. With this in mind, I propose a Jobs for Metro Milwaukee program.

We plan to become a leader in keeping and creating jobs throughout this area. The Jobs for Metro Milwaukee program is detailed, so I will highlight some key parts tonight.

First, we have some major developments to look forward to in the new year. Although many do not know it, we own the largest amount of land under the Park East Freeway. This is an exciting project that will build off of the successes of downtown and the riverfront. My hope is to expand that promise north to the Historic King Drive area and beyond.

Last Wednesday, I asked Governor Doyle to help us move forward with the clean up and development of the Menomonee River Valley – and ultimately the creation of hundreds of new jobs – by changing the state’s relationship with the Potawatomi. Longer compacts will allow them to invest in job creation beyond Indian gaming. This is the push we need to really move the project forward in the valley.

Working with Greendale Village President Scott Leonard and Greenfield Mayor Tim Seider, we are able to get things going with the rehab of the 76th Street corridor near Southridge. Not only is this an important job site, the businesses in this area generate an enormous amount of sales tax revenue for the county. We need to keep shoppers coming to this area.

On the northside, we propose to help with the start of Historic Granville Association. This group will build off of several anchor institutions to create jobs and opportunity in the area of 76th and Brown Deer.

We are also moving up the reconstruction of our county building at 12th and Vliet to help with efforts to improve business development along Vliet Street. In addition, we are looking to work with the Milwaukee Housing Authority on development around King Park.

This year, we gave help to the United Community Center through our CDBG funds. Now, we need to find a way to help the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Wisconsin prepare a permanent home in Milwaukee County. They are a vital partner in our quest for more jobs.

One of the first images of the county for job creators is our airport. We saw the opening this past year of a first class parking garage and a new home for the car rental companies at Mitchell Field. Now, we want to continue our improvements at the airport – which includes no tax levy funds – to so that we may attract more business to our area.

We also want to insure that major carriers like Midwest Airlines are able to continue to provide high paying jobs for people in our county. They are an anchor for the airport and we need them to improve during these tough economic times.

Medical research is an area ripe for growth in our county. In addition to working to expand the number of companies in the Milwaukee County Research Park, we want to

work with Tech Star and the state funded technology zones to attract more jobs to our county.

On other parts of the county grounds, I propose that we move forward with the state DNR to establish a state forest in the northeast quadrant. We are now prepared to move with the City of Wauwatosa on a limited development of the area surrounding the Eshweiler Buildings. Thanks to Mayor Terry Estness for her help in our two meetings with the public on this plan.

Regarding the southeast quadrant, I am sending down a resolution to allow the county to negotiate with Children's Hospital of Wisconsin to purchase their land. Our role on the county grounds has changed and we should no longer be in the landlord business.

Finally, I am excited to announce that we are putting together a Hot Summer Jobs for Teens program. Credit for the idea comes from my friend Tyrone Dumas. While were both on the campaign trail last year, I came to fully realize how much he loves Milwaukee and I am happy to help put in place an idea he brought to my attention.

Starting this month, my office will begin to recruit businesses from all over the county who will help with our Hot Summer Jobs for Teens program. Our idea is to put together a clearinghouse of jobs for teenagers that will be available between the end of school in June and the start of school at the end of August.

To jump-start the program, we will ask our partners and vendors to help create jobs for teens this summer. Our goal, however, is to go far beyond jobs generated by the public sector to creating job opportunities all over the county and the region.

Last year, the county and the Private Industry Council worked together to create 100 jobs for teens within the parks system. We want to build off this concept and help connect teens to jobs all over the county this summer.

Combined, these elements are all part of our Jobs for Metro Milwaukee program. This is part of our vision for the new year that includes:

- Continuing to Restore Trust in County Government
- Becoming Better Stewards of the Taxpayers' Resources
- Retaining and Creating Jobs in Milwaukee County

There will be plenty of challenges ahead this year. If we remember that the people of this county could have opted to just become cynical or move away last year, but instead, opted to stand up for their county, then I know that we can successfully take on all of the challenges together.

Thank you and God bless you.

