



# County Of Dane

## Office Of The County Executive

Joe Parisi  
County Executive

To: County Board of Supervisors

Fr: Dane County Executive Joe Parisi

Re: 2021 County Budget

### **2021 County Budget: Resilient, Resolved, Continued Commitment to Community**

In my annual budget message a year ago I talked about how we had spent the better part of the past decade pouring a foundation well equipped to serve this growing community for the next ten years and beyond. Little did we know how quickly the strength of our civic core would be tested as this new decade dawned. The Covid-19 global pandemic has brought immeasurable grief to families, paralyzed communities, and its legacy will be marked by varying degrees of loss for all of us. Our county has not been immune to this sadness and loss. That said, from the outset of this pandemic Dane County was better prepared than many of our counterparts. That's because we didn't wait for a pandemic to invest in people and the very special places that give this community its identity and exemplify our character. 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, were better prepared to face the full throes of the global catastrophe that's engulfed our state and nation.

This is what we have done, because it is who we are. Our shared sense of community and willingness to do whatever it takes to help one another is prevailing as we navigate this unrivaled time. There's no doubt we are bending, but Covid-19 will not break us. That's not to say any of this has been easy, far from it. There's been real human suffering. Like other communities, Covid has only magnified our underlying challenges. The impacts on each one of our homes, children and families, our livelihoods and work, and activities has been deeply personal for each one of us. We have cried together, held one another, been frustrated and reassured one another. We know folks who have fallen ill, friends who couldn't memorialize the loss of a loved one, or sit bedside at a hospital with those who are sick. As a people we are being tested like never before. Through it all, we have never forgotten or lost sense of who we are. We are an empathetic people who understand the human condition and prioritize it. We see the worry on the face of the store clerk who gets up day after day to work a minimum wage job not knowing which customer they greet may have Covid. We are sympathetic to the single parent balancing work responsibilities who makes time regardless



how late in the day to help a child through challenging homework so they don't fall further behind. We pause to reflect on the daily sacrifice of the health care workers - responders in the field, nurses and doctors in the clinics and hospitals, who have found the will-power in the face of very real fears for their own well-being - to fight to save lives of those stricken with this cruel virus. We are a community comprised of these cumulative efforts. Together, we are the foundation with the resiliency and strength to help this community persevere through these times.

Everything we have done leading up to this pandemic laid the groundwork for our response to it. The eviction prevention fund we created within Dane County's Joining Forces a few years ago provided the template used to help stabilize housing for 13,000 individuals this summer. Building Bridges, the school-based mental health teams we debuted in 2013, are now built out to 10 Dane County school districts. Now more than ever, Building Bridges is integral in supporting young people and their families who continue to balance the emotional challenges that come with both socializing and learning at a distance. **This countywide school based mental health network ensures our young people have access to critical supports in a virtual learning environment during what is quite possibly the most challenging period for mental and behavioral health in modern history.** The focus we place on conservation - protecting lands and investing in parks and clean lakes - have afforded families safe outdoor recreation and opportunities to improve wellness away from the confined spaces in which Covid thrives. **Our parks are on track to see 1 million more visitors in 2020 than last year** – an estimated 4 million total - a new all time record. Our ability to collaborate, bringing large dairy farms and local organic growers to the same table, resulted in a partnership that's fed families and stocked food pantry shelves with locally grown goods and produce. **Thousands of pounds of food grown right here are feeding those in our community struggling during the pandemic.** Thanks to a recent contract extension with Second Harvest, we are track to put \$7 million into the food pantry network this year along with an additional \$360,000 to construct additional perishable (cold) food storage capacity at the Badger Prairie Needs Network in Verona. Our countywide Joining Forces for Families network paired with our Early Childhood Zones continues to meet families where they are at, critical safety nets even more relied on in times like this when needs are so great. The number of families seeking assistance from Dane County Joining Forces for Families tripled during the pandemic. **Thru September, JFF has helped 570 families with around 1200 children remain in housing.**



