

ANNUAL REPORT

Dane County Board of Supervisors

2023



Message from County Board Chair Patrick Miles

As we begin 2024, I want to look back on some of the important work the County Board did in 2023, but also look ahead.

This will be a transitional year for Dane County government. Up to one third of the County Board will change over in April, with ten incumbents not running again, and a handful of contested races. The Board will welcome a new Chief of Staff for the County Board in the coming months, as our long-time Chief of Staff, Karin Peterson Thurlow embarks on her well-earned retirement. The anticipated resignation of County Executive Parisi this spring will require appointment of an interim followed by a special election in the fall.

In addition to elections on the local level, 2024 will also see a highly anticipated presidential election. Dane County will continue to be pivotal in state and national elections. Acknowledging the importance of elections security, the county recently purchased and is renovating a building to serve as a secure elections facility.

Transparency and inclusion have long been foundational to the work of the County Board. In 2024, the County Board will launch a new project to engage intentionally with residents to hear priorities, concerns, and ideas to inform policy initiatives for the coming term. As elected officials, we serve the people, making inclusive public engagement critical. The county has acknowledged the need to make sure all members of the public are able to participate in local government and has made strides in providing language access by increasing interpretation and translation services. To this end, the county will hire a comprehensive Language Access Coordinator to assist all departments.

Finally, I want to acknowledge our fantastic County Board staff. You will see in the following pages that the Board staff are innovative and dedicated to supporting us to govern well and engage those we serve.

We have accomplished much, and there is still much to do. I look forward to working with my colleagues on the County Board and the Dane County community in the year to come.





Note from Chief of Staff Karin Peterson Thurlow

As I leave county service, I have been reflecting not only on the past year, but also on the arc of my 27 years with the County Board Office.

Anticipating and Managing Change

In order for the Board Office to effectively support and respond to the changing needs of County Board members, we have focused on people, process, and space. When I began my career with the county, we were in a small space with a small staff. Over the past 10 years, as processes and demands have become more complex, our professional and support staff has increased. The growth in the number of positions, coupled with the need for flexible meeting space, prompted the Board Office to develop space on the third floor of the City-County Building, near committee meeting rooms.

The Board Office has managed two seismic shifts in process in the past dozen years. First, we embraced a legislative management system which dramatically reduced our use of paper while just as dramatically increasing the accessibility of information to the public. Second, as a result of the pandemic, we pivoted to a fully remote platform to conduct the legislative process, and now to a hybrid approach. The expertise of staff, both within the Board Office and throughout county government, allowed the Board to continue to meet effectively, and to accomplish the particularly critical work of providing a social safety net in the first difficult months of the pandemic. The evolution of a hybrid meeting structure is a positive result of the challenges of COVID-19. The Board's work is accessible and transparent, with more members of the public than ever before participating in committee and Board meetings.

Guided by the Values of Equity, Sustainability, and Transparency

It is often said that Dane County government addresses issues 'from A to Z' (the airport to the zoo). The County Board has approached the myriad of topics that come before it through a prism of equity, sustainability, and transparency. While these guiding values differ in their application, they have provided keys to addressing challenging issues with the good of county residents in mind.

Note from Chief of Staff

Karin Peterson Thurlow, cont'd.

In my time with the Board Office, supervisors have addressed wave after wave of compelling issues, big and small: 1) the animals: monkeys, elephants, deer, and feral cats (oh my!); 2) the crisis in public safety communications; 3) fiscal issues: the 2009 fiscal repair, the vehicle registration fee, and the use of federal funding to blunt the impact of the pandemic; 4) criminal justice reform, with a focus on equity, from pretrial to re-entry; 5) affordable housing and homelessness, including development of an ever more robust Affordable Housing Development Fund and the siting of the Beacon; 6) planning and conservation, from comprehensive plans and transfer of development rights, to an ongoing commitment to funding land and water conservation; and 7) maintaining and developing sustainable infrastructure to support the county's mission, including the Badger Prairie Health Care Center, the Henry Vilas Zoo, the courthouse, and the current work on the jail.

