

Dane Co. Exec. Parisi: Introduces 2021 budget

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Today, Dane County Executive Joe Parisi introduced his 2021 budget proposal at Dane County's Emergency Management Office in Blooming Grove, where he laid out Dane County's plans to address negative impacts from the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, while also continuing to prioritize human services, equity, renewable energy, and conservation efforts.

"Our shared sense of community and willingness to do whatever it takes to help one another is prevailing as we navigate this unrivaled time," said Dane County Executive Joe Parisi. "Because we have built upon our legacy year after year with innovative efforts to support mental health in our schools and community, protected hundreds of new acres each year for families to recreate, and meet families where they are at with critical supports, we are better prepared to face the full throes of this global catastrophe that has engulfed our state and nation."

To date, Dane County has yet to experience a major COVID-19 outbreak in a homeless shelter setting—an incredible achievement given this higher risk population. Given the continued rapid spread of this virus and with colder weather months ahead, the risk of infection will only continue to increase in congregate settings. County Executive Parisi's 2021 budget includes \$9 million to ensure those who face homelessness will continue to have hotel rooms for safe respite. These dollars should allow Dane County to keep homeless individuals in a safe environment through June of 2021. As of late September, Dane County had over 360 people housed in area hotels. Since the pandemic response started over six months ago, 77 households have transitioned from hotels and shelter into permanent housing, and they are now better connected to behavioral health supports, long term case management, health care and employment.

Dane County's Small Business Pandemic Support Grant Program infused over \$10 million into hundreds of local small businesses. Despite these efforts, businesses still face a long, challenging road back from the pandemic. To help support them, County Executive Parisi is including \$50,000 in his budget for the regional economic development entity MadRep to assist with COVID-19 business recovery. It will survey local businesses on needs as the pandemic evolves and use that information to inform business retention and start-up work. The organization is applying to the state for \$10 million in revolving loan dollars to support what will no doubt be a challenging several months ahead for businesses and the economy they support.

Dane County also knows the long-term mental health and addiction recovery needs in this community will long outlast the COVID-19 pandemic. County Executive Parisi is including \$500,000 in his budget to partner with the organization "Restoring Roots" on a new multi-unit development to provide stable housing and recovery services to those who struggle with addiction. Long term housing with wraparound services like job training and other life skills offer a path back to those who find themselves in the long, dark hallways that come with addiction. Dane County is hopeful this contribution to jumpstart this collaboration spurs others to join in and bring this estimated 50-unit recovery house project to completion.

In conjunction with the County Board of Supervisors, County Executive Parisi is including \$300,000 to study the feasibility of developing a [Behavioral Health Triage and Restoration Center](#) that will not only be another bold step at improving mental health care in the Dane County community but also offers its next innovative effort to continue reforming the criminal justice system, reducing recidivism, and in turn the jail population. It will not only help divert those in a behavioral health crisis away from jail or emergency rooms but also provide a place to safely stabilize the situation at hand while providing resources and mental health supports.

This spring, Dane County moved quickly to adopt remote work policies and procedures so those in its workforce who could work outside the office had the ability to do so. While originally done to help promote social distancing, these strategies also help reduce climate emissions and potentially avoid recurring capital expenditures to expand county office buildings. Parisi is including \$150,000 in his 2021 budget to evaluate the feasibility and benefits of longer-term remote work assignments and, in turn, develop a comprehensive plan for the county's space needs moving forward. He is also including \$2.5 million in the Department of Administration budget so Dane County can continue to meet time sensitive needs related to the pandemic. These dollars will allow the county to acquire personal

protective equipment and cover the ongoing expenses associated with contact tracing and testing.

County Executive Parisi is including \$1 million in the 2021 budget so the Badger Prairie Health Care Center can complete construction on a new isolation room in the event a resident of the facility should test positive for COVID-19. CARES funding will cover the ongoing initial design work for this project to convert Badger Prairie's therapy gym into a COVID-19 care area. That space has the infrastructure needed to serve as an isolated specialty care area for residents and help keep employees separated from the rest of the nursing home staff and residents, consistent with CDC guidelines.

