

Kent County State of the County

Transformational Change for a Better Future

Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park

Wednesday, April 27, 2022



Stan Stek, Chair, Kent County Board of Commissioners



Welcome

Thank you, Sara. It is certainly great to have you join us as our MC tonight. I can't imagine anyone I'd rather have warm up a crowd. On the other hand, most of our guests will likely say tomorrow morning, "I am not sure about those other guys, but that judge was pretty good!"

We also appreciate all you do in service to our courts and our county on a daily basis. You, and the rest of our judiciary in Kent County, are some of the best in the state. Thank you.

And thank YOU all for being here.

A very special welcome to the elected and appointed government officials who have joined us tonight:

County Commissioners

First, my fellow members of the Kent County Board of Commissioners. Could you please stand?

While we are elected from different places on the political spectrum, this Board has worked collaboratively, committed to one shared vision for Kent County.

County-Wide Elected Officials

Our countywide elected officials who are here tonight – please stand when I say your names:

- Kent County Sheriff Michelle LaJoye Young
- Kent County Prosecutor Chris Becker
- Kent County Treasurer Peter MacGregor, and
- Kent County Drain Commission Ken Yonker

Thank you.

Judges

Many of our judges and court administrators from throughout Kent County are here. Their names are listed on the screen.

Judges and administrators... All rise.

Thank you for joining us.

City, Village and Township Leaders

Will our leaders from our local cities, villages and townships please stand and be recognized.

The list is long, but their names are on the screen. Thank you all for coming.

State Representatives and Senators

Senator Mark Huizenga

Senator Winnie Brinks

Rep. Bryan Posthumus

Rep. Rachel Hood

Rep. Tommy Brann

U.S. Reps and Senators

Mary Judnich

Office of U.S. Senator Debbie Stabenow

Peter Dickow

Office of U.S. Senator Gary Peters

JJ McGrath and Rick Treur

Office of U.S. Rep. Peter Meijer

And finally, a very heartfelt *welcome aboard* to our “new” Kent County Administrator, Al Vanderberg, who we’ll hear from in a few minutes.

Al, on behalf of the Board of Commissioners, I'd like to take this opportunity to say how grateful we are for your tremendous leadership since returning to Kent County.

You are a results-focused, strategic, and data-driven leader, and your experience is exactly what Kent County needs as we move forward. You've already led us through some tough issues, and you've done so with insight and grace.

When the search team interviewed Al, we told him that our vision was to be the best run County in the state. And when he accepted our offer to become our County Administrator, he in turn stated he would not come to Kent County for anything less than being the best.

Reflections on the Pandemic

But life has not afforded us the luxury of pursuing our vision in a static predictable world. We are constantly confronted with challenges and what seems like tougher and tougher issues.

Indeed, you hardly need me to tell you that these past few years have been difficult, and these past few weeks have been agonizing.

We have struggled for two years with the COVID-19 pandemic that brought illness, hospitalizations, and deaths. This includes the loss of one of our own - Kent County Sheriff Deputy David Cook - who died of COVID on November 1.

We have strained under the burdens caused by the COVID mitigation directives limiting our lives and our liberties in many ways. We have had to deal with the corrosive effects of increased political polarization. Our employers have struggled with an extraordinarily tight labor market. We have found our spendable income eroded by inflation and a severe lack of affordable housing continues to oppress us. And, we have seen increasing negative impacts from environmental contaminations.

Acknowledge the Moment

Even as we gather here tonight, we are in the throes of perhaps our greatest challenge as a value-driven community with the tragic death of Patrick Lyoya.

Three weeks ago, we asked ourselves if we should cancel this event. We wondered if we could stand in front of you and talk about our community's accomplishments, promises and priorities at a time when these circumstances have forced us to reassess who we are and what kind of community we want to be. Few events have challenged our core values or compelled more soul searching than this one.

When a community and its people are wounded and fractured, it can be difficult to be clear eyed. But we must ask what we can learn from this and how we can help heal what is broken.

The answers will not come easily. It may be even more difficult to make changes.

But we recognize that these are steps we must take *together*. So, we gather together this evening with renewed hope and determination to build a community that is both equitable and welcoming, and is safe and secure for all.

