



KENT COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

# 2022 YEAR IN REVIEW

# A WORD FROM THE BOARD CHAIR & COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Colleagues,

It has truly been an honor to have served as your Chair and Administrator this year and we are extremely proud of all that we accomplished. We worked together to appropriate millions of federal dollars to the community, provide much-needed support to our court system while being good stewards of County resources, waive restaurant licensing fees, and teamed up with our partners to ensure the continuation of services to our older residents and veterans.

This report outlines several notable accomplishments we achieved together over the past year as well as a preview of a few of the issues that await in 2023.



*Stan Stek*

**STAN STEK**  
CHAIR, KENT COUNTY  
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS



*Al Vanderberg*

**AL VANDERBERG**  
ADMINISTRATOR/CONTROLLER,  
KENT COUNTY



## AAA Bond Rating

A year-in-review report would not be complete without mentioning our strong financial stability. **For the 24th consecutive year, we maintained our AAA bond rating from the rating agencies, S&P Global and Moody's Investors Services.** We are one of an estimated 25 counties in the country to receive this rating. Our pension plan is nearly fully funded, and other post-employment benefit liability (OPEB) has been significantly reduced. These financial successes are a testament to the strong leadership of our current and past Commissioners.



## 2023 Budget

The Board adopted the **Fiscal Year 2023 budget**, which will run from January 1, 2023, to September 30, 2023. **It is a nine-month budget to align the County's fiscal year with State and Federal sources and to reset the County's fiscal year end to September 30, which will gain internal efficiencies.** The total budget is \$440.2 million and includes \$371.6 million for operating expenditures, \$13.6 million for capital improvements, and \$59.9 million to support other funds.



## Agricultural Preservation

The Agricultural Preservation Board, through the Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) program, secured an easement to protect 67 acres of farmland in Grattan Township and received full funding to preserve two farms in the Fruit Ridge area.



## American Rescue Plan Act

After we received the \$127 million from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), the Board developed a highly collaborative approach to allocating resources to the community. These activities included the launch of an [interactive website](#), six community forums, 33 meetings with leaders from disproportionately impacted communities; an online survey; and an online portal to submit funding requests.

As previously stated, “This process pushed us to our capacity to engage, and to compromise, and to reach conclusions because this was never going to be easy and it hasn't been easy.” **In the end, we unanimously approved a package of 30 projects totaling more than \$108 million in funding that will have a transformational, generational impact on the communities we serve.**

Thank you for thoroughly reviewing, researching, and evaluating each proposal and the proposal set as a whole. We are excited to begin working with the funded organizations to implement these projects.



## Amphitheater

**The Board authorized the Grand Rapids-Kent County Convention/Arena Authority (CAA) to execute an agreement with the City of Grand Rapids for the purchase of real property for the development of an outdoor amphitheater.** The proposed amphitheater site of 11.6 acres would be part of a greater riverfront development of 31 acres including a greenway park, trail, and 1,500 to 1,700 housing units.

While the CAA and Grand Action 2.0 have a lot of work to do to bring the amphitheater to fruition, this step was essential to moving the project forward.

## **Administrator's Office - Branding, 6 C's, Reorganization and Enhanced Communication**

Under Commissioner Bolter's leadership, we underwent an extensive community engagement and internal interview process in 2020-2021 to select Al as our next Administrator/Controller. Since August 2021, the following initiatives have been initiated:

- In 2019, we began a process to better align our **brand communications** with our vision, mission, and the work we all do in and for the communities we serve. The Board approved the new brand design and messaging on October 27. The branding team is currently working with several public-facing departments and offices to build out a set of unified department logos representative of each of their service areas. The team is completing a comprehensive brand guide to help each department and office effectively and consistently apply the brand to new materials going forward.
- An **Organizational Improvement Initiative** – 6 C's –on customer service; creativity; communication; cultural intelligence; competency; and collaboration was launched. A majority of the department directors and elected officials underwent the Kent – Disney Way Customer Service Training Initiative in the Fall and training for all employees will begin in February 2023. The Robertson Brain Health Initiative with the Health Department staff and a Toyota Kata – LEAN – Continuous Improvement project in KCAA are currently underway.
- **The Administrator's Office was reorganized to improve efficiency and to clarify reporting assignments.** We also welcomed a new Gateways for Growth Welcome Plan Coordinator to help our community be more welcoming to New Americans; a second Deputy County Administrator to oversee operations of four internal departments and facilitate several external task force initiatives, and a Director of Strategic Impact to lead grant development and continuous improvement projects.
- To increase internal and external communication, two series of **Local Unit of Government Quadrant Meetings** and **Brown Bag lunches with employees** were held. Additionally, an **Administrator's Digest** is sent nearly every week which highlights the work of our departments and employees.