On so many occasions in recent years with flooding, tornadoes, and other unpredictable events with wide scale community impact, Dane County Emergency Management has served the community capably and professionally. Prior to the pandemic, Dane County acquired a former Fitchburg Fire Station to be the new home of its Emergency Management offices. County staff worked with a design firm this year to determine what modifications are needed for the building to allow the Emergency Management team to develop a state-of-the-art Emergency Operations Center. Parisi is including \$4.4 million in this budget for the needed upgrades to the new home of Dane County Emergency Management.

Other highlights and new programs featured in the County Executive's 2021 budget include:

Human Services

One year ago, Dane County set out on its latest venture—development of a brand-new Behavioral Health Resource Center (BHRC). Designed to address the difficulty in navigating behavioral and mental health care, this brand new, fully county operated and funded Center is now only weeks away from beginning operations. County Executive Parisi's 2021 budget includes over \$900,000—all county dollars—to cover the full cost of staffing this facility with clinically licensed behavioral health resource specialists, case managers, and a peer support specialist.

As COVID-19 permeates 2021, its economic fallout will only become greater. Affordable housing will be more challenging to come by as the number of families struggling to keep up rises. County Executive Parisi is including \$6 million in his

budget for the 2021 Dane County Affordable Housing Fund. This will help build new housing projects across the county, including the City of Madison—creating opportunities for the growing number of families in need. This budget maintains the county's rent assistance efforts through Joining Forces for Families that Parisi started and increased in past budgets.

This budget continues county government's commitment to protecting those who struggle with homelessness. Existing shelter capacity has reached a threshold where more needs to be done. Recognizing this, privately led efforts have sprung up in the past year about how to best address this need as a community. Dane County will proudly partner in this work and serve as the primary capital contributor for purchasing the property and subsequent redevelopment for the most appropriate entity that steps forward ready and able to operate a new night shelter. A \$3 million county grant awaits the best partnership that comes together to meet this need in our community.

County Executive Parisi's 2021 Human Services budget totals \$239,497,599. Similar to years past, this comprises the largest share—almost half—the total of the entire county budget. This safety net served Dane County well this year and remains an area of pride and strength as the community heads into the continued unknowns of the months ahead.

Equity & Access to Opportunity

Parisi's 2021 budget expands on Dane County's successful conservation and job skills training work with Operation Fresh Start (OFS), infusing more direct investment into workforce development and job training. \$50,000 is being included in the budget as part of a partnership to create a new "conservation graduate" crew that will work across the community, readying them for potential careers with Dane County Parks and other forestry, landscaping, agriculture, and conservation related employment fields. This new \$200,000 project teams money from Dane County, City of Madison, Groundswell Conservancy, and Madison Audubon Society. Members of the new crew will represent the diverse, underserved populations of OFS. They will receive the experience and training necessary to pursue a career in the green industries of conservation and forestry.

County Executive Parisi is putting \$2 million in his upcoming 2021 budget to help the Urban League of Greater Madison purchase a site for an [economic development hub along the South Park Street corridor](#) dedicated to supporting minority-owned

businesses. The project will be modeled after the Sherman Phoenix project in Milwaukee, an entrepreneurial hub in the Sherman Park neighborhood providing high-quality commercial space and support for small businesses. Parisi believes it is critical to “go bold” and demonstrate decisive leadership when opportunities like this emerge to address disparities and improve economic justice. Projects like this will not only directly address disproportionate unemployment and underemployment rates among African Americans in this community, it is also the ideal project for the new economy that will emerge after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Climate & Renewable Energy

The 2021 budget converts more of Dane County’s Highway Department fleet of diesel burning trucks into those that run on compressed natural gas. In just a few years, Dane County has deployed dozens of these trucks, reducing diesel emissions and serving as a model for how even large vehicle fleets can both keep the public safe and improve air quality.

Dane County’s airport solar project is on track to being online in the coming weeks, generating enough electricity to power 1,700 homes. The renewable electricity from this new project will reduce greenhouse gas emissions in an amount equivalent to the emissions produced by over 5,000 cars or the burning of 14,000 tons of coal per year. Footings have been poured, racks constructed and in the coming weeks panels will be mounted. This 9-megawatt project is set to be fully operational in mid-December.