Kent County Law Enforcement

As we take these steps together, the first is to acknowledge that this event was a tragedy for those involved and for the entire community.

The second is to acknowledge that, while police work and the expectations of the community are changing dramatically, one of our highest priorities is maintaining a secure environment in which every person - regardless of their race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, political belief or economic status - can feel safe to live their lives as they choose.

When you pair these two priorities, it's clear that, to meet our law enforcement obligations to this community, we must focus on:

- Attracting and retaining those individuals most suitable for law enforcement;
- Broadening the competencies of law enforcement;
- Providing them the best available technologies and systems;
- Maximizing training the entire workforce; and
- Assuring that our law enforcement policies and systems promote our core community values.

We are not suggesting that there are simple solutions or that we have all the answers. Continued efforts to diversify law enforcement agencies so they are reflective of the communities they serve are vitally important. Work to build bridges and understanding between the community and law enforcement must continue. Innovative collaborations with behavioral health providers to design new response solutions are critical.

But the importance of de-escalation training, mental health training and use of force training has never been more apparent.

In pursuit of these objectives the Board of Commissioners has supported the Kent County Sheriff's initiatives to recruit and retain a highly qualified workforce that reflects our community. We have approved funding for new technologies and have fully funded our Sheriff's efforts to expand workforce training.

For instance, Sheriff's Office law enforcement training staff completed a program at the *Force Science Institute* to become certified in the industry standard in de-escalation training.

The Sheriff's office has doubled its annual de-escalation and mental health training efforts for law enforcement and corrections staff over the past two years.

The Sheriff's Office has made use of Mobile Crisis Teams, including a Juvenile Crisis Unit, from Network 180 since late 2020 and is working with Network 180 to expand the number of Mobile Crisis Teams that are active in the county. Law enforcement officers can call in a team for a co-response any time mental health issues appear to be in play.

The outcomes of these efforts are tangible. For instance, Kent County Sheriff's officers use of force at ANY level is extremely rare. They have tracked this data for years. It shows that Kent County Sheriff's officers use force in *less than one half of 1% of all police contacts*.

We're proud of that statistic, and the Sheriff prioritizes annual training to ensure that those numbers hold.

Others have taken notice, as well. The West Michigan Training Consortium provides the most comprehensive training available to 47 law enforcement agencies and hundreds of officers throughout West Michigan. Many of the trainers come from the Kent County Sheriff's Office.

I would like to thank Sheriff Michelle LaJoye Young and everyone at the Kent County Sheriff's Office for their vital service to our community.

But we are again confronted with the need to be vigilant to what is not working and to be open to change to ensure that our actions are consistent with our values.

So, as we look ahead to other steps we must take to heal and strengthen our community, we take direction from what we have gone through together.

CARES ACT & ARPA Funding

That collective experience includes the careful administration of CARES Act dollars – a collaborative process that helped our community retain a solid footing throughout the crisis.

Kent County was awarded \$114.6 million in Federal CARES Act funding on April 24, 2020.

Over the following six months, the Board of Commissioners COVID-19 Relief Subcommittee, led by former Board Chair Mandy Bolter, met 17 times with more than a dozen community groups, foundations, chambers, agencies and representatives from several County departments, offices and agencies, all of whom provided vital data, information and resources.

As the local administrator of the funding, the Kent County administration used the findings and recommendations of the subcommittee as the blueprint for a highly collaborative approach to allocating resources to the community.

In all, Kent County allocated more than 74 million dollars to public and private-sector entities throughout the county. The largest pool - \$34.24 million - went to business assistance grants allocated in partnership with the Grand Rapids Chamber.

Together, we partnered with other local organizations to reach into urban, suburban and rural communities throughout the county to ensure broad and equitable funding distribution.

Additionally, we allocated \$2.95 million to public, private, and charter schools, \$14.65 million to 32 local units of government, \$2.54 million in personal protective equipment to more than 6,400 employers, and partnered with the Heart of West Michigan United Way to allocate \$9.36 million to nonprofit organizations.

Our goal with the CARES Act funding was to support those who were hurting as quickly as possible.