As the virus forced change in every area of our lives, altering every norm we had come to know, county government remained a constant this community could rely upon. We pressed forward with impactful, tangible work to address poverty, create opportunity, and enhance our ability to overcoming barriers. **Dane County's brand new Behavior Health Resource Center is on the verge of launching** – a communitywide connection point bridging people and families to critical mental and behavioral health services. This bold, nearly \$1 million per year support is a new county investment into the wellbeing of this community. It will serve as a model for areas like ours that seek to simplify the complicated health networks needed to access direct care. **This summer we awarded the first of \$250,000 in county grants to help five community centers start up mental and behavioral health services for the young people who frequent these centers.** Recently



we launched the Dane County Ending Deaths by Despair Coalition, a group of community leaders who have come together with a shared commitment of ending the needless loss of life

resulting from suicide or drug and alcohol overdoses. Coordinated by the Safe Communities Coalition – which has successfully integrated recovery coaches for real time help to those in crises – this new effort created in the 2020 budget brings together multi-sector expertise to confront a challenge that’s been exacerbated in the midst of Covid-19. The timing for this work is now. Year to date our county has seen an almost 20% increase in ambulance calls for individuals either attempting suicide or reporting feeling suicidal thoughts, according to new data from Dane County Emergency Management.

Dozens of young people took part in our driver’s education program this summer with the Madison School District and the local CESA office. Since starting just a few years ago **we have now helped over 500 kids afford the education needed to drive safely**, providing them better access to employment and education. Thanks to the Urban League and Latino Academy, our



latest commercial drivers’ license mentoring group started work with the Dane County Highway Department this summer. In just a few short years we have provided direct gateways to employment, diversified workforces and swung open wider the doors to opportunity that all in our community deserve. The same goes for our multi-year collaboration between Dane County Parks and Operation Fresh Start with Dane County’s Conservation Crews I first created in 2014. We doubled that effort in recent years and **we have created two separate Conservation Crews, providing pathways to employment and helping dozens of young people develop job and social skills**. Given the challenges of poverty we see so clearly in many of our neighborhoods – in both communities big and small – it’s clear we can do even more to help create opportunity and in turn reduce disparities.



With that in mind, my 2021 budget expands our successful conservation and job skills training work with Operation Fresh Start (OFS), infusing more direct investment into workforce development and job training. I’m putting \$50,000 in the budget, 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 the County, City of

Madison, Groundswell Conservancy, and Madison Audubon Society. The Conservation Graduate crew will include a professional supervisor and five individuals who successfully completed the Operation Fresh Start Conservation Crew program. 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. The program will include rigorous training, designed to replicate industry work place standards with a focus on advanced field instruction in the area of fire management, the proper use of power equipment, tree planting and pruning, and trail building techniques.



**This summer I announced a new partnership with the Urban League of Greater Madison to help bring the vision of a minority owned business incubator to reality.** A similar project in Milwaukee County, known as Sherman Phoenix Project, helped jumpstart economic opportunities for communities of color, providing a much needed sense of place and ownership for members of the Black community. We believe in doing what works and has proven effective. Teaming with the County Board, we amended our budget just a few months ago to re-purpose \$100,000 so the Urban League could hire a project manager to launch this similar effort here. In just a couple of months great momentum has built for this project. As County Executive, I believe it's critical we "go bold" and demonstrate decisive leadership when opportunities like this emerge to address disparities and improve

economic justice. In working with Dr. Ruben Anthony, I'm including \$2 million in my budget so when the Urban League finds the right location for this project, county government will provide the funds to acquire that property and get this business hub going on the South Side of Madison. Projects like this will not only directly address disproportionate unemployment and underemployment rates among African Americans in this community, it's also the ideal project for the new economy that will emerge after the Covid-19 pandemic. It's a direct investment in creating opportunity for minority entrepreneurs looking for a means to start their business dream.



Madison's Black Community needs more than economic opportunity. It also needs a central place to gather, network with fellow Black professionals, and celebrate culture. **My budget includes \$810,000 to help organizers pursue and acquire land on**

**the south side for the Center for Black Excellence and Culture.** Reverend Dr. Alex Gee and other community partners will celebrate the heritage and advance the future of Dane County's Black community. This development will foster a sense of community and family, celebrate and teach about impactful Black culture, help nurture and develop Black business and community leaders, connect employers with talented Black professionals, and most certainly become a new cultural landmark along the Beltline corridor. I'm grateful for the work of Reverend Gee and others in pursuing this vision, another progressive step forward in our community's conversation about improving diversity, equity, and opportunity.

