

ICC Meeting Remarks

Sept. 9, 2019 | South Milwaukee City Hall

Good afternoon, my name is Erik Brooks, and I am the mayor of the City of South Milwaukee.

I want to thank the mayors and village presidents for coming to the City of South Milwaukee today and providing some really good feedback and deliberation on what is being proposed. It's important.

And I really appreciate County Executive Abele and County Board Chairman Lipscomb coming to the ICC to seek our feedback. It's all about Milwaukee County and its communities, and we all benefit from a stronger Milwaukee County.

The feedback provided today will help shape the legislation and inform the vote in two weeks at the special meeting of the ICC. ...

In the end, the details matter. We had a lot of questions today about details, and we'll get to those as we move forward here and hopefully get this moving forward through the legislature.

Simply put: We need radical change in the way local governments are funded in Wisconsin, and we need it here in South Milwaukee.

Our system is broken. And because of it, it is increasingly difficult for us to fund the services our residents and others expect and demand from us. It's a story playing out across the county, and across the state.

Before I bring up others to speak, I want to share a little bit about our story ... and the impacts our current system has had on every one of the more than 21,000 people who live in South Milwaukee.

Two years ago, we in South Milwaukee needed to go to referendum, asking voters to raise their taxes to maintain paramedic services and add two new police officers to the smallest department per capita in the region. Thankfully, it passed 2-to-1, but this is no way to balance a budget and invest in your services.

Now this year, just a couple weeks ago, our common council, in this chamber, heard from our health insurance consultants that we're facing an increase in insurance costs of 16% for 2020. That is a \$400,000 hit to our budget, a hole we must fill with money we do not have.

There are plenty of other examples like this.

At the same time, as we feel this pressure with our local budget, we are feeling the county's budget pain more than anyone.

Almost a third of our land is county property -- parks, including Grant Park and the Oak Creek Parkway, as well as Grobschmidt Pool. All of these community treasures need major capital and operating investment right now, and I worry about their future because Milwaukee County lacks the funds to adequately invest in them.

Roads are crumbling. Buildings are aging. Equipment is failing. Our parks are not being maintained as they should.

We're also served by three Milwaukee County bus routes, and two of them are proposed to be eliminated in 2020 ... leaving dozens of students and commuters without a way to get to and from school and work. All in, the county is proposing eliminating a third of all of its bus routes – a third! – next year due to an inability to fund the transit system.

Police, fire, parks, transit ... these are just a few examples of services we're struggling to fund in our current system.

Every community is dealing with this to some degree -- urban, rural, big, small, rich, poor, red, blue, with no regard to geography. This has to stop, and we need help to do it.

We want to be effective partners with the state, and to be part of the solution. But we need the state legislature to give us the tools to truly invest in our communities ... and I look forward to seeing legislation to help us do that.

With that, I'd like to call up Tim Sheehy, executive director of the MMAC, a key part of the unprecedented coalition of city, county, business, labor and community leaders on this issue. Milwaukee County and its communities are an economic engine for the state, we need legislation to help make sure we stay that way. Tim?