

KENT COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

2023 YEAR IN REVIEW



A MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR & COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Dear Community Members,

Together with the Kent County Board of Commissioners, county administration, and our dedicated staff, we're pleased to share our annual report - a testament to our collective efforts in strengthening Kent County.

Throughout the past year, our efforts have centered on enhancing public safety, upgrading vital infrastructure, and ensuring the prudent management of taxpayer funds. Simultaneously, we've upheld our commitment to fiscal responsibility, fostered economic growth, preserved our agricultural heritage, and expanded essential county services. Every decision and action has been geared towards enriching the quality of life for our community.

A key objective has been fostering better communication and engagement with you, our residents.

Sincerely,

Your input is crucial in shaping our initiatives. Through various means, we've aimed to create more meaningful connections to ensure your voices are heard in decisions shaping our county's future.

We encourage you to explore this report, learn about the issues addressed, and see the progress made for the county and its residents. Your continued support in the year ahead is vital for our collective progress.

The Kent County Board of Commissioners appreciates your trust in allowing us to serve this vibrant community. We look forward to continuing this journey together, working hand in hand to build a better future for all.



A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Stan Stek'.

Stan Stek

Chair, Kent County Board
of Commissioners



A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Al Vanderberg'.

Al Vanderberg

Administrator/Controller,
Kent County



All About the Board of Commissioners

As we mark the end of an eventful year, it is important to consider the significant alteration that occurred within the Board of Commissioners.

The 2021 redistricting resulted in the expansion of the Board from 19 to 21 commissioners.

We began the year bidding farewell to six Commissioners who were instrumental in our County's progress. Simultaneously, eight new commissioners joined, introducing fresh perspectives, marking a significant turnover of nearly 40% in our Board's composition.

Within our 21-member commission, Republicans account for 57% and Democrats for 43%. However, beyond these numbers, every Commissioner shares a common commitment to public service and the advancement of Kent County.

In October, the **Board approved a fundamental restructuring of the standing committee structure** to improve our ability to provide effective oversight. The new committee structure will be effective beginning January 1, 2025.

Board Meetings and Educational Opportunities

Throughout the year, Commissioners participated in a series of informational meetings, work sessions, and tours to familiarize them with internal County operations and critical matters that may require a vote.





Opportunities for Public Input

The Board also met to deliberate and vote on issues while fostering dialogue and interaction with residents.

The Board passed 141 resolutions, spanning topics from public safety and health to enhancing essential county services and facilities, while maintaining fiscal responsibility.

Celebrating and Recognizing Outstanding Community Contributions

In a display of community appreciation, the Board **presented 25 proclamations** to individuals and organizations, spanning from honoring the achievements of Eagle Scouts to recognizing retirements, festivals, and the invaluable service of our veterans. This collective effort is a demonstration of our commitment to fostering connections and celebrating the richness of our community.

10

Work Sessions



22

Informational Meetings



15

Legislative & Human Resources Committee Meetings



19

Finance & Physical Resources Meetings



21

Board of Commissioners Meetings



ECONOMIC PROSPERITY

We will focus on sound fiscal management and policies to support the economic prosperity of the County as well as the West Michigan region.

Commitment to Fiscal Excellence

This year marked a strategic shift as we aligned our fiscal year with that of our major funding sources - the State of Michigan and the federal government - adopting an October 1 - September 30 budget cycle. This adjustment will significantly streamline our fiscal processes, enhancing efficiency.

