

**STATE OF THE COUNTY ADDRESS—PORTAGE COUNTY**  
**July 19, 2011**

It will be 15 months tomorrow since I was sworn into this office as your County Executive. To say that this last 15 months has been a whirlwind is an understatement. Perhaps more than any of us could have imagined only a few short months ago, we stand in a very different place today as a community and as an arm of state government. No matter which side of any political continuum you stand on, I think that we can all agree that these times demand us to evaluate our current course and consider refined or alternate pathways toward accomplishing our mission in service to the people of this county.

***And we have everything going for us here in Portage County, the heart of Wisconsin, if we work together.***

This afternoon, I would like this State of the County Address to achieve two goals: 1) Recognize a few of our accomplishments over the last 15 months—a period of many “firsts” for Portage County; and 2) Share a vision for Portage County government, a model for your consideration as we continue the strategic planning effort launched earlier this year.

Let's start, then, by highlighting a few of our “firsts.” Let's use a timeframe of at least the last decade. That is, if it didn't happen in the past 10 years—it will qualify as a “first.”

1. For our 2011 tax year, we kept the county levy flat. This was the first time since 1989 that a larger county tax levy burden wasn't created for the citizens of Portage County.
2. Our total county budget amount was smaller this year by about 5% than the previous year under the other county executive. This is a reduction of \$1.5 million and the first time in a decade that the proposed county budget didn't "grow" larger than the year before—all while maintaining or improving the level of service, thanks to many innovative staff members. In fact, over the last 20 years, there are only a couple of exceptions to having the budgeted amount grow bigger one year than the year before it. In a recent letter to the editor, a former county board member mentioned what he thought it was a needless expenditure for this County Executive position and office which costs about \$250,000/year for the salary and benefits of my Executive Assistant Jami Gebert, me and the costs for other purposes like copies or travel. In my first county budget alone, I stopped this runaway trend of growing a bigger budget annually...and saved six times the amount of my office's expenses at the same time.
3. One of the keys to achieving this fiscal control "first" for our county is that we redesigned the process used for budgeting, including integrating reorganizations into the new budgets. In addition, I issued allocations to each department to challenge them.
4. In another significant "first," you, the County Board, began your first formal internal audit process and chose the Highway Department as your first focus. Outside consultants have now completed that audit and the Highway Commissioner is working with his staff and others in our Finance Department to correct identified deficiencies and improve processes to better protect county resources.
5. For the first time, Portage County has a comprehensive handle on understanding its electrical and natural gas energy consumption for our facilities and parks thanks to the completion of our *Phase I Strategic Energy*

*Management Plan.* We have now established a baseline and set the goal of reducing electricity and natural gas consumption by 10% in the calendar year 2015 compared to our baseline year, 2009, in which we spent nearly \$700,000 on facility-related energy costs. I applaud you for the vision of setting this ball in motion through a resolution that was passed days after I took office last year. Since implementing initiatives identified through the smart energy planning process, we have saved an estimated \$12,000/year already on “low hanging fruit.”

6. A second phase of our energy planning process is already underway to study transportation fuels used in county government operations—a comprehensive assessment of our vehicle and equipment use of fuels. This is another “first” for Portage County. I expect that energy-related policy initiatives will follow Phase II as we continue to make strides in reducing our operational costs for energy.
7. Another significant first includes a county-wide, comprehensive volunteer policy that standardizes our volunteer management practices and provides our first centralized tracking system for hundreds of volunteers across multiple departments who help us accomplish our mission through their generous time and talents. This process created another opportunity for a volunteer to participate in shaping her own county government: Mary, an RSVP volunteer supervised by Jami in my office, now comes to our office every Wednesday to update our central volunteer database.
8. About 40 people on key teams are involved now in another “first” for Portage County: Redesigning our entire personnel management and benefits system in accordance with the Governor’s Budget Repair Bill which has changed the breadth and depth of the role of unions in our workplace. This is a significant undertaking by staff, workers, county board members, and my office as 86% of our county employees (over 550 workers) are members of seven different unions. Combine this with management staff that has their Human Resource policies, and we have a daunting task before us as we seek common ground and uniformity in our policies and work rules to the greatest extent possible and

practicable...All with a deadline of October 1 when six of our seven collective bargaining agreements expire. I understand many other counties are watching us to learn from our inclusive process.

