



Dane County In Action

A STRATEGIC VISION DELIVERING RESULTS
THE DANE COUNTY WAY

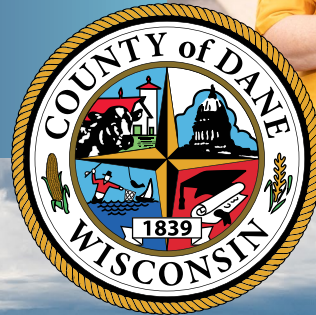





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A Message from County Executive Agard

Dane County government plays a central role in the daily lives of its residents, often in ways that are not immediately visible, but are essential to the health, safety, and well-being of the community.

My job as County Executive is to listen to residents and respond to their ideas, needs, and preferences; to work with county staff in forming a coherent vision of the county's way forward; to administer the day-to-day operations of the county; and to develop the County budget.

Dane County is the fastest-growing county in Wisconsin and the primary driver of the state's population and economic growth. With that growth comes both opportunity and responsibility. The County must plan thoughtfully to ensure that investments in infrastructure, services, and natural resources keep pace with resident demand while preserving the qualities that make Dane County a desirable place to live, work, and visit.

This strategic vision is designed to foster stronger coordination within County government. This plan is grounded in collaboration, responsible stewardship, and a commitment to leaving the County stronger for the next generation. It serves as a framework for how departments and staff will work together to meet the challenges and opportunities ahead. This is the Dane County Way.

It is a privilege to serve as the County Executive of Dane County and to work with many dedicated employees and stakeholders who are helping to lead Dane County into the future.

In Service,

Melissa



Introduction

Dane County is a growing, dynamic community at a pivotal moment. As the primary driver of population and economic growth in Wisconsin, the County faces significant opportunity alongside the added pressures that come with development. Demand for services is rising, infrastructure is under pressure, and residents deserve a government that delivers results that are effective, equitable, and fiscally responsible.

This strategic vision outlines how the Agard Administration will lead Dane County to meet this moment. County government plays a unique and often underappreciated role in residents' daily lives. It delivers essential services that support families, protect public safety, and respond to crises. It also manages the infrastructure, natural resources, and public systems that allow communities to function and grow. Much of this work happens behind the scenes, but it is foundational to the County's strength and quality of life.

During this planning process, many consistent themes emerged. Demand for services is increasing even as staffing and budget pressures constrain capacity. Departments are working to modernize systems and use data more effectively. Public trust and engagement remain critical to success. And perhaps most importantly, nearly every priority depends on coordination across departments, jurisdictions, and community partners.

At the same time, Dane County will continue to face budget challenges, which requires careful stewardship of public resources. Fiscal responsibility is not separate from the County's goals, it is the foundation that makes them possible. Meeting this moment requires thoughtful decision-making now to protect the services residents rely on, maintain and improve critical infrastructure, and prepare for future growth.

The structure of county government, designed for democratic oversight and shared authority, adds complexity to the work. In addition to the County Executive, there are 60 independently elected County officials who play critical roles in delivering services and administering justice. County departments operate within a broader system shaped by state and federal mandates, municipal partnerships, and community organizations. Success depends not only on the work of individual departments, but on how effectively actors coordinate and collaborate.

Within this context, the role of the County Executive is to lead not by directing every action, but by aligning efforts across a complex system and doing so in a way that reflects community needs and input. The Executive convenes partners in the community and other branches of government, sets direction, promotes shared priorities, and communicates with the public. This leadership role is essential to breaking down silos, improving coordination, and ensuring that county government delivers results.



The Vision

THE DANE COUNTY WAY

As the County continues to grow, success will depend not only on what we do, but how we do it. Growth brings new possibilities but also requires thoughtful planning, difficult choices, and a commitment to balancing competing priorities to preserve the Dane County Way.

The Dane County Way is rooted in the idea that strong communities are built through collaboration, compassion, and responsible leadership. It is a belief that government works best when it listens to residents, brings people together, and acts with responsiveness and care. The Dane County Way is about balance — progress and pragmatism, urban and rural, economic development and environmental protection. It means planning ahead while living within our means. It means being honest about challenges while remaining focused on solutions.