Aligned with our commitment to prudent fiscal management, the total **Fiscal Year 2024** budget of \$585.5 million, with \$15.3 million allocated to capital improvements, underscores our dedication to **prioritizing essential services like public safety while conscientiously managing taxpayer funds**. This commitment to fiscal responsibility is exemplified in our proud maintenance of the **Triple-A credit rating** from S&P Global and Moody's Investors Service for the 25th consecutive year. **This distinction sets us apart as only one of three counties in Michigan and one of 106 counties nationwide to attain this prestigious recognition.**

The Board **established the Kent County Insurance Authority**, effective October 1, 2024, to allocate funding for various risk management needs. This Authority will allow enhanced management and direct decision-making regarding insurance coverage and risk-related issues, such as litigation protocols and settlements. **Ultimately, the Authority will aid in better risk management, potentially leading to cost savings.**

Advancing Legislative Priorities

Throughout the year, we continued to forge strong collaborations with our state and federal lawmakers, centering our efforts on critical legislative priorities. One of our achievements included securing a **5% boost in statutory revenue-sharing funding**. Additionally, within the Fiscal Year 2024 State of



Michigan budget, a **2% one-time allocation** was earmarked for **public safety enhancements**. A significant development arose through State Rep. John Fitzgerald's legislation, adding a new 63rd District Court judge for the November 2024 election. In October, **the Board voted to add a new District Judge position**, an Assistant Prosecuting Attorney, and a Senior Administrative Specialist to support the case processing requirements. Additionally, two Sheriff Deputy positions will be added to enhance security details.

On the federal front, Congresswoman Scholten requested \$500,000 for the Kent County Greenway project in the budget, which is currently advancing through the appropriation process. A highlight of the year was the **Congresswoman and her staff touring a portion of the trail**, gaining a better understanding of its scope and importance.



Investing in Community: Acrisure Amphitheater

The Board voted in November to **appropriate \$15 million to the Acrisure Amphitheater**, a proposed \$184 million riverfront venue slated for downtown Grand Rapids. This funding, drawn from Kent County's hotel and motel room tax revenues, signifies a significant investment in our community's cultural landscape. The development will expand cultural opportunities as well as stimulate tourism and bolster employment, enriching our community in multifaceted ways.



HIGH QUALITY OF LIFE

We will foster a high quality of life that promotes safe and healthy communities, strategic growth, and world-class outdoor resources.

Investing in Public Safety

As the landscape of criminal activity evolves, increased investment in public safety operations has become essential. Sheriff Michelle LaJoye-Young initiated a study to ascertain the required staffing levels at the Kent County Correctional Facility. Based on the study's findings, **the Board approved funding for 20 additional corrections officers this year.**

In late December, the Finance Committee approved over **\$1.8 million to upgrade the mechanical controls for the correctional facility's cell doors**, aiming to achieve higher operational efficiencies and increase safety and security for staff and inmates.

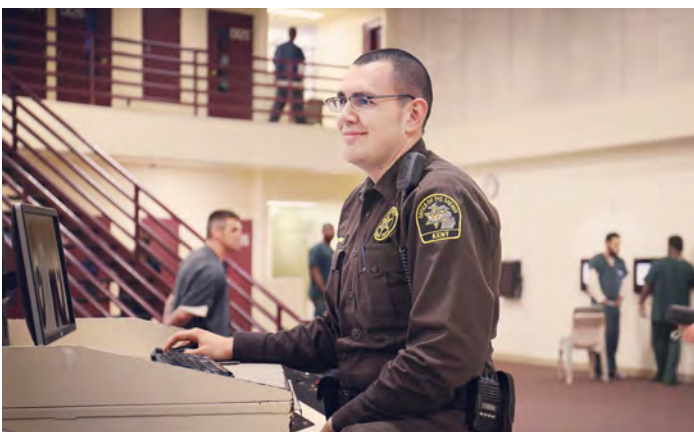
Additionally, the Board **approved funding for five new contracted school resource officers.** With over \$2.8

million in Kent County American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding, the Sheriff's Office is currently implementing an **800 MHz radio safety system** across all participating **K-12 public and private schools.** This cutting-edge communication will facilitate immediate direct lines between schools, dispatch, and first responders during emergencies, making it the first program of its kind in Michigan. This decision was complemented by the **addition of a contracted patrol car servicing Algoma and Courtland Townships.**

