



OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Milwaukee County

CHRIS ABELE • COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Milwaukee County Executive Chris Abele's 2013

Budget Address

(As prepared for delivery)

Good morning. Thank you, Chairwoman Dimitrijevic for the opportunity to address the County Board today. Thank you also members of the County Board, Constitutional Officers, members of the Judiciary, Milwaukee County Employees and guests for attending today.

I want to send a special thank you to all the people who worked very hard on this budget. Our talented budget staff worked long nights and some weekends to help put this together. They are a testament to the many great Milwaukee County employees who often go unnoticed.

This is the second budget I have put together since taking office and this year we made some significant changes in our budget process.

This year after putting the budget together I met with department heads and elected officials one last time before I made my final decisions. That might seem like a small thing, but those meetings gave everyone one more chance to give their input and it made for a better and more open process.

When I decided to run for office two years ago, I did so because I knew we had to do better in Milwaukee County government. I know that if we are afraid to make big changes then Milwaukee County will not be around for our children and certainly not for generations after.

Last year was a perfect example. We faced a \$55 million deficit and were in danger of massive cuts to transit and important services. Because of some tough decisions, we saved transit, avoided furlough days, put more money into mental health care and started on the road to economic sustainability.

The choices this year are also tough, but already we are seeing the fruits of our labor. This year the deficit is \$28.5 million... it's less because of the decisions we made last year. \$28.5 million is still too much, but we are moving in the right direction.

My 2013 budget doesn't raise taxes or rely on increased fees. There are no furlough days and for the first time in the county's history we are beginning to address deferred maintenance in a real, prioritized way.

I have a number of talented and dedicated Department heads in attendance and I'd like to recognize one of those people - Jim Duff, the Director of the Milwaukee County Veterans Service Office.

I don't know where he finds the time or the energy but in the past year Jim and his small staff have put on numerous job fairs for veterans, helped connect countless vets with important services and resources, created the Purple Heart Pass and after all of that, Jim still found time to ride his bike in the Memorial Day Parade.

I mention Jim not just to point out all of his good works but as an example of what my budget prioritizes. This budget continues to support Jim and all the other departments and important services that Milwaukee County offers.

This budget also improves public safety, it lowers our long term debt and it works towards my goal of putting Milwaukee County on a sustainable path.

Once again, we need to make tough choices. This budget prioritizes funding for services that people need the most. There are no cuts or fare hikes for Transit, we've added more money for Child Support Services to partially compensate for state cuts, and this budget makes a significant investment in long neglected parks.

I want to start by talking about parks. The future of parks has been a hot topic lately and I want people to know I remain dedicated to keeping the Milwaukee County Parks system the shining star that it is. Parks never has been and never will be about one person or one park and this budget will make some of our long neglected parks stronger.

This year's budget includes more than \$6 million for capital parks projects and a 6% increase in the Parks operating budget.

I unveiled my plan yesterday for Moody Park. I'm proposing to tear down the old pool... and in its place, put in a state of the art splash pad, new basketball courts, a soccer field, a community garden and park that will revitalize not just Moody Park, but also the neighborhood.

Because these changes impact so many in this district, we've made it priority to keep Supervisor Bowen informed on this plan at Moody. I know he cares a lot about this community and he's been helping us work with the people who will benefit most from this plan. Working with Supervisor Bowen and the rest of the Board, I'm confident we can make this park -and others throughout this community- places that support and strengthen neighborhoods.

The budget also calls for making significant upgrades at Lindsay Park, Lindbergh Park, Johnsons Park, King Park and Humboldt Park.

While many county residents don't see these parks as much as some of the more visible and prominent ones - we know that they are valued by the people whose neighborhoods they enrich and it's high time they got the investment they deserve.

Everyone should know this is just the start; we are already working on a plan to fix up a new round of neglected parks in 2014. I am dedicated to making sure the Milwaukee County Parks are in great shape for everyone for decades to come.

One of the big challenges in our budget this year is rising health care costs. While those costs have increased, the employee share of total costs is not going up.

The last number of years has been difficult for Milwaukee County workers. Like many public sector employees, they are unfairly criticized for budget problems that have been made by elected leaders. During these tough budget times, workers have been asked to make sacrifices through wage freezes and furlough days.

I'm happy to say this budget lessens that load. Not only are there no furlough days but employees this year will receive cost of living and step increases. My budget also includes money to reward those workers who go above and beyond.

The Human Resources Department is working on a performance bonus plan that will recognize employees in all departments who truly shine. Public service is a noble calling and this is a small way to thank those who go the extra mile.

