



# Milwaukee County Report from 18th District Supervisor Johnny L. Thomas



FALL 2011

## Johnny L. Thomas Milwaukee County 18th District Supervisor

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Thomas



### Committee Assignments

Finance and Audit  
Chair

Economic and Community  
Development

Transportation, Public  
Works and Transit

Dear Friends,

As we close 2011, I thank you for the faith that you have placed in me to be your Milwaukee County Supervisor. It is an honor and a privilege to serve you in this capacity. I have spent my first term learning the innermost workings of County government, and I am pleased to share this summary report documenting the services provided to you.

Since I was elected to the County Board in 2008, I have authored resolutions to close pension loopholes, create a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, and revive the practice of providing annual fiscal status reports on the financial health of Milwaukee County. I also developed a long-range solvency plan, called the Road Map for Milwaukee County's Future.

As we enter 2012, I hope to strengthen our ability to improve your lives via County services as well as through development, issue advocacy, and legislation. In these ways, I will remain true to my pledge to make District 18 more attractive, safe, and prosperous for everyone.

In closing, whether you observe Hanukkah, celebrate Christmas or Kwanza, or practice the principals of another faith, I hope you have a happy and safe holiday season and a healthy and prosperous New Year!

Best Regards,

Johnny L. Thomas, 18th District Milwaukee County Supervisor

## Reintroducing Respect for our Neighbors

This past year, incidents of "wilding" at Mayfair Mall, Riverwest's Reservoir Park, and the Wisconsin State Fair were widely reported in the media. With an eye toward the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., I cannot help but feel saddened and disappointed about these events.

Dr. King challenged us to respect one another before passing any judgment. We've come a long way toward addressing discrimination, redlining, and other policies aimed at restricting the liberties promised in our Constitution. It hurts even more when the very people that Dr. King marched to protect are the source of policies aimed at undoing everything many in our community marched and ultimately died for.

The behavior of youth in public, regardless of ethnicity

or background, should be a benchmark for how far we've come and how far we have to go. Respect crosses all boundaries. These three incidents are examples of the lack of respect permeating our community. Children of all backgrounds and races disrespect themselves, their neighbors, and our city.

A tightened curfew does nothing to curtail cruising (youth just find another stretch of road), reduce youth violence (statistics reflect an increase), or improve neighborly respect. If we are not careful, these new curfew rules will be confused with 21st Century policies used to reintroduce policies and practices from the 50's and 60's. Each of us needs to make an unwavering commitment to reintroduce respect for our neighbor.

# Employee Benefits: Frugality AND Fairness

In March of 2011, Supervisor John Thomas authored an amendment to the 2011 County Budget calling for the County to explore partnerships with other local governments to help control employee health care and retirement costs. Then, County Supervisors met with Dr. Gregory Thornton, the Superintendent of the Milwaukee Public Schools, to discuss a potential memorandum of understanding to partner on employee and retiree health care. An agreement with MPS would allow Milwaukee County to leverage its buying power and provide a greater return on scarce resources. "If we can make this happen," Thomas said, "we'll make the quality of life better for our employees and our taxpayers."

Thomas believes that in the wake of major cuts in state support for local governments, including Milwaukee

County, we need to take every opportunity to reduce our costs while maintaining the services that citizens depend on. Thomas cautions, "We can't depend on the State to do it for us." He credits Board Chairman Lee Holloway with taking the lead in exploring partnerships with MPS and neighboring municipalities to collaborate on health insurance for employees.

Supervisor Thomas has also played a positive role in supporting another type of partnership. He issued the following statement after the County Board passed domestic partner benefits for Milwaukee County employees: "The passage of domestic partner benefits for County employees is an important step forward for Milwaukee County. Offering benefits equally to all families makes Milwaukee County more competitive. This is a historic event for the County."

## Accomplishments & Issues

Here is a sequential listing of some of Supervisor Thomas' accomplishments, as well as some notable issues the County Board has dealt with, since his election in 2008.