Championing Community Health

The Board's allocation of **\$2.5 million from the Department of Housing and Urban Development**, coupled with \$3.8 million from ARPA funds, signifies a critical step in **safeguarding families from lead-based paint and home health hazards.** To expand these efforts, the Health Department secured over \$1 million from Ready by Five millage funds **to expand investigations into elevated blood lead levels in children's homes.**

The Board allocated \$3 million in ARPA funding to Cascade Township for PFAS mitigation, aiding in connecting homes with wells to the Grand Rapids water main. These strategic investments underscore our dedication to addressing crucial community health issues.





Wall-Breaking Ceremony for Behavioral Health Crisis Center

Preserving Agriculture Farmland

Scott and Melissa Sieracki celebrated preserving their 67-acre Grattan Township property in October. **We secured the development rights through our Purchase of Development Rights program, ensuring perpetual agricultural use.** For 22 years, the Sierackis have cultivated corn, soybeans, wheat, and hay. The **Purchase of Development Rights** program, **safeguarding 2,800 acres on 29 properties since 2002**, selected the Sieracki farm for its prime soils and proximity to other conserved land.

Improving Access to Recreation and Leisure Opportunities

The allocation of \$15 million from ARPA funding marked a significant step in the expansion of our parks and trails, aligning closely with the ambitious Grand River Greenway vision. This allocation signified a pivotal commitment to nurturing natural spaces and connectivity from Lake Michigan to Downtown Grand Rapids and across the eastern border of Kent County.

Of this amount, \$10 million from ARPA funds will play a crucial role in propelling ongoing efforts to develop the Grand River Greenway.

Two acquisitions exemplify this progress:

- Collaborating with a family trust, the Parks Department secured riverfront property, expanding Two Rivers Park in Caledonia Township. This acquisition

safeguards the Coldwater and Thornapple River confluence, fostering Two Rivers Park's growth.

- Securing a 27-acre parcel adjacent to the 12-Mile Greenspace extends it to around 43 acres, offering enhanced recreational opportunities along the Rogue River and Fred Meijer White Pine Trail State Park.

Additionally, the Finance Committee accepted \$19 million from Downtown Grand Rapids Inc. This funding will complete a 23-mile non-motorized trail across several townships and include a Grand River bridge, enhancing Greenway connectivity.

These park expansions, bolstered by ARPA funding and collaborative support, reaffirms our dedication to enriching natural spaces and creating a more connected, vibrant, and accessible greenway for present and future generations.

Enhancing Access to Mental Health Services

Kent County, Network180, and Trinity Health Grand Rapids **held a wall-breaking ceremony for the upcoming Behavioral Health Crisis Center (BHCC)** in May. Set to **open in early 2024**, the BHCC is designed to offer vital connections to crucial services for individuals experiencing mental health or substance use crises, aiming to ease the strain on emergency departments and law enforcement. This center, backed by \$3.9 million in funding, is one of 30 projects moving forward thanks to our ARPA investments.

EXCELLENCE IN SERVICE DELIVERY

We will adopt innovative ways to deliver services that maximize efficiency and provide an exceptional experience to those we serve.

Transforming County Facilities for Enhanced Services

This year we marked significant strides in expanding and enhancing County services to meet the needs of our growing community. On June 1, we **opened our North County Campus** in Cedar Springs bringing a new public health clinic and Sheriff's Office substation.

We **opened the Kent County Fleet Services building** in Grand Rapids in September. This cutting-edge facility empowers us to bring critical services in-house, reducing reliance on external resources and effectively safeguarding taxpayer dollars.

November brought on an important decision by the Board, **approving a countywide facilities plan**. The plan entails constructing a new County administration building and medical examiner's facility at the Fuller campus. Additionally, the plan includes repurposing 300 Monroe to accommodate the Prosecutor's Office and flexible/shared office spaces, with potential renovations at 320 Ottawa to support Indigent Defense services.

