



OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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MILWAUKEE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Milwaukee County 2021 Recommended Budget

KEY POINTS

To advance Milwaukee County's vision of becoming the healthiest County in Wisconsin by achieving racial equity, County Executive David Crowley's 2021 Recommended Budget aims to:

- **Create intentional inclusion** with investments that allow the County to reflect the full diversity of the community and create a culture of inclusivity in our organization.
- **Bridge the gap** in health disparities with investments that break down silos across County departments and allow for better, more streamlined services for our community.
- **Invest in equity** by channeling resources "upstream" to areas that elevate health and racial equity and enhance the County's fiscal sustainability.
- Advance the case for obtaining **additional funding** from the state and federal government for Milwaukee County and a **local option sales tax** for Milwaukee County.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

RACIAL EQUITY

Why is Milwaukee County focused on achieving health and racial equity?

Milwaukee County acknowledges that explicitly and implicitly racist policies and practices at the local, state and federal government levels have worked to the advantage of white people and to the disadvantage of people of color. While these discriminatory policies and practices may not appear to have any correlation with health outcomes, the impact along racial lines is indisputable. Race is a leading predictor of both quality and length of life. In Milwaukee County a White person will live on average 14 years longer than a Black person, according to data from the Wisconsin Department of Health Services.

To affect change, Milwaukee County's strategic direction will examine how policy, budget and operational decisions made by each department impact residents. We will focus as far upstream as possible so that we can invest in the root causes of the issues that most affect our community. Although it will be a long journey to undo hundreds of years of systemic racism, the 2021 budget is a start.

What do you mean by focusing "upstream?"

Imagine this: A pair of friends are fishing on a riverbank when suddenly they see someone struggling in the current. They rescue them. Soon, they see another person. They rescue them, too. This continues all afternoon.

Finally, the pair decide to go *upstream* to find out where and why so many people were falling in. They discover a scenic overlook at the river's edge without any warning signs or protective barriers. The friends go to community leaders to report the number of people they rescued and explain the connection to the unprotected overlook.

The community leaders agree to install a protective guard and post warning signs, preventing the problem of people ending up in the river and needing to be helped *downstream*. The community saves resources, energy, and lives.

It's time for Milwaukee County to do the same. In order to achieve health and racial equity, we have must shift the bulk of our focus upstream on strategies that prevent poor outcomes for people in our community.

How does this budget address racial equity?

To advance our vision, the budget advances Milwaukee County's three strategic focus areas: creating intentional inclusion, bridging the gap in health disparities, and investing in equity. Specifically, the budget resulted in:

- Changes to procurement practices to ensure small and minority-owned businesses can compete for County contracts;
- Re-investment of savings from youth justice reform into educational and mentorship programs that support young people before they enter the system;
- Playground replacement in historically underserved neighborhoods; and
- The integration of Veterans Services and the Department on Aging with the Department of Health and Human Services to ensure residents have access to services across the lifespan.

Additionally, the Office on African American Affairs convened a group of departments over the past year to develop a tool to help the County examine its budget in the context of our vision.

What is a Racial Equity Budget Tool?

The REBT is a series of questions that help those preparing the budget identify who benefits and who is burdened by our decisions. All departments, including elected offices, submitted the REBT with their budget requests. Use of the REBT sparked intentional conversations about the impact of our budget on Milwaukee County as a whole and communities of color. REBT submissions can be found at:

<https://county.milwaukee.gov/files/county/administrative-services/PSB/BudgetsCopy-1/2021-Budget/2021-Requested-Budget/Racial-Equity-Budget-Tools/Combined2021RequestedBudgetREBT.pdf>

Does this mean that my community will get less if another community gets more?

When we look over the past several decades, even centuries, it is clear that some communities have received more resources and investments than other communities. Taking a racially equitable approach will mean that communities that have historically not seen the same level of investment as White communities will receive targeted investments to bring them up to the same level. It's important to

remember that a rising tide lifts all boats. Our region is stronger when all of our residents and communities are thriving.

How was the public engaged in the budget process?

The County Executive and County Supervisors co-hosted three virtual budget open houses, the last of which had a hybrid in-person option for individuals who did not have access to technology. For the fourth straight year, residents had the opportunity to weigh in through Balancing Act, an online budget simulation tool. When faced with the same \$42.5 million gap, participants needed to raise revenue or change services to balance the budget. Results from the first round of Balancing Act informed the County Executive's recommended budget. Balancing Act it will remain open through the County Board's phase of the budget.