### APRIL 2008

- Elected County Supervisor, 18th District
- Appointed to Personnel Committee; Economic & Community Development Committee; and Finance & Audit Committee (Vice Chair)

### JUNE

- Appears on WMCS 1290 with Cassandra McShepard

### AUGUST-SEPTEMBER

- Board Implements County Strategic Fiscal Plan

### NOVEMBER

- Barack Obama elected 45th President
- County voters approve advisory referendum on 1% sales tax for Parks, Transit, & Emergency Medical Services
- Board votes to sell northeast quadrant of County Grounds to UWM

### DECEMBER

- Appointed to Regional Transit Authority Task Force

### JANUARY 2009

- House of Correction transferred to Sheriff's Department
- New Granville Senior Center opens at Elks Club on Good Hope Road

### FEBRUARY

- Board's Black History Month invocation presented by Pastor John McVicker of Christ the King Baptist Church
- Board votes to issue Pension Obligation Bonds

### APRIL

- Hosts Unity Caucus luncheon
- Hosts Community Brainstorming
- Board votes to pursue economic stimulus funds

### MAY

- Votes to override County Executive Walker's veto of \$150,000 expenditure to provide summer employment for over 300 youths

### JUNE

- With residents, launches successful campaign to keep Noyes and Pulaski indoor pools open

### AUGUST

- Appointed to Strategic Planning Committee

### SEPTEMBER

- Releases Road Map for Milwaukee County's Future – ideas for decreasing costs & apportioning revenue increases

### MARCH 2010

- Establishes a workgroup to increase local workers in public works projects

### APRIL

- Objects to outsourcing County security positions to Wackenhut when guards with questionable records are hired and estimated savings are downgraded

### JULY

- Board adopts Sup. Thomas' resolution to establish standards for evaluating privatization initiatives.
- Board passes Sup. Thomas' plan to request proposals for transit video to raise revenue for MCTS.

### JANUARY 2011

- Presents Milwaukee County's priorities to Madison's new majority legislators

### APRIL

- Appointed Chairman of Finance and Audit Committee

### MAY

- Appointed to the Comprehensive Economic Development Plan Oversight Committee
- With the Voter ID issue in mind, Sup. Thomas objects to the WI Government Accountability Board's suspension of state training for Special Registration Deputies because it could make access to the polls even more difficult

### JUNE

- Appointed by Mayor Tom Barrett to Milwaukee Area Workforce Investment Board

### SEPTEMBER

- As panelist at Community Brainstorming, speaks on impact of State Budget on Milwaukee County

### OCTOBER

- Addresses students at Travis Technology High School
- Conducts 2012 County Budget hearings

# Transit is a Civil Right

*“Transit means jobs. The economy is struggling to recover and people are out of work. A severe cut to the largest transit system in Wisconsin is the last thing the State should have done,” Supervisor Thomas has said.*

As a member of the Committee on Transportation, Public Works, and Transit (TPWT); Thomas has opposed cutting bus routes and has sought to re-established routes that have already been cut. For example, he was able to take the northern extension of Route #23 to Bradley Road off the chopping block, by adding a few minutes longer wait between pickups. He has opposed increasing fares.

As paratransit riders have been saddled with a fare increase to pay for other government services, he has worked to keep those fares as low as possible and maintain paratransit coverage for the entire county.

Thomas has supported a number of measures to improve rapid transit in Milwaukee County. In 2008 he co-sponsored a resolution calling for the County to hold a non-binding referendum on the future of the Milwaukee County Transit System (MCTS). The referendum was approved by a majority of the voters, asking Governor Doyle and the State Legislature to increase the sales tax by ½ cent, which would be dedicated to helping MCTS maintain its buses and improve service. But as is often the case, Madison ignored the needs and will of the people of the Milwaukee area, refusing to authorize the sales tax.

In 2010, to create more revenue for the bus system, Thomas investigated and proposed a return of transit TV. Different from the technology used in the previous system, this one would include advertising and would make buses wi-fi hot spots. Bids were taken for a new system, however, none of the proposals in the first round included all the features needed to make it a profitable venture. It is hoped that, as the technology improves and the economy strengthens, a better transit TV system will become available to MCTS.

In recent years, “grab-and-run” theft of transfers has been a drain on the bus system’s coffers. In a current pilot program, MCTS is finding that on buses with driver safety shields, there has been a significant decrease in assaults on drivers as well as transfer theft. Thomas and others on the TPWT Committee look forward to stopping transfer theft and fraud altogether by installing new fare boxes that will eliminate paper



*Supervisor Thomas address the Board and visitors.*

transfers and enable the use of “smart cards.”

In September, Supervisor Thomas participated in two community meetings to educate the public about the State’s draconian cuts in aid to mass transit in Milwaukee County. The meetings were sponsored by the Granville/Brown Deer Chamber of Commerce, the Village of Brown Deer, and Transit Now and co-sponsored by the Association for Northwest Advancement, Capitol West Neighborhood Association, and the Milwaukee Aging Consortium.

At the meetings, Thomas noted that the County Board as well as the Milwaukee Common Council will need to make difficult decisions about the transit needs of their citizens. “Transit is a civil right that must not be denied to any person who resides and works in Milwaukee County. Whether the City pursues the downtown trolley project or not, I hope they would coordinate with the Milwaukee County Transit System to relieve congestion and enable deployment of buses where they are needed, heading to and from the downtown.”