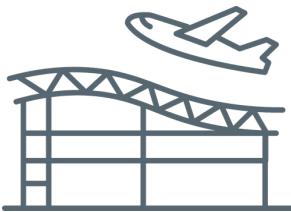


## **Animal Shelter/Animal Control Operations Restructuring**

**On July 1, the animal shelter moved from the Health Department and was structured as a stand-alone county department reporting directly to the administration.** This change allows the Health Department to focus on other public health priorities. **At the same time, animal control operations were reassigned to the Sheriff's Office** to set up this function for greater success through additional training, enhanced collaboration with the Prosecutor's Office, and public safety-specific communication tools.

The Board approved the creation and subsequent funding (\$680,334) for three full-time animal control unit supervisors at the Sheriff's Office, including equipment and operational expenses. Additionally, the Board adopted an ordinance to align with state law, eliminate inconsistent provisions, and, for activity not rising to the criminal level, provide for enforcement through a **Municipal Civil Infraction Bureau**. The Board also adopted a [Kent County Animal Control Ordinance](#) which applies anywhere in the county where local city, township, or village ordinances are not already in place.

## **Airport Bonding and *ELEVATE* Expansion**



**We partnered with the Airport Authority Board to finance the expansion of Concourse A and the construction of a baggage handling system and a consolidated rental care facility.** These capital improvement projects will help accommodate projected passenger growth over the next 20 years.

When calculating this \$300 million bond into our fund balance, our net direct debt is .03% which is well below the authorized amount. Additionally, by using the County's strong credit rating, the airport will experience significant savings over the life of the bond.



## Broadband

The Board's commitment to increasing residents' access to high-speed internet continued in 2022. **Under the leadership of Commissioners Greene (C) and Wooden, we are gathering information about the locations of service gaps and preparing to compete for federal and state dollars dedicated to broadband infrastructure.**

Merit Network has completed data collection and is analyzing the data to share with Guidehouse for developing strategy, plans, and partnerships to address our residents' broadband needs. This work will also contribute to ongoing opportunities to correct state and federal maps of broadband services that impact the allocation of broadband funding.



## Community Action

The Board appropriated funds and authorized agreements for KCCA and Fiscal Services to continue partnering with the Heart of West Michigan United Way to conclude the multi-year **COVID Emergency Rental Assistance (CERA) program.**

The state-funded program provided rental assistance to eligible individuals and households to prevent homelessness and increase housing stability. **To date, more than 16,400 individuals were assisted, and 33,000 assistance payments processed.** Also, the department is undergoing a continuous improvement process on its Weatherization Assistance Program (Toyota Kata - LEAN) to significantly reduce the turnaround time for services to be delivered. This work will be important as the department finalized a \$6.1 million grant agreement with the Michigan Department of Health & Human Services to expand weatherization services to more eligible households. **Finally, we recently welcomed Gustavo Perez as the department's new director.**

## Millages – Ready by Five, Seniors, and Veterans

In August, Kent County voted to continue two millages that provide services to some of our most vulnerable populations – older adults and veterans.

- **Senior Millage:** This 24-year-old millage will continue to fund services for seniors from 2023 to 2030 at the rate of .50 mills. In addition, **the Board approved more than \$11 million in Senior Millage funds for more than 32 agencies providing 51 unique services** to older adults in our community between January and September of 2023.
- **Veterans Millage:** **A 2021 Veterans Millage Board Subcommittee, chaired by Commissioner Burrill, recommended the ballot language adopted by the Board and approved by the voters at the rate of .050 mills.** For eight additional years, the funds will support staff and services for veterans, including emergency services (e.g., food vouchers), support services (e.g., home accessibility improvements), wellness (e.g., group recreation outings), and mental health and substance abuse treatment services.

