

2006 KENT COUNTY UPDATE

ROGER MORGAN

Good evening. This year, we're going to be trying something a little different than what you've seen in the past as far as a "State of the County," address. I've asked Vice-Chair and Finance Committee Chair Dan Koorndyk and Legislative Committee Chair Dean Agee to join me as we present a collective Update about where the County has been and where we are going.

I would like to state that I am both honored and humbled by the responsibility you have placed in me by selecting me as the Chair of the Kent County Board of Commissioners. I believe that we have a high quality organization, and it starts with the high quality of individuals that our citizens have elected to this Board. During the five years that I've been on the Board, I have found my colleagues to be dedicated individuals who are sincerely interested in serving our community. And this dedication and genuine interest in public service is reflected in our collective accomplishments. I would like to highlight some of those, and then ask Dan and Dean to provide a brief "report card" and agenda for the upcoming year from their perspectives. I will then make some closing remarks about my views for our future.

Under the leadership of immediate past Chair Dave Morren we have accomplished many things during the past several years. I would like to just mention a couple of those from the past 12 months. From my perspective, six activities stand out:

First, the Interim Dispatch Authority: With the cities of Wyoming, Grandville, and Walker, the County created an Interim Central Dispatch Authority to further study the possibilities of consolidating emergency 911 communications. The Authority, which has been meeting on an almost bi-weekly basis to study this important matter, to refine the recommendations from the Central Dispatch Implementation Planning Report that was presented

in July 2004 by Plante & Moran, and the Authority will be making its recommendations to the Board within the next 60 days. Commissioner Art Tanis and Sheriff Larry Stelma are two members of the 5-member Authority that represent the County. They are joined by Wyoming City Manager, Curtis Holt, who chairs the Authority, City Commissioner Chuck Deschaine from Walker, and City Council member Joe Sierawski (SeeRawSki) from Grandville. I would personally like to thank all five members for their service. This intergovernmental cooperation is not unique, and this leads to the second activity that I would like to highlight.

The County has been an active member of the Grand Valley Metro Council since its inception in 1990. During the past year, however, past-Chair Dave Morren rightfully thought it would be beneficial to meet on a regular basis with the six core cities of Grand Rapids, Wyoming, Kentwood, Walker, Grandville, and East Grand Rapids to discuss areas of collaboration and cooperation. To this end, representatives from the County and the six cities meet monthly in an effort to improve communications and investigate ways to improve efficiency and services to our citizens.

The third area I would like to mention is the Building Task Force, led by Commissioner Wahlfield, which now includes Commissioners VanderMolen, Koorndyk, and Vonk. During the past year the Task Force recommended, and the Board of Commissioners approved, two properties for acquisition: one on the East Beltline just north of 4 Mile in Plainfield Township, which will house a consolidated 63rd District Court facility, and a parcel on 17 Mile Road just east of US 131 to house a “North Kent County Complex” which will include a health clinic, 63rd District Court annex, Department of Human Services annex, and potentially the north Sheriff Substation. The County has had a long history of looking ahead, and these are two examples of continuing that practice. I would like to thank Fritz and Dick for their work on this Task Force

since its inception, and to welcome Dan and Ted as they continue to look at the long-term facility needs of the County.

The fourth area is the continued success of Millennium Park. The Park welcomed more than 500,000 visitors in 2005, many of them enjoying the Spray Park, which completed its first full season. An additional 250 parking spaces were added, as well as a trail connector from Veterans Memorial Drive to the Recreation area, providing safer pedestrian access from the Kent Trail System. With the opening of the recreation core and the completion of Phase I construction, the County has shifted its focus to address some of the environmental issues associated with reclaiming former industrial lands for public greenspace. Approximately \$1.6 million in grant funding has been allocated for environmental issues in the Park, including \$800,000 in EPA Brownfield funds, and \$800,000 in State funding for oil well work. Accessing some of the State funds, the MDEQ has already completed re-plugging four leaking oil wells located in Millennium Park's Lake Leota and readied this area for future development. Other notable activities in 2005 included:

- Completion of a Strategic Business Plan to help guide decision-making as we continue to fulfill the vision for the Park.
- Acquisition of 126 acres, using a combination of State grant and County funds,
- Design of a trail network with a phased construction plan allowing it to begin to be built on land we own now and expand onto that which we hope to own in the future
- Increased park police unit presence and security measures to ensure that the children at the park are properly supervised and that park rules are followed

The fifth accomplishment is the exciting Vision and General Development Plan of the John Ball Zoo that was rolled out in August. This vision takes into consideration the current and

future needs of the Zoo and Park, the natural topography of the property, and includes stirring new features and exhibits! The Zoo Society and Zoo staff, especially Society Executive Director Brenda Stringer and Zoo Director Bert Vescolani, are to be congratulated for shepherding this process, which was done in a manner that received positive comments and support from the neighbors, the City of Grand Rapids, and many others. Quite a change from five years ago!

