

Clay County, Minnesota State of the County Address – 2018

Welcome and happy new year everyone! It's hard to believe another year has passed and we're stepping into 2018.

2017 was a successful year for Clay County with many demands on our departments, our budgets, and our taxpayers. The opioid crisis is not only affecting us, but the nation as a whole. Our own detox center has seen a wider variety of addictions in 2017. They have requested and were granted a capacity increase of up to 16 beds. They also were successful in securing a \$300,000 grant to aid in the education and rehabilitation of the opioid addiction.

In addition, Public Health has continued its integrated service in the Partnership4Health which is a four-county consortium utilizing cooperation for the most effective services to our citizens. Another party heavily affected by the increase in drug addiction is our Social Services department. They have experienced an increased demand for services including behavioral health, financial, housing, and the most critical - child protection services. We are seeing a higher turnover of our employees which we attribute to heavy stress and demand for services. Separating children from their natural parents is a difficult and demanding service. Our out-of-home placements continue to cost the County both financially and psychologically. We are very hopeful there may be some improvements in keeping our youths in the County for better treatment, counselling, and long-term corrective action. Our Social Services department has also been an aggressive leader in coordinating a software consortium that Clay County hosts for at least a nine-county region. This adds extra work for our IT department but also generates some revenue dollars which helps spread the cost to improve our technology services.

I'm very happy to report our Veterans Services Office continues to do an outstanding job serving our veterans and have been very active in establishing a Veterans Court which will hopefully aid in benefitting some of our troubled veterans.

Our Highway Department is one of the best around. They service not only the County roads but also contract with most of our Townships to clear and blade their roads as well. With covering County and Township roads, our Highway Department covers over 1600 miles of roads in addition to designing and overseeing construction of all bridges in the County. In 2017 the Highway Department has also been an integral part of the construction projects on our campus; contracting for soil borings, parking lot designs, and overseeing the job sites for construction of new parking lots.

When we talk about our construction coordination it's easy to segway into our Building Maintenance Department. Not only do they care for our heating and cooling needs, but they maintain our outside facilities, and do their work with personal commitment and pride. They continually go above and beyond to assist with any and all projects remotely connected to the projects that are currently underway on our campus. They engaged in the remodeling of the County Attorney's office space and relocated the Law Library. Georgia and Joe are currently assisting in finding suitable office space for Probation and Juvenile Administration.

In 2017 we witnessed our State Legislature approve buffer zone legislation for the purpose of improving Minnesota's water quality. They have encouraged - and Clay County has accepted - the responsibility of educating and enforcing the buffer zone regulations. Our Planning and Zoning Department has coordinated with the County Attorney's office to draft County Ordinances to assist with this important project. Planning and Zoning has also worked aggressively with the City of Moorhead on zoning overlays to improve the atmosphere of development within the extraterritorial jurisdictions of the City of Moorhead.

Our Solid Waste Department and Highway Department moved into their newly completed joint facility at our landfill which houses our personnel and expensive equipment. Kirk has worked tirelessly with our State Legislators and the City of Moorhead to form a foundation in seeking funding to aid in a new Solid Waste Transfer Station. He is also seeking a cooperative private partnership for an expanded recycling process center enabling more recycling to reduce landfill needs.

The Recorder's Office continually looks for efficiencies and streamlining the filing processing time of all properties. The Recorder's personnel continue to produce more without adding staff.

Our Assessor's Office saw a major change in their computer software which aids in a more detailed valuation process. Their use of new software also allows them to detail over 15,000 rural parcels with only three field assessors. It is difficult work assessing our County properties fairly and staying within the mandates set by the State Department of Revenue.

The collection of taxes, distributing the revenue collected, determining all the classifications for rating tax assessments, paying the County's bills, paying the employees, certifying our accounting process to meet the government's standards of acceptable practices all falls on the shoulders of the Auditor – Treasurer Department. Whether it be the collection of motor vehicle fees, highway permits, or our general taxes, we can count on the work being done with precision and in a timely fashion.

Fortunately, the State of Minnesota is experiencing high employment but along with high employment, job seekers have several options in search of their employment. We find a constant turn-over in our nursing as medical facilities expand in our region. The nursing scenario along with many other departments keeps our HR department in constant interviews, processing backgrounds, and orienting new employees. In addition, they are required to service the needs of the more than 500 County employees.