In addition to these two millages, we approved another round of **Ready by Five** millage funding in October for 45 programs and services in the amount of \$7,841,744. Between January and October 2022, Ready by Five served over 10,000 expecting parents and children through age five across all areas of the county.

Please note: The allocations above are based on a nine-month budget to align with the County's new budget cycle.

## Parks Growth & New Office



**In September, we held a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new Parks Department office.** This \$2.68 million facility was approved by the Board in 2020 through the Capital Improvement Program. It offers over 7,000 square feet of office space and replaces the “temporary” modular offices constructed in 2002. Additionally, the Parks Department **successfully opened three additional rental cabins** this year at **Wabasis Campground**.

The cabins had a 92% occupancy rate between Memorial Day and Labor Day. The Department, along with a generous gift from James and Shirley Balk, **purchased 125 acres of the closed Silver Lake County Club.**





## Probate Judge

Acting upon the Board’s Judicial Resources Subcommittee recommendation, which was chaired by Commissioner Theil, the **Board unanimously voted to add one new Probate Judge position** and two Judicial Court Clerks to address increasing population trends and court caseloads. Our current Probate Register, Avery Rose, was selected by voters in the November election to assume this judgeship on Jan. 1, 2023.

## Restaurant Fees Waived

**For the second year in a row, we waived the food licensing fees for the 2,372 food establishments in Kent County** to assist these establishments in overcoming the economic and labor setbacks caused by the pandemic. This nearly \$1.2 million appropriation came from the American Rescue Plan Act.

Dear Kent County Board of Commissioners,

We are extremely grateful for your consideration of waiving food licensing fees for 2021 and 2022! Thank you Commissioners for recognizing the value our small businesses bring to the community. Our goals align, as serving community well, is key.

**To serve, protect, and promote a healthy community for all**, The Kent County Health Department (KCHD) Food Safety Committee was created to improve food safety in Kent County by advising the department regarding matters involving food safety, policy development, industry communications, quality improvement, and to provide a forum for public input regarding related issues.

KCHD Food Safety Committee is made up of a diverse group of 21 individuals/owners from the local food service industry, Kent County Health Department staff and MDARD representatives. All work together to foster dialogue and positive forward movement for those who are licensed to work in food service in Kent County.

The pandemic wreaked havoc on us all. Restaurants and the food service industry was damaged quite badly. Unfortunately, there were businesses that will not open their doors. Many are legendary and we salute their efforts.

We are so grateful for your decision to help us by waiving licensing fees for the past two years. There is no doubt your actions have help to assist the more than 2,300 food establishment license holders in our county. Your actions help to support jobs, businesses and community so Kent County can continue to build a stronger, more resilient economic environment.

Many Thanks!

*Sharon Miller*  
Culinary Cultivations  
RQ  
Noco Provisions

*John P. ...*  
Kent Career Tech Center  
Teres el Coñaco Family

*Jessica Lopez*

*Janice ...*  
The Candied Ham

*L. R. Angelo*  
Toby Malters - Food Truck

*Cynthia ...*  
Sun Over Restaurants

*James H. ...*  
Culbers Restaurant



## Legislative Priorities

In March, the Board approved a wide-ranging list of state priorities. In July, Gov. Whitmer signed the Fiscal Year 2022 State Budget which aligned with several of our legislative priorities.

- **6%** (5% in the base and 1% one-time) increase in revenue sharing
- **\$4 million** increase for Raise the Age Fund
- **\$5 million** for the construction of a new Behavioral Health Crisis Center in Kent County
- **\$2.35** hourly wage approved for direct care workers on an ongoing basis
- **\$5 million** in one-time funding for grants to local health departments to provide free or low-cost water testing to private well owners
- **\$150 million** for the cost of developing a single, statewide judicial case management system. Currently, there are 242 trial courts using and funding more than 16 case management systems and 150 computer systems.
- **\$15 million** for the Secondary Road Patrol Grant Program
- Inclusion of boilerplate language that implements a master agreement between the West Michigan Partnership for Children and the Michigan Department of Health & Human Services to maintain our performance-based child welfare contracting program.

Additionally, the Legislature approved **legislation extending trial courts' authority to impose fees** to fund trial operations until May 1, 2024.

