

WISCONSIN CENTRAL TIME

Marathon County Newsletter

Winter 2014
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Welcome

Brad Karger, County Administrator

In 2012 the County Board developed a 5-year strategic plan which identifies the most important work of the county. Expanding communications with residents to improve the public's understanding of the services provided, the role of County Government, and the issues confronting Marathon County Government was identified as a key element to our success in serving you.

Marathon County government serves you in some ways you know – public libraries and snow plowing, plus those which may not be top of mind. Such as:

- Operation of the Jail
- Court services
- Child welfare investigations
- Educational services of University of Wisc. Extension
- Water quality protection services
- Public health services

The diversity and reach of Marathon County Government is extensive.

This new and improved newsletter offers information on:

- What the county does
- How it decides which public services to provide
- How services are funded
- What the county promises to deliver
- How you know your money is being well spent

We will also offer insight about the people who make decisions on your behalf in Marathon County.

Brad Karger

Marathon County Administrator



The Marathon County Government budget for 2014 is \$167 million. \$57 million of that amount comes from property taxes. The rest comes from state income taxes, sales taxes, user fees, and state and federal grants.

\$167 million is a lot of money and county leaders will be accountable for the money spent and the results achieved.

County Government is complicated. Our challenge is to provide you with a quarterly report on your \$167 million investment. We will share our successes, failures, challenges, lessons learned, and goals for the future.

If the articles in the newsletter are not of interest to you, let us know that and tell us what subjects are of interest. We are creating something new and it can take many forms. With your input we can evolve this newsletter into a communication instrument you value.

I have invested the last 25 years of my career in public service in leadership positions of Marathon County Government. It is an honor to serve you. Thank you for taking the time to read the newsletter. Enjoy!



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www.co.marathon.wi.us

Marathon County Jail: Lessons Learned

Brad Karger, County Administrator

Oh my! I have been the subject of more public scrutiny since February, 2013 than ever before in my 33 years of public service. Along the way I have learned and reaffirmed lessons I will share.

Recap - events that precipitated the media coverage:

- Public disclosures about the Sheriff's attendance
- Sheriff Hoenisch's resignation
- The assault of Corrections Office Julie Christensen
- Public disclosures about jail staffing levels
- Dysfunctional work culture at the jail
- Jail's poor state of technology and infrastructure

At least a couple of days each week, during a four month period, I was on the television news or quoted in the newspaper. People who had never heard of me before were recognizing me around town. If not a character building exercise, this was definitely a character revealing experience. All of this affirmed I have the ability to learn and develop from others and I am a good communicator; even under stressful conditions.

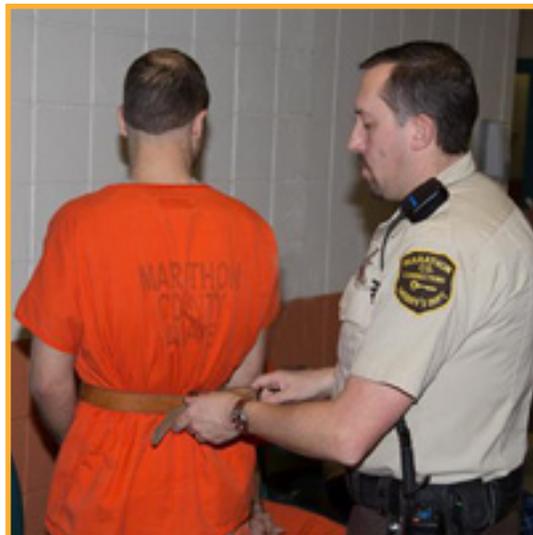
This could have been an organizational and personal meltdown, but it wasn't, because we did a few things right. I don't pretend to have all the answers but learned a few lessons that I want to remember:

Push information out the door. I gave the media every bit of information needed to do a thorough job of reporting

without sugar-coating. The reporters received all the information requested, plus I gave them information they didn't know existed. We did this for many reasons. The most important reason being the public had a right to know the extent of the problem and the only way that could happen is with accurate and timely information.