9. We have other “firsts” related to county communications with more e-government initiatives than ever. Official county board email addresses have been offered to every County Board Supervisor to aid them in communicating with their constituents and help us save copies and postage. All but a couple of Supervisors have taken this step into the e-world. Nearly all of the communications from my office are in an electronic format. My office also launched the first monthly Portage County e-newsletter for county employees. A copy of *Portage County News* is not only provided to employees, but to county board members, municipalities, and when relevant, to the media. Through listening sessions scheduled quarterly around every quadrant of this county, we also have, for the first time, regular, face-to-face communications between the Executive and the rural residents in their communities in Portage County. So far on my “county rounds,” the Town of Dewey wins the award for having the most participants at a listening session: 22 citizens attended!
10. Another “first” is this year's launch of a strategic planning process across all county departments and in collaboration with their respective oversight committees. We began by having all departments identify their mandates with information to help inspire a discussion about the choices we have in meeting each requirement. We had them identify past relevant studies and conduct an analysis of their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. We also asked them to identify their space-related needs so that we can gain a broad picture of county wide space-related issues. As they say in strategic planning, “program drives property” so determining programmatic or service needs will support policy makers in better overall facility-related decision making.
11. Also worthy of mention as a “first” is that since going on-line in February 2009 with CodeRED (our automated emergency alert system that citizens can subscribe to free of charge at the Portage County website), there have been

two cases when it was utilized to find lost residents—a lost child in July last year and an adult this past April. To give you a synopsis of how it works, I will share the Emergency Management report related to the missing person's case about three months ago: *At approximately 4 a.m., Dispatch received a call reporting a missing 82-year-old man with Alzheimer's disease. At 6:11 a.m., the CodeRED job was launched to 3,337 phone numbers. At 6:33 a.m., a resident called to report her family had started looking for the man and they found him lying in some woods at the base of a hill behind their home. Paramedics arrived, tended to the man, and called firefighters for additional assistance. In less than two-and-a-half hours thanks to CodeRED and citizen volunteers that signed up for this community service, we may have saved this man's life.*

Throw in two floods, a tornado, closure of a paper mill causing the loss of 360 jobs, and a leaking dam, and we have had our hands full working in Portage County over the past year!

**But we have everything going for us when we work together...**

Building on our 15 months of “firsts” in budget control, planning, policy, communications, and emergency response, I would like to propose that you consider a concept for county government that I believe will advance us further. An effective and efficient county government, to me, is one that is as nimble as possible in responding to changing needs and the dynamic times in which we live. It is a county organization that looks out for the good of the whole. It is guided by the voices of many people, not one, two or a few. It is responsive, appropriately strong, and smart. There is a balance of power, with a measure of earned trust. The priorities of the county as a whole are #1, not the priorities of individuals with their own agendas. It is a respectful workplace where there are high expectations for staff and workers, but where they are also lifted up to meet the challenges. It is accountable and transparent and effective and makes the citizens of this county proud to call Portage County “home.”

But, right now in Portage County government, there are over 30 different departments or quasi-departments, most with separate budgets and directors or elected leaders in charge. I have 17 direct reports to my office and I coordinate with another 11 county elected officials in addition to the full County Board. There are over 40 different oversight committees, commissions, boards and advisory groups, each with own administrative costs, board packets, per diems and travel (when needed). This is how we have evolved over time. (See my first “pie” diagram.) Essentially, we have a silo effect among departments, each vying for their piece of the county levy (budget) pie in order to advance their respective mission and goals.

