



COUNTY OF KENOSHA

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Kerkman’s State of the County address outlines year of successes, future plans for county government

Kenosha County Executive Samantha Kerkman delivered her State of the County address to the County Board Tuesday night, highlighting the accomplishments of the past year and previewing some of the work to come in the near future.

“A little more than a year ago it was my honor to be sworn in as your County Executive,” Kerkman said. “Tonight, it is my privilege to come before you with my first State of the County address.”

Among the new initiatives Kerkman announced is a plan to add a Prevention Specialist Educator position to work with schools across the county to develop programming on substance abuse prevention.

Kerkman also announced a tentative agreement with Racine County and the State of Wisconsin, in which the state would assume permanent jurisdiction of the recently expanded portion of county Highway KR while the counties would take ownership of state Highway 75. This is anticipated to save Kenosha County some \$300,000 per year in annual maintenance costs, she said.

“We are looking to partner with some of our neighbors in areas where working together would benefit all of us,” Kerkman said.

As an example of this, Kerkman cited the county’s recent Chapter 51 mental health patient agreement with Lake Behavioral Hospital in Waukegan, Ill.

“This was more than six years in the making and, thanks to persistence all around, we can now send some Chapter 51 mental health patients just a half hour away, rather than three hours,” Kerkman said. “This saves us money, and it benefits the patients by keeping them closer to home.”

The Prevention Specialist Educator position, Kerkman said, is one of the early recommendations of the Opioid Settlement Review Panel, which is charged with developing recommendations for prudent uses of the settlement funds that the county is receiving from pharmaceutical companies.

“The team of experts on the panel have determined this is a high-priority use of a small amount of the settlement dollars, and I’m confident there will be more well-researched recommendations coming from that group,” Kerkman said.

Kerkman also highlighted a series of “firsts” that she and the County Board accomplished during their first year of work together. Among them:

- Holding the county’s first ever Budget Vision Session, so that supervisors could make their priorities known early in the upcoming budget process, while hearing from department and division heads about the budget issues that they face.
- Launching the Broadband Advisory Committee to make recommendations on how to attract further investment to improve high-speed internet service in Kenosha County’s underserved areas.
- Convening a roundtable of village leaders from across the county and hosting the first-ever Bi-County Council of Governments meeting jointly with officials from Racine County.
- Bringing together leaders from across Kenosha County for a Law Enforcement Summit to discuss public safety.
- Launching the Kenosha County Veterans Honor Portal, an online tool that provides easy access to information for veterans and others in the community, which will soon have a new Veterans History section, just in time for Memorial Day.
- Making traveling constituent outreach a priority, with the Saturdays in the Park with Sam and Cocoa & Coffee with Kerkman office hours events held across the county, which many County Board members also attended.
- Taking county government services to the Kenosha County Fair.

Kerkman credited the County Board for making budget adjustments for 2023 that are helping to resolve some of the county’s employee recruitment and retention challenges.

More recently, she said, the board moved the county significantly further along in its quest to maintain and improve its status as an employer of choice, approving the recommendations of a classification and compensation study that will boost pay scales in most areas effective July 1.

That was a major investment — one we all agree is necessary for us to retain and attract a high-quality and skilled workforce,” Kerkman said.

In closing, Kerkman referred to the county administration, the board and all of the county’s employees collectively as “#TeamKenoshaCounty.”

“Everybody on our team has a unique role — from the legislators who cast their votes in this room, to our department and division heads and their talented teams, to the crews out on our highways, plowing the snow and paving the roads,” Kerkman said. “Thanks to #TeamKenoshaCounty, the state of Kenosha County is strong, and the future is bright.”

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