As this budget is introduced, Dane County is actively working to complete plans to convert over 100 acres of county land into a new large-scale solar development. The county will lease land for this project next to its East District Campus (across from the landfill) in the Town of Cottage Grove and then acquire renewable energy credits from this new solar field. The project is expected to generate 14 megawatts of electricity—enough energy to power 2,650 homes, but more importantly gets county government on the brink of producing a near equivalent amount of energy as it consumes.

Conservation & Water Quality

County Executive Parisi’s 2021 budget includes \$6.5 million for construction of the second phase of the Lower Yahara River Trail from Fish Camp County Park to Lake Kegonsa State Park. Plans and permits for this next phase of the Lower Yahara River

Trail are on track to be done by spring, with construction bids slated for release later next year.

Another trail project the county continues to make progress on is the North Mendota Trail project adjacent to Highway M near Waunakee and Westport. To date, Dane County has invested over \$1.3 million for the planning and development of a segment of the trail between Highway M and Woodland Drive and Governor Nelson State Park. Parisi's 2021 budget includes \$350,000 to continue development of the trail through Governor Nelson State Park and funds to plan for a future trail connection that eventually leads to Mendota County Park.

County Executive Parisi is including \$1.75 million to expand the Continuous Cover Program. The popular program helps to preserve lands from the ongoing pressures of development, reduce run-off, and mitigate the effects of climate change. To date, Dane County has protected close to 700 acres of land in 22 townships. Converting to grasses and pollinator habitat has reduced phosphorus run-off into local waters by over 1,700 pounds a year.

Dane County continues to make important progress with its multi-million-dollar effort to reduce flood risk along the Yahara Chain of Lakes. The Yahara Chain of Lakes Sediment Removal Project started this summer and is designed to improve flow—moving rainwater that currently sits in the lakes for weeks through at a steadier clip. There is over \$6 million in the budget, including \$2.5 million in new money, for this work to stay on track next year.

Dane County learned of the virtues of sediment removal for flood mitigation because of its experience with "Suck the Muck," which continues to remove phosphorus from river and stream beds that feed into area lakes. Sediment removal was completed this summer along a nearly one-mile stretch of Token Creek, where 20,000 tons of phosphorus-laden sediment was removed. Parisi is including over \$9.1 million in his budget to keep this initiative going in 2021.

Dane County continued its legacy of preserving lands by protecting close to 600 more acres in 2020. Dollars being put into conservation have the dual benefit of preserving the finite resource of land and the opportunity to improve water quality and recreational access. With this in mind, \$4 million will go to Dane County's Conservation Fund and \$1 million will go to its Flood Risk Reduction Fund in 2021.

A comprehensive list of outdoor projects and water quality initiatives being funded

in County Executive's 2021 budget was announced earlier this week and can be found [HERE](#).

2021 Budget by the Numbers

"This budget was deeply challenging, in the midst of what has been an incredibly difficult year for all of us, at every level," Parisi said. "Still, in my 59 years of living in this community I know our resiliency will carry us through to the other side of this generational moment. Regardless how much longer this difficult journey lasts or what the coming days bring, we know we have a county government that's capable and committed to its people and this very special place."

Sales tax collections are on track to end the year down almost \$12 million. Additional revenues that county departments like the Henry Vilas Zoo, Alliant Energy Center, and those collected by the Dane County Treasurer's Office have all declined this year—a direct result of the economic fallout from COVID-19. All of it adds up to millions in fewer dollars for county services. Parisi's budget offsets these short-term losses through use of Dane County's rainy day fund. These reserve fund dollars will sustain county government services largely as the community knows them for 2021.

This budget buffers both the services Dane County provides and the staff who provide them from the greatest financial losses county government has experienced since the national Great Recession nearly a decade ago. Unlike then, this budget has no across the board wage reductions or furloughs.

The 2021 operating budget totals \$615,541,049. The capital budget is \$71,649,300. The budget includes a levy increase of 4.09%, increasing taxes on the average home by \$30.18.