THE VALUES THAT GUIDE THIS VISION:



Good Governance

Delivering high-quality, efficient, and relatable public services measured not only by outcomes, but by humanity, professionalism, transparency, and accountability.



Inclusive Engagement

Strong decisions are built on listening and engaging residents, municipalities, community organizations, and partners across the region to ensure that diverse perspectives are reflected in policy and decision-making.



Sustainable Growth

Manage growth to build strong communities over the long-term by balancing development with environmental protection, preserving farmland and natural resources, and ensuring that infrastructure and services keep pace with demand.



Shared Prosperity

Dane County's growth should benefit all residents. Expanding access to opportunity for everyone is essential to building a strong, inclusive economy. This work includes a deliberate focus on advancing equity and addressing racial disparities to ensure that we can all prosper.



Responsible Stewardship

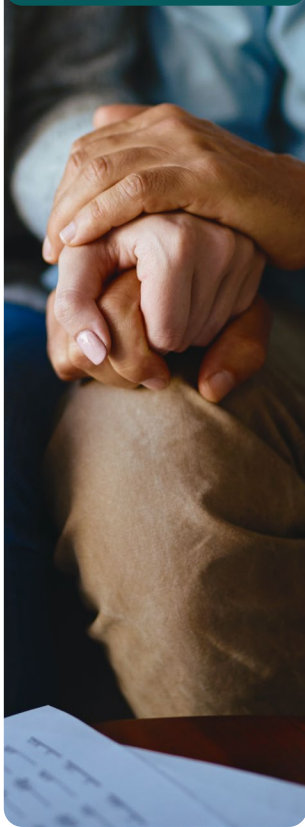
Responsibility to care for the County's financial, natural, and physical resources. Dane County must live within our means, maintain critical services and infrastructure, protect the environment, and position Dane County for long-term success.

Moving Dane County Forward

Four pillars define the focus areas of County Executive Agard's strategic vision. They are grounded in the themes identified across departments and embrace Dane County government's greatest opportunities to improve outcomes for residents, strengthen communities, and prepare for future growth.



Community Services Delivery



Economic Development



Justice System Improvements



Environmental Leadership



Together, these pillars reflect the breadth of county government's responsibilities and the need to balance immediate service delivery with long-term stewardship. Dane County's strength lies in its people, its partnerships, and its commitment to the Dane County Way — working together, planning ahead, and acting with care for one another. This strategic vision is designed to build on that foundation to prepare the County for the opportunities and challenges ahead.

1
Community
Services
Delivery



Dane County and its community partners provide essential services to tens of thousands of residents each year. Programming spans aging and disability, mental health, children and families, economic assistance, housing stability, and long-term care. At its core, this work helps individuals and families meet basic needs, navigate periods of crisis, and build the stability required to live healthy, independent lives.

The County strives to provide access to effective, innovative, and evidence-based services and resources that support wellbeing, safety, justice, and opportunities for people of all backgrounds to thrive.

Achieving that vision requires strong programming and systems that are accessible, responsive, and centered on the needs of residents. Human services systems are often complex and difficult to navigate. One of the County's most important responsibilities is to simplify and demystify these systems so residents can easily access the support they need. When government works well, people can find help quickly, understand their options, and secure services.

By leveraging federal and state funding, strengthening collaboration with the hundreds of purchase-of-service community partners, and improving coordination across programs, Dane County can continue building a human services system that empowers residents to chase their dreams and live better lives.

This strategy focuses on three priority areas that Dane County Health and Human Services, our emergency response personnel and community stakeholders have consistently identified as foundational drivers of wellbeing:

“

When we invest in people,
we build a Dane County
where everyone can thrive.

–County Executive Agard

”



MEET PEOPLE'S BASIC NEEDS

Goal	Approach
Deliver accessible, coordinated, person-centered services to support the health and safety of children, families, older adults, veterans, and people with disabilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sustain aging, disability, and long-term care services.• Manage programs and purchase of service partnerships that help residents meet their basic needs.• Strengthen services that keep residents housed and reduce entries into homelessness.

