

**MILWAUKEE COUNTY
INTER-OFFICE COMMUNICATION**

Date: April 22, 2026

To: Marcelia Nicholson-Bovell, Chairwoman, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors

From: Grant Helle, Director – Office of Sustainability, Department of Administrative Services, Facilities Management Division

Subject: WY062502 Climate Action 2050 Plan Implementation Update

File Type: Informational Report

This informational report provides updates on the implementation of Milwaukee County's strategic plan to achieve carbon neutrality in county facilities and operations by 2050 – hereafter referred to as the 'Climate Action 2050 Plan', or 'CA50 Plan.'

POLICY

File No. 21-389 commits Milwaukee County operations to become carbon neutral by 2050 and requests the Sustainability Director to develop and administer a strategic plan to achieve carbon neutrality in Milwaukee County facilities and operations by 2050.

File No. 23-485 requests that the Office of Sustainability, Department of Administrative Services develop criteria to evaluate the contribution of capital projects to Milwaukee County's carbon neutrality policy and strategic plan.

File No. 24-652 requests that the Department of Administrative Services – Office of Sustainability and Office of Strategy, Budget and Performance – Project Management Office to collaborate with the City of Milwaukee and other applicable entities to apply for, and accept if awarded, grants to help effectuate climate action goals.

File No. 25-262 requesting approval of the Climate Action 2050 Plan.

File No. 26-338 reaffirming Milwaukee County's commitment to the principles and goals of the Paris Agreement and affirming support for the scientific conclusions of the Greenhouse Gas Endangerment Finding.

REPORT

This informational report contains the following sections:

1. Background
2. Implementation Updates
 - a. Key Projects Initiated
 - b. Governance and Engagement
 - c. Implementation Pathways
 - d. Metrics
3. Risks and Challenges
4. Co-Benefits
5. Next Steps

1. BACKGROUND

In 2021, Milwaukee County committed to achieving carbon neutral operations by 2050 through adoption of File No. 21-389. This commitment applies to all County operations, including County facilities and fleet emissions, and reflects Milwaukee County's long-standing leadership in sustainability and climate action.

Following this commitment, the Milwaukee County Office of Sustainability (OS) within the Department of Administrative Services, Facilities Management Division, led development of the Climate Action 2050 Plan (CA50 Plan). The planning effort was guided by the County's Sustainability Task Force (STF), a cross-departmental body formed in 2021 and chaired by the Sustainability Director, with representation from all County operating departments.

The CA50 Plan was developed through a multi-year planning process that included collaboration with County departments, engagement with community stakeholders, and technical analysis supported by external consultants. The plan establishes a long-term framework to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from County operations while advancing equity, resilience, and alignment with Milwaukee County's broader strategic goals. The CA50 Plan was formally adopted by the County Board of Supervisors in April 2025.

Following the CA50 Plan adoption, the County has turned focus to implementation. These efforts focus on translating the adopted plan into actionable projects, establishing consistent methods for tracking progress, and ensuring that implementation efforts remain aligned with departmental priorities, funding availability, and Countywide objectives. This informational report provides an update on key elements of that implementation work.

2. IMPLEMENTATION UPDATES

Key Projects Initiated

In the past twelve months since Board adoption of the CA50 Plan, Milwaukee County departments have made measurable and meaningful progress toward the County's outlined climate action strategies. Departments have advanced initiatives across energy efficiency, electrification, renewable energy deployment, fleet modernization, climate resilience, and emergency preparedness. Many of these efforts represent both incremental operational improvements and foundational steps toward longer-term systemwide transformation.

Countywide, departments have continued to modernize facilities through LED lighting conversions, HVAC upgrades, and retro-commissioning planning, reducing energy use while addressing deferred maintenance. Departments such as MCTS, MKE Mitchell Airport, DHHS, and the CRC have each made capital or operational improvements aligning with CA50 goals. Several departments have also leveraged state and federal funding streams, including the Inflation Reduction Act, to pursue solar installations and other clean-energy projects. Notably, the Marcia P. Cogg's Building solar PV system was completed, serving as a demonstration project for future countywide solar expansion. Additional feasibility studies, including geothermal assessments, are underway to evaluate future clean-energy potential.