### **Pandemic Response and Recovery**

At the outset of this pandemic we set forth with the resources at our disposal to try and mitigate the economic and human harm of Covid-19. We fed people and created markets for local growers. We prevented thousands of evictions, provided safe housing for the homeless, bolstered the bottom lines of child care providers and infused much-needed dollars to help keep our struggling small businesses afloat. These initiatives were timely, bold, and effective. **Our rates of eviction actually declined this year compared to 2019** and countless small business owners have recognized the effort led by Dane County and

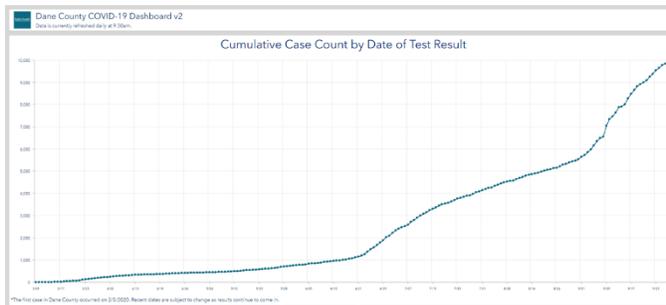


Dane Buy Local to mitigate the severe losses being felt across the country on "Main Street." We know when it comes to this pandemic we have much work yet in front of us. County government marshaled an unprecedented response when the chaos of Covid-19 hit our community. We

know eventually that our around the clock work will transition from response to recovery. While that juncture may be a ways off, it's important we prepare now for what we think the coming year might bring.

It's worth noting that to date we have yet to experience a major Covid outbreak in a homeless shelter setting; an incredible achievement given this higher risk population. We know 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. That's why my budget includes \$9 million to ensure those who face homelessness will continue to have hotel rooms for safe respite. These dollars should allow us to keep homeless individuals in a safe environment through June of 2021. As of late September, we have over 360 people housed in Dane County hotels. Agencies the county partners with to assist these families and individuals report the expanded hotel shelter operation has improved stability and connection to critical services. Since the pandemic response started over six months ago, 77 households have transitioned from hotels and shelter into permanent housing and they're now better connected to behavioral health supports, long term case management, health care and employment.

**Throughout this pandemic we have always prioritized the public health, safety, and wellness of our citizens – even when difficult.** Some of the steps we have taken to minimize

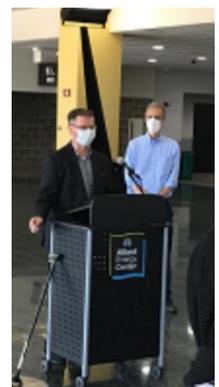


spread of illness offered unforeseen advantages that give us reason to explore continuing them even once the pandemic eases. This spring we moved quickly to adopt remote work policies and procedures so those in our workforce who could work outside the office had the ability to do so. While originally done to help promote social distancing, these strategies also help reduce greenhouse

gas emissions and potentially avoid recurring capital expenditures to expand county office buildings. I'm including \$150,000 in the budget to evaluate the feasibility and benefits of longer-term remote work assignments and in turn develop a comprehensive plan for that means for the county's space needs moving forward. Technology kept our people safe this year. In the future it may help keep our capital borrowing for building projects in check. I'm also including \$2.5 million in the Department of Administration budget so we can continue to meet time sensitive needs related to the pandemic. These dollars will allow us to acquire personal protective equipment and cover the ongoing expenses associated with contact tracing and testing.

One of the great attributes about our county is our vibrant and diverse local business community. These folks have endured a lot in this pandemic. Closures, restrictions on capacity and other steps to prevent illness took their toll. **Our Dane County Small Business Pandemic Assistance grant fund infused over \$10 million into hundreds of local small businesses.** I am hopeful that further stimulus assistance from the federal government in the coming weeks will enable us to provide more direct support to struggling small businesses. I could not be more grateful for Colin Murray and his team at Dane Buy Local with their work to review thousands of applications for this program and award dollars to businesses that represent the fabric of our many diverse communities.

**We were among the first places in the entire country to do this.** Despite our nationally leading efforts, these businesses face a long, challenging road back from this pandemic. To help support them, I'm including \$50,000 in the budget for the regional



economic development entity MadRep to assist with Covid 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. MadRep is uniquely positioned to help lead on this. 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 yet for our businesses and the economy they support.