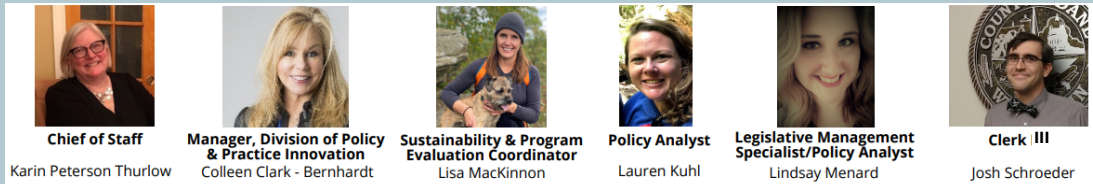
It's a heavy lift for Board members to become familiar with such a range of issues and determine the best strategies to help the residents of Dane County. While issues ebb and flow in their prominence at any given moment, they never really go away. And so the work continues.

In Appreciation

In closing, I want to express my sincere appreciation to each of you and to my colleagues in both the Board Office and throughout county government. The nature of time is curious: the years passed quickly, but the hours at meetings sometimes really, really did not! The relationships I have made because of this job have enhanced my life, and I am grateful.



County Board Staff



Engagement

Language Access

Recognizing the need to make sure all members of the public are able to participate in county government, the Board Office developed processes and procedures throughout 2023 for language access. This was in part prompted by a request from a local Spanish-speaking organization for translation of agendas as well as interpretation at specific county meetings.

Working with the organization and an interpretation/translation organization in Dane County, staff developed best practices and directions for use of an interpreter at a hybrid public meeting, notably, an evolving area as hybrid meetings are still relatively new. These best practices and directions were shared broadly with committee staff members and will be modified and improved over time.

Supervisory District Demographic Profiles

The County Board website has evolved over the years to provide additional resources for members of the public including information for providing public testimony, committee information, and County Board history to name a few. The website also includes a map of each of the supervisory districts. In 2023, the Board Office worked with the University of Wisconsin's Applied Populations Lab and the county's Land Information Office to develop district demographic profiles, and include the information in the maps. This data provides a snapshot of the demographic make-up of each district.

[Supervisor Maps](#)



Engagement

Engage Dane Reinvigorated

Approximately six years ago the Dane County Board of Supervisors embarked on the Engage Dane initiative to make inclusive engagement foundational to Dane County government. Over the past ten years, the Dane County Board has prioritized equity as key to informed and responsible decision making.

The Engage Dane initiative builds on this work and paves a clear path forward between the community and county government, providing for robust and meaningful discussion and partnership on the important issues facing the county.

The pandemic has changed how community members connect with one another as well as how government interacts with residents.

When Engage Dane was initially launched, several community groups were asked how they interact and would like to interact with county government in terms of outreach.

To update this information to reflect the current reality, two focus/interview sessions were held with youth organizations, and residents were asked questions about county government using POLCO, a survey tool.

Members of the public provided information about what would be helpful to know more about county government, as well as the best way to communicate information.

What would be helpful to know more about county government?

Top themes:

- Information about what the county does and the services it provides
- Information about the county budget including priorities and process as well as suggestions for a taxpayer receipt showing where money goes
- Taxes

*Based on POLCO survey responses from 2023 survey



Evaluations

2023 Program Evaluation: Dane County Government Workplace Climate Assessment

In June 2023, the County Board Office contracted with Keen Independent Research to conduct a qualitative and quantitative assessment of workplace climate across Dane County government.

The objective of contracting for these services was to provide an unbiased, independent review of the Dane County workplace climate to:

- Identify areas in which Dane County government is succeeding in fostering positive, effective, high-performing, and desirable workplace climates.
- Identify areas in which Dane County government is experiencing challenges and/or creating barriers to fostering positive, effective, high-performing, and desirable workplace climates.
- Gain greater understanding of the contributing factors and influences on both the successes and challenges identified to learn from those examples and formulate recommendations.
- Provide specific recommendations to the County Board Office based on findings from research on innovations and best practices (local, national, international) for creating positive and desirable workplace climates that could be implemented by Dane County government.
- Identify any budgetary implications/needs for implementation of recommendations.

