



October 7, 2008

County Executive Jim Kreuser's 2009 budget proposal highlights

General theme: Working together to improve public health and safety

“It is a privilege and an honor to be working toward the common goal of making Kenosha a better place to live, work and raise a family,” County Executive Jim Kreuser said.

Kreuser's budget proposal was presented on the 109th day of his term, which began June 18th.

“In that time, together, we have:

- Put into place more stringent ethics standards to regain the public trust and confidence in county government
- Remedied the medical examiner vacancy by hiring forensic pathologist Dr. Mark Witeck, and adopting a collaborative agreement with United Hospital System that is truly a win-win situation and saves taxpayers money
- Worked with Mayor Keith Bosman, city officials, City Council members, the State and the County Board to move quickly to bring Gordon Foods to Kenosha County – bringing good construction jobs and living wage employment opportunities; and
- Brought County, City, Town and Village leaders together at the recent Council of Governments meeting, where we had a productive time talking about the future goals of Kenosha County

“This budget is a vision of what we want Kenosha County to be – a vision made possible as the result of talking to County Board Supervisors and citizens,” Kreuser said.

Kreuser said the budget meets state levy requirements and moves the county forward by:

- Putting video conferencing capability in the court system to save labor costs related to transporting inmates
- Paving 18 miles of County Highways, six miles of which will be paved this year to take advantage of a current contract with favorable pricing, saving about \$150,000
- Continuing a commitment to economic development activities by supporting the Kenosha Area Business Alliance
- Expanding services at the Kenosha County Center by offering a limited array of Sheriff's Department services at Highways 45 & 50

- Adding an 8th Branch of Circuit Court
- Addressing a public health and safety issue by slowing the growth of gang membership. The County is realigning resources to create a Gang Intervention Supervisor. That person will work with community groups, the City, Kenosha Police, County Sheriff's Department, Gateway Technical College, Kenosha Unified School District, the Westosha Central School District and the Wilmot High School District to coordinate services for youth.
- Giving at-risk youth something positive to do by increasing the summer jobs program. The additional funds will expand the program, allowing another 30 to 45 youth to participate, up from about 15 this year.
- Redirects more money for the Boys & Girls Club to enhance the organization's already strong alternative at-risk programs.
- Enhancing bike paths in our county with a proposal for a bike/pedestrian path in cooperation with the City of Kenosha and Kenosha Unified School District at Highway 31 and 60th St., which seeks to provide a safer way for people to walk and bike in that area.
- Continues the work started this year to turn the KD Pit into a thriving, rustic park.

“There is another health and safety issue we need to address,” Kreuser said. “I heard it at listening sessions across this county – from people in and around Paris, Twin Lakes, Salem and the City, that the top priority is public health and safety.

“People are concerned about the 911 Dispatch Center. When asked, people said it didn't really matter where it was physically located. What mattered most is that calls for help will be answered. When they call, their parents call, their brothers and sisters call or when law enforcement calls, the worst sound they can hear is silence.”

Kreuser is proposing a \$9.6 million addition to the south of the Public Safety Building. The proposal provides needed space for the 911 Dispatch Center to grow, allows for added space for more than the next generation for the Kenosha Police Department and meets the Sheriff's Department needs at that location.

The County Board will also be given additional options to review for the building renovation.

“This is not a take it or leave it plan,” Kreuser said.

City of Kenosha Mayor Keith Bosman has provided Kreuser a letter of intent to enter into a long term lease with the county at the Public Safety Building. The City would pay the costs related to KPD expansion and its share of the Joint Services expansion, Kreuser said.

“It is an arrangement that will be equitable for both and will address the real public safety issue nagging this county at least since 2004 when a study identified a lack of adequate staff,

equipment and space,” Kreuser said. “We are on borrowed time.”

Staffing for the dispatch center will also increase as the addition comes on line, Kreuser said.

“It just doesn’t make sense to build the dispatch center and not adequately staff it,” he said.

Also in the budget is the copy of a letter from the state Secretary of the Department for Veterans Affairs. The letter states the state would like to explore the idea of a partnership with Kenosha County to put an assisted living facility on the grounds of the former Brookside Care Center. The concept is in the exploratory stages only, he said.

“Wouldn’t it be great, if it was financially feasible, to have our own veterans live in an assisted living center here and then have the choice to go to Union Grove or to Brookside when they needed to?” Kreuser said.

The Budget by the numbers

- Proposal would: Increase taxes on a home valued at \$100,000 by 48-cents over 2008;
Increase taxes on the “average” home, valued at \$195,204 by 95-cents
Increase taxes on a home valued at \$200,000 by 96-cents
- Meets the State-required levy limits, which allows for new construction to be factored in the calculation
- Proposed mill rate of \$3.7413 per \$1,000 of equalized value
- General purpose levy proposed for 2009: \$53.7 million, a 2.54% increase
- Total budget: \$199 million
- Of that total, \$144 million come from State, Federal and other revenue sources