This pandemic has been taxing on all of us. Those with mental and behavioral health challenges have disproportionately suffered and there's been a startling subsequent increase in the occurrences of overdoses and other unhealthy behaviors of last resort. Year to date, ambulance agencies in our county have seen a 33% increase in the number of 911 emergencies involving substance abuse. From January 1st until this week, there have been 61 days this year in which there were 10 or more ambulance responses for an overdose or severe intoxication. In the same time frame a year ago, that happened 18 times in those nearly 9 months. There's no doubt there's a direct correlation between this data and emotional turmoil brought on by this pandemic.

We also know the long-term mental health and addiction recovery needs in this community will long outlast the Covid-19 pandemic. Recognizing this, **I'm including \$500,000 in the 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.** The fight against this scourge doesn't fall into prescribed 30 or 90 day



windows but instead success happens with sustained, time intensive work from advocates and those with lived experiences walking side by side those who struggle. 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. I'm hopeful the county's contribution to jumpstart this collaboration spurs others to join in and bring this estimated 50-unit recovery house project to completion.

In this budget I'm also recognizing that our work to protect vulnerable populations from this pandemic is far from over. I'm including \$1 million so our Badger Prairie Health Care Center can complete construction of 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 care area. That space has the infrastructure needed to serve as an isolated specialty care area for residents and – should the need arise - help keep employees separated from the rest of the nursing home staff and residents, consistent with CDC guidelines. Science continues to suggest Covid will be around for quite some time yet and this project meets the imperative of having a designated, separate area to care for our most vulnerable residents.

Covid has also reminded us the value of a cohesive, well coordinated emergency response system. Before this pandemic even fully arrived, **Dane County Emergency Management convened an expanded emergency operations center (EOC), bringing together schools, social services, health care, and other critical sectors to the same table to plan and prepare.**



We approached this public health emergency as one community, addressing challenges and sharing ideas with the broadest cross section of EOC participants ever assembled. We met an unprecedented crisis with an unprecedented response. 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 us all capably and professionally. Prior to the pandemic, the county acquired a former Fitchburg Fire Station to be the new home of our Emergency Management offices. County staff worked with a design firm this year to determine what modifications are



needed for that building to allow our Emergency Management team a state-of- the-art Emergency Operations Center. I'm including \$4.4 million in this budget for the needed upgrades to the new home of Dane County Emergency Management– a substantial upfront investment for a county agency that yet again more than demonstrated its capabilities this year under the direction of Chief Charles Tubbs.

## Human Services

Our community is not immune from the challenges posed by poverty, addiction, and mental illness. That's why every one of my budgets to date has bolstered efforts to address these areas. One year ago we set out on our 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.



My 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. The Center was designed over the past year through a partnership with mental health providers and hospitals. It will be located at 818 West Badger Road, sharing a building with Dane County's Restorative Court, Joining Forces for Families and Immigration Affairs.

Staff at the BHRC will be responsible for directing people to the right level of care at the right time and for assuring so-called “warm handoffs” across behavioral health care systems. Essentially, they will facilitate seamless transfers of care between two entities where the referring service provider assures a person is engaged with the provider being referred to. Staff will identify and mitigate barriers for those accessing care through a person-centered approach. Peers will walk alongside people to provide a more supportive experience.



This project came about thanks to input and work from behavioral health care providers, insurers, and other stakeholders. Access Community Health, Chrysalis, Group Health Cooperative, Journey Mental Health Center, NAMI Dane County, Quartz, SSM Health, Tellurian, UnityPoint Health, UW Health, the UW Medical Foundation, Veterans Administration, and the Wisconsin Department of Corrections all participated in Dane County's

Behavioral Health Resource Center Workgroup, led by Human Services Director Shawn Tessmann. This unprecedented partnership across the private and public sectors will improve access to behavioral health services and most importantly, patient outcomes.

