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Dane County Exec. Parisi: Signs 2021 budget

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Today, Dane County Executive Joe Parisi signed the 2021 Dane County Budget: Resilient, Resolved, Continued Commitment to Community. The $696 million-dollar spending plan works to address the impact of COVID-19 on the Dane County community, while continuing to prioritize human services, equity, renewable energy, conservation, and more.

“Everything we have done leading up to this pandemic laid the groundwork for our response to it,” said County Executive Parisi. “Our shared sense of community and willingness to do whatever it takes to help one another is prevailing as we navigate this unrivaled time. The 2021 budget works to buffer the services Dane County provides and address the devastating impact COVID-19 has had on our community.”

To date, Dane County has yet to experience a major COVID-19 outbreak in a homeless shelter setting. 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 safer environment through June of 2021.

The COVID-19 pandemic has put an overwhelming strain on our community, negatively impacting many struggling with mental illness and addiction. Dane County’s commitment to addressing behavioral health challenges has existed for years and will remain a top priority during the pandemic and beyond.

In conjunction with the County Board of Supervisors, County Executive Parisi has

included $300,000 in the 2021 budget to study the feasibility of developing a Behavioral Health Triage and Restoration Center. This Center will not only be another bold step in improving mental health care in the Dane County community, but will also serve as a way to continue reforming the criminal justice system, reducing recidivism and the jail population. It will help divert those in a behavioral health crisis away from jail or emergency rooms and provide a place to safely stabilize the situation at hand, while providing resources and mental health supports.

One year ago, Dane County set out to develop the 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 open. County Executive Parisi's 2021 budget includes over $1 million to cover the full cost of staffing this facility with clinically licensed behavioral health resource specialists, case managers, and a peer support specialist. This new, new one-stop resource for mental and behavioral health care is believed to be the first of its kind in the nation.

"We are facing an unprecedented time in our nation with a pandemic," said State Representative and Dane County Board Supervisor Shelia Stubbs. "The 2021 budget is a reflection of our community priorities. I am honored to partner with County Executive Parisi, my colleagues, and the community."

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. $7 million has been included in 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.

Additionally, $2 million will go to JT Klein's affordable housing development known as Oak Ridge Westgate & Westgate Commons. JT Klein will demolish the Westgate Mall and redevelop the entire site in multiple phases, which upon completion will include 223 market rate, 71 workforce, and 161 affordable senior apartments. $1.35 million will go to support Movin' Out/Rule Enterprises' affordable housing project at 1402 South Park Street. Units will be a mix of 1, 2, and 3-bedroom apartments, and all 150 units will be targeted to households earning between 30% and 80% of

County Median Income.

“County Executive Parisi proposed a budget that maintained both critical services and our county workforce in challenging times. This was a zero-sum year, where every addition to the operating budget had to be offset by a subtraction, so the budget would continue to balance,” said Dane County Board Chair Analiese Eicher. “The County Board added modest increases for crisis services, pretrial services, and Veteran’s Services, while making cuts to the Sheriff’s Office and in other areas across county government. Again this year, our commitment to the Affordable Housing Development Fund and to specific affordable housing projects grew. I am proud that the County Board unanimously approved the 2021 budget.”

The 2021 budget also makes investments to improve outdoor spaces and enhance Dane County residents’ quality of life. $6.5 million will go toward constructing 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.

County Executive Parisi has also included $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.

“Regardless of 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,” said Parisi. “I am grateful for what everyone has done – regardless of scale – to help neighbors and friends. And, I am hopeful the 2021 budget will help our community through this unprecedented period.”