HELP PEOPLE NAVIGATE PERIODS OF CRISIS

Goal	Approach
Provide timely, coordinated assistance to mental health, substance use, housing, and other crises that help residents early, facilitate recovery, and avoid deeper issues. This work is grounded in a strong commitment to public safety.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Deliver community-based behavioral health and substance use treatment services.• Improve coordination across sectors so individuals secure services promptly and do not fall through gaps.• Modernize systems to support continuity of care and better track outcomes.

BUILD LONG-TERM STABILITY AND INDEPENDENCE

Goal	Approach
Support stable and predictable services that reduce costly long-term, deep-end service dependence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Leverage federal and state funding to support the Dane County community through robust, intentional, and coordinated services.• Promote early intervention services to help ensure our children have to the tools necessary to flourish.• Invest in workforce capacity and community provider partnerships to allow families the opportunity to thrive.

2

Economic Development



Although Dane County has not historically seen itself as a central player in economic development, every major county decision, from infrastructure and transportation to land use and public venues, shapes the economic conditions in which residents, workers, businesses, and communities thrive or fall behind. Economic development is not separate from county government’s core work; it is tied directly to affordability, fiscal stewardship, and expanding opportunity.

The county’s role in economic development increases as the county grows. Dane County is projected to approach 900,000 residents by 2050, up from roughly 600,000 today. At the same time, many residents are experiencing rising costs while paychecks have not kept pace. Ensuring that growth does not raise the cost of living is one of the County’s central challenges.

This growth carries significant responsibility. Decisions made today will shape Dane County over the next 5, 10, and 30 years, and getting this right is critical to ensuring that growth strengthens rather than undermines the County’s affordability, quality of life, and long-term sustainability.

In order to address the complex issues that shape the regions future thoughtfully and transparently we must work to balance economic growth with protection of natural resources, farmland, and quality of life in rural and urban communities.

Strategic investments in county assets like the Alliant Energy Center can generate revenue that helps offset the cost of county services, reducing the burden on taxpayers while enabling access to amenities that enhance quality of life and support increased economic activity.

This strategy focuses on three priority areas that reflect the County’s distinctive role in the regional economy:



Dane County’s economy grows stronger when opportunity is accessible, local businesses are supported, and all residents can succeed.

–County Executive Agard



RAISE THE PROFILE OF DANE COUNTY

Goal	Approach
Position Dane County as a competitive destination for business, tourism, and major events.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Advance revitalization of the Alliant Energy Center Campus.• Support growth at Dane County Regional Airport.• Promote major conventions, agricultural showcases, and community events.

PROMOTE ACCESS TO ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

Goal	Approach
Expand access to economic opportunity so residents across Dane County can find good jobs, start businesses, and build stable futures.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Build stronger working relationships with community stakeholders to coordinate around shared priorities.• Support workforce pathways and worker empowerment through training and employment initiatives.• Use county policy and planning tools to expand housing supply and improve affordability.

INVEST IN INFRASTRUCTURE AS A PLATFORM FOR PROSPERITY

Goal	Approach
Grow the economy by strengthening the public assets and systems on which private-sector success and community prosperity depend.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Maintain and modernize transportation infrastructure.• Use land use planning, zoning, and development review to manage growth while protecting quality of life, agriculture, and natural resources.• Invest strategically in county facilities such as the airport and Alliant Energy Center.

3

Justice System Improvements



Dane County is charged with ensuring safe communities and a fair justice system. Our justice system is made up of independently elected officials, including the Sheriff, District Attorney, 17 county judges, public defenders, municipal courts, local police departments, and community partners. Each plays a distinct and essential role in protecting public safety and administering justice. In this landscape, the County Executive’s role is to bring partners together, align efforts, and drive progress on shared challenges to improve system-wide outcomes.