THE FISCAL CRISIS AND COVID-19

How much did Milwaukee County start in the red this year?

Milwaukee County began the 2021 budget process estimating a gap of \$42.5 million. These gaps are largely due to irresponsible decisions made decades ago, the growing cost of state-mandated services, and state-imposed caps on our ability to raise our own revenue. Since 2012, Milwaukee has faced a cumulative budget gap of over \$320 million.

How did COVID-19 affect this year's budget? How will you navigate all the uncertainty in the future?

COVID-19 hit Milwaukee County hard, particularly our departments that rely on generating their own revenue to continue providing services. Parks, Zoo, Transit and the Airport were up against significant revenue shortfalls as facilities were temporarily closed, events were canceled, and travel significantly decreased. We will closely monitor the budget situation throughout the course of 2021 to ensure that our departments are on track to make their revenue target. Due to the unpredictability of the pandemic, additional facilities may be closed in the future.

Milwaukee County got \$77 million in CARES funding. Why are you still facing a budget gap?

The federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act provided \$77 million to Milwaukee County to help with new costs and community needs associated with the pandemic. Milwaukee County has used these funds to provide:

- Life safety measures, including personal protective equipment, increased cleaning and sanitation, COVID-19 related sick time, and necessary technology enhancements;
- Emergency operating costs, such as enabling social distancing and isolation in the Criminal Justice Facility and House of Correction, countywide emergency planning and communications, and increased death investigations conducted by the Medical Examiner's Office; and
- Economic and public health services, including small business grants, housing assistance, and expanded healthcare access and mental health services.

All of these funds must be spent by 12/31/20 and cannot be used in the 2021 budget. The one exception is CARES Act funds for transit, which is a separate pot of money that does extend into 2021.

TAXES AND FEES

Are my property taxes going to go up?

The average homeowner will not see any change to their Milwaukee County property taxes in 2021. The State of Wisconsin has limited growth in the total property taxes a County can collect, and the only option this budget seeks to increase is based on the value of net new construction in the County. If there is more new construction than demolitions in the County, the County can factor in the value of the difference between the two in the overall countywide property values. The exact tax rate for everyone is then set. This translates to an additional \$3.5 million for Milwaukee County in 2021, but with no impact on the average home.

Is the Vehicle Registration Fee going to go up?

No. The 2021 budget does not include an increase in the Vehicle Registration Fee. However, the VRF remains one of the very few options we have in increasing County revenue. Even within that option, though, we don't have much discretion—the funds are capped by the state, and the County is prohibited by state law from implementing a progressive VRF. These limitations are a good example of why it's so important we explore local funding options like the sales tax to invest in our community.

Is the sales tax going up?

No. The sales tax in Milwaukee County will remain at 5.5 percent. With the recent sunset of the 0.01 percent sales tax funding Miller Park, Milwaukee County's sales tax is actually lower than it was last year.

Is Milwaukee County still trying to increase the sales tax?

Yes. Through the Move Forward MKE Coalition, Milwaukee County and other municipalities, business leaders, state and local legislators, and community partners are working with the State of Wisconsin to increase the sales tax by 0.1 percent. Coalition members believe this is the best way to invest local dollars in local priorities like transportation, housing, health and our cultural institutions. Increasing the sales tax would require a change in state law, and partners are working on the best path forward to balance the urgent needs of our community with the impact of the pandemic. Learn more at <https://www.moveforwardmke.com/>

Where does the conversation with the State on the sales tax stand?

In late 2019, Sen. LaTonya Johnson and Rep. Evan Goyke introduced a bill to increase Milwaukee County's sales tax by 0.1 percent. This bill received a floor hearing in the last session, and we will continue work with partners to advance this proposal in the next legislative session.

EMPLOYEES

Are employee health care premiums and pension contributions increasing?

Employees will not see any changes to their health care premiums this year. Despite having to fill an extremely challenging budget gap, Milwaukee County prioritized benefits for our public servants and is proud to hold health care flat for the third year in a row. Pension contributions will remain flat at 6.2 percent for general employees. Represented public safety employee pension contributions are subject to collective bargaining. Based on the most recent actuarial valuation data, public safety pension contributions are expected to go from 8.9 to 9.7 percent.

Why do some employees get a 1 percent raise and others only get 0.5 percent?

