

BECKER COUNTY

STATE OF THE COUNTY ADDRESS

December 17, 2019

John C Okeson Board Chair

Becker County is doing well, with an expanded tax base, an 8-year average of over 60 million in new construction that helps spread the levy over a larger tax base and a maximum levy set of under 3% for 2020. Becker County is strong financially and we maintain an AA+ Bond rating.

We have a strong organization that is doing great work and providing services for the people of Becker County.

With the retirement of Administrator Jack Ingstad in January and the hiring of Mike Brethorst in March service continues at a great pace.

It has been a busy and productive year for Becker County departments.

The Highway department completed a very busy 7.5 million construction season with 4 miles of reconstruction, 22 miles of pavement reclamation with bituminous surfacing and 4 miles of bituminous overlays.

Maintenance also had a busy season with over 50 miles of sealcoating, many miles of crack sealing, regravelling, aggregate shouldering and over 180 miles of centerline and edge stripping.

This all comes after a very long and stressful snow and ice season and as we again head into another.

Progress continues on a new Public Works facility.

Environmental Services Solid Waste was very busy. This past fall, we had a fire at the new transfer station. We are actively working to reopen the facility and presently using the old transfer site.

Recycling continues to increase with the updates to the material recovery sort line. This additional equipment was funded in part by a \$200,000.00 MPCA grant.

The department will be doing a pilot project of sorting mixed loads of demo to help reduce material sent to the landfill.

We continue to do shingle grinding and the material will be used by the county for different projects such as shoulder stabilization.

The Sheriff's department has had another busy year with the opening of the new 21-million-dollar jail in April.

By year end, deputies will have responded to over 12,000 calls for service. Because of the continued increase in calls, an additional deputy was added in July along with the addition of a K-9 named Durman. Very generous donations from the citizens of Becker County were used for his purchase and training.

The Task Force is busy seizing large amounts of Meth, Heroin and other illegal drugs.

Planning and Zoning had a milestone accomplishment after multiple years of planning and help from the IT Department, they have converted to online permitting and application process.

They had another typical busy permitting season with 879 site permits, 337 new septic and 821 existing septic permits were processed along with addressing 424 complaints.

Our Land Commissioner was busy preparing for several sales including 17 parcels on the land sale for a total of all land sales in 2019 of \$380,050.00.

Also, two timber auctions were held with 9507 cords being sold for \$262,575.00.

The County Attorney's office was busy with 9 jury trials and 9 convictions with the majority being felonies.

The DWI, Drug and Veterans Courts are doing well with 11 graduates this past year.

IT department was busy with the many day to day technology tasks as they continue to upgrade and secure our systems. Continued support for the payroll system, Tax system, Assessors Vanguard system along with the support of over 420 workstations, tablets and laptops. The addition of the new Jail was another major undertaking for the department. They continued upgrading of the County's website, GIS mapping and Next Generation 911 just to name a few.

In 2019 the Human Service Department has continued to do well meeting the Performance Measurements and Benchmarks enforced by the Department of Human Services.

The Department has also taken the lead role for the upcoming Becker County Jail Diversion Program along with many other internal and local external partners to get this program rolling.

The Human Service staff has worked hard to create a balanced budget and identify cost savings wherever possible.

Assessor office in 2019 contracted to assess 4 more districts (Townships), without adding any additional staff to cover the workload. In 2018 the department started a land code clean-up which was carried over into this year, will help simplify the land codes and provide a more consistent sales ratio.

The big change in the assessor's office was the retirement of Steve Carlson and the appointment of the new County Assessor Lisa Will with the transition going well.

Parks and Recreation along with many partners created a Master Trail Plan that started in May and was adopted by the County Board in November, this will aid in future planning and help with securing future grants.

Presently we are working with the City of Frazee for a designation of a Regional Park just adjacent to Frazee along with help from the National Park service.

Work continues on the Heartland Trail section between the Detroit Lakes tunnel and Acorn Lake, which is to be bid in December, with the Acorn Lake section presently under construction, and the remaining sections into Frazee in the design stage.

Grant funding was received to improve the trail at TH 10 and CASH 54 to include the connection to the tunnel as this intersection will be redone with signals in 2020.

Through the Becker EDA, the County's has been approved for participating in the MN Cities Participation Program which will provide at least \$100,000.00 in financing for first time home buyers and low-income families.

Also, the County approved signing onto the Brightfields program which will assess renewable energy opportunities at the County Landfill.

In 2019 the County formed a Complete Count Committee for the 2020 census for the purpose of improving census count within the County. Accuracy is very vital to the County as it affects many funding and demographic streams for the next 10 years.

EDA has approved \$10,000.00 in support as part of a collaborative of Cities and businesses to help locally employed residents buy a home. In Becker County 13 loans were approved within the first 2 months of the program startup.

In closing I wish to thank all the dedicated employees, elected officials, Administrator and all the department heads. You have helped to make Becker County a better place to live.

Special thank you to my fellow board members.

I would ask that we have a moment of silence to remember our deceased employee this past year Dick Goodmanson.

Thank You

Merry Christmas and looking forward to a Great New Year.

Thank you for coming and please stay and join us for the Christmas Tea.