These decisions reflect the Board's commitment to upgrading facilities to serve the community better and optimize County services.

"We are thrilled to open these new state-of-the-art facilities, a testament to Kent County's commitment to efficiency and fiscal responsibility."

**- Kent County Board of Commissioners
Chair Stan Stek**



Nurturing Talent and Elevating Service Standards

We remained committed to cultivating a vibrant workforce and advancing customer service throughout the past year. We strive to be the employer of choice, nurturing diverse talents, and honing our service excellence.

This steadfast commitment to elevate customer service persisted through our **Disney Way training**. To date, **574 of our 1,750 team members** have participated in the training and additional sessions are slated for 2024.

“I really enjoyed the interaction with all the different departments at the Disney Way Training. It was nice to be able to relate to the problems county-wide and be able to come up with solutions.” - Kent County Employee

In our pursuit of nurturing talent this year we made significant investments in the well-being of our workforce. More than **129 department directors, county-wide elected officials, and health department staff** participated in the **Robertson Brain Health** program.

After completing a comprehensive assessment, participants received personalized diet and exercise recommendations aimed at achieving optimal brain health and balanced brain chemistry. The program's impact extends beyond individual health. If each participant adheres to their brain health recommendations throughout their careers, the **County is estimated to save \$618,000 in healthcare costs**. Moreover, **participants could potentially save more than \$26,000 each in healthcare expenses**. This initiative is among the many that showcase our ongoing commitment to nurturing a workforce that flourishes in mind, body, and spirit.

Amidst this, our **Weatherization Assistance Program** faced a challenge with a **257-day wait from application to service delivery**. Our team's revamp drastically **reduced this to 91 days**, and we persist in aiming for a 45-day timeline. This dedication ensures efficient, timely aid for our community. We're devoted to implementing innovative strategies and continuously enhancing our service standards for the people of Kent County.



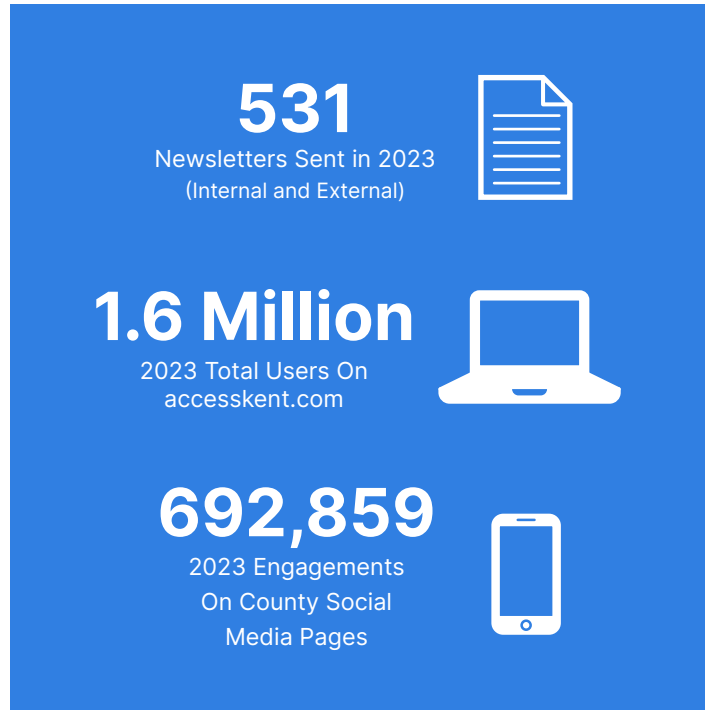
EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

We will be transparent and clear in the communications and decisions of the County.

This year we marked significant strides in amplifying our reach and improving resident engagement. We proudly **unveiled our new brand**, reflecting who we are - Kent County government and the place we call home.

