

# Overview of Milwaukee County: 2002 to 2010

## **Economic Success in Milwaukee County**

County Executive Scott Walker understands that government doesn't create jobs, people do. But he does know that government can create an environment that is better for doing business. County Executive Walker has worked to create an environment that is better for job creators.

Dynamic Research Park: During County Executive Walker's tenure, Milwaukee County worked with the City of Wauwatosa to attract some 2,000 jobs to the Milwaukee County Research Park as part of the expansion of GE Healthcare.

The Milwaukee County Grounds are home to numerous medical institutions. With the support of County Executive Walker, new construction has been completed by the Medical College of Wisconsin, Children's Hospital of Wisconsin, **Froedtert** Lutheran Hospital and the Blood Center of Southeastern Wisconsin.

County Executive Walker also worked with the leadership of the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee to build their new School of Engineering on the county grounds. The proximity to the institutions on the Milwaukee Regional Medical Center and the businesses in the Milwaukee County Research Park (especially GE Healthcare) will aid economic development throughout the region.

Growing Airport: Milwaukee County operates General Mitchell International Airport. County Executive Walker recognizes that our airport is the front door to business leaders from around the globe. With that in mind, he and the County Board have presided over \$199 million worth of improvements since 2002 (all without tax levy). During the past several years, the new parking structure opened, all of the concourses were remodeled and the center concession mall was redone.

General Mitchell International Airport is now the fastest growing airport in America and the third fastest growing airport in the world. The airport has experienced 10 consecutive months of record-breaking growth.

Under County Executive Walker's leadership, the airport has grown into a major economic engine and he has expansion plans for the future with new airlines, runways and concourses.

The strength of the airport attracted Southwest Airlines, encouraged Air Tran Airlines to establish a hub and promoted expanded routes by Frontier, Delta and

other airlines. In turn, nearly 1,000 new jobs have been added in Milwaukee County.

More airlines also lead to cheaper flights. The average airfare at Mitchell is now \$98 less than O'Hara, \$78 less than the national average and \$17 less than Midway.

## **Major Improvements in the County Fiscal Situation**

Under County Executive Scott Walker's leadership, property tax growth has been controlled, debt is down by more than 10% (by 2012, the outstanding debt will be down by nearly 30%) and the workforce has been reduced by more than 20%. Before Walker took office, the bond rating for the county was given a negative outlook in 2002. Now, the county has a stable outlook.

In a recent report, Standards and Poor's ranks Milwaukee County's financial practices as "strong". Moody's further notes that the county's bond rating reflects in part the "improving financial position, supported by strong management and prudent budgetary controls."

Walker introduced 8 straight budgets without an increase in the property tax levy from the previous year. In the year before Walker took office, property taxes increased by 5.8%. Had taxes continued to grow at that rate over the past seven years, property taxpayers would have paid \$285 million more to operate county government.

Walker insists on balanced budgets and has consistently taken steps to insure modest surpluses at the end of each year. A year ago, despite the problems faced by other governments, the county finished the year with a surplus.

In 2009, the county issued \$400 million in Pension Obligation Bonds (POBs) to reduce the county's pension liability. These bonds were a method of "refinancing" the unfunded liability the county had for employee pensions. The county's actuary estimated that the bonds result in a property tax levy savings of \$237 million over the life of the bonds.

## **Preserving Public Safety**

Public safety is a priority for County Executive Walker. During his tenure, he worked with Sheriff David Clarke to create a Targeted Enforcement Unit that works to fight crime throughout the county – particularly on buses and in parks. His budgets put total control of corrections under the Sheriff and he funded the development of a new Parks Patrol.

He worked with District Attorney John Chisholm to create a witness protection program to insure that criminals do not intimidate those asked to testify in a criminal case.

He worked with the Chief Judge and other law enforcement, criminal justice and community leaders to form the Community Justice Council. This group works to consolidate resources within the system to increase public safety and accountability.

### **Transit Innovations**

Compared to other peer transit systems, the Milwaukee County Transit System has the lowest expense per passenger and the highest ridership per capita - according to an independent performance audit.

He also negotiated a plan with city and county leaders in Waukesha and Waukesha County to improve transit options for riders in both counties. This is a positive sign for regional cooperation.

### **Quality of Life**

#### Building a World-Class Zoo

During County Executive Walker's tenure, the county and the Zoological Society of Milwaukee combined to open more than \$30 million worth of new projects at the Milwaukee County Zoo. Now, the zoo is one of the best in the country and is fully accredited through the Association of Zoos and Aquariums.

#### One of the Best Park Systems in the US

The National Recreation and Park Association recently announced that the Milwaukee County Parks System won the Gold Medal for the best park system in the country. County Executive Scott Walker hired the former state parks director to manage the system and create new partnerships - with an eye towards becoming a Gold Medal system.

Over the past few years, the system opened a new aquatic center, replaced playground equipment, remodeled the Washington Park band shell, re-opened Bradford Beach to the public, developed new dog parks, created an off-road bike trail, expanded the Oak Leaf Trail, remodeled and illuminated the Domes, reopened the ice skating rink at Red Arrow Park, put up a new open-air pavilion at the site of the old Coast Guard station and developed hundreds of new public/private partnerships to support the parks.

## **Infrastructure Improvements**

From 2003 through the current 2010 budget, Milwaukee County has spent and budgeted more than \$930 million on infrastructure maintenance and improvements.

## **Supportive Housing**

Through a partnership with the City of Milwaukee – as well as state, federal and community agencies - Milwaukee County led the effort to create more than 150 units of supportive housing for people with special needs. This was a direct result of the leadership of the County Executive and Mayor.

## **Supporting our Seniors and Others with Long-Term Care Needs**

During Scott Walker's tenure, Milwaukee County was able to eliminate the waiting list for services needed by older adults in our community by becoming one of the first Family Care programs in the state (there were thousands of people on waiting lists before this program). Today, Milwaukee County's Family Care program is one of the only financially solvent programs in the state.

FamilyCare provides long-term care assistance to people in the most client appropriate setting (which is also the most cost effective). The service is very efficient and operated this past year without a tax levy subsidy from the county.

County Executive Walker is expanding the program to people under the age of 60 with developmental and physical disabilities.

His administration has been able to attract private funds to create major innovations in programs for older adults (like Connecting Caring Communities).

## **Finding Ways to Keep Kids Out of the Prison System**

Since 2002, Milwaukee County has formed a number of partnerships with community-based organizations that helped reduce the number of young people sent into the state system by 33%.

## **Honoring Our Veterans**

Every year, Scott Walker hosts (along with the American Legion this year) Operation Freedom at the zoo. The annual program provides free admission, food and beverage to military personnel, their families and veterans. All of the costs are covered by private support.

During County Executive Scott Walker's tenure, the county veterans service office moved from the basement of the courthouse to a more accessible site on

the VA grounds - which increased visits to the office by 200%. He also worked with the state Department of Veterans Affairs to form a partnership to help process benefits for veterans from the area.

### **Promoting Tourism**

Scott Walker rides his Harley-Davidson Road King around Wisconsin and four neighboring states each year to promote tourism. The tour travels close to 2,000 miles and Walker conducts interviews that generate media coverage in over 100 television, radio and newspaper outlets to highlight attractions like Summerfest, Miller Park, Lake Michigan, the zoo and our parks system. Last year, VISIT Milwaukee (the convention and visitors bureau) estimates the advertising value of the trip at \$183,000.

### **Regional Cooperation**

In addition to agreements involving transit, Milwaukee County has entered into agreements with Racine County for child support services, surrounding counties for medical examiner services, and other cities for public works projects.