



OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Chris Abele

MILWAUKEE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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***Abele Proposes 2012 County Budget Without Tax Increase
Budget Would Prevent Transit Cuts, Invest in Community Mental Health***

MILWAUKEE – Milwaukee County Executive Chris Abele on Thursday unveiled a proposed 2012 budget that erases an inherited \$55 million shortfall without major cuts to services while living up to his commitment to not include a property tax increase.

The proposal eliminates potentially massive transit service cuts, without fixed-route fare increases, that had been expected due to a record drop in state aids, increasing fuel costs and other financial challenges. The budget retains border-to-border countywide paratransit, which was being considered for a service-area reduction, using a mix of property taxes, new state funding and small paratransit fare increase.

Other threatened transit services would be spared, including freeway flyers and flyer service to Summerfest and the State Fair, assuming Milwaukee County gets an estimated share of leftover federal funds from the disbanded Regional Transit Authority.

Despite the major deficit, Abele's budget proposes increasing funding for the county's mental health department by \$3 million to accelerate the transition away from hospitalization and toward care within community settings. That shift is expected over time to save taxpayer dollars and improve care.

The budget contains a number of reorganizations aimed at improving efficiency, accountability and service delivery, Abele said. The budget also includes \$1 million to help pay down the county's debt load.

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“As I developed this budget, everything was on the table except a property tax increase and a fixed-route bus fare hike,” Abele said. “We’ve been able to find savings and efficiencies that will allow us to continue to provide needed services to Milwaukee County residents. But it doesn’t stop here. I will continue to work hard to save taxpayer dollars, hold down taxes and provide the services residents depend on.”

“I’m pleased that this budget also begins to pay down debt. County residents will be much better off when we no longer are paying more than \$100 million in debt service and are able to use such resources to provide vital services instead.”

Abele’s budget calls for \$269,554,701 in property taxes, the same amount approved for 2011. Under his plan, budgeted expenditures decrease by 5.6 percent, from \$1,293,694,700 to \$1,221,166,445.

The county faced a \$55 million shortfall going into this budget, including nearly \$29 million in state aid cuts approved earlier this year.

Initiatives in the budget include:

- Directing \$3 million in tax levy funding to support moving mental health services away from hospitalization and toward community care, including support to create up to two North Side crisis intervention programs, an additional 8-bed crisis respite facility in the community and to develop additional community crisis options.
- Dedicating a portion of the proceeds from any 2012 land sales to a new revolving loan fund to provide capital for businesses.
- Forming a free-standing Department of Human Resources, and creating a new Department of Transportation with Airport, Transit/Paratransit, Highway and Fleet Management Divisions.
- Establishing a new Division of Facilities Management within the Department of Administrative Services (DAS) that will also house architectural, engineering and environmental services in order to achieve stronger efficiencies. Expand the role of the Division of Procurement to create a shared county resource for the centralization of contracts and leases.
- Creating a new Division of Economic Development within DAS to serve as a central point for job development, retention and expansion progress and strategy among civic, regional economic development and non-profit community organizations.

To help address the deficit, the proposed budget calls for \$20 million in savings from redesign of the health care plan for employees and increased employee contributions, and \$5.5 million in additional savings from a 4.7% pension contribution. Further savings include changes in the Sheriff’s Department that would result in more focus on core and mandated responsibilities.

Abele presented his budget proposal at a Thursday meeting of the County Board. The board will begin reviewing the budget in October and is scheduled to approve the county budget in November.

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