I'm happy to say that my budget this year does not include any cuts to transit and para-transit and doesn't have any fare hikes. The budget staff and I worked hard to insulate transit because I am dedicated to preserving our transit system.

As the economic engine of the state, Milwaukee County needs a strong and sustainable transit system.

We are in good shape in 2013 but we need to come up with significant funding for 2014 when the CMAQ grant expires.

During my public budget listening sessions one of the biggest issues I heard about was transit. I know how important transit is to Milwaukee County and people will be happy to know this budget does NOT include any cuts to transit and para-transit and riders will NOT be asked to pay higher fares.

I think that's worth repeating – for the second year in a row we are not cutting routes and are not raising fares.

The Milwaukee County Transit System is a vital part of this community. It gets people to work and school, it helps the economy grow and I am dedicated to making sure it stays strong. As part of that effort, my budget also includes half a million dollars more for transit security. Our Transit system is safe and the addition of this money will make sure it stays that way.

Finding a better funding source for Milwaukee County Transit is not a new idea and unfortunately there are no easy answers. I want to ask the Board to join me in calling on the state to reinstate the transit funding it cut last year.

Renewing that important funding is a big first step in getting the transit system on a sustainable path.

This budget includes one-and-a-half million dollars in EMS subsidies to the municipalities and the promise for the same amount of funding for the following three years. This four year plan gives certainty to the municipalities and in return the municipalities' will provide us with critical data on their EMS services.

These funds are designed to support the municipalities EMS services, not pay for them, and the proposed amount is at an appropriate level given the significant levy investment we as a County make in the backbone infrastructure of this system.

We took big steps in 2012 on our Mental Health Redesign plan. Last month I had the honor along with Supervisors Romo-West and Bowen to help open a community Crisis Resource Center on Milwaukee's north side. That building is a great example of what we are doing and the direction we are heading on mental health, moving important services into the community, and doing so even before we have realized any savings from the institutional downsizing.

This commitment to community-based services allows easier access for the people who need these services and moves us more in line with best practices.

This budget continues the Behavioral Health Division's important work with the Mental Health Redesign Task Force on fully implementing the Redesign.

This continues my commitment to transform our mental health system into a sustainable model that treats patients with respect and lessens the financial pressure on Milwaukee County taxpayers.

In this budget the Milwaukee County Department of Aging remains a strong, stand-alone department. We must continue to support the good work Stephanie Sue Stein and her department does and all the seniors they serve.

Public safety remains my top priority... and this budget strengthens that while also lessening the burden on Milwaukee County taxpayers.

As part of the 2013 Budget we are working with the City of Milwaukee, the Milwaukee Police Department and other Police Departments across the county to provide security at County Parks. When residents call 911, it's the police who generally respond; they have been a great ally and we are happy to have them as partners.

Not only does this plan create a strong partnership with local governments, it will also allow us a better way to gather policing data for the parks. Getting more information will allow us to make better decisions on how we allocate money for Parks security moving forward.

This budget includes more money for transit security. Our transit system is safe and the addition of this money will make sure it stays that way.

This budget also has more money for criminal investigators for the District Attorney's Office. Right now the DA has 10 investigators with huge caseloads. This budget will add 3 more investigators, including one who will specifically focus on forensic computer investigations. These additions will lessen the investigators' caseloads and add investigators to important areas.

Last year we made some tough choices in the Sheriff's Office budget. Finding savings that way is never a popular or easy thing to do but I was confident it was the right thing to do. This year I am making some similar choices.

Once again the Sheriff's budget takes up the largest portion of the property tax levy. The Sheriff's \$122 million budget is more than 44% of the total tax levy.

My dedication to public safety is unwavering and this budget proves that. We are fully funding the Sheriff's Office to continue their core duties while allowing municipalities to focus on the policing they excel at.

These decisions continue to be made in a thoughtful and data driven manner. I look forward to an open and reasoned discussion on these changes.

For the first time in three years, Milwaukee County will move forward on a Capital Budget and we are doing so in a way that addresses deferred maintenance in a real and prioritized way. My capital plan includes money for road repairs, transit, city and suburban parks, important health and human services needs and money for our cultural facilities.

We are including significant money for Capital projects at the Milwaukee County Zoo. As usual the Zoo is doing great work and serving families across the state and I want to make sure we continue to support this world class operation.

To ensure forward movement on creating a new Huber facility, I'm including money for a master plan. Gathering this information will allow us to make a sensible decision in the future.

The Capitol budget also includes a significant commitment to the War Memorial Center. This money will begin to handle some of the long term maintenance needs that have been ignored too long.

We have to be unafraid of making big, structural changes. This budget continues to do that. People should know I will continue to make the right decisions for all of Milwaukee County.