Within the Department of Administrative Services, several core initiatives further advanced CA50 implementation. The Office of Sustainability has begun rolling out the County's Sustainable Design Standards, supporting more efficient and climate-aligned building practices. DAS also completed significant steam-trap upgrades in the Historic Courthouse, significantly improving District Steam efficiency and reducing steam use. Additionally, DAS partnered with DHHS to deliver the new 50 kW solar installation at the Marcia P. Cogg's Building and coordinated Focus on Energy rebates that returned over \$33,000 to departmental project budgets to help accelerate future efficiency improvements.

Fleet-related emission-reduction efforts continued with multiple departments piloting electric vehicles, expanding charging infrastructure assessments, and accelerating conversion to hybrid/electric patrol and administrative vehicles. The County is also advancing policy-driven fleet right-sizing efforts to reduce underutilized vehicles and associated emissions. MCTS contributed significantly to transportation-sector progress through its electric bus operations, reduction of diesel consumption, and improvement of operational efficiency.

Departments also strengthened climate resilience and emergency response capacity. The Office of Emergency Management led major cross-agency initiatives, including long-term recovery operations following the 2025 flooding event, expansion of the Extreme Weather Task Force, and development of standardized emergency sheltering coordination frameworks. These efforts are improving the County's ability to prepare for

and respond to climate-driven extreme weather events, support residents during disasters, and align with regional and statewide partners.

Across Parks, MCDOT, DHHS, and other operational departments, staff advanced projects that enhance public health, community access, and environmental stewardship. These include trail conversions, water-reduction projects, occupancy-control installations, reforestation of more than 20 acres of parkland, and planting of thousands of native trees and shrubs. These initiatives contribute directly to reducing carbon emissions, improving natural ecosystem resilience, and expanding public access to safe, climate-friendly spaces.

Collectively, these efforts demonstrate a consistent and growing alignment between departmental operations and the CA50 framework. Over the past year, departments have not only delivered tangible emission-reduction projects but have also established the planning, policy, and collaborative infrastructure needed to accelerate progress in the years ahead. *Appendix A* provides additional detail on these projects and initiatives for each department, showing the significant number of climate action strategies already being addressed. These strategies will inform the soon-to-come public-facing climate action dashboard that is outlined in the 'implementation pathways' section of this report.

Governance and Engagement

Milwaukee County is entering the next phase of CA50 implementation, shifting from foundational planning to coordinated, repeatable, and scalable execution across departments. To support this transition, the County is strengthening its governance structure, formalizing decision-making processes, and expanding engagement with both internal and external partners. These updates ensure that CA50 Plan implementation remains transparent, equitable, data-driven, and aligned with operational realities and long-term strategic priorities.

Looking ahead, the Sustainability Task Force (STF) continues to serve as the central cross-departmental body for climate action but will evolve into a more structured venue for project oversight, information sharing, and alignment with capital planning cycles. The STF will support departments in translating the CA50 strategies into department-specific implementation pathways, ensuring consistent interpretation of requirements, identifying opportunities for collaboration, and maintaining alignment with the CA50 milestones and goals.

In parallel, OS will oversee the development and administration of standardized procedures for project intake, prioritization, reporting, and performance tracking. These procedures will provide departments with consistent guidance on how CA50 requirements intersect with annual budgeting, capital planning, and operational constraints. This governance framework will be essential for coordinating the many interdependent projects required to achieve carbon neutrality.

In this next phase of implementation, engagement with internal stakeholders will expand and become more embedded in core workflows. This includes structured collaboration with departmental leadership, facility operators, fleet managers, and fiscal staff to ensure that CA50 strategies are integrated early in project planning and decision-making. The rollout of the Sustainable Design Standards beginning with 2026 capital projects is one example of this deeper integration, ensuring that sustainability and emissions reduction considerations shape capital project scope from inception through construction.

Additionally, new internal communication tools and processes will be deployed. These include guidance documents, assisted grant coordination, capital project charter templates, and recurring coordination touchpoints to support departments in navigating new requirements and identifying opportunities for early wins. This internal engagement framework is designed to reduce administrative burden, clarify implementation expectations, and create shared ownership of climate action across County divisions.

Milwaukee County will also expand its engagement with external partners, community organizations, regional agencies, and subject-matter experts. Past engagement efforts summarized in prior reports (including the Vulnerability Assessment¹, Community Workshop Notes², and engagement tracking materials³) laid the groundwork for broader community participation. Ongoing work will emphasize partnership-based engagement by working with the Office of Equity and other departments to ensure that implementation reflects community needs and advances equity outcomes.