The assessment considered, among other things: Equity (e.g., in demographic representation, salary, promotional opportunities, etc.), security/safety in workplace (defined broadly, recurring specific workplace climate issues, resources needed for success in individual positions, departments, and workplace as a whole (training, education/continuing education, technology, etc., employee compensation and benefits, and policy impacts affecting current and prospective employees.

Keen Independent conducted comprehensive data analysis and provided a number of opportunities for candid employee feedback. The County Board Office anticipates the findings and recommendations from this assessment will be used to promote interdepartmental learning and inform future policies, practices, and investments that will foster and strengthen positive workplace climate across Dane County government.

Keen Independent Research will deliver the final report mid January 2024. The Report will be available on the Dane County Board of Supervisors webpage.

Legislative Process

The Dane County Board Office made two key enhancements to the legislative process in 2023:

- a legislative process certification program created for staff who coordinate and manage boards, commissions, and committees
- a new registration process for members of the public attending board meetings

In late 2022, the Board Office held a multi-day training for staff who coordinate and manage boards, commissions, and committees called Committee Academy. The Committee Academy was a huge success and feedback suggested there was a need for ongoing training for staff on the legislative process. To address this need, the Board Office developed a Legislative Process Certificate Program; a 3-part training for staff that focuses on legislative management, Legistar, and how to provide orientation for new members of boards, commissions, and committees. The Board Office will offer one module a month, with the trainings repeating quarterly. Upon completion of all three modules, participants will receive a “certificate” indicating familiarity with tasks required to provide staff support to legislative and advisory bodies. The program kicked off in October and approximately 20 staff members completed the inaugural training program. The Committee Academy is the first training program to standardize legislative management across county committees, and also advances equity by providing opportunities for advancement.

With the implementation of virtual and hybrid meetings, public engagement and attendance at public meetings increased significantly. To account for the increase in attendance at board meetings, the Board Office worked with the County Clerk and Information Management to improve the registration process. The changes improved user experience and provided a better platform. The new process is working well with, over 200 people registering successfully the first time it was used. Additionally, members of the public attending meetings in person can now register using a QR code, which will automatically add them to the queue of speakers and decrease the need for paper registration forms.

The Board Office is committed to improving the legislative process for staff and members of the public and will continue to look for innovative ways to ensure the process is accessible, understandable, and transparent.

462

Registrants to speak
at County Board
meetings in 2023



110+

County committee
and Board meetings
staffed by the County
Board Office



Equity Plan

2023 County Board Equity and Inclusion Plan Update

The 2023 update of the Dane County Board of Supervisors and County Board Office Equity & Inclusion Plan identifies new and ongoing policy and program initiatives and actions. It provides a snapshot of the many policy and program initiatives and actions the Dane County Board of Supervisors and County Board Office have completed since development of the first equity plan in 2018.

The updated plan broadens the original plan's conception of racial equity and social justice to affirmatively encompass equity and inclusion related to gender identity, religious affiliation, disability, etc. The plan highlights a number of priorities; it does not present an exhaustive list of what the County Board and Office are currently doing or intend to do to support and add to those priorities, as the work of the County Board evolves dynamically throughout the year with the creation of new policies and programs.

The Equity & Inclusion Plan describes strategies the County Board will actively develop, continue, and maintain to advance equity and inclusion as a part of its mission and day-to-day work.

The Equity & Inclusion Plan is organized using the five Areas of Opportunity with related Goals and Key Action Steps for achieving a more equitable and inclusive County Board of Supervisors, County Board Office, and, by extension, Dane County government as a whole.