Before our one-of-a-kind facility is even fully online, this budget takes the next step at even further bolstering our service commitment to those who struggle with mental illness. In conjunction with the County Board of Supervisors, **I'm 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 our community but also offers our next innovative effort to continue reforming the criminal justice system, reducing recidivism, and in turn the jail population.** A triage and restoration center would provide services to address mental health challenges both inside and outside the criminal justice system. 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. Prior to such a facility coming together, it's important the county identify how such a center could work and the types of partnerships needed to make it feasible. This type of bold next step in the community's mental and behavioral health care will take partners to become reality; the City of Madison, hospitals, and health care systems will all need to actively participate. Such a facility would ease challenges for local law enforcement and also hospital emergency rooms, making it critical they're included in the collaborative dialogue necessary but also share in the financial commitment to ensure a successful operation.

Our community continues to see increasing challenges with access to affordable housing. Since starting the Dane County Affordable Housing Fund in 2015, we have allocated over \$18.7 million to projects across our county that have supported almost 1,500 affordable housing units and 1,669 housing units overall. This year's fund distributed almost \$4.5 million, supporting the proposed creation of over 323 units of new, more affordable housing. As we saw this summer with how quickly our Pandemic Rent Assistance Fund – which awarded over \$10 million to help tenants teetering on the brink of eviction - the need for housing stability in this community is only increasing. 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. I'm including \$6 million in this budget for our 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 I started and increased in past budgets. Additionally, we will continue to aggressively pursue every avenue possible to secure additional federal dollars to bolster the expanded eviction prevention efforts we launched

this summer. A change in vision, leadership and coordination from our nation's Capitol is long overdue as all communities struggle to meet the economic needs arising from this pandemic.

This budget continues county government's commitment to protecting those who struggle with homelessness. Our Day Resource Center provided much needed respite in the midst of the pandemic. The Warner Park Community Center was opened as extra shelter space. When the pandemic wanes, this community will face a renewed conversation about how to best provide night shelter for our homeless population. 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. The Day Resource Center is a model of the good that's possible when public, private, and non-profit entities work together. We can do it again to meet the needs of those who struggle having a place to sleep at night. As we have seen in the past, big projects like this only work when trusted, effective partners come together.

My 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 us well this year and remains an area of pride and strength as we head into the continued unknowns of the months ahead.

### **Climate, Renewable Energy**

In any given year, running out of names for hurricanes and apocalyptic images of western wildfires would have more than enough to compel a genuine national conversation about the rapidly advancing impacts of climate change. Similar to Covid-19 however, **willful denial of climate change does nothing to correct course on a deteriorating reality.** The continued lack of leadership on this issue from our nation's capitol has left states and local units of government like us here in Dane County with the imperative to act. **This year, we issued the Dane County Climate Action Plan, a comprehensive report detailing the work we as a community can focus on to make a difference.** This is a blueprint to reducing carbon emissions and renewing focus on energy efficiency and conservation that will serve the public, private, and non-profit sectors to contribute to this shared priority. **Dane County government continues to be a national leader on combatting climate change.** From our renewable natural gas (RNG) plant at the Dane County landfill that turns waste into clean burning vehicle fuel, to our community farm dairy digesters – one of which is now generating renewable fuels manure and bringing it to our county RNG plant – **our record to stem the effects of climate change is among the most progressive in the country.** The budget converts more of our highway department fleet of diesel burning trucks into those that run on compressed natural gas. In just a few years we have 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.



As this budget is introduced, Dane County's path to being 100% renewable is coming into clearer focus. We are now only months away from accomplishing this feat; one that others have charted courses to completing in the coming decades. **Our 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.

Consistent with how we lead, as one major project is coming to completion, another is just beginning. As this budget is **introduced the 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 our 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 we consume. This is our boldest step in our aggressive pursuit to offset what we use. Yet again, we are leading by example. Each unit of government could make publicly owned lands available for large-scale renewable energy projects to help contribute our piece toward improving the challenges facing the Earth’s climate. It’s the same reason why even residential conversions to prairie grasses and flowers are helpful. If we all do a little, the result can be a lot. This is why this summer’s first blooms of a new prairie the county seeded atop now capped sections of our landfill was so impactful. Those flowers brought more than joy through their natural beauty. They also marked the dawn of a new era for what was once a waste disposal site but one day soon will have walking trails for the public. This initial landfill prairie restoration covered 40 acres, the first step in a symbolic but important transition of these lands.