The County has now been awarded more than 127 million dollars in ARPA funding. With these funds, we will be able to be more strategic and identify where the dollars can be used for major transformational projects to benefit the entire community for generations to come.

At the April Board of Commissioners Executive Committee meeting, 5 categories of spending were discussed. They include:

- Community Resiliency
- Community Transformation
- Infrastructure
- Economic Innovations and Workforce Development, and
- Improving Government Operations

Prior to and throughout the pandemic, we've worked alongside community members - including many of you - on big issues like behavioral health, broadband and affordable housing.

Going forward, we will continue to engage diverse community collaborations taking direction from what we have learned through the pandemic.

Behavioral Health

A great example of an initiative already in progress is the behavioral health continuum of care initiative, led by the Kent County Population Health Consortium, in partnership with Network 180. As chair of the Network 180 board, this reinvention of crisis care in Kent County is near and dear to my heart, so I'm going to take a deeper dive here. I will talk about a few of the other ARPA funding priorities.

Our community reassessed how we were responding to the increasing number of mental health crises flooding our jail and emergency rooms. Approximately five years ago, a Crisis Center Task Force was established to bring together individuals and expertise from across the community to explore how we can do this better. We learned that we were not providing vital crisis care in a timely and effective manner. And it was clear that the system of essentially 'boarding' people who are in crisis in our jail and emergency departments is a significant waste of taxpayer dollars. We were convinced we could do better. As new models for treatment response were developed, the task of making these ideas reality was transitioned to the Consortium.

The enormous spike in demand for behavioral health services during the pandemic further shaped this work.

It has been an unprecedented example of collaboration and cooperation, convening the CEOs of all our local hospitals and healthcare systems, along with Network 180, the Kent County Health Department, law enforcement agencies, the Urban Core Collective and others. Special thanks to Mike Jandernoa, Tina Freese Decker, Matt Biersack, Mark Eastburg, Kent Riddle, Peter Hahn, Phil Weaver and, now, Tim Becker, Jill Krause and others – most of whom are here tonight.

The group is focused on launching a new continuum of care for crisis mental health and substance use disorder services to ensure that critical care is effectively provided in a timely and efficient manner.

First, we're planning a new Crisis Stabilization Unit - a secure, high intensity therapeutic alternative to hospital emergency room admissions, jail admissions and full psychiatric hospitalization. It will be equipped to provide involuntary treatment and accept direct drop offs from law enforcement. Any

individual presenting with a behavioral health crisis – regardless of their ability to pay - will be stabilized at the center, released once stabilized, or transitioned to other appropriate care.

This new unit will be jointly operated by Network 180 and Trinity Health St. Mary's and will be centrally located, on a bus line, on St. Mary's downtown campus.

Second, we're working to expand mobile crisis capacity that will enable mobile crisis teams to respond to behavioral health crises in all types of community and residential settings. These mobile crisis teams will consist of trained behavioral health care workers and paramedics working in teams under the direction of law enforcement officers.

These teams will be available 24/7 to respond directly to the point of engagement when a behavioral health crisis presents an immediate risk of harm to the person or to others. We have already implemented a model for this work with the Kent County Sheriff's Office and our partners at the Grand Rapids Police Department, and we look to expand these efforts to other agencies.

Third, the plan includes a new Peer Respite Center to be operated by Hope Network. This service model offers a home-like environment operated entirely by peer staff, who have direct, personal experience with behavioral health issues. Those experiencing a behavioral health event can self-report to this center for immediate support and assistance.

Fourth, we are establishing an enhanced Substance Use Stabilization Unit in partnership with Mel Trotter Ministries.

And finally, we are working on a system to fast track psychiatric inpatient contracting and admissions for hard-to-place individuals with the most complex and intense clinical needs.

While meeting the most critical behavioral health needs here in Kent County, these innovations will ultimately serve as models for communities across Michigan seeking to solve similar behavioral health crisis challenges.

In all, it will cost over \$20 million to establish this continuum of services. Thus far, we've secured nearly \$9 million in grants, community support and system funding. We have asked the state to appropriate another \$9 million, with the balance to come from ARPA funding.