As a former Military Police officer in the U.S. Army, Supervisor Thomas brings an appreciation of the freedom of ownership of a firearm, along with strong support for regulation for responsible ownership. In May 2011, Thomas co-sponsored a County Board resolution expressing opposition to legislation that was pending in the Wisconsin State Legislature that would greatly expand the list of locations and circumstances where an individual may carry a concealed weapon. The resolution stated that Milwaukee County must have the authority to regulate its own facilities such as the courthouse, the zoo, the mental health facility, the Cogg's Center, and all MCTS buses. With this authority, passengers and drivers would be more secure, and the County would be able to impose felony penalties for carrying a concealed weapon without a permit and for obtaining a weapon illegally.

## Bringing Back a Useful Financial Tool

At their September meeting, the County Board approved a resolution from Supervisor Johnny Thomas to resume publication of the annual Fiscal Trends report in Milwaukee County. Fiscal Trends, last produced by the County's Department of Administrative Services in 1999, outlines and evaluates financial trends affecting Milwaukee County.

"This gives policymakers in Milwaukee County the ability to track fiscal benchmarks and make better and more informed decisions," said Supervisor Thomas, who learned of the report and considers it a useful tool, worth the staff time to produce it. The Fiscal Trends indicators include areas such as community needs/resources, county expenditures, county revenues, property taxes, employee pension system, and debt structure/condition of capital facilities.

Thomas considers Fiscal Trends an outstanding tool for decision making. "Each area is given a conclusion rating of positive, monitor or warning," he said. "This gives policymakers insight on fiscal indicators that are the most urgent." The Fiscal Trends report for 2011 will be submitted to the Finance & Audit Committee by the Dept. of Administrative Services in December.



*Sue Gollither inducted into the Senior Citizen Hall of Fame for her community service.*



*Student Government Day with Kaelyn Marks of Nicolet High School and American Legionnaires.*

## Thomas Spearheads Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

Recognizing that a comprehensive economic development strategy (CEDS) is necessary for Milwaukee County, Supervisor John Thomas included the formation of such a committee in the 2011 County Budget. In August, the County's new Economic Development Plan Oversight Committee met for the first time. Supervisor Thomas is one of three Supervisors appointed to the 15-member Committee, which will more clearly define Milwaukee County's mission and goals as they relate to economic development. "We have so many assets, but we are not utilizing them at their highest potential," he said. At the meeting, County Executive Chris Abele spoke, as did Brian Taffora, the County's new Economic Development Director.

The committee will transform the economic future of Milwaukee County and include regional collaboration. Milwaukee County, business leaders, the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, labor unions, and other stakeholders on the committee will prepare a comprehensive strategic development plan. Supervisor Thomas intends for the committee to instill public confidence in the development process through transparency, efficiency and accountability in the work of guiding resources toward major economic development projects.

The committee's economic development plan will include the following: Milwaukee County's airports; the ground transit system; the Lake Michigan watershed; economic and demographic trends; existing economic development work by a variety of agencies and organizations; and employment efforts on the part of neighborhood-based organizations, business groups, universities, local governments, and regional organizations.

The strategy for economic development is intended to improve retention of businesses in Milwaukee County, increase the attractiveness of the area to businesses, enhance entrepreneurial growth, and achieve greater equity in employment and income across the County. When we have a clear CEDS, federal funds will be more available for our efforts to grow new jobs.

The committee met for the second time in September and will meet next in early December.

## Supervisor Thomas Hosts Lindsay Park Concert



*The Charles Walker Band rocks out.*



*A good time for the younger...*



*... and the older.*

For the third consecutive year, Supervisor John Thomas has hosted a summer concert at Lindsay Park. The park lies between W. Marion and W. Congress streets, from N. 84th to 87th. The August 25 event featured the Charles Walker Band on stage, presenting a fun mix of blues, R&B, and original pieces for an appreciative audience at the picnic tables under the trees. While parents and older children listened to the music, the sandy jungle gym area hit the spot for the youngest children, and baseball was the order of the day for some of the grade-school kids and an obliging dad.

This concert and the August event in the two previous years drew a total of approximately five hundred people, mostly 18th District residents, to Lindsay Park. Eddie Butts and his skillful bandmates entertained at the 2009 event with a wide variety of musical styles. The 2010 entertainers were the highly professional soul and R&B band, Hidden Agenda.