### **Conservation, Water Quality**

This year, perhaps more than any other, we saw firsthand the direct benefit of conserving lands and creating outdoor spaces for families to recreate. Since the very early days of this pandemic Dane County parks and trails have been some of busiest places to be. Our dog parks have never been more popular. The Lower Yahara River trail and its scenic overlook bridge was a destination for moms, dads, and kids both on foot and bike. Our natural resource areas were everything from launching points for canoes to just a place to safely catch some fresh air. The return on our investment into these lands and the water that flows thru it couldn't be clearer.

**Because of what we have accomplished, thousands of acres will be protected for generations to come, offering close to home escapes for all ages looking to get out and re-connect with the world around them.** This continued focus on land preservation has the added benefit of further reducing our carbon footprint.

To that end, my budget expands on a couple of our successes. Two years ago I started the Dane County Continuous Cover program in the budget. Its goals were simple - improve water quality, preserve lands from the ongoing pressures of development, reduce run-off, and help mitigate the effects of climate change. To date, we have protected close to 700 acres in 22 townships in



short order. Converting to grasses and pollinator habitat has reduced phosphorus run-off into our waters by over 1,700 pounds a year. A pound of phosphorus grows 500 pounds of algae so this innovative effort isn't just a win for land conservation. Interest in this program by farmers and rural property owners continues to outpace available funding. Therefore, I am increasing

funding for the Dane County Continuous Cover program next year (\$1.75 million) to help willing property owners preserve our landscape and better protect our valuable waters.

Our shared conservation values make our network of trails and parks such an integral component of our quality of life. In a year full of strife, our community needs an exciting project that helps us all better immerse ourselves out in the world around us. That's why I believe the time has come to build the second phase of the incredibly popular Lower Yahara River Trail. The bridge and boardwalk that connect Lake Farm County Park with the Village of McFarland have become a family destination for the entire region. **This budget includes \$6.5 million for construction of the second phase of the Lower Yahara Trail from Fish Camp County Park to Lake Kegonsa State Park.** Plans and permits for this project are on track to be done by spring with construction bids slated for release later next year. The day is nearing when you will be able to hop on a bike in downtown Madison and pedal straight to Stoughton along a route of unrivaled scenic beauty.



Another trail project the county continues to make steady 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. Constructed in 2019, this segment includes over 1600 feet of elevated boardwalk and a 100 foot clear span bridge over Six Mile Creek. The new section of trail provides an off-road option in an area that frustrated many cyclists and families for years due to a lack of safe riding alternatives. The 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.

I am funding several other important trail and outdoor projects in this budget:

**\$150,000 for the Walking Iron Trail.** Dane County is pleased to continue partnering with Sauk County on the feasibility, planning and design of a multi-use trail bridge across the Wisconsin River. The counties worked together in 2019 and 2020 on a study to determine the feasibility of constructing the bridge. 2021 funding will be used for further analysis of the Wisconsin River channel and existing railroad bridge crossings. The bridge, when constructed, will link the Village of Mazomanie to Sauk City. In addition to the two counties, the WI DNR, WI DOT, the Wisconsin River Rail Transit Commission and the Wisconsin and Southern Railroad Company are involved with the project.



**\$100,000 for the Ice Age National Scenic Trail at the Ice Age Junction Natural Resource Area.** Dane County, City of Verona, Ice Age Trail Alliance and the Southern Chapter of WI Trout Unlimited worked together 2019 to start restoring a segment of Badger Mill Creek and adjoining wetlands. The project includes realigning of a segment of the Ice Age National Scenic Trail, which has suffered from wet and muddy conditions.

**\$500,000 for the PARC & Ride Grant Program.** PARC & Ride grants support development of regional bicycle trails that are identified in the [Dane County Parks & Open Space Plan](#). Funds are awarded to local units of government and nonprofit organizations. Eligible projects now include bicycle playgrounds – an outdoor space designed to offer a variety of features and fun obstacles that safely build cycling confidence.

Additionally, we will continue our multi-year restoration of the 20-mile-long Cap City Bike Trail next year with engineering work to identify long term solutions to preventing flood damage the trail experiences near the Badger State Trail overpass. 3,500' of pavement was restored in 2020, from Seminole Highway west toward the bicycle roundabout. The restoration of this segment includes raising portions of trail that have had chronic flooding and ice build-up. All told, Dane County refinished over 8.5 miles of the Cap City Trail in 2018 and 2019, improving safety for all users.