Future engagement activities may include community listening sessions, informational events and targeted outreach to organizations with expertise in clean energy, resilience, workforce development, and health equity, among other things. These efforts will ensure that the CA50 implementation reflects best practices, leverages external funding and expertise, and builds broad support for the County's climate commitments.

Together, these governance and engagement enhancements will support transparent, scalable, and accountable implementation of the CA50 Plan. By formalizing decision-making, deepening engagement across County operations, and strengthening community partnership, Milwaukee County is building the institutional infrastructure necessary to deliver the transformation required to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050.

Implementation Pathways

The adopted Climate Action 2050 Plan establishes a clear set of emissions reduction strategies to guide implementation across County facilities and operations. These strategies were developed in collaboration with County departments and are intended to

¹ In April 2024, the Office of Sustainability shared the Vulnerability Assessment Survey Results with the County Board – see [File No. 23-529](#).

² In December 2023, the Office of Sustainability shared the May 2023 Community Workshop Notes with the County Board – see [File No. 23-986](#).

³ In April 2024, the Office of Sustainability shared a Community Engagement To Date Tracker with the County Board – see [File No. 23-529](#).

be implemented incrementally over time, with emphasis on actions that are technically feasible, operationally aligned, and fiscally responsible.

The CA50 Plan identifies the following core strategies as foundational to reducing greenhouse gas emissions from County operations:

- Lighting
- Retro-commissioning
- Controls upgrades
- Heat pumps and building electrification
- Building envelope and duct sealing
- HVAC upgrades
- Vehicle fleet conversion
- On-site solar
- Off-site carbon-free electricity

In addition to identifying these strategies, the CA50 Plan evaluated County facilities and fleet assets to determine where these approaches are most applicable. The plan highlights specific buildings, building types, and vehicle classes that are strong candidates for implementation based on factors such as asset condition, remaining useful life, energy use, and operational needs. The plan also establishes interim milestones and goals intended to help focus implementation efforts over the next five to ten years, providing direction for near- and mid-term action while maintaining flexibility over the longer term.

Rather than prescribing single, fixed implementation pathways, the CA50 Plan is designed to inform and support department-specific approaches to implementation. Each department is expected to pursue its unique implementation pathway, reflecting its operational priorities, asset portfolios, and capital planning cycles, while maintaining alignment with the Countywide strategies and interim objectives specified in the CA50 Plan. Collectively, these department-level efforts represent Milwaukee County's path toward achieving carbon neutrality by 2050.

To support departments in advancing this work, Milwaukee County has engaged a Consulting Team for a scope of services focused on CA50 Plan implementation. This effort builds directly upon the strategies, project recommendations, and interim goals identified in the CA50 Plan and is intended to help departments move from planning to action. Key elements include supporting departments in prioritizing and advancing projects, updating foundational data such as the emissions inventory, and developing a public-facing climate action dashboard. This dashboard is intended to provide County stakeholders with a clear, current view of progress toward the CA50 Plan's interim 2030 emissions reduction goals and long-term 2050 carbon neutrality goal, as well as high-level highlights from department-level initiatives. Emissions data will serve as the primary metric underlying dashboard reporting. Final details regarding the dashboard's

format, content, and update cadence are still being refined as implementation and reporting processes continue to mature.

Throughout this phase, the Sustainability Task Force will continue to play a central role in supporting implementation. The STF provides a forum for cross-departmental coordination, knowledge sharing, and alignment with Countywide objectives, and will continue to assist OS in guiding implementation efforts as departments advance their respective paths toward CA50 goals.

OS has partnered with a consulting team to develop sustainable design standards (SDS) that outline both requirements and best practices for design and construction projects at Milwaukee County. The SDS apply to both new construction and renovation projects and serve as the tool for moving sustainability to the beginning of decision making for the project delivery process. The ultimate goal of the SDS is to drive energy efficiency and emissions reduction into all county capital projects and renovations that will support progress towards Milwaukee County's carbon neutrality. The SDS are currently being applied to and complied with for 2026 capital projects.

