

State of the County

By Adam Payne, County Administrator

Sheboygan County has 850 employees working in 19 departments administering over 200 programs and services. The total budget is \$167 million, comprised of \$52 million in property tax levy and the balance coming from state and federal revenue, private pay, and fee or service charges. The four largest departments are Health and Human Services (\$41.2 million), Transportation (\$23.9 million), Sheriff (\$23.1 million), and Rocky Knoll Health Care Center (\$14.5 million) and amount to nearly 2/3rds of the entire County budget. The remaining departments include: Building Services, Clerk of Courts, Corporation Counsel, County Clerk, Court Commissioner, District Attorney, Finance, Human Resources, Information Technology, Medical Examiner, Planning and Conservation, Register of Deeds, Treasurer and Real Property Listing, University of Wisconsin-Extension, and Veterans Service.

Key Accomplishments and Milestones of 2021

COVID-19 Pandemic Response Continues—In the past year our county-wide vaccination levels have risen to 60%, with over 80% of those who are 55 years and older being fully vaccinated. Our Division of Public Health has provided nearly 10,000 vaccinations and has enhanced vaccine access through rural pop-up clinics, homebound vaccinations and offsite clinics to support communities who may experience barriers. Additionally, the County launched a community testing site at the Aging & Disability Resource Center that is in strong demand. Sheboygan County continues to work collaboratively with many community partners including hospital presidents, public health professionals, emergency responders, elected officials, and community stakeholders to drive a coordinated response to the pandemic.

Successful Ryder Cup Golf Tournament—Sheboygan County was in the spotlight as it hosted the Ryder Cup at Whistling Straits, an event that had upwards of 45,000 daily visitors, 27 hours of live worldwide broadcast coverage and an estimated \$135 million economic impact on the region. The Sheboygan County Memorial Airport with its new terminal and customs facility supported over 1,200 aircraft take-offs and landings. Airport staff and members of the Aviation Heritage Center welcomed visitors. Our Health and Human Services, Transportation, and Sheriff's Departments worked closely with Ryder Cup officials on security, traffic, food safety, and COVID-19 mitigation plans. Over 4,000 volunteers stepped forward to help and all involved contributed to a highly successful event.

Child Protection Services Out-of-Home Care Reduction—The volume of referrals into child protection due to child maltreatment has remained steady for over 20 years, but the number of children placed in out-of-home care grew to a high of 367 in early 2019. To address this growing challenge, the County Corporation Counsel and Health and Human Services Departments worked together to implement system changes, including: increased efforts to locate relatives, improved contracted in-home safety services, enhanced legal representation of child protection cases, and worked more closely with families to resolve problems instead of relying on the court system. These changes have resulted in an approximately 60% reduction of children placed in out-of-home care (from 367 to 148). A decrease of this magnitude is a testament to the dedication and innovation of staff who embraced change, leading to positive results.

Rocky Knoll Health Care Center Maintains Five-Star Rating—Despite the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and staff shortages, Rocky Knoll earned a five-star rating from the Wisconsin Department of Health Services and Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services for the fourth consecutive year. This rating reflects the dedication of our staff and commitment to quality. With the application of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding, Rocky Knoll and our Human Resources Department are striving to tackle the workforce shortage by offering higher wages, along with new recruitment and retention initiatives, including tuition reimbursement and student loan repayment programs.

Facility Enhancements—Resident room improvements are underway at the Rocky Knoll Health Care Center. Roads were repaved at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay Sheboygan Campus, and the Bookworm Gardens’ footprint and lease were expanded. The Aging and Disability Resource Center was remodeled and will soon be co-located with Economic Support. Plans are underway for expanding the Sheriff’s Department Alternatives to Incarceration unit at the Detention Center, and for exterior restoration for the Taylor House at the Sheboygan County Historical Society Museum.

Highway 23 Expansion—The four-lane expansion of Highway 23 in Sheboygan County was completed, with the remainder of the project in Fond du Lac County to be constructed in the year ahead. This project was originally enumerated by the State over 30 years ago, and construction finally commenced in 2019. The project will significantly enhance safety and support economic development. In addition, the Planning & Conservation and Transportation Departments worked with the Wisconsin Department of Transportation to expand the Old Plank Road Trail. The 30-mile trail will now extend from the City of Sheboygan to the City of Fond du Lac.

New Educational Facility at Sheboygan County Marsh—Construction of the Kohler Center for Marsh Education project is nearly complete. One wing of the building houses the YMCA Outdoor Skills Center’s Marsh Education program, which services over 1,000 students annually. That wing will be available to rent when educational programming is not taking place. The other wing houses new bathrooms for the County’s campground. Structural support for the building comes from trees harvested from the property and the building is LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certified; a showcase of environmental sustainability.

Collaborative Approach for American Rescue Plan Act Funding—The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) was enacted on March 11, 2021. ARPA provides \$1.9 trillion nationally in funding, of which Wisconsin is eligible for \$2.5 billion and Sheboygan County is eligible for \$22.4 million. Sheboygan County established six taskforces seeking community engagement and input on the following priority areas of concern: Affordable Housing, Behavioral Health & Crisis Response, Broadband Development, Childcare, Transportation, and Workforce Development. The taskforces will submit a report and recommendations for the County Board’s consideration in early 2022. Counties have until December 31, 2024 to obligate the funds.

Replacement of Asphalt Plant Planned—The County’s Transportation Department maintains 450 miles of paved road and 152 bridges, which are vital to our quality of life and economic development. The County’s asphalt plant provides essential, cost-effective material for county and municipal roads. The current asphalt plant is 35 years old and needs to be replaced due to age and the inability to purchase parts. With the support of the 0.5% county sales tax, a new plant will be established that is more efficient, less reliant on virgin materials, and allows the County to continue to provide cost-effective road construction and maintenance.

Strong Fiscal Track Record Continues—Sheboygan County has an impressive fiscal track record, healthy reserves, an excellent bond rating, and provides quality services in a responsible manner. In November, the County Board enacted a 1.14% property tax levy increase. Over the last ten years, the average annual levy increase has been just 1.22%. The Finance Department submits the County’s Comprehensive Annual Financial Report to the Government Finance Officers’ Association (GFOA) for official review. The Finance Department has earned the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting from GFOA for the last seven years; a testament to the County’s fiscal stewardship.

A thoughtful County Board, dedicated staff, and a community that works together are key to our success.