An effective justice system holds perpetrators accountable, repairs harm, supports victims, and creates pathways for people to move forward. In doing so, it strengthens individuals, families, and communities while reducing the likelihood of future harm.

Dane County faces the urgent, difficult reality of significant racial disparities in justice system outcomes. These disparities demand serious attention from leaders across the justice system. At the same time, the development of a new jail facility and increasing fiscal pressures underscore the importance of using resources wisely. Making our justice system more just requires sustained attention, transparency, and stronger collaboration among partners.

This strategy identifies three priority areas to improve justice system outcomes:



Safer communities are built through collaboration, prevention, and a justice system that works for everyone.

–County Executive Agard



STRENGTHEN JUSTICE COORDINATION

Goal	Approach
Reduce long-term justice system involvement by strengthening early intervention, improving coordination across service systems, and supporting people to prevent deeper justice system involvement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Focus on prevention and early intervention, decrease recidivism, and address intergenerational harm.• Improve coordination across partners and systems to better support justice-impacted individuals.• Remove barriers to the utilization of prevention programs.

SUPPORT EFFECTIVE DIVERSION AND COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS

Goal	Approach
Expand the use of diversion and community-based alternatives to incarceration so that fewer low-level cases result in unnecessary jail involvement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strengthen diversion initiatives that safely reduce unnecessary jail involvement for low-level offenses.• Work with stakeholders to encourage consistent use of diversion programs.• Promote programming that combines personal accountability with treatment, supervision, and rehabilitation.

IMPROVE DATA COORDINATION ACROSS JUSTICE SYSTEM PARTNERS

Goal	Approach
Improve and standardize data collaboration, information sharing, and definitions across the many entities involved in the justice system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Convene justice system partners to align on key system metrics and reporting practices.• Improve data sharing and communication while respecting the independence of participating agencies and their existing legal constraints.• Establish consistent definitions and long-term tracking of key indicators.

4

Environmental Leadership



Dane County has a long tradition of championing environmental issues, leading the state in expanding park land, preserving farmland, and advancing clean energy projects. Residents expect their county government not only to respond to environmental challenges, but to proactively build a resilient future and protect what makes Dane County special.

Environmental Leadership means pairing science-based decision-making with strong coordination across departments and partners to preserve the county's natural, agricultural, and cultural assets while preparing for future risks. This includes safeguarding farmland, protecting open space, and honoring the landscapes and histories that shape Dane County's identity.

The County Executive's role is to coordinate action across departments, municipalities, community organizations, farmers, businesses, and residents; mobilize partners; and elevate innovative solutions that strengthen resilience, advance equity, and improve quality of life for all who call Dane County home.

This plan identifies three priority areas that advance environmental leadership:

“

From our lakes and wetlands
to our parks and farmlands,
these resources define
Dane County and must be
protected for the future.

–County Executive Agard

”

BUILD RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

Goal	Approach
Strengthen community resilience to climate and environmental risks while preserving the land and natural systems that protect people, property, and agriculture.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Invest in natural infrastructure to reduce flood risk, improve water quality, and strengthen ecosystems.• Preserve farmland and open space through planning and partnerships.• Align planning across jurisdictions to prepare for future climate risks while maintaining strong erosion control, stormwater, and shoreland standards.

FOSTER A CLEAN AND HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

Goal	Approach
Protect natural resources, reduce pollution, and responsibly manage materials to sustain a clean and healthy environment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reduce phosphorus and sediment runoff through conservation practices, cost-sharing programs, and technical assistance.• Expand waste diversion and recycling programs while advancing the sustainability campus as a hub for reuse, renewable energy, and education.• Bring science-driven remediation efforts, including PFAS mitigation, to scale to protect water quality and public health.

ENABLE EQUITABLE ACCESS TO NATURE AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

Goal	Approach
Ensure all residents can access, experience, and benefit from Dane County's parks, natural areas, and environmental programs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Expand access to parks and outdoor spaces through targeted outreach, youth programming, and transportation solutions.• Preserve culturally and historically significant landscapes, including those important to native communities and early settlement history.• Integrate environmental considerations into community services and partnerships to support vulnerable populations facing climate risks.