Metrics

Emissions Information

Greenhouse gas emissions are the primary metric used to track progress under Milwaukee County's Climate Action 2050 Plan. As implementation of the CA50 Plan continues, emissions data will remain central to evaluating the effectiveness of climate action efforts, informing decision-making, and communicating progress to County leadership and the Board of Supervisors.

As part of the 2026 CA50 implementation support scope, Milwaukee County has engaged a Consulting Team to update the County's operational greenhouse gas emissions inventory for calendar year 2024. This updated inventory will provide the most current emissions data as the County advances from plan adoption into sustained implementation and reporting. The inventory will focus on operational (Scope 1 and Scope 2) emissions from County facilities and fleet, consistent with prior CA50 emissions assessments.

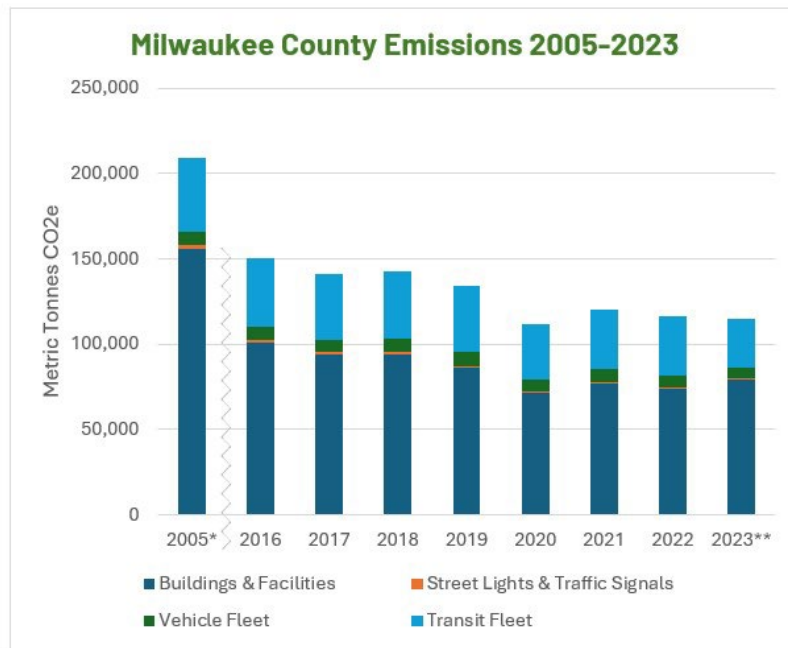
Under the current scope of work, this team has begun coordinating with OS and County departments to collect necessary data required to complete the emissions inventory analysis. As of April, 2026, this work is ongoing with publication of updated emissions results anticipated to be complete by the end of June 2026. Emissions data will be integrated into County reporting and will serve as a primary input to any climate action dashboard developed as part of CA50 implementation support.

Beyond the 2024 update, the Consulting Team's scope also includes supporting the County in establishing clearer reporting requirements and processes to make future emissions updates more efficient and consistent. These efforts are intended to reduce

administrative burden in future years, improve data continuity, and enable more regular emissions reporting as a core component of ongoing CA50 tracking and transparency.

As we complete a 2024 emissions inventory, we anticipate that general usage patterns within the county will remain similar to prior years. (Figure 1) depicts annual greenhouse gas emissions dating back to 2016, supporting a trend towards achieving a 50% reduction in carbon by 2030.

Figure 1. Milwaukee County Operational Emissions 2005 – 2023⁴



*2005 serves as the baseline for Milwaukee County's Emissions Reduction Goal. Emissions values for years 2005 & 2016-2022 are provided from the County's ICLEI ClearPath inventories.