Once this system is in place, it will significantly improve the quality of care while at the same time dramatically reduce the cost to the taxpayers.

Kent County Courts

Acting on another lesson from the pandemic, the administration will seek Board of Commission approval for ARPA funding to update the record system for the Kent County Courts and law enforcement divisions and expand electronic filing in our courts.

People less familiar with the court system in Kent County may not know that the County funds the 17th Circuit Court, the Kent County Probate Court and the 63rd District Court. The County's funds are further utilized within the 17th Circuit to fund The Friend of the Court and several specialty courts, including The Specialized Business Docket, Girls Court, Juvenile and Adult Treatment and Support Courts - which include mental health and substance use disorder services and treatment - Truancy Court and the Young Sex Offender Treatment Program.

Our teams in the County's courts and prosecutor's office managed incredible caseloads through nearly impossible situations over the past two years, with multiple shutdowns forcing them to transition to virtual hearings and electronic filings for months at a time.

While our Chief Judges and County Clerk determined new processes to keep justice moving, the situation demonstrated the need to get all records digitized.

Once fully funded, this transformative project will securely digitize roughly 100 million pages of records for our courts, clerk of the court, prosecutor's office, and sheriff's office.

Additionally, electronic filing will make the process of filing with our courts easier, more accessible, less expensive and will streamline the judicial process.

And in another significant investment in our court system, we approved one new probate judge along with dedicated staff in 2022.

This will represent a significant investment in our court system and allow us to better serve Kent County's growing population.

Kent County's Vital Role

Kent County is focused on the future, not the past. On transformation, not incremental change. We are stronger today than ever before. In fact, just last week we learned that we maintained our AAA Bond Rating with both Standard & Poors and Moody's.

In a few minutes Administrator Vanderberg will address several initiatives moving ahead at the County. But for now, I assure that we will continue to play a stabilizing role across our region, and we remain deeply committed to moving our community forward regardless of the challenge.

We understand that each sector and organization represented in this room has its own unique vision, mission, and role within our county. We look forward to continuing to work with you to secure a safe, healthy, and vibrant community in which you have an opportunity to make your vision a reality. Thank you.

Al Vanderberg, Kent County Administrator



Thank you, Sara. You're a tremendous asset to our organization and to the people of Kent County. And you're demonstrating profound strength simply by being here this evening.

Most of you may not know that Sara's mother-in-law, Patricia Burpee, passed yesterday at the age of 99. Sara wanted to keep this commitment tonight, but she's leaving now to be with her family.

Sara, our deepest sympathy to you and Linda. We wish you and your family grace and peace.

My thanks to all of you - for being here this evening and for your warm welcome back to Kent County. This is a great community, and I am both humbled and proud to serve as your County Administrator.

I've to come to think of myself as the "time-capsule" county administrator. It's been fun to reengage with many of the people and successes from my time as deputy county administrator many years ago.

I share Chair Stek's enthusiasm about the future of Kent County. This *is* the moment for transformational change.

Kent County is seeing significant population growth – 9% since 2010. That level of growth means changing demographics and evolving needs. Kent County is poised for growth on a scale that we have not previously seen.

- 55 percent of our population is under the age of 35,
- Diversity is on the rise. 29% of our residents identify as ethnically or racially diverse,
- Our educational attainment – including high school diplomas, associates degrees, four year and post graduate degrees – exceeds both the state and national averages.

As your County government, we must lead transformational change to meet ever-evolving community needs. That calls for an agile environment and systems that allow our talent, technology, and space management practices to evolve, as well.

We also must recognize that transformation is both a strategy and a future state of being. It's the decisive action we take now to make the future better.

Wayne "The Great One" Gretsky said it well: "I skate to where the puck is going to be, not to where it has been."

I'll outline several pieces of our transformation strategy this evening that point to where we're going.

Internal Transformation - In 5 Parts

Anytime you seek to make change in the world, you must start at home. That's because an organization either moves forward or it falls back.