A critical component of equity is how pay increases are calculated. Traditionally, Milwaukee County has provided the same, across-the-board pay increase at mid-year for all employees. The 2021 budget provides a new look at pay increases largely based on findings from the County Audit Division's report, *Pulling Back the Curtain: A Look at Milwaukee County's Workforce through Racial and Gender Equity Lenses from 2009 to 2019*. This report highlighted substantial overrepresentation of White workers in the top third of County earners, and an overrepresentation of African American workers in the bottom third of County earners. In order to help address this disparity, the 2021 budget provides a 0.5 percent increase at midyear for workers in salary ranges over \$100,000 per year, and a 1 percent increase for workers in ranges below \$100,000.

Why are skilled trades employees getting a special raise?

To address significant pay equity gaps, over the past several years Milwaukee County has made targeted investments in specific groups of employees. In 2019 correctional officers saw a targeted increase to bring them closer to market rate. Our skilled trades staff were slated to see a similar increase in 2020, but it was delayed due to budget shortfalls created by the pandemic. The 2021 budget will make good on this promise and bring trades professionals closer to market rate with a targeted pay equity increase starting in the first quarter of 2021.

Does this budget include any employee furloughs?

Although some employees were furloughed in 2020 as a result of the pandemic, no additional furloughs included in this budget. Departments did their best to cover their tax levy targets while maintaining as many staff as possible in 2021.

Is there any money budgeted for employee equity increases?

A central allocation is budgeted for salary adjustments based on race and gender equity. This funding is different than the DOSAA in previous years as departments will not receive a pro-rata share of the funding. Human Resources is developing a process for making recommendations on the highest priority equity issues to address. Implementation of these salary adjustments will not take place until the County Board reviews a report on the details of the increases and releases the fund via appropriation transfer.

SERVICE INTEGRATION

Why are you integrating the Department on Aging and Veterans Services with the Department of Health and Human Services?

Milwaukee County aims to serve people and families seamlessly and across the lifespan, regardless of their age or ability status. This model is a best practice, and Milwaukee is one of the few jurisdictions in the nation that has not yet shifted to this model. This integration advances Milwaukee County's vision and strategic plan, and will result in several benefits:

- Quicker turnaround in connection to services;
- More direct access to an expanded array of services such as eviction prevention, mental health, and energy assistance;
- A reduction in stigma related to aging as the population over 60 years of age grows in Milwaukee; and
- Increased, direct access for Veterans to wrap-around services offered by DHHS.

What do you mean by “No Wrong Door?”

Milwaukee County's departments and services have historically been siloed. Residents would need to go through one door to get transportation, another door to get mental health services, and yet another door for housing. As we aim reduce barriers for residents to access our services and achieve racial equity, we are moving toward a “No Wrong Door” model where everyone can get the variety of services they need regardless of where they enter the system. This model has started in our Department of Health and Human Services, but it will be expanded across the County.

Are you getting rid of the Milwaukee County Department on Aging Executive Director position?

No. The Executive Director position will remain in the 2021 budget to oversee the Aging Unit. The position will be changed functionally to an Aging Division administrator to fall under the Department of Health and Human Services umbrella. This puts the position at the same level as other division heads that report to the DHHS Director (i.e., Administrators for the Housing Division, Division of Youth and Family Services, Disabilities Services, and the Behavioral Health Division).

Will the integration plan result in any changes to the Commission on Aging or the Aging and Disability Resource Center Governing Board?

No. Both the COA and ADRC Governing Board will continue to carry out their current responsibilities.

Will there be any service reductions for older adults? Are older adults going to get left behind with this integration?

No and no. In fact, we expect older adults to have access to more services with this integration. We are adding people and resources on the frontlines to preserve and expand services for older adults, including:

- Three new positions, including two human service workers, which are frontline positions in the Aging Resource Center;
- The first Elder Benefits Specialist position to be the designated department staff person on all things Medicare and some Medicaid services;
- Extra funding for the transportation contract to make sure older adult residents can get to doctor appointments and grocery stores and have an opportunity to live full, independent lives no matter their age or ability; and
- Investments in nutrition, including working with new partners to expand meals for the most underserved seniors in our community.

Integration also allows the County to reduce the cut to the senior center social programming contract and continue to coordinate (mostly virtual) social programming options five days a week at all five of the county-owned senior centers.

What is happening with the senior center programs?