**2023 Vehicle Fleet data not currently available. Modeled using 2022 Vehicle Fleet data as a placeholder value.

Energy Use Information

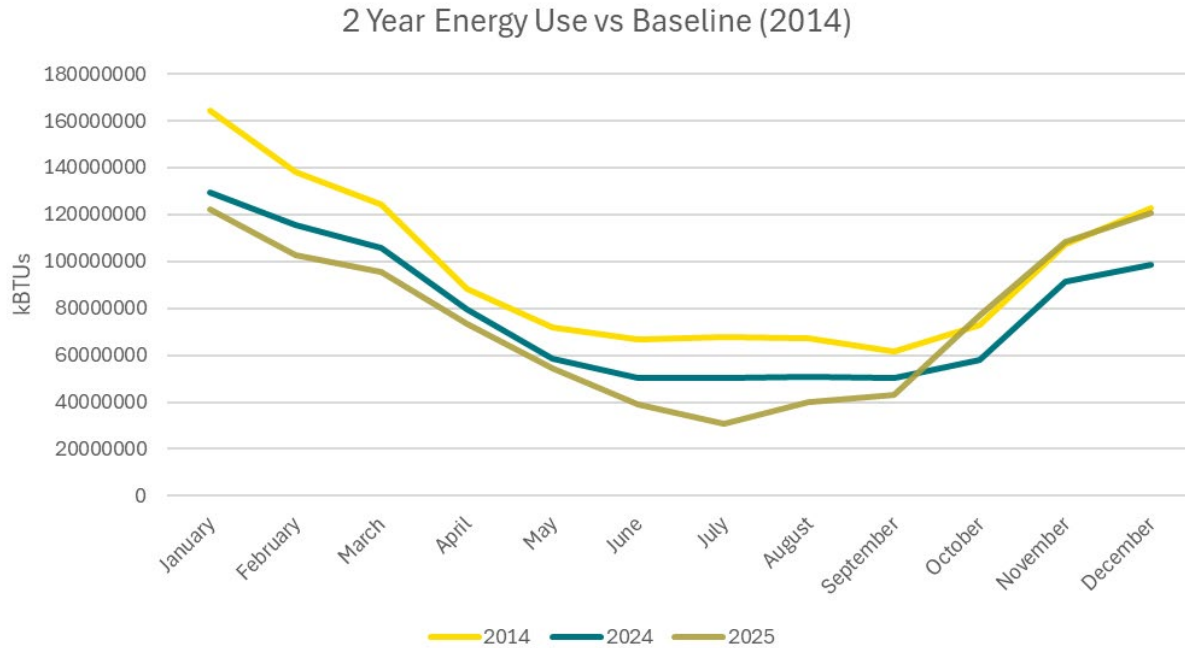
OS consistently monitors energy usage across county operations through utility billing data. This is being done to highlight facilities with high energy impacts, target energy efficiency projects, and inform capital project decision making. Monitoring usage patterns and comparing prior year usage and weatherization data enables forecasting year over year for operational budgets.

As seen in (Figure 2), total energy usage for 2025 is 21% lower than usage in the (2014) baseline year. 2025 total usage was 907 million kBtus compared to 1.15 billion

⁴ In April 2025, the Office of sustainability shared the Climate Action 2050 Plan document, containing emissions data, with the County Board – see [File No. 25-262](#).

kBTUs in 2014. 2025's usage is 5% higher than the previous year (2024). Calculations by the Office of Sustainability indicate this higher usage is a result of more extreme weather in 2025 with increased heating and cooling degree days, as well as a temporarily increased building portfolio as the former Marcia P. Coggs building and the Medical Examiner's building, among others, pend final action.

Figure 2. Milwaukee County Total Energy Usage

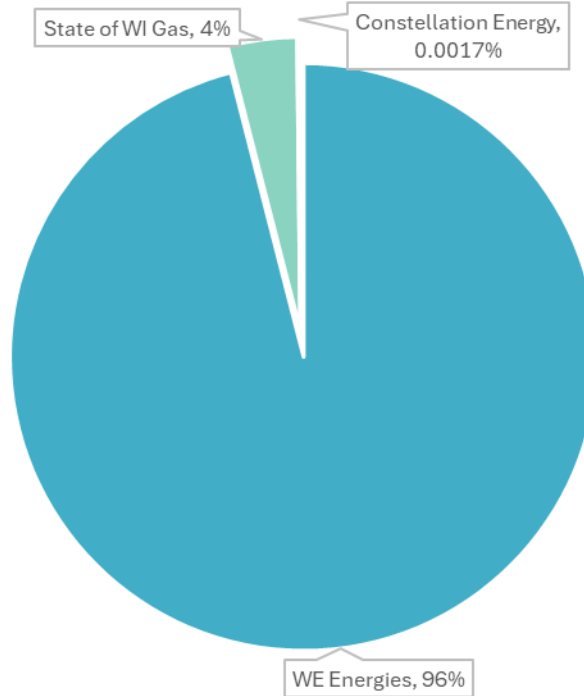


3. RISKS AND CHALLENGES

Milwaukee County's ability to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 is shaped by several external and internal factors. A primary long-term risk is the County's reliance on WE Energies to 'green the grid', or decarbonize the regional electric grid by 2050. Because the majority of County energy consumption will continue to come from the utility (See *Figure 3*), progress toward CA50 goals depends in part on the utility's stated commitments to eliminate coal by 2035 and achieve net-zero generation by 2050.