Implementation

DEVELOPING ROUTINES FOR OUTREACH, METRICS, INREACH

This plan is designed to align Dane County's work around a shared set of priorities. Delivering results requires establishing consistent routines for coordination, engagement, and accountability across county government.

As demand grows amid resource constraints, improving coordination is an efficient way to increase impact without significant new financial investment. This implementation framework focuses on three areas where the County can operate more effectively:



OUTREACH:
Regular Partner
Engagement



METRICS:
Data-Driven
Evaluation



INREACH:
Consistent Internal
Coordination

These elements create a reinforcing system: aligning efforts internally, connecting with partners externally, and continuously improving through shared metrics.



OUTREACH:
Regular Partner
Engagement

Dane County's work extends beyond the boundaries of county government. Success depends on strong relationships with municipalities, community organizations, and residents. Strengthening these connections will improve coordination, build trust, and ensure that county initiatives reflect the needs and priorities of the communities they serve.



METRICS:
Data-Driven
Evaluation

Clear priorities and strong coordination must be paired with meaningful ways to measure progress. Establishing a shared set of metrics will allow Dane County to track outcomes, inform decision-making, and communicate results to residents and stakeholders.



INREACH:
Consistent
Internal
Coordination

Delivering on this plan requires improving coordination between departments, leadership, staff, and other elected officials. The County Executive's Office will help to align efforts, identify shared challenges, and support cross-department collaboration by establishing pillar teams, checking in regularly with key county stakeholders, and engaging staff.

Together, these implementation strategies create: aligning efforts internally, engaging partners and residents externally, and using data to guide decisions and measure progress.

By establishing clear routines for coordination, engagement, and accountability, Dane County will build on its existing strengths, creating a continuous cycle of improvement. This approach reflects the Dane County Way — working together, planning ahead, and taking responsibility for delivering results that improve the lives of residents today and in the future.

A Foundation of Fiscal Responsibility

Our ability to deliver high-quality services, maintain public trust, and invest for the future depends on strong stewardship of our tax dollars.

Dane County faces rising costs, particularly in health care and personnel, while key revenue sources have not kept pace with inflation. This imbalance limits our ability to respond to community needs, maintain infrastructure, and invest in long-term growth.

Much like a household facing rising expenses without increased income, delaying action only makes future decisions more difficult.



My administration is confronting these challenges directly rather than kicking the can down the road. We will focus on what matters most and deliver services more effectively. Dane County serves residents through human services, public safety, infrastructure, and environmental programs. Preserving these services requires disciplined budgeting, clear priorities, and a long-term perspective.

We have taken concrete steps to strengthen our financial position. We implemented a hiring freeze, incentivized early retirements, eliminated vacant positions, and asked departments to reduce costs without compromising core services.

We have launched a comprehensive review of contracting practices and County assets. These efforts are producing results: 2026 budgeted expenditures are lower than the previous year, and the average homeowner saw just a \$15 annual property tax increase from Dane County.

Demand for services continues to grow. We are addressing growth by protecting high-impact services and modernizing service delivery. Even in a challenging fiscal environment, we are investing in urgent priorities, including a new 911 Center, infrastructure improvements, environmental initiatives, and innovative approaches to justice.

The path ahead will require continued discipline and difficult choices. By grounding our strategic vision in fiscal responsibility, we can ensure Dane County remains strong, resilient, and prepared for the future.





Acknowledgements

This strategic plan reflects the contributions, insight, and commitment of staff across Dane County government. Thank you to the department heads, managers, and frontline staff who shared their work, perspectives, and ideas throughout this process. Your expertise and dedication to serving residents are what make this County strong.

This planning process was developed by Tyler Engler, who supported the County Executive's Office in communications and strategic planning during a transition period. Drawing on experience in public policy and consulting with local governments, Tyler worked closely with departments and the Executive team to translate shared priorities into a coordinated framework for action.