Finally, the Board and staff embarked on a strategic planning process that resulted in the formal adoption of the County's 2006 Strategic Plan by the Board of Commissioners this past January. This plan provides a series of Board-generated priorities and will serve as the framework for future action.

The accomplishments noted above represent the opportunities and challenges we face, not only in 2006, but in future years. Before I talk about those, I would like Dan and Dean to make their comments.

DAN KOORNDYK

Thanks Roger. I, too, would like to express my thanks to the Board for placing your trust in me by electing me as Vice Chair. It is a responsibility that I do not take lightly and I look forward to working with you during 2006.

From a financial perspective, the County continues its long tradition of being a solid and stable organization. Maintaining the long-term financial health of the County was reaffirmed during the strategic planning process as one of our over-arching goals. While we face our share of challenges, we also have been able—through sound policy-making and strong fiscal management—to preserve a triple-A rating from the two major rating agencies. The Government Finance Officers Association has recognized both the County’s budget and audit with its prestigious designations.

During the coming year, we will continue to balance the needs of the citizens and our financial ability to carry out our mandated services. We will closely monitor the state’s finances to determine what impact it may have on our finances. We will continue to make five-year projections so that we can be prepared to address any potential shortfalls in revenues. We will strive to present an operating budget that uses less of the general fund reserves. As has been done in the past, the Finance Committee will have budget discussion meetings to review the 2007 budget. This has proven to be an effective way for staff to communicate the progress in developing our annual budgets, and for the Board to provide direction to staff throughout the process.

This year, the Finance Committee will also face a number of crucial decisions. In the near future, we will receive a recommendation from the inter-departmental staff committee on Corrections and Detention. The current millage expires in December 2009 and for the past 18 months the staff committee has been looking at the future needs of the Correctional facility, in

terms of capacity, staffing, and financing. When you think about it, December 2009 is not really all that far away.

Later this year, the Finance Committee will also be presented with a formal Master Plan for Millennium Park. This Plan is necessary to provide parameters on the future general development of this great park. The Plan will not be developed in a vacuum; it will be prepared with a lot of input from the community, and will be brought to the Board of Commissioners for approval.

It is also important for the County to continue to improve the County's facilities. Roger mentioned the great work of the Building Task Force. This Task Force will continue to meet regularly to determine how to best address the long-term facility needs of the County. It is anticipated that recommendations will be coming from the staff related to improvements to facilities located at the Fuller Campus, including the Boiler Plant, Animal Shelter, Fleet Services, and a major roadway through the Fuller Campus.

A couple of years ago then-Chair Dave Morren made it a mission to address the needs of the Department of Human Services building at 415 Franklin—back then known as the FIA. With considerable support and commitment from State Representative Jerry Kooiman, the County has been working with two different agencies of the State—the DHS and the Department of Management and Budget—along with other stakeholders to address this facility. We continue to work with all stakeholders and hope to have a plan in place soon which will result in a facility that will better serve and respect the residents of the County.

The Finance Committee will also have the opportunity to review the activities and recommendations of the interdepartmental staff Budget and Finance Action Team, which was created in 2005 to look at the short- and long-term financial needs of the County, what cyclical

issues have to be addressed, and what systemic issues need attention. We will also examine fee structures throughout the County, for both our mandated and discretionary services.

This seems like a long list, for even though I have only outlined a few of the issues we face. As you can see, we have a very busy year ahead of us, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank my fellow commissioners for your support and for your effort and commitment to these projects. And now I would like to turn the next portion of the presentation over to Legislative & Human Resources Committee Chair Dean Agee.