Internally, implementation challenges include aging facility infrastructure, capital and staffing constraints, and the need for sustained cross-departmental coordination as project complexity grows. As departments advance electrification, building system upgrades, and fleet transitions, challenges may arise related to budget cycles, operational impacts, and construction sequencing. Finally, as CA50 reporting and emissions tracking requirements expand, continued improvements to data systems and reporting processes will be necessary to ensure accuracy and reduce administrative burden.

Figure 3. Milwaukee County Utility Providers by Percentage of County Utility Cost 2025



4. CO-BENEFITS

While Milwaukee County is taking responsibility and eliminating our carbon footprint, the core mission remains to provide governmental services to residents and visitors. Understanding this, the CA50 Plan and its included strategies aim to take a comprehensive approach to decarbonization and identify further advantages it can offer, beyond simply cutting carbon emissions and reducing costs. These advantages are referred to as co-benefits. Co-benefits have proven to align with the strategic priorities of other Milwaukee County's departments, strengthening the overall positive impact of the proposed climate action strategies.

The following are just a few examples of co-benefits that have been identified⁴:

- Local Job Creation
- Community Well-Being
- Urban Heat Island Reduction
- Energy Independence
- Community Decarbonization Education and Leadership

5. NEXT STEPS

In the year ahead, Milwaukee County will continue advancing the Climate Action 2050 Plan by transitioning from foundational planning into expanded, department driven execution. Key priorities include advancing electrification and energy efficiency projects, applying Sustainable Design Standards to new capital projects, refining project prioritization, and completing major technical analyses such as the updated greenhouse gas emissions inventory and ongoing geothermal feasibility work.

To support transparency and ongoing performance tracking, Milwaukee County will incorporate emissions and project level data into a developing Climate Action Dashboard, which will become a central tool for monitoring implementation progress and informing future decision making. This dashboard will complement strengthened reporting processes and provide clearer visibility for leadership, departments, and the public.

The Office of Sustainability, in coordination with the Sustainability Task Force, will continue supporting departments as they align capital planning and operational needs with CA50 objectives. Engagement with external partners and community stakeholders will also expand to ensure equitable and well-supported implementation. OS will maintain its commitment to providing an annual CA50 update to the Milwaukee County Board in April or May, board cycle dependent, offering regular updates on progress, challenges, and emerging opportunities in the transition to carbon neutrality by 2050.

ALIGNMENT TO STRATEGIC PLAN

The Climate Action 2050 Plan ongoing implementation continues to support Milwaukee County's strategic plan by creating intentional inclusion and investing in equity. The planning team successfully developed the plan with intentional inclusion of diverse stakeholders, both internal and external to the county administration. This level of engagement will continue as the project team executes implementation efforts. In addition, as described in the CA50 Framework⁵, the plan emphasizes strategies and actions that provide racial and health equity co-benefits, not just environmental protection or cost savings. The project team remains focused on achieving co-benefit success in this and future stages. Finally, the Climate Action 2050 Plan can support the county's fiscal sustainability, as smart energy efficiency investments continue to reduce operating costs.

⁵ In August 2021, the Office of Sustainability shared the CA50 Framework with the County Board – see [File No. 21-770](#)

FISCAL EFFECT

The report is informational only and there is no fiscal impact.

VIRTUAL MEETING INVITES

Sean Hayes, Director of Facilities Management – Department of Administrative Services – Facilities Management Division

Grant Helle, Director, Office of Sustainability – Department of Administrative Services – Facilities Management Division

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ATTACHMENTS

1. Appendix A: 2025 Climate Action Initiatives & Projects

cc: Kelly Bablitch, Chief of Staff, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors
Janelle M. Jensen, Legislative Services Division Manager, Office of the County Clerk
Aaron Hertzberg, Director, Department of Administrative Services