**We continue to make important progress with our multi-million-dollar effort to reduce flood risk along the Yahara Chain of Lakes.** Sediment removal that started in the river channel this summer is designed to improve flow, moving rainwater that currently sits in our lakes for weeks thru at a steadier clip. This year's work is focusing on the area between Lakes Monona and Waubesa and is

expected to be complete this fall. When this phase of work is done, the river will be 2-4 feet deeper and 40,000 cubic yards of sediment will be removed. While we have been fortunate this year to avoid sustained high water events on our lakes, we are moving forward expeditiously to keep this project going given the unpredictability of climate change rains. Dane County purchased its own dredging barge and equipment this year, which is due to arrive this month (October). It will be deployed next summer as part of the second phase of our flood risk reduction work and focus on areas downstream of Lakes Waubesa and Kegonsa. There is over \$6 million in the budget for this work to stay on track next year.

We learned of the virtues of hydraulic dredging for flood mitigation because of our experience with Dane County's "Suck the Muck," which continues to remove phosphorus from river and stream beds that otherwise finds its way into our lakes. Sediment removal was completed this summer on 8/10s of a mile of section of Token Creek. **20,000 tons of phosphorus laden sediment was removed!** Additional restoration work was done to reduce erosion along the creek, slowing the return of new sediment into the water. Our next stop with this multi-year project is Six Mile Creek in the Town of Westport in an area known as Mary Lake upstream of Woodland Drive. Samples taken from sediment there have shown high levels of algae growing phosphorus so it's on track to be removed next summer. Bids on this next phase of "Suck the Muck" will be released this fall. At that point, we will move to the next phosphorus "hot spot," incrementally chipping away at one of the primary contributors to algae growth in our lakes. I'm including over \$9.1 million in this budget to keep this pioneering work going in 2021.



Our Urban Water Quality Grant program continues to be an effective tool at tackling phosphorus and other runoff from more urban sources. **We awarded almost \$1.1 million in county funds this year to Middleton, Fitchburg, Monona, and Verona for projects that will remove over 85,000 pounds of sediment and 173 pounds of phosphorus annually from runoff before it enters local rivers and lakes.** Each year - even ones as chaotic as this - our Department of Land and Water Resources makes important progress in our quest to clean our local waterways. The work we are doing is making a difference. The budget includes \$2.7 million for us to continue improving storm water runoff with communities in 2021.

Let me take a moment to recognize the work of our parks' staff and all they do – often without much fanfare – that contributes to the quality of life we so deeply appreciate. The Dane County "Get Outside" program I launched a year ago helped kids ages 5-14 learn how to fish this summer at the Jenni and Kyle Preserve. The program took kids out on bikes on the Lower Yahara River Trail and even helped learn a little disc golf. Staff teamed with the Boys and Girls Club for a five-week virtual environmental leadership series that encouraged two hours of outdoor time a week for young people. Dane County Parks staff managed 54 habitat restoration projects covering 530 acres this year. 150 acres were planted to restored prairie. Seed from our parks prairies was donated to partners this year - enough to cover 20 acres. Staff distributed 4,900 free native plants to 32 school and community groups. Since starting in 2016, this program has provided more than 15,000 plants to 86 different groups across the county.



We have a thriving community, with a high quality of life in large part because of the continued priority we place on having a first rate system of parks and natural resource areas. **Park permit sales were up considerably in this year of Covid. We saw enormous growth in the number of daily permits for lake access, mountain biking, and disc golf. Our community found refuge from this pandemic in our parks in record numbers.** Construction started this summer on our newest dog park at Anderson Farm County Park. We acquired 160 acres in the Town of Verona where Badger Mill Creek and the Sugar River intersect for important stream restoration work and new public access for fishing and canoeing. Comparable to the opportunities presented when we acquired a farm last summer to expand the Pheasant Branch Conservancy, **our investments in conservation right now have the dual benefit of preserving the finite resource of land but also the opportunity to improve water quality and recreational access.** Restoration work is already underway on the land we acquired adjacent to Pheasant Branch last year with a new basin to trap sediment and runoff now being constructed. **All told, we permanently protected over 600 more acres of land in 2020.** My budget for 2021 includes \$4 million for the Dane County Conservation Fund and an additional \$1 million for the Flood Risk Reduction Fund which is used to acquire properties that can help mitigate flooding.