So, as we work to become the best partner to help lead the transformation of Kent County, that's exactly what we are doing. Our internal efforts are focused on five areas:

- Cultural Transformation
- Attracting Top Talent
- Facility Improvements
- Key investments in departments, offices, courts and agencies, and
- Departmental Structure

Cultural Transformation

Let's look first at cultural transformation. Last Tuesday, I presented an update to the Board of Commissioners Executive Committee on our internal cultural transformation plan focused on 6 C's:

- Customer Service
- Creativity
- Communication
- Cultural Intelligence
- Competency, and
- Collaboration

Through this work, we are defining how we will rise to the challenge of serving our growing and diversifying community.

Our team is 1,750 strong and works across 25 departments, offices, courts, and agencies. While we have vastly different job descriptions, we share a vision. That is to be your ready partner in building a welcoming place where everyone has an opportunity to thrive.

As we focus on the 6 C's, we are developing a common language and understanding of our priorities, injecting new ways of thinking across the organization, and training team members to meet new expectations and hold ourselves accountable as individuals and as an organization.

We will adopt practices from the private sector, including Toyota Kata lean and innovation and design-thinking principles, and we'll develop some of our own next practices along the way.

We are already a leading county in the state. But we aim to go from good to great.

That calls for investments to train and equip our team for change. Because as John Maxwell said: "Change is inevitable. Growth is optional."

Attracting Top Talent

Next, we're focused on attracting top talent. I'm sure many of you are, as well. Everything changed in 2020. Given today's competitive talent market, we're reassessing how we recruit and compensate employees, and we are redefining workspaces.

A big shift over the past two years is that employees want a flexible work environment. We'll spend this year digging deep into what a network-based organization focused on customer service and quality outcomes looks like. We'll also prioritize creating a fulfilling environment for those employees who simply can't work from home.

Facility Improvement & Space Needs Analysis

Our internal review also includes a space needs analysis. In October, we broke ground on a 13-million-dollar North Campus to meet the needs of our growing community. The 30,000 square foot facility, which is scheduled for completion in April 2023, will include a North Sub-Station for the Sheriff's Office, Health Department clinic, and 'hoteling' space for other County services.

We are also carefully analyzing how our buildings at 300 Monroe, 320 Ottawa, 82 Ionia, and our Fuller campus are utilized. We're asking if the right services are being provided in the right locations or if we need to make changes.

And, we are anticipating completion of our new Parks Department office near Millennium Park.

These assessments and changes are being made to best serve residents now and into the future.

Key Investments in Departments, Offices, Courts & Agencies

Next, we are making key investments in our departments, offices, courts and agencies.

Chair Stek mentioned that we will add a Probate Judge and will make major investments to digitize all court records.

Further, we'll ask the legislature to approve the addition of another 63rd District Judge to serve the high-growth outer perimeter of the county.

These investments will enable us to increase both capacity and efficiency in our court system and allow us to better serve our growing population.

Additionally, in 2021, we promoted Teresa Branson as our first Chief Inclusion Officer, underscoring the organization's commitment to fully embed diversity, equity, and inclusion in our strategic priorities.

This is important for everyone one of us. To paraphrase Theodore Roosevelt, "This county will not be a good place for any of us to live in unless we make it a good place for all of us to live in."

We are also supporting the Sheriff's commitment to transparency in law enforcement.

Kent County recently invested 2.2 million dollars to purchase body-worn cameras for all 200 law enforcement personnel in the Sheriff's Office. This investment was fully operational in 2021. The appropriation also funded replacement tasers and upgraded in-car cameras for all officers and police cruisers.

Other public safety investments included a 25-million-dollar upgrade in our 911 radio dispatch system used to transmit public safety information to law enforcement agencies and personnel countywide.

And this year, the Sheriff's Office is budgeted to build and open a virtual reality de-escalation training center within their current firearms range.

This multi-functional center will integrate virtual reality de-escalation training with firearm and taser training at a level that is nearly impossible to do with the use of live ammunition.

Those aren't the only investments we're making in County technology. I side with W. Edwards Deming when he said, "In God we trust. All others must bring data." We live in a day when the ability to collect and utilize data to drive quality outcomes is growing exponentially.

So, in the year ahead, we will build a data center that will serve as a foundation for future use of artificial intelligence in service delivery. This will include use of machine learning, natural language processing and robotics that will enhance the flow of information between residents and their County government and continually improve service delivery.

