



Winnebago County

Office of the County Executive

The Wave of the Future

Neighborhood Improvement Fund Presentation

Prepared Remarks of County Executive Jon Doemel

March 15, 2022

Thank you, Chairman Ramos. Before I was county executive, I was a community leader looking to help our community solve issues. I am a firm believer that neighbors helping neighbors builds the fabric of a strong community quicker and more efficiently than the government alone. That said, you all have the opportunity in the coming weeks to approve a grant which will significantly provide an infusion of needed capital to address homelessness.

Traditionally, we think of homelessness as individuals who live on the streets, sleep on benches, and panhandle for money. In reality, homelessness is much more and the risk of being unsheltered caused by substance abuse, poverty, domestic abuse or other issues that are root causes of homelessness can be alleviated with enhanced collaboration.

Housing affects almost all aspects of life. Stable housing means:

- That children are more likely to do well in school and live a better life
- It means increased financial stability
- It enables parents to keep a stable job
- and reduces the chronic stress that too often leads to poor health and family crisis

The issue of homelessness and housing instability is also bi-partisan. Both Governor Walker and Governor Evers have tackled this issue head on.

We are excited for the opportunity to move the needle on these issues. I am honored to stand before you today with key partners from our community and within the county to assist in this presentation.

We ask that you think of this issue not as "homelessness" but rather as housing instability. Homeless is not entirely the guy you see on the street.

Winnebago County has many gaps in our housing continuum. The Winnebagoland Housing Coalition issued their "Homeless Continuum Report" last July discussing how to improve our continuum locally. The coalition brings together stakeholders from Fond du Lac, Green Lake and Winnebago Counties.

The report was supported by the Oshkosh Community Foundation with assistance from the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh and the Oshkosh/Winnebago County Housing Authority.

The partners and stakeholders who comprise the coalition are listed on the slide. Again, the issue of homelessness and housing insecurity was proposed by the community.

Based on the federal Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing Act of 2009, interconnected agencies, which make up the WHC, developed a more defined continuum.

The WHC has seven categories of their continuum: prevention; outreach, intake & assessment; emergency sheltering; transitional housing; rapid re-housing; community/specialized housing; and, permanent housing.

As we wrote the grant, we looked for shovel ready projects which filled needs in several of these areas.

Here is a visual of the local continuum – with some definitions below them.

I know the slide is small and maybe hard to see; however, I wanted to show you the continuum as visualized by the coalition. The purpose of the continuum and the grant is to meet people where they are and advance them along the continuum.

This issue did not come out of thin air.

Frequently, you as the county board receive reports on studies or plans. Then due to scarce taxpayer and community resources, the reports are put on a shelf and not acted upon. This grant will allow for Winnebago County, through the state and ARPA, to invest in several of the actionable items from last summer.

Specifically, we chose Day by Day Warming Shelter and Oshkosh Kids Foundation as recommendations two and three from the WHC report. Additional grantees were chosen based on their ability to have a project that fit the grants definition of "shovel-ready."

The county through our Homelessness Eviction and Loss Prevention (HELP) pilot will be able to take a more active role in prevention and articulating needs across the continuum.

This slide re-visualizes the continuum. We have limited availability of housing in some very vulnerable segments within our county. With the rising cost of housing, failure to act will only result in a larger issue to address in the near future.

Based on a 2020 report from the United Way, nearly a quarter of county residents are Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed or ALICE. This speaks to the number of residents who could be at risk for future housing insecurity.

The WHC and ALICE studies are just two examples of several around the county pointing to housing as an issue.

The Neighborhood Investment fund is a grant administered by the Wisconsin Department of Administration made available through funds provided by the American Rescue Plan Act. The purpose of this grant is to provide local and tribal governments help to build long-term, sustainable economic success. All projects approved in this grant were required to be shovel-ready and all eligible expenses are to occur before December 31, 2024 when the projects are expected to be completed.

The team at public health and human services had a very short timeline to pick a theme which could be competitive statewide and fill a need.

There was an emphasis in the grant for shovel-ready and projects inside a qualified census tract – which are areas of the country that have the highest rates of poverty.

Once the housing continuum and WHC report was our theme – we targeted the projects that could be completed by the end of 2024.

On Thursday, March 3, Governor Evers awarded and announced a Neighborhood Investment Fund grant for Winnebago County in the amount of just over \$10.35 million

Now I would like to introduce our partners and give them the opportunity to give you a brief summary of who they are, what their mission is and how their project will help accomplish our collective goals.

- Day by Day
- Oshkosh Kids Foundation
- Solutions Recovery
- Covey
- Habitat for Humanity
- Winnebago County Human Services

These projects, should you choose to accept the grant funding, will directly impact emergency shelter, transitional housing, and permanent housing along with community and specialized housing. We rounded it off with a resource center directly run by Winnebago County to operate as a backflow prevention keeping families and individuals from falling back into housing instability ensuring the progression to stable housing remains successful for these citizens well into the future. This is not about making a wider net, this is about creating partnerships to help our people out of the net and have the ability to catch those that have fallen through the cracks.

Today, is the presentation on the grant. The next steps are

- The county board will need to approve the grant
- County hires an LTE to assist in grant deployment
- The County staff will work with WHC and other stakeholders to define outcomes
- County staff will work with legal counsel and our finance department to ensure proper spending

- County staff will work with community organizations to ensure project success through meaningful collaboration.

And so, in conclusion, this funding and these partnerships will make a huge impact on our housing needs and will help strengthen our bridge to housing stability. The initiatives under this grant are a collaboration of government, nonprofit, and the private sector.

This is government offering a piece of support to our local community to move forward its own initiatives. We support our communities when we support our non-governmental organizations and find ways to work together.

By approving to accept these funds, you are stabilizing housing and freeing up other local funds to be more available to our community. You have a real chance to move the needle and help create a path to stability for those who are the most vulnerable in our county. Thank you.