Leaders need to listen to the signals and follow-up. Prior to the public disclosures about the dysfunction in the jail I had signals a problem existed in that facility. I read

the work culture survey results and it was reported to me that capital expenditures had been budgeted, but not spent. Plus, I read the jail inspection reports. While it is clear that authority for jail operations rests with the Sheriff, I had knowledge of jail deficiencies and should have used my influence to seek change. As a result, I will ask more questions, look for contradictions, and work hard to keep communication lines open with staff at all levels.



No one expects perfection. If perfection were a requirement of our leaders, we'd never elect a national president. Marathon County residents expect their leaders will exhibit shortcomings or experience problems. The public knows these jobs are difficult. At least once a month, since I became the County Administrator, someone tells me "I wouldn't want your job"! We expect our leaders to learn from their mistakes and strive to improve. Isn't that what we expect from anyone?

Marathon County Jail: Lessons Learned *(continued)*

Brad Karger, County Administrator

Most people, including media professionals, want their public leaders to succeed. The assumption among public officials is that news reporters in particular, take pleasure in the failure of public officials. I never fully bought into that line of thinking, but then again, I've never really put that much thought into it prior to this experience.

The media and the public want the truth and a public accounting. They want to know what happened in the past to cause a problem and what will happen in the future to avoid reoccurrence. News reporters want to do their job as best they can. Accurate public information is their goal and the public wants a sense their best interests are being served. Except for a few internet trolls, people in the media and in the community want their community leaders to be successful. Why wouldn't they?

We have a good jail staff. They are dedicated and have performed through adversity. There is a new administration in place—Sheriff, Chief Deputy, and Jail Administrator. The Independent Jail Security Panel has given us a road map to create a culture of safety for our inmates and jail staff. We have the talent and a solid plan. The stars are aligned for great improvement.

These are the key lessons I learned on my four month journey in a whirlwind of public scrutiny. Maybe these aren't the right lessons or maybe these lessons will need refinement. Anyway if there is anything here that you can use--please do so. It's like advice that is offered for free and worth every penny.



Respect and Compassion: Meeting the Needs of the Hungry

Vicki Tykla, Director and Jan Huebsch, Support Programs Manager - Department of Social Services



Our values as an organization dictate Marathon County officials and employees will in all situations exhibit respect and compassion to our residents. This is our trademark and you can expect nothing less from us.

Here are some facts:

- In 2013, nearly 24,000 Marathon County residents received FoodShare benefits (once known as food stamps). This is about 18% of our citizens.
- In 2013, each month Marathon County distributed on average, \$1.9 million to FoodShare recipients.
- Within this group of program recipients, 33% of the households included at least one working individual and 38% of the households included at least one individual who is elderly, blind or disabled.

FoodShare was created to help stop hunger and to improve nutrition and health. FoodShare is a federal and state mandated program for which Marathon County

provides the determination of eligibility and distribution of benefits. Although mandated, the support of FoodShare most importantly represents a willingness of Marathon County to provide for minimal level of food security for our residents in need, oftentimes our most vulnerable residents.

To deliver our services with compassion, we must honestly ask ourselves:

- What is the likelihood you don't know someone who receives assistance with purchasing food? (Remember, 1 in every 5 residents)
- Can you envision any circumstances where you might need this benefit to feed your family or are you economically bullet-proof?

We don't make any of the rules. We are asked to administer the rules of the state and federal government. And we administer the rules in order to help people through challenges. What we do control locally is our attitude and treatment of our customers. If life happens and you need support, Marathon County pledges to provide services:

- Without disdain and judgment
- With compassion
- With respect

The values of staff and the Marathon County leadership dictate that FoodShare applicants/recipients are treated with respect and dignity. This same commitment extends to all public services that the County provides.

