

Manager's View

**A message from
County Manager Tom Zdunek**

“Standing at the Crossroads”

September-October 2013

Over the past couple of years—and in the midst of a down economy—we have been able to provide salary increases for our employees. This investment in our employees was a wise one and, in many cases, long overdue. That's the good news.

We now find ourselves facing some not-so-good news. We have a statutory mandate to provide a county jail. As you've probably heard in the news, our county jail has faced overcrowding over the years due to a variety of factors, most of which are out of our control. Recently we have been able to get the jail population closer to the capacity for which it was designed.

Unfortunately, this was accomplished by housing inmates in other counties and even out of state. This is a very expensive practice and one we cannot sustain over the long run. In the absence of systemic change in the criminal justice system, we simply need additional bed space to meet our statutory obligation to provide a safe, secure environment for our staff as well as those in custody.

So we stand at a crossroads facing in one direction the current system, which results in over population, and in the other direction the need to find the additional space to house offenders. Potential solutions include building more beds, increasing community custody and jail diversion programs, and working with the court systems to become more efficient in processing cases, among others. Of course all of these solutions come with a price. Given that the local economy hasn't bounced