A pivotal addition to our communication strategy was the **introduction of the Board of Commissioners newsletter**, a tool offering residents insights into the decisions and actions the Board took on their behalf and for the county's benefit. We also **bolstered communication channels between the Board and County Administration**, enhancing operational efficiencies through weekly reporting. We also **maintained our quarterly meetings with local government units**, fostering an exchange of ideas, addressing shared concerns, and collaborating on various matters. Together, these initiatives amplified our commitment to transparent governance, effective collaboration, and operational enhancement within our community.

As we head into **2024**, stay tuned for our website revamp, an exciting step forward in elevating our channels to better connect and serve our community.



INCLUSIVE PARTICIPATION

We will provide innovative and inclusive ways to engage residents and involve them in County government.

Welcome Plan Expansion: Fostering Inclusive Communities

In June, the Board approved transitioning the Welcome Plan Coordinator position to full-time and approved the Regional Community Collaborative grant. This grant will significantly enhance the Welcome Plan's aim to create a more welcoming Kent County for all residents. With the involvement of over 50 community organizations, the Welcome Plan targets integration barriers across civic engagement, economic development, safe communities, education, and equitable access to services.



AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT (ARPA) FUNDING IN ACTION

In response to the American Rescue Plan Act, our ARPA-funded initiatives began in May 2022, initiating an extensive community engagement effort. Through interactive platforms and forums, we gathered insights from residents, receiving over 320 proposals totaling \$3 billion, crucial in determining priorities for Kent County's \$127.6 million ARPA allocation.

In December 2022, the Board appropriated over \$108 million for 30 transformative projects. These projects span a broad spectrum, encompassing initiatives such as implementing an 800 MHz radio safety system in every participating Kent County K-12 public and private school building. Additionally, they cover endeavors to enhance our local road network, expand senior services in Lowell and Walker, establish a new agricultural learning venue, build a new hub for childcare, healthcare, and community events, and more. Throughout 2023, staff worked on contract implementations. **We are now witnessing impactful transformations through several programs.**

A crucial move to tackle the housing shortfall was the allocation of \$17.5 million to the **Kent County Affordable Housing Loan Fund, the most significant contribution of ARPA funds aimed to address the housing shortage.** Finalizing a contract with nonprofit lender IFF in October, the Board established the Kent County Affordable Loan Fund Authority Committee for oversight. IFF plans to begin accepting applications in 2024.

In December, the **Board allocated the remaining \$9.3 million of our ARPA funding to three critical internal infrastructure projects,** directing resources toward the Fallsburg Dam renovation, Fuller Campus Clinic, and Medical Examiner Facility construction projects.

For a detailed breakdown of all projects funded by our ARPA allocation, please refer to the subsequent pages. Stay updated on the progress of these initiatives at kentcountyarpa.com for continuous information and updates.



Ribbon Cutting for the Walker Senior Neighbors Center



ARPA PROJECTS

PROJECT	ALLOCATION
1. 2022 Food Establishment Licensing Fee Waiver	\$1,300,000
2. ARPA Consultant Support (Guidehouse)	\$397,000
3. Behavioral Health Crisis Center (Network 180)	\$3,923,356
4. Boston Square Community Hub (Amplify GR)	\$4,000,000
5. Broadband Initiative Consultant Support (Guidehouse & Merit)	\$375,000
6. CDFI funds for Kent County's African American Community (Urban League of West Michigan)	\$4,000,000
7. Community, Economic and Workforce Development in Kent County's Hispanic community (The Hispanic Center of Western Michigan)	\$2,000,000
8. COVID-19 Overtime Expenses (Kent County Sheriff's Office)	\$737,000
9. Education Container Classrooms & Otter Habitat (John Ball Zoo)	\$6,000,000
10. Fallasburg Dam Renovation	\$4,000,000
11. Four Star Theatre Renovation	\$500,000
12. Fuel the Movement: Innovative Workforce Development for Economic Mobility (The Center for Community Transformation)	\$1,000,000
13. Fuller Campus Clinic Modification	\$3,900,000
14. Grand Rapids Public Museum West Entry and Gathering Space	\$1,000,000
15. Health Department COVID Response (Outreach, Vaccines, & Testing)	\$234,129
16. Heroes for Life: Sickle Cell Disease Blood Donors Initiative (Grand Rapids African American Health Institute)	\$1,000,000