After a year of partisan politics, the **Governor signed House Bill 6358 (P.A. 231) into law which transfers the former State Police lab on the Fuller Campus to Kent County.** We are currently working with the Department of Management and Budget on the required real estate transactions.

On the federal side, U.S. Senators Peters and Stabenow successfully requested **\$5 million** be included in the Department of Transportation budget for the **replacement of the air traffic control tower.**



## Sheriff's Office

To continue to help improve school safety, we **authorized additional School Resource Officers at Kenowa Hills Public Schools, Kent City Community Schools, and Rockford Public Schools.** The SRO program not only enhances the safety of students, staff, and parents but assists with a wide array of responsibilities such as mentoring, security, and teaching educational programs.

Additionally, a 2-way radio network will be developed in the year ahead to connect every K-12 school in Kent County directly to our dispatch center.

The **Board also appropriated funds and authorized agreements** in February between the Sheriff's Office and the United State Department of Justice to form an **Enhanced Collaborative Model Task Force to Combat Human Trafficking.** In November, the KCSO Human Trafficking Task Force arrested a 38-year-old Comstock Park man for trafficking a 16-year-old Grand Rapids teen. As you can see, this grant is already paying dividends in combating human trafficking!



## Sustainable Business Park

In 2021, the Department of Public Works (DPW) selected an anchor tenant Continuous Materials and Anaergia (CM+A) for the Sustainable Business Park (SBP). The DPW Board subsequently approved a Project Development Agreement (PDA) with CM+A to “define the terms, tasks and responsibilities,

schedule, early termination/payments to proceed to 30 percent site and facility design, permits, utilities, terms of the service and lease agreements, feedstock agreements, and business park design to finalize the project capital costs, tipping fees, and financing.” In addition to this work, an SBP Advisory Group, comprised of local units of government, County and business leaders, and a waste hauler representative, was convened to walk alongside the project and provide feedback. While not a decision-making body, this group will make recommendations to the DPW Board in early 2023, on how a countywide waste system could be optimally implemented.

## Work Sessions/Informational Meetings

Throughout the past year, we held work sessions and informational meetings on the administrator's office reorganization, animal shelter/animal control restructuring, amphitheater, airport bonding, branding, CIP, and legislative priorities. In the year ahead, there will more meetings on the Insurance Authority, SBP, etc. We encourage you to attend these meetings as they provide us an opportunity to thoroughly examine complex issues.



# 2023

## The Year Ahead

We recently updated our [Strategic Plan](#) which focuses on five key priority areas: Economic Prosperity; High Quality of Life; Excellence in Service Delivery; Inclusive Participation; and Effective Communications. While this plan will guide some of our work as well as that of our 25 departments and offices, there are significant issues awaiting us in the year ahead which include but, are not limited to:

- **ARPA Implementation:** A lot of work remains in implementing the ARPA allocation approved in December. **County staff will be working with award recipients on contractual terms** and there is **approximately \$8 million in unallocated reserves that the Board will need to appropriate by the end of 2024.**
- **Board Transition:** We have six highly experienced Commissioners leaving the Board, and the Apportionment Commission added two more seats to the Commission. Therefore, **we will be welcoming eight new Commissioners in January.** This will undoubtedly be a period of transition and one that will create both challenges and opportunities.
- **Finalizing Space Needs Study:** The Administrator's Office and Facilities Management contracted with Progressive AE **to develop a report of the County's facility and infrastructure needs.** This information, along with cost data, will allow the Board to engage in a productive discussion on the future of County facilities.

- **North County Campus:** This facility will consist of our new Sheriff's North Sub-Station and North County Health Clinic with a total project budget of \$13,130,000. When completed in the Spring of 2023, the 30,000 sq. ft. facility will be of great service to our northern communities.



- **Potential Establishment of an Insurance Authority:** In late January, there will be three informational meetings on the proposed implementation of a Kent County Insurance Authority.
- **SBP Bonding Decision:** The Board of Public Works and County Commissioners will need to decide on several key issues including, but not limited to, the public investment of the SBP. However, several issues are not finalized and continue to be influenced by the SBP Advisory Group and the work of the PDA as highlighted above.

We thank you for your hard work and dedication to making Kent County a great place to build a business and raise a family.