DEAN AGEE

Thank you, Dan. Our goal, and one that is reflected in our newly-adopted Strategic Plan, is to diligently work with our state legislators to “pursue legislative changes needed to support the Board’s decisions.” To this end, the Legislative & Human Resources Committee recently voted to proceed with the following Legislative issues:

1. Inmate Medical Expenses: Kent County favors any attempt to limit liability of counties for inmate medical expenditures, and is seeking support in three specific areas:
 - extending to counties the same care exclusions placed on Medicaid recipients and participants in county Indigent Care Plans;
 - Eliminating the exclusion of Medicaid coverage while incarcerated; and
 - Allowing counties to benefit from rates and discounts negotiated through the State Medicaid program.
2. Local Unit Jail Per Diem Fees: A bill was passed by the State Senate in December 2005 and referred to the House Committee on the Judiciary. If passed, this legislation will provide municipalities with populations greater than 1,000,000 the ability to seek reimbursement for charges the municipality incurs for incarceration of local ordinance violators in the county jail. This legislation is targeted only to Wayne and Oakland counties and should be broadened to all include all municipalities.
3. Hotel/Motel Tax: In 2004 the County was successful in having legislation passed to preserve our ability to continue to levy the current Hotel/Motel Tax levy. It is now necessary to amend another section of state law so that when Kent County’s population surpasses 600,000, hotels and motels in Kent County are not taxed twice.

Both Senator Hardiman and Representative Hildenbrand have introduced legislation to address this issue.

4. Consolidation of government services: Given the fiscal constraints facing all local units, and given the increased emphasis on intergovernmental cooperation, the County should favor any legislation that encourages consolidation of governmental services.
5. DHS facility: The County, as it works to address the DHS facility issue mentioned by Dan, should encourage State to follow through on the relocation of the Kent DHS Facility.
6. State Convention Facility Development Act: Kent County is strongly opposed to a “freeze” of distributions at the 1999 level so that funds in excess of the “frozen” can be distributed to Wayne, Oakland, and Macomb counties.
7. Telecommunications: Later this spring, the Board will be receiving a report and recommendations from the Central Dispatch Interim Authority. While we don’t know yet what those recommendations will be, we know that counties are enabled to surcharge for landlines, but not for cellular phones. We will be monitoring legislation to allow surcharge for cellular phones for 911 calls.
8. TIFAs, Smartzones, Brownfields: The County should endorse and support any legislative efforts to provide for “opt out” provisions for taxing jurisdictions similar to DDA statute. The County has been working with Representative Kooiman regarding potential legislation, including limitations on captures. MAC is aware of this; Bob White spoke to the MAC Legislative Committee on 1/20/06.

9. DHS/Road Commission Boards: Endorse any legislative efforts to increase the size of Department of Human Services and Road Commission boards. Legislation on Road Commission size was introduced in 2005 and has gone through a couple of iterations.
10. Appointed Drain Commissioner: SB945 was introduced on 1/11/06 by Senators Toy, Hardiman, Gilbert, Sanborn and McManus to provide enabling legislation for counties with more than 500,000 population, when the position of drain commissioner becomes vacant, may opt to have an appointed—rather than elected—drain commissioner. Referred to the Committee on Local, Urban, and State Affairs.

We have found success in working with the state to address issues that affect Kent County, and we will continue to do so as issues arise.

In addition to the legislative issues, the Legislative & Human Resources Committee will be reviewing the performance measures of selected departments to ensure that we continue to move toward outcome-based measures. We want to continue to hold our departments accountable to provide services, both those we are mandated to provide as well as discretionary activities, in an efficient and cost-effective manner.

As you can see, the plate of the committee is as full as that of our colleagues on the Finance Committee.

Now I would like to turn back the microphone to Chair Morgan.

ROGER MORGAN

Thank you Dan and Dean, for your comments. As I mentioned in January when the Board of Commissioners adopted the Strategic Plan, I believe this document will be an invaluable tool as we head into the future, especially given the opportunities and challenges we face. I mentioned in my opening comments that some of our biggest accomplishments also represent some of our most significant challenges. Key among the decision points for 2006 will be based upon recommendations coming from the Judgeship Committee, the Corrections and Detention Report, the Central Dispatch Report, and the Millennium Park Master Plan. There will be many more decisions we have to make, some of which may not yet have even materialized, but I am confident that with your talent and genuine desire to serve, this Board will be up to the task.

I appreciate you extending me the privilege of being Chair. We have an outstanding County—one of the premier counties in the country. I look forward to working with you, my colleagues on the Board, as well as our dedicated staff, as we collectively discuss and debate the issues that we will face this year.