Departmental Structure

On the departmental front, we are considering a significant realignment in our animal shelter and animal control services in the months ahead. Details are being finalized, and you'll hear more about this next month.

I can say that the plans have been deliberative, and we are very grateful to our animal shelter team, volunteers and local animal welfare organizations. They've been wonderful partners working in the best interests of our community and the animals in our care.

Transforming our internal culture, attracting top talent, and improving our facilities and departmental structure are critical to our ability to deliver excellent services and to help build a prosperous place for all.

But that's just part of the story.

Prioritizing our Strategies

2022 marks the 4th year of the Kent County Strategic Plan. With goals related to economic prosperity, high quality of life, excellence in service delivery, inclusive participation and effective communications, the plan has provided clear guideposts for our work since 2019. But we had to shift focus during the pandemic.

To get things back on track, the Board of Commissioners and I recently revisited the plan, developed a set of strategies to advance each of the five goals, and identified important outputs and desired outcomes of those strategies to track our progress.

This exercise has been important as we identify funding and service priorities for the year ahead.

Visionary Use of ARPA Funding

That includes helping to guide allocation of ARPA dollars. We are committed to steer these dollars to support transformative action that will make positive generational change and continue to reverberate into the future.

As Chair Stek noted, Kent County was awarded more than 127 million dollars in ARPA funding. This provides us a rare opportunity to make strategic long-term investments, both within the County organization and throughout our county as a region.

The Process

To help us with this important planning process, we've hired Guidehouse - a consulting group that advises the U.S. Department of Treasury and the State of Michigan on how to distribute and leverage ARPA dollars. We're meeting with them to make sure we are in full compliance with the complex set of requirements that dictates how the money may be spent and, equally important, how these funds will be audited after the program ends.

The funding application process will kick off by early June. Leading up to that, Kent County will host three community engagement sessions in May where we'll hear from residents, community organizations and others about their priorities.

We will take public input, funding applications and other county needs into account when prioritizing the final recommendations that go to the Board of Commissioners for approval.

We also expect to use ARPA dollars to advance some major initiatives already underway.

Transformational Initiatives Already Identified

Broadband

Broadband is a priority ripe for ARPA funding. Right now, significant areas of Kent County don't have access to high-speed internet... In some areas where there IS access, it is substandard.

We need to change that. With the rise of the gig economy, the need was evident before the pandemic. But the true fallout from our lack of connectivity became painfully clear over the last two years. Not all residents could easily work or learn from home due to broadband deficiencies.

CARES Act funding provided emergency access through limited hotspots. And our legislators have continued to champion this issue in Lansing.

Now, ARPA funding can help SOLVE the problem. But we need to better understand the extent of it at a parcel level before we can develop a county-wide solution.

We will soon hire a consultant to assist in identifying and prioritizing the needs across the county. Drawing on regional expertise and insights from community groups, we'll ask how we can leverage ARPA dollars in partnership with the state, local communities and service providers throughout Kent County to make a meaningful impact.

Once that analysis is complete, our goal will be to work with public, private and nonprofit partners to fund a collaborative and comprehensive solution. Without it, we cannot deliver on our collective commitment to ensure that Kent County is a place where *everyone* has an opportunity to thrive.

Medical Examiner's Office

Within our own organization, we are in the early stages of planning for a new state-of-the-art medical examiner's facility that can better serve the entire region. It's time to get our medical examiner out of the small basement space where they've been operating since the early 2000's and into a modern facility that suits the operations of this vital community service.

We'll be able to share more as the plan takes shape later this year.

Grand River Greenway

We also aim to leverage federal, state and local funding, including ARPA dollars, to further advance plans for the Grand River Greenway.

A loosely-knit coalition of public, private and nonprofit organizations is working to develop a contiguous, non-motorized trail along the Grand River starting on the shores of Lake Michigan in Grand Haven and running to Lowell. This 76-mile trail would connect the region's largest population centers with rural communities, parks, natural areas, rivers, trail networks and other amenities.

