



MANAGER'S MESSAGE FOR 2023 RECOMMENDED BUDGET

Thank you for reviewing the 2023 Recommended Budget.

Our emphasis for the 2023 Recommended Budget is quite simple: to continue core service by emphasizing Sedgwick County's most important asset – our people. **Our goal for 2023 is to bring county pay levels to more closely resemble pay in the nearby governments within our region and State in an effort to retain and grow staff.**

Our county staff began discussing the 2023 budget in the late fall of 2021. We already knew at this early stage that employee compensation had to be addressed. Over the last several years Sedgwick County had fallen behind the pay curve and this needs to be reconciled if we expect to maintain service levels. In addition, we have seen extreme inflation rates not seen since the 1970's which put further stress on all employees. And we had to modify a strategy that was responsible to the taxpayers of Sedgwick County without causing undue tax burden or cost.

When discussing staff compensation we had three clear options:

Continue the status quo since the Great Recession a decade ago and simply adopt the forecasted wage increase of 2-4%.

Increase the compensation forecast to a more aggressive number and give the most meaningful across-the-board wage increase as possible without causing more hardship to our citizens.

Increase the compensation forecast and recommend meaningful raises for all employees and strategically increase compensation for high-vacancy positions without a pipeline of applicants. In addition, we would commit to routinely moving the pay scale, which has not been done over the last decade – a strategy that will help us in years ahead to make sure our wage rates do not continue to fall behind other employers.

Of the above, we intentionally chose option #3 – the most difficult to manage and implement but the right thing to do.



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We feel our efforts for the recommended 2023 budget take us further down the track to improve county compensation to make us more competitive with other employers in the region and State. And, as we said throughout this process, one budget year will not fix a history of insufficient employee compensation. We will continue to address issues of compression within the compensation scales the remainder of 2022 and into 2023. Our ultimate goal is to end up with a fair and competitive wage environment while being fiscally responsible to our citizens of Sedgwick County.

In addition to compensation, this budget also continues to address environmental working conditions for employees by funding modern and advanced equipment to do the important service work of the county while keeping our employees as safe as possible. We will work to maintain our public facilities to taxpayer standards and will continue to enhance supervisory training to insure a fair and equitable working environment for our employees who are doing their best to serve the citizens of this community and the Sedgwick County organization.

This 2023 Recommended Budget will also continue the commitment to behavioral health services to the community. Our future commitment to these important services include funding for the Mental Health & Substance Abuse Coalition, as well as a \$1,000,000 contingency to be utilized for enhanced and additional services.

And, of course, this Recommended Budget maintains funding for continued core services surrounding public safety, services, and road and bridge infrastructure.

Finally, we know the continuing saga of COVID is not gone from our midst entirely and this budget ensures that continued personal protective equipment, testing, and vaccine availability remain intact for our public as we work toward what is hopefully the true end of the pandemic.

In conclusion, the 2023 Recommended Budget has been challenging to develop with emphasis on employee care and core services, all while maintaining "flat" budgets and keeping costs as low as possible for the consumers of these government services. We will continue to emphasize efficiency and core services as we move into the future.

-Tom Stolz, *County Manager*

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