Each of the two previous concerts was connected to a multifarious neighborhood fair organized by Supervisor Thomas. The fairs provided activities for children such as baseball, soccer, cricket, jump rope, chess, face painting, and storytelling. A bouncy house and raffles with prizes added to the fun. Inexpensive lunches were served from the charcoal grill. Numerous participating organizations contributed equipment, supplies, and funds for those two events. For adults and families, volunteers from a variety of groups gave out information at tables about social, health, and educational services they provide.

The primary partner with Supervisor Thomas all three years was the Milwaukee County Parks Department, manicuring the park, contracting with the bands, and setting up the stage each time. A number of other government agencies took part in one or both of the fairs: The County Sheriff's Department, Milwaukee Police, and Milwaukee Fire Department brought their

equipment, horses, and police dog for visitors to see and touch. The Milwaukee Area Domestic Animal Control Commission, Milwaukee Commission on Domestic Violence, Milwaukee County Department on Aging, and Milwaukee Health Department were there, as well.

Participating non-governmental organizations included the American Cancer Society, American Heart Association, Angelfood Ministries, SHARE Mobile Market, Bryant & Stratton College, Cardinal Stritch University, Kaplan University, Cho's Tae Kwon Do and Murphy's ATA Tae Kwon Do Center, Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin, Goodwill Industries, IOU Sports, Impact 211, Milwaukee Brewers, Milwaukee Kickers Soccer Club, Wisconsin Humane Society, and Wisconsin Scholastic Chess Federation.

Financial assistance for the fairs came from Andrew Automotive, Associated Bank, Clifton Gunderson LLP, G4S Wackenhut, Harris Bank, Johnson Controls, Regal Cricket Club, Roeschen's Omnicare Pharmacy, and Walgreens.

In-kind donations and other assistance came from Culver's, Klement's Sausages, Lena's Foods, Mad Science, Roundy's, Stuartco, Target, Play It Again Sports, and Art Smart's Dart Mart.

The 2009 fair, through small, lunch-line donations, raised \$110.00 plus 340 pounds of non-perishable food items, all for the Hunger Task Force. From the lunch line at the 2010 fair, \$300 was raised for the Center for Veterans' Issues, Ltd., and food items were donated to St. Benedict's Community Meal at 9th and State Street.

Supervisor Thomas said, "I'm grateful for the contributions these organizations and individuals have made toward the quality of life for Milwaukee families during these past three summers. They have served the community well."



**Johnny L. Thomas**  
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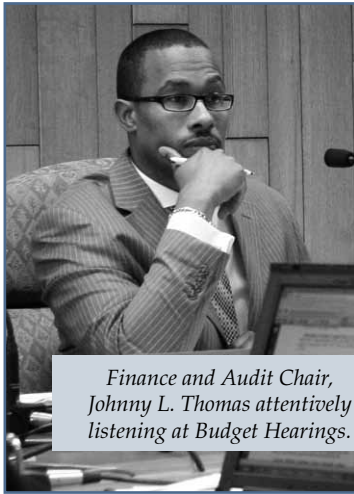
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## Committee Work on Your Behalf



*Finance and Audit Chair, Johnny L. Thomas attentively listening at Budget Hearings.*

A County Supervisor since 2008, Johnny Thomas has served on numerous committees.

Currently Chair of the Board's Finance & Audit Committee, he is also a member of the Economic & Community Development and Transportation & Public Works Committees.

When special – ad

hoc – committees are formed, Supervisors often play key roles in them. Thomas was co-founder of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategic Plan Advisory Board, and he is a member of the Pension Study Commission. To represent the interests of Milwaukee County among all the counties in Wisconsin, Thomas has served with the Wisconsin Counties Association as a member of their Taxation & Finance Steering Committee and their Resolutions Committee.

In addition, as a member of the County Ambassador Program (CAP), Thomas has traveled to Madison to discuss key local and state issues with state legislators on behalf of the people of Milwaukee County.

From November 2009 to June 2011, Supervisor Thomas served on the County's Long Range Strategic Plan Steering Committee. This ad hoc committee was charged with putting a strategic plan in place before the start of 2011 budget deliberations. A strategic plan is an advance plan, which allows a government body to make current financial decisions, not only in light of current needs but giving strong consideration to expected needs several years down the road.

An important part of strategic planning is to obtain accurate estimates of the yearly cost of the County's structural debt – including the money that will be owed year after year to retirees and to the persons and institutions that hold the interest-paying bonds the County has issued in the past. Serving with Thomas are on this committee were Supervisor Pat Jursik, Chair, the heads of the County Departments on Aging, Child Support Enforcement, Administrative Services, and leaders of AFSCME District Council 48, the MMAC, and the Public Policy Forum.