



Dane County
210 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
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DATE: November 19, 2023

TO: Dane County Board of Supervisors

FROM: County Board Chair Miles
Supervisor Castillo
Supervisor Erickson
Supervisors Pellebon
Dane County Clerk Scott McDonell

SUBJECT: Dane County Delegation Report – Kassel 2023 Visit

In 2007, Dane County entered into a cooperative agreement with Landkreis (County) Kassel, Hessen, Germany, to form a sister county relationship to exchange ideas regarding transportation, education, culture, and the arts, and build economic partnerships.

This June, following multiple cultural exchanges with Kassel over the past 15 years, a delegation including County Board Chair Patrick Miles, Supervisors Castillo, Erickson, and Pellebon, and County Clerk Scott McDonell traveled to Kassel. The delegation was also joined by Charles James, a long-time member of the Kassel-Dane Sister County Task Force. They met with local officials and business leaders to discuss commonalities and collaboration opportunities related to economic development, renewable energy, and climate change, as well as to strengthen the sister-county partnership.

Specifically, the 2023 delegation met with officials from SMA Solar Technologies, SERA Hydrogen Technologies, Wirtschaftsförderung (WFG) Kassel, the State Sports Association, and the Kassel County Government. The delegation noted the following salient points and next steps:

- Connect Christian Strube at WFG Kassel (Kassel's economic development agency) with contacts at Madison Region Economic Partnership (MadREP), including Jason Fields and Gene Dalhoff.
- Kassel relies heavily on apprenticeships – Dane County could reach out to Kassel and WFG to explore the use of apprenticeships in local corporations – particularly in light of increased federal grants and subsidies for apprenticeship programs.
- Kassel is experiencing challenges with brain drain, migration, and industrial shifts, which is also true to some extent in Dane County. Dane County should coordinate with Kassel and WFG to explore ideas to mitigate these challenges.
- Dane County should explore federal subsidies from the Inflation Reduction Act for transportation and renewable energy infrastructure and may be able to coordinate with US offices of SMA Solar.



- The University of Kassel and industrial companies such as SERA Hydrogen Technologies coordinate in workforce training, development, and recruitment. Dane County could explore the feasibility of similar programs between Dane County corporations and the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Madison College.



- Schedule a follow-up meeting with the Madison Area Sports Commission to coordinate events and potentially an annual team exchange with Kassel.
- Connect artistic contacts from Dane County and Kassel, and have artists visit to do training, performances, and work with students. Coordinate Madison College Big Band travel to Kassel next year.
- In discussing human services with Kassel hosts, the delegation learned that Dane County has a different of allocating funds than Kassel. Being that law enforcement and

Dane County's jail combined are one of the largest focuses of dollars, how they used dollars that were not earmarked for that was interesting.

- In Kassel, artists are paid when they are underemployed. If they are underemployed, they just need to show they are doing some form of art, and that is enough for them to receive a stipend to live. The delegation saw a manifestation of that at the hotel. There were artists who performed nightly to a nearly empty area. However, they were still able to perform and were still paid.
- Persons who were unemployed had their rents paid by the county.
- The delegation visited a refugee camp operated by Kassel. It was a striking contrast to how refugees and immigrants are often depicted in U.S. media. In Kassel, they integrated the population with the community, providing permanent housing, a pathway to citizenship if available, medical care, case management, education, and food security.

The 2023 delegation was enthused by newly formed partnerships and potential for projects in the coming years.