### How it All Came Together

The events of this year show the importance of budgeting diligently. All of our efforts in recent years to right-size expenditures and revenues with projections based on actual experience allowed our county reserve - or "rainy day fund" - to grow to its highest level ever. That put us in a better position for even the extremities of this year. That said, the revenue we have set aside over the years is finite and overdrawing on it today could well lead to more challenging budgets ahead, especially since this pandemic is running on its own timeline. Continued prudence and balance are our best approach. These budget fundamentals prevented us from having to make the deep service cuts that so many other units of government are now facing. Even 5% reductions to our human services or other vital programs would have had devastating impacts in the lives of real people, at a time when those services are needed most. This is not something I can support. While my budget is uncharacteristically light on new policy initiatives compared to previous spending plans that I've introduced, my focus is placed squarely where it needs to be:

protecting what we've worked so hard to establish. Deep reductions to critically needed services that comprise our safety net would be counterintuitive to what our community needs right now.



There's little doubt when it comes to revenues counties depend upon, when it rained in 2020, it poured. 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. My budget offsets these short term losses through use of our rainy day fund. These reserve fund dollars will sustain county government services largely as we know them for 2021, continuing our robust commitment to our community. Dollars from our human services reserves will go to sustain our hotel housing for hundreds of homeless individuals deep in 2021. Transitioning this population back into the shelter setting in the middle of winter and a global pandemic would undermine the great progress made to this point at keeping those who struggle with homelessness safe.

This budget buffers both the services we provide and the people (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.

County staff and the agencies we partner with have been part of this community's front-line response and will continue to be relied upon as this pandemic continues. Now is not the time to reduce their economic stability. This is why our recent extension of the county's health insurance agreement is so critical – it provides the county cost certainty and our employees and families continuation of relationships they have established with their current doctors. Upending the doctor/patient relationship for thousands of county workers and their families in the midst of the pandemic was untenable. I'm grateful for the work of my administration and Dean Health Plan to reach agreement on an extension. Steps such as furlough days or even rolling back a year's worth of wage reductions could have saved this budget upward of \$5 million and reduced the extent to which we dip into our reserves. To me the prospect of those savings, while significant at a timely juncture, would have been entirely inconsiderate of the difficult work our staff faced this year. Again, our budgets put people first.



Any changes I made to the 2021 operating budget are funded through existing revenues. Reserve fund dollars were not used for my budget initiatives. I chose to re-allocate existing dollars already in our budget over spending down the reserve fund even further given we don't yet know the full impact of this pandemic. Should the prognosis of a deeply challenging fall and winter emerge as forecasted, our economy could experience another deep lull, re-creating the need to have a healthy reserve fund when we sit down to do the 2022 budget a year from now. I would encourage the County Board to also consider this template for any amendments. Increases in spending without a way to pay for them will deplete our reserve at an inopportune time, potentially jeopardizing our bond rating and ability to manage future deficits we should anticipate as a result of Covid.

My 2021 operating budget totals \$615,541,049. The capital budget is \$71,649,300. The budget includes a 3.4% levy increase on the average home which amounts to an increase of \$30.18.



This budget was deeply challenging, in the midst of what has been an incredibly difficult year for all of us, at every level. I am grateful for what everyone has done - regardless of scale - to help neighbors and friends through this period. As we have done through floods, storms, fires and more, as a community we come together and rally. We still have a lot of work in front of us with this pandemic. For all the unknowns, there are also things we do know. We know we will push thru the struggles ahead and emerge stronger. This is something I've referred to in the past as "The Dane County Way."

This sense of who we are as a community has been so visible this year. We see it in the acts of self-sacrifice, the gift of time, and even just an ear to listen. It's evident in every meal delivered, medicine or groceries picked up for a neighbor, the kindness of strangers, and unseen smile on the other side of a facemask as we pass on the sidewalk. We have done a lot of difficult things, but we have done them as one. Our hope, compassion, and thoughtfulness will light whatever darkness lies in the road ahead. We know there will be detours and even some ravines. 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.