The trail will also connect to many significant projects such as the Grand Rapids Public Museum expansion, Restore the Rapids, the proposed 12,000-seat amphitheater, and, potentially, an aquarium.

Work on the Greenway has been underway in Ottawa County for decades. Construction of the non-motorized Idema Explorers Trail, running from Lake Michigan to the Ottawa-Kent border, is nearly fully funded and due for completion in 2027.

In March, DGRI secured 55 million dollars in State funding to build critical trail links and connections in Grand Rapids and extend the trail to Lowell.

Now, we are working to secure additional funding to build three key sections of trail along the Grand River in the City of Grand Rapids, Plainfield Township and Ada Township. These will serve as critical connectors and will spur completion of the remaining planned sections.

The Greenway is a monumental project that will leverage our region's most valuable natural assets to enhance our quality of life and our economy. Kent County and the Kent County Parks Department look forward to being part of the coalition that makes this decades-long dream a reality.

County as Convener & Ready Partner

I take Kent County's role as a convener, a problem solver, and a partner that can help build common vision very seriously.

I'll close this evening with just a few more examples of where the County is leading or partnering on transformational change.

Airport

In September, we approved the issuance of 93.6 million dollars in revenue bonds to help finance the Gerald R. Ford International Airport Concourse A expansion. The expansion will add 8 gates and new amenities to accommodate projected passenger growth over the next 20 years. In fact, Chair Stek, other stakeholders and I were just at a beam-raising for this exciting airport expansion this morning.

Additionally, in partnership with Ford Airport leaders, we are advocating with Congress to move the air traffic control tower from its current location to the east side of the airfield. This would remove barriers to terminal expansion and allow Ford Airport to replace the second oldest operational air traffic control tower at a top-100 airport in the country.

With these improvements, Ford Airport will continue to boost our local economy now and into the future.

Housing

Second, as a new member of the Kent Housing Next Board, I look forward to working alongside those in our community who bring tremendous insight into ways to remove barriers to housing at all price points.

While we don't know exactly what Kent County's role will be in the year ahead, we stand as a willing partner, ready to work with other local units of government, businesses, and nonprofits to find and implement solutions to this critical need.

County-Wide Mobility

Next, we will convene a regional mobility task force including Disability Advocates of Kent County, the City of Grand Rapids, and others to assess mobility challenges and develop a transit strategy to meet the needs of our growing population.

To be clear, we're not talking about a county-wide transit system. More likely, a collection of solutions to ensure people throughout Kent County have access to transportation and all this community has to offer.

Convening LUGs to Move the County Forward

Knowing that we're more effective when we work together, I've also brought back quadrant meetings with elected and appointed leaders from cities, townships, and villages across the county. We'll be meeting in the four county quadrants twice a year to discuss priorities and joint initiatives, build relationships and learn from each other.

Sustainable Business Park

One key initiative that we've been working on with a stakeholder group comprised of leaders from our local cities and townships, The Right Place, the Grand Rapids Chamber and the Department of Public Works is the Sustainable Business Park.

Right now, the trash we bury in Kent County landfills could fill two U-M football stadiums each year.

And our landfill expenses have tripled in the past three years due to PFAS contamination.

If we're committed to transformational change, we need to leave something better for future generations.

Our goal is to divert 90% of Kent County-generated trash that goes to landfills by 2030. To reach that goal, the Department of Public Works has been working on plans for a 370-million-dollar sustainable business park where tenants will treat, recycle, repurpose and capture value from our community's solid waste.

Last October, DPW made significant progress when they identified an anchor tenant.

But this isn't a done deal. It's a complicated project, and change is always at least a little messy. John F. Kennedy once said, "My experience in government is that when things are non-controversial and beautifully coordinated, there is not much going on."

Well, the stakeholders and the DPW have a lot going on as they work to understand the intricacies of this initiative and develop a feasible plan.

Thank you to all the stakeholders who are working to develop a countywide waste management solution.

Conclusion

These are the kind of positive, transformative partnerships that we'll focus on in the year ahead.

There's a new energy and optimism in Kent County. We are dedicated to thinking big and taking decisive action with all stakeholders to make Kent County the very best place it can be for generations to come.

Thank you.



KENT COUNTY



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