Areas of Opportunity

- Organizational Commitment
- Leadership Development
- Program Innovation
- Collaboration
- Resource Mobilization





Relationship with UW-Madison

The County Board has worked with the University of Wisconsin-Madison on various policy topics over the last several years, including the UniverCity Alliance initiatives, which is a UW program that connects students and classes with local communities to work on real-world projects. In an effort to continue to build the relationship between the UW and the Board Office, as well as to expand research capacity, the Board Office has contracted with the UW to have students to complete two policy research projects during each semester. A recap of the projects completed in 2023 follows.

Youth Mental Health

A project completed during the Spring semester focused on the youth mental health crisis in Dane County, with results presented to the Executive Committee, Health and Human Needs Committee, and Public Protection and Judiciary Committee. The report included key research and data regarding teen mental health in Dane County. One of the three recommendations was to increase funding for each of the 15 youth centers supported by the Department of Human Services, and monitor the development of future youth centers in Dane County and fund accordingly. During the 2024 Dane County budget process, a capital budget amendment was introduced and adopted to provide \$1 million dollars to fund the initial feasibility study and development of a teen center in Fitchburg.

[Report](#)

County Services for Rural Seniors

Approximately 5 years ago, the Board Office completed a review of the implications of an aging population for county services and programs. A UW student project in the spring of 2023 updated the data using census information. The project also included a research component to review innovative policies around the country to provide services to seniors, specifically rural seniors. The final report included several examples of policies that addressed health and mobility assistance.

[Report](#)



Relationship with UW-Madison, cont'd.

Pay for Success

A project for the fall semester focused on researching the pay for success funding model and how or if it could be implemented in Dane County. The research focused on the difference between pay for success models and social impact bonds, the key elements of a successful proposal, data used to determine baseline measurements and measure success, examples of projects funded through a pay for success model, the development of contracts and transactions, and additional areas of inquiry.

Role of Public Event Centers

Over the last several years, the County Board has considered redevelopment of the Alliant Energy Center. The Alliant Energy Center hosts a wide variety of events from small meetings to the County Fair, Midwest Horse Show, and World Dairy Expo.

During the Fall 2023 semester, a student researched and compiled a list of recent innovations in development and operation of public event centers/conference centers run by or associated with local governments as well as other entities. Areas of interest included integration of sustainability and equity in design, operation and programming. Priority research areas included a focus on centers that attract events because of the work they have done, or how the facility is built with areas of interest in mind.



Safety Plan

In a time of conflict-filled discourse, there has been heightened concern for safety in meetings for staff, elected officials, and members of the public. Throughout 2023, the Board Office developed a safety plan for county public meetings in City-County Building meeting rooms and the County Board Chambers. The work included a review of potential risks and the creation of processes to ensure a safe environment.

The County Board Office security team worked with Emergency Management, Facilities, Risk Management, Sheriff's Office, and Corporation Counsel to develop elements of the security plan including emergency exits, evacuation routes, door access, first aid/stop the bleed kits in City-County Building meeting rooms. County Board staff and supervisors, and Facilities Management staff were offered several training opportunities in the summer of 2023, including active shooter and stop the bleed training from the Sheriff's Office, and CCR training from Emergency Management.



Looking Ahead to 2024

Presentation and Language Consistency

The Board Office worked to develop a style guide to provide consistency in language and appearance of reports and presentations. In addition to providing consistency, the style guide addresses accessibility and the use of person-first language. The style guide and presentation format will be used in the 2024-2026 Board term.

Strategic Community Engagement Process

The 2024 budget included an amendment to conduct a strategic community engagement process for the County Board. The project will engage residents using a racial and social equity lens to hear residents' concerns and priorities for Dane County government.

This strategic community engagement process is intended to further advance outreach efforts between Dane County residents and the Dane County Board, specifically to inform policy initiatives.

The process will include focus groups held throughout Dane County, with additional focus groups provided for Spanish and Hmong speaking residents. The request for proposals for this work was released in January 2024, with the initiative to begin in April 2024. This is a long-term project with strategic engagement events slated to repeat every other year (2024, 2026, 2028, etc.).

Onward

The year ahead promises to be full of change, challenges, and opportunities. The County Board Office staff will continue to seek innovations in policy, technology, and process in support of the work of the Board.