*I propose that we consider a different way.* I submit to you that many departments or sections of departments, share similar mission “themes” with other departments or sections of departments. What I mean is that they share common threads in their mission and are more alike than different from each other. (See my second “pie” diagram with clusters of colors to represent shared themes of our mission.) Some thematic clusters of our county’s mission might include:

1. Public Safety/Emergency Response
2. Health and Human Services/Fostering Resiliency of Children, Families, Adults
3. Infrastructure/Public Works/Natural Resources/Planning
4. Recreation/Culture
5. Operational Effectiveness/Fiscal Responsibility
6. Economic Development
7. Government Services/Justice Services

These are only my ideas generated from research about how some other counties have reinvented themselves. There are different ways to focus our mission and I propose that we discover the right themes or “hubs” for Portage County together.

(See my third diagram.) Let's take the "Public Safety and Emergency Response" mission of county government as a proposed "theme." It is represented at its core in Portage County by two departments: The Sheriff's Department and the Department of Emergency Management. They work closely together already and report to a common oversight committee, the Public Safety/Emergency Management Committee. But, could there be additional benefits and savings gained by establishing joint goals and reporting their progress on these goals as a team?

Let's consider a different example: Consider our county government's mission of providing infrastructure support—the physical infrastructure and layout that help us achieve transportation, environmental, economic development, and other longer term goals. Departments (or parts of departments) that share this mission include Highway, Solid Waste, Parks, Facilities, and Planning and Zoning. Each of these five departments has a different oversight committee. Most of them have different unions. Prior to Governor Walker's Budget Repair Bill that changed the roles that unions play in our public workplace, it was much more difficult to share staff across departments because of the differences that had evolved through collective bargaining agreements—different policies, work rules, and seniority rights that complicated our ability to interdepartmentally share staff.

Now, with our "new normal" to begin October 1<sup>st</sup>, we may be able to "swing" workers across units depending on the job, the need, the worker, or the opportunity.

Here's an example: Parks, Facilities, and Highway Departments all plow snow. Would it make sense to share teams or equipment? Are there other "job" linkages worth exploring? What about collaborative budgeting and shared performance goals? Would there be any savings in oversight committee meetings and costs? Of course, certain commissions or boards are required by statute and sometimes

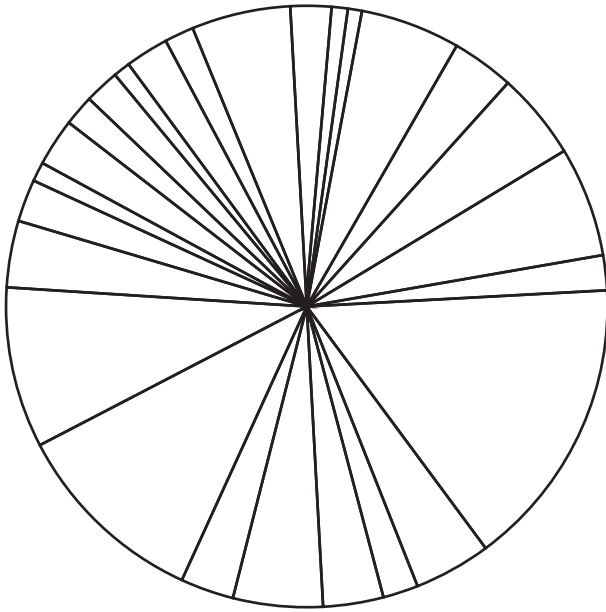
there are reasons that budgets must be kept separate. BUT, do you wonder like I do what the advantages in service to our mission would be if we adopted an organizational design that emphasized collaboration and established shared performance goals across mission “hubs?”

There are many questions and ways to go about creating our next generation of county government. I would love to explore the choices with you and the citizens of Portage County.

This will be another significant undertaking, but I believe that exploring ways to re-engineer county government is the right thing to do. I propose that we work together over the next two years beginning in January 2012 to explore the possibilities and discover the best answers together—county leadership, staff, workers, our municipalities, and the citizens of this county.

Transition times are times of opportunity. We've come a long way together in only 15 months. Let's see where these challenging times and this momentum can take us in optimizing our ability to provide awesome service to our residents. We have everything going for us in Portage County when we work together and keep our mission at heart!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Paul", written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.



**County Departments  
Share Budget "Pie"**

**County Departments  
Share Mission "Themes"**



## **Examples**

- **Public Safety and  
Emergency Response**
- **Infrastructure**