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the five county-owned senior centers are currently closed, and the County expects that the centers will remain closed through at least the first quarter of 2021. Programming at the five County-owned senior centers will continue five days per week in 2021, but it will likely look different than in years past. With the centers being closed, programming will be primarily virtual. Senior center staff will continue to make wellness check phone calls to make sure that customers' needs are being met. Milwaukee County is following public health guidelines to ensure that our residents remain safe and healthy during the pandemic. We have been advised that large groups of older adults gathering together inside puts residents and staff at risk of spreading and contracting COVID-19. We will continue to monitor safety guidelines and aim to bring our community together in person when it is safe to do so.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Some groups have been calling for a 25 percent cut to the Sheriff's budget. Are you cutting the Sheriff's budget?

The Sheriff's expenditure budget has been reduced by \$1.3 million, or 2.7 percent, since last year. Many of the Sheriff's services are mandated by the state—such as operating the Milwaukee County Jail and serving the Courts. Costs to operate the jail are very much dependent on the entire justice system, including how many people are arrested and booked, a process which is typically under the jurisdiction of municipal police departments. Additionally, more space and correctional officers have been required in the Jail in order to maintain appropriate physical distancing to keep those in our custody safe during the COVID-19 pandemic. That said, a 25 percent cut to the Sheriff's budget would likely put the Sheriff out of compliance with state mandates. Especially with COVID-19, extensive cuts could result in lower quality of service at the jail with overworked or fatigued staff who may not be able to uphold safety standards, and delayed court cases or hearings if deputies are not available to staff the courtrooms as mandated. Courts and Jail make up approximately 80 percent of the Sheriff's budget. Moving forward, Milwaukee County looks forward to working with the County Board, the Sheriff, and community members to identify the best way to work up stream to advance health and racial equity.

PARKS AND CULTURALS

Are any pools going to close?

Milwaukee County Parks has been hit hard by the pandemic, since Parks relies significantly on revenue from large events and activities that could not occur for safety reasons during the pandemic. Therefore, there is not enough revenue to support all of our pools opening in 2021. Unfortunately, closures that occurred in 2020 will continue throughout 2021 at McCarty pool, Jackson pool, Grobschmidt pool and Hales Corners pool. Noyes pool will open in the fall of 2021.

Is there anything in this budget to address the Domes?

Yes. The County continues to engage the community to build consensus around the best way forward for the Mitchell Park Horticultural Conservatory (The Domes). In 2016 the County installed protective stainless-steel mesh in all three Domes in order to reduce the risk of deteriorating concrete falling and endangering visitors and staff. This protective barrier has reached the end of its useful life and must be replaced. The 2021 budget includes \$500,000 for this project. As the structure of the Domes continues to deteriorate, we will continue to work with stakeholders on a creative, clear and reasonable path forward.

If Milwaukee Public Museum is finding a new home, why are you spending money to repair the facility?

The Milwaukee Public Museum has been long searching for a new home, since the costs to catch up on deferred maintenance and renovate the current building at 800 W. Wells St. would be more than \$100 million. Milwaukee County owns the MPM building. Due to deferred maintenance, several parts of the stairwell structure have separated to expose concrete and steel, resulting in significant water leakage. When it rains, these leaks cause a significant slip and fall threat to patrons using the parking lot. This and other life safety repairs are necessary to keep the building in adequate shape before MPM moves to its new location, likely in 2026.

It seems like Parks are getting the short end of the stick. Why is the Parks budget getting reduced?

Counties are an arm of the state. Milwaukee County is required by Wisconsin state statute to provide many services, from mental health to courts to highways. Parks are not a service that is mandated by the state. That said, the Parks Department has had to rely on generating its own revenue for the past several years. When the pandemic hit, revenue-generating departments were hit hard as well. It will be imperative to find a long-term solution to maintain our parks system and ensure our community has equity able access to safe, beautiful green space.

TRANSIT

Will any bus routes be cut?

No. There will be no changes to fixed route or paratransit services in 2021, thanks in large part to the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. Were it not for these funds, the

Milwaukee County Transit System would have faced a \$12.1 million gap in 2021 due to increasing expenditures and significantly decreased ridership during the pandemic. , the transit system remains at risk for future years if ridership does not return to pre-pandemic levels.

Are bus fares changing?

No. It was important to hold bus fares flat given the financial challenges we know many of our riders are facing due to the pandemic. Bus fares will remain at \$2.25 cash and \$2 per ride with M-Card or the MCTS mobile app.