FOR MORE INFORMATION REGARDING FOODSHARE

Please contact the IM Central Consortium Call Center - **888-445-1261**

www.co.marathon.wi.us

Big Eau Pleine Reservoir: Safe, Healthy, Prosperous

Andy Johnson, Conservation, Planning & Zoning

The formula for a fish kill in the Big Eau Pleine reservoir is simple. Add the following ingredients:

- Polluted runoff from agricultural lands carrying soil, manure, and fertilizers into the reservoir;
- Low water levels in the reservoir;
- A long lasting cover of ice in spring.

A fish kill provides a stark and stinky reminder that the water in the reservoir is not clean enough to consistently support a healthy fishery.

Over the next 3 years, Marathon County will lead a partnership of landowners, agencies, farmers, sportsmen and citizens to develop new land practices, program incentives and educational strategies to reduce sediment and nutrient rich runoff from entering the water and to minimize the risk of fish kills.

We are approaching the watershed work as a community project. The key components of the Fenwood Creek project will include:

- **Citizen water quality monitoring.** The Big Eau Pleine Citizens Organization began in-stream monitoring work in 2013 to share information on water quality.

- **Farmer Councils.** Landowners and farmers will directly participate with agencies and citizens to design water quality programs and incentives.
- **Best Management Practice** demonstrations. Agencies and farmers will develop and demonstrate land practices that reduce sediment and nutrient runoff.
- **Community Outcomes.** Agencies, citizens, landowners, and farmers will identify the education activities and management practices that will be implemented to improve water quality.

The traditional watershed approach is government led utilizing landowner financial incentives, technical assistance, and laws to change behavior. This approach will not necessarily lead to the outcome of clean water. Marathon County with its partners will develop a coalition of interested citizens, residents and resource users to help change our understanding of the resource issues and the action needed by all to create lasting improvements.

This newsletter will track the work of the farmers, government agencies, and citizens as they develop a new partnership that improves the health of the nearly 7,000 acre reservoir.



Before



After

A Brownfield Partnership: Wausau's East Riverfront District Project

Andy Johnson, Conservation, Planning and Zoning, and Dennis Lawrence, NCW Regional Planning Commission

The success of Marathon County and the City of Wausau are intertwined. One cannot succeed without the other. Specifically, the Wausau downtown is a critical element of Marathon County's success. The opportunities realized and the "quality of life" enjoyed by all citizens and businesses are a function of public and private partnerships. The East Riverfront District project is the latest example of Marathon County and the City of Wausau partnering to improve the community.



In 2012, Marathon County received a \$400,000 grant from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to help local urban and rural communities complete environmental assessments and remediation plans on economically strategic lands. These lands are referred to as brownfields. With clean-up of petroleum and/or hazardous wastes, these properties can be developed to become productive economic and community development assets by creating jobs and expanding the tax base.

The East Riverfront District is certainly a prime property for redevelopment. Located north of the Dudley Tower and Eye Clinic of Wisconsin, the site is approximately 15 acres of riverfront property, including an important stretch of the River Edge Trail. Since the 1970s, the City of Wausau along with many private and public interests have worked to secure funds to plan, assess, purchase, and remediate the property for optimal use.

Marathon County has utilized the EPA grant to provide Phase I and II assessments and planning on five parcels of land within the project area. Once complete, the remediation work can begin to clean up the area for future development. Additionally, Marathon County will allocate \$470,000 from the Environmental Impact Fund for environmental

remediation of the property.

For Marathon County, the partnership is based upon our commitment to:

- **Resource protection.** These sites contain hazardous waste and petroleum products that threaten to leach into the Wisconsin River and groundwater.
- **Health concerns.** The contamination is in an area of the community with vulnerable populations.
- **Recreation.** Expansion of the riverfront walkway provides walking and biking opportunities that support healthy lifestyles.
- **Economic development.** The site in downtown Wausau has great potential for commercial, residential, and job creating opportunities after the clean up.

Wausau's riverfront project is of county-wide significance and Marathon County intends to support, financially and otherwise, the City's effort for increased commerce, job creation, enhance recreational opportunities, and safeguard the water resources.