Boston Square Community Hub (Amplify GR)



The Grand Agricultural Center of West Michigan
(Kent County Youth Agricultural Association)

PROJECT	ALLOCATION
17. Internal Administrative Management of ARPA Funds	\$237,302
18. Isolation shelter for COVID positive people who are unhoused (Mel Trotter Ministries)	\$254,703
19. Kent County Convention and Arena Authority Revenue Loss	\$511,934
20. Kent County Domestic Violence Action Network (Domestic Violence Community Coordinated Response Team)	\$4,000,000
21. Kent County Equitable Housing Initiative (Housing Next)	\$500,000
22. Kent County Inclusion Strategic Plan	\$55,000
23. Kent County Parks/Greenway	\$15,000,000
24. Kent County Revolving Housing Fund (IFF)	\$17,500,000
25. Knapp Corner Drain Project	\$2,000,000
26. Krause Memorial Library Expansion (City of Rockford)	\$2,000,000
27. Lead Remediation - Paint, Pipe and Training (Kent County Health Department)	\$3,800,000
28. Live. Work. Thrive. (AYA Youth Collective)	\$2,000,000
29. Lowell & Walker Senior Centers (Senior Neighbors)	\$220,808
30. Medical Examiner Facility	\$10,519,075
31. Meijer Sports Complex (The West Michigan Sports Commission)	\$1,000,000
32. Nourish Tomorrow Advancement Campaign (Feeding America West Michigan)	\$2,000,000
33. Organizational Improvement and Kent County Employee Wellbeing & Development	\$1,000,000
34. PFAS Remediation: Water Main Extension in Cascade Township	\$3,000,000
35. Preventative Animal Control by Increasing Pet Owner Access to Veterinary Care (C-SNIP)	\$1,000,000
36. School Safety Radio Network (Kent County Sheriff's Office)	\$2,837,500
37. SMB & Workforce development, support, and training (Wyoming Kentwood Chamber of Commerce)	\$138,000
38. The Grand Agricultural Center of West Michigan, Raising Barns, Building Youth Campaign (Kent County Youth Agricultural Association)	\$6,000,000
39. The Junior Achievement Free Enterprise Center: "Building Futures...Inspiring Dreams"	\$1,000,000
40. Transforming Kent County's Road Network (Kent County Road Commission)	\$8,500,000
41. United Methodist Community House 900	\$1,000,000
42. West Michigan Construction Institute Phase II Expansion	\$1,000,000
43. Winter emergency shelter to accommodate social distancing (Mel Trotter Ministries)	\$165,000
44. Wyoming City Center Bridge and Trail Activation	\$6,000,000

NAVIGATING FORWARD: ADDRESSING UPCOMING CHALLENGES

As we navigate the road ahead, we acknowledge that exceptional strides were made in the past year for the betterment of Kent County and our residents. However, considerable work lies ahead.

In August, the Kent County Brownfield Redevelopment Authority Advisory Committee was formed to improve access to tax incentives for various developments, including housing. In 2024, we will establish a countywide Brownfield Redevelopment Authority to address affordable housing needs, especially starter homes.

Other key priorities for the Board in the upcoming year include formulating a comprehensive solid waste

management plan, considering the Ready by Five Millage renewal, and successfully implementing the Insurance Authority.

Additionally, allocating funds from the opioid settlement and advancing the Mobility Task Force's work remain crucial items on our agenda.

We invite every resident to actively engage in shaping our shared future. Attend a meeting, tune into livestreams, or connect directly with your Commissioner. Your voice is vital in driving the positive changes that benefit the entire County.





