

October 2022 | VOL. 6

OUR GREAT COMMUNITY

Quarterly newsletter of Washington County, Wisconsin
DISCOVER. CONNECT. PROSPER.



COUNTY EXECUTIVE
JOSH SCHOEMANN

A photograph of two police cars at night with their red and blue emergency lights flashing. A person is standing between the cars with their arms raised. The scene is dark, and the lights create a strong contrast.

*Our Great Community
only Stays Our Great Community
If We Are Safe*

Dear Fellow Citizens,

In Washington County, working together as a community, we have built a quality of life rooted in values we hold near and dear. A Safe and Secure Community has been paramount as we set goals and make budgets. In my nine years with the county, we have reduced the size of government in every way: cut programs, cut staff, and made the same budgetary sacrifices we all face within our family budgets. Our efforts have been fruitful. Our current biennial budget has us reducing property tax levy (collections) four out of the nine years of my tenure for a combined total of \$1.75 million. We have been lockstep in our mission to keep government in check, while protecting the taxpayers' dollars, and fulfilling the core services for community. Washington County has stood firm in these solemn responsibilities.

While life here has been thriving with much safety, prosperity and tranquility - a place where families flock in search of quality neighborhoods and schools - we know life just outside of our county's borders has taken a sad turn and many of our friends in neighboring counties no longer feel settled. They do not feel safe. And rightly so.

We are acutely aware of the burgeoning crime all around us, but here in Washington County we also have seen increases in concerning behavior - skyrocketing fatal drug overdoses and mental health crises; and over half our jail's occupants are now from somewhere other than Washington County. The Sheriff's Office recently conducted a four-hour long multi-jurisdictional patrol operation on Hwy 41 and made 75 stops, with 17 vehicles searched for criminal activity. Among those stopped, arrests were made for possession of fentanyl and cocaine, stolen vehicles, fleeing resulting in freeway pursuits, and a woman with a homicide warrant. As your County Executive, I cannot ignore these warning signs.

Continued on next page

It is easy for us here in Washington County to go about our lives, secure in the thought we are not Milwaukee, but last May, an incident at Slinger Middle School was the final straw for me. On May 27, there was a report of a student with a gun at the school, where hundreds of students and staff were in the middle of their school day. In an unusual coincidence, Sheriff Schulteis and his deputies happened to be conducting training at Fair Park when the call came in. Within minutes, over 75 law enforcement personnel flooded Slinger Middle School. Thankfully, this incident turned out to be a hoax, but it dramatically illustrated a frightening “what if”. If law enforcement had not been training at Fair Park, it is certain the response at Slinger Middle School would have been from far fewer and the response time would have been considerably longer. I never, ever want to be looking in hindsight, wishing we had done more to protect our citizens.

Sheriff Schulteis and I immediately underwent an after-action review, doing a deep dive into what we have; what we need. For example, I learned that despite our number of households nearly doubling, current minimum staffing in our Sheriff’s Office has not changed since the 1980s, and Washington County is close to the very bottom in per capita patrol staffing levels compared to eight surrounding counties, and last among every law enforcement agency in the county!

In the past five years, two sheriffs, three county board chairmen, four different county boards and a new county executive all identified the need to analyze minimum staffing requirements in the four areas of the Sheriff’s Office: administrative, patrol, communications, and jail. We consulted former Washington County sheriffs as well as former Milwaukee County Sheriff David Clarke. The more we uncovered, the more it became apparent we needed to raise this issue to the public, with urgency.

This spring, Sheriff Schulteis and his team completed the staffing needs analysis and developed the Washington County Anti-Crime Plan, a proposal to increase minimum staff patrol, strengthen mental health support, and enhance our jail protocols. The proposed changes would put the Sheriff’s Office in the middle of the pack in comparison to other counties in southeast Wisconsin. The Sheriff and I, along with the Washington County Board of Supervisors, concluded the only way to execute the proposal quickly and fully was by asking the people of Washington County via a referendum with the Washington County Anti-Crime Plan. We cannot simply, quickly, or responsibly divert \$3.6 million of your property and sales tax without significantly altering your county government. The citizens must have a voice.

The impact that increasing crime is having on our community brings us to an intractable conflict of values. Does our love for smaller government and lower taxes override our insistence for a safe and secure community? Or at this juncture, do we favor proactive policing rather than continued spending cuts?

We understand you likely have many questions about the Anti-Crime Plan. To listen to your concerns, over the next several weeks, Sheriff Schulteis and I have scheduled Town Hall meetings throughout Washington County. We invite you to come to these meetings to express your opinion, ask questions, or just listen. Please see the listing of meetings in this newsletter.

I realize this is an incredibly complex issue that involves district attorneys, judges, personal values and so much more. Increased law enforcement will not solve all of these problems, but as we saw in conservatively-run cities in the 1990s, tough-on-crime government produces results. No matter the outcome of this profound question, let this referendum and community conversation be a clear signal to anyone coming to or through our county wishing to commit acts of crime or violence: Stay away! You are not welcome here! Our goal is to see criminals arrested, charged to the full extent of the law and sentenced.

The question falls to you, the people of Washington County. It’s your money. It’s your community. How shall we proceed?

Sincerely,

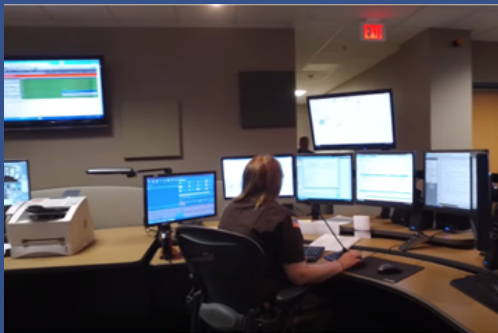


Josh Schoemann
Washington County Executive

Washington County Anti-Crime Plan Referendum Language

Question: Under state law, the increase in the levy of Washington County for the tax to be imposed for the next fiscal year (2023), is limited to 3.61%, based on Washington County's best estimate, which results in a levy of \$37,734,920. Shall Washington County be allowed to exceed this limit and increase the levy for the next fiscal year (2023), for the purpose of funding the Washington County Anti-Crime Plan by a total of 9.89%, which results in a levy of \$40,018,760, and on an ongoing basis, include the increase of \$3,600,000 each fiscal year going forward?

Community Town Hall Meetings



All Sessions 5:00-6:30PM

Monday, Oct. 10

Hartford Union High School - cafeteria

805 Cedar Street, Hartford

Thursday, Oct. 13

Tower Heritage Center

320 S 5th Ave., West Bend

Monday, Oct. 17

Germantown High School PAC

W180N11501 N River Ln., Germantown

Tuesday, Oct. 18

Kewaskum High School - theatre

1510 Bilgo Ln, Kewaskum

Wednesday, Oct. 19

Washington County Fair Park

3000 County Hwy PV, West Bend





HERBERT J. TENNIES GOVERNMENT
CENTER 432 EAST WASHINGTON STREET
WEST BEND, WI 53095

PRSRRT STD
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
WEST BEND, WI
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In this issue
Washington County
Anti-Crime Referendum
Town Hall Meetings
Schedule Inside!