Thank you as well to the many community partners, municipalities, and stakeholders who collaborate with Dane County every day. This plan reflects not only the work of county government, but the broader network of people and organizations committed to strengthening our communities.



Appendix

Melissa Agard
County Executive

County Board of Supervisors

Patrick Miles
County Board Chair
District 34

Colin Barushok
District 1

Heidi Wegleitner
District 2

Analiese Eicher
District 3

Matt Veldran
District 4

Henry Fries
District 5
Sergeant at Arms

Yogesh Chawla
District 6
1st Vice Chair

Erin Welsh
District 7

Jeffrey Glazer
District 8

Aria Trucios
District 9

Keith Furman
District 10

Richelle Andrae
District 11
2nd Vice Chair

Tommy Rylander
District 12

Jay Brower
District 13

Anthony Gray
District 14

Amy Larson
District 15

Goodwill Obieze
District 16

Dan Blazewicz
District 17

Michele Ritt
District 18

Brenda Yang
District 19

Paula Brandmeier
District 20

Jeffrey Kroning
District 21

Gussie Lewis
District 22
Sergeant at Arms

Chuck Erickson
District 23

Sarah Smith
District 24

David Boetcher
District 25

Lisa Jackson
District 26

Kierstin Huelsemann
District 27

Michele Doolan
District 28

Don Postler
District 29

Patrick Downing
District 30

Jerry Bollig
District 31

Chad Kemp
District 32

Donald Dantzler Jr.
District 33

Michael Engelberger
District 35

David Peterson
District 36

Kerry Marren
District 37

Dane County Elected Officers

Jeff Okazaki
Clerk of Courts

Kristi Chlebowski
Register of Deeds

Scott McDonell
County Clerk

Kalvin D. Barrett
Sheriff

Ismael R. Ozanne
District Attorney

Adam Gallagher
Treasurer

Dane County Judges

Honorable Benjamin Jones
Branch 1

Honorable Payal Khandhar
Branch 2

Honorable Diane Schlipper
Branch 3

Honorable Everett Mitchell
Branch 4

Honorable Nicholas McNamara
Branch 5

Honorable Nia Trammell
Branch 6

Honorable Mario White
Branch 7

Honorable Stephanie Hilton
Branch 8

Honorable Jacob Frost
Branch 9

Honorable Ryan Nilsestuen
Branch 10

Honorable Ellen Berz
Branch 11

Honorable Ann Peacock
Branch 12

Honorable Julie Genovese
Branch 13

Honorable John Hyland
Branch 14

Honorable Stephen Ehlke
Branch 15

Honorable Rhonda Lanford
Branch 16

Honorable David Conway
Branch 17

Dane County Leadership

Shelby Slaven

Director
Department of Administration

Mark Papko

Director
Dane County Regional Airport

Kevin Scheibler

Director
Alliant Energy Center

Wes Sparkman

Director
Tamara D. Grigsby Civil Rights Department

Carlos A. Pabellón

Corporation Counsel

Charles Tubbs

Director
Dane County Emergency Management

Jenny Cooke

Director
Dane County Family Court Services

Clement Abongwa

Commissioner
Dane County Highway & Transportation

John Schlueter

Director
Dane County Department of Human Services

Edjron Pearson

Administrator
Juvenile Court Program

Laura Hicklin

Director
Dane County Land & Water Resources

Tracy Herold

Director
Dane County Library Services

Dr. Agnieszka Rogalska

Chief Medical Examiner

Colleen Clark-Bernhardt

Director
Dane County Office of Justice Reform

Todd Violante

Dane County Department of Planning & Development

Shannon Pierce

Director
Dane County Pretrial Services

Janel Heinrich

Director and Health Officer
Public Health Madison & Dane County

Luis Bixler

Director
Department of Public Safety Communications (9-1-1)

Dan Connery

Director
Dane County Veterans' Services Office

John Welch

Director
Dane County Waste & Renewables

Janine Wachter


Interim Director
Henry Vilas Zoo

Shelly Shaw

Director
UW-Madison Extension Dane County


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