Our Technology and Information Services continue to be an integral part of the County's ability to offer information at the departments' fingertips. These two departments not only keep our computers up and running but offer detailed information on mapping, parcel layout, and state-of-the-art technology in these modern devices. They too step forward to accept the challenge of multi-County programs and oversee the development of our new buildings.

In the legal and technical world we live in, our County Attorney's office seems to touch every department on occasion. They review all our legal documents. They help us draft contracts and agreements. They defend us from allegations, prosecute all the County crime, represent the State in both child and adult cases, and do so in a very professional manner.

In the midst of all the projects we experienced last year is Law Enforcement. The Sheriff's office has been saddled with transporting and housing not only the 70 to 80 in-house prisoners kept on campus, but they have been called upon to coordinate and transport as many as 70 prisoners who are being housed out of County. This is not only expensive and time demanding, but stressful on our employees as well. It robs time from other important functions such as civil and criminal paperwork, and can rob from our general patrol as well. They are making due with their facilities and limited personnel to complete their statutory requirements, all the while finding time to engage and assist in the biggest construction project Clay County has seen. In 2017 we witnessed the start-up and groundbreaking of construction of two major projects: the new Correctional Facility and the new Law Enforcement Center. We would encourage all our viewers to go on our website or drive by our campus and check out how much progress has been made with these buildings. In addition to the buildings, we've witnessed the improvement and expansion of several parking lots. This is all very costly and in 2017 we completed the final bonding for the Law Enforcement Center and secured the required State legislation to impose a one-half cent sales tax to aid in the payment of these projects. This is a huge relief to our County property tax and a much-welcomed achievement.

When we are talking about the structural part of the new Correctional Facility we cannot leave out the many hours of preparation which have taken place in 2017 in the program design to operate our new facility. The correctional staff have formed a transition team and are detailing every policy and movement to assure a safe and successful opening and operation of our new Correctional Facility. They have been engaged with Social Services and many others to establish a Behavioral Health Unit within this new facility which will aid in stabilizing and begin the process of recovery for many individuals who are incarcerated. The Correctional Facility, under the direction of the Sheriff, supported financially by our County

Commissioners, will complete a place not only to house prisoners, but will be looked at as a model program for the start of rehabilitation on the path to recovery.

We, however, are not finished. In 2017 our Juvenile Detention Center continued its population explosion so much that the County Board took official action in allowing the employment of an architect to start a design plan for expansion. Steve has worked tirelessly with the 11-County consortium to study the programming demands, review the needed capacity, and plan for 20 years into the future. Obtaining and keeping 11 Counties on a unified path forward is no easy task, but one which the Juvenile Center has successfully completed with much more to come in 2018.

2017 has also been an interesting year with the Fargo-Moorhead Diversion Project. Our County Commissioners have stayed very active in the process. In light of a federal court ruling the Governors of Minnesota and North Dakota formed a task force to consider options in progressing this most important project. We were fortunate enough to have one of our own commissioners, Commissioner Mongeau, on that 16-member task force to represent the needs of Clay County. The task force had tight time lines, and we feel an atmosphere is now set to progress this project to conclusion.

With 2017 behind us, we must also look to 2018 for completion of many of our projects. We will open our new Law Enforcement Center and complete phase 1 of our new Correctional Facility. We will plan, design, and fund an expanded Juvenile Center which will also host non-secure youth who will have access to needed programming for their development. The County is seeking to secure State funding for a new Solid Waste Transfer Facility. We also need to design and bid several road construction projects. We will consider implementation of a Land Management Office for continued and improved customer service with a one-stop shop for land management functions. We will complete a successful election process, one which is so vital to our democracy.

In closing, this year's success could not be accomplished without the support and dedication of all five County Commissioners. We are the policy makers, the final

decision-makers, and the buffer zone between the departments and the citizens. A hearty thank-you goes to my colleagues for their support. On behalf of our Board, I would like to extend a sincere thank you to our citizens who have placed their trust in us to govern the many programs which have been discussed today. Our Board's genuine thank you is also given to our departments and the many employees who complete the day-to-day tasks which service the needs of our citizens. Our Board is committed to the delivery of services in an efficient, cost-effective, and profession manner. Please feel free to contact any of our County Commissioners or our County Administrator if you have any questions or comments. Thank you and have a great 2018!

Kevin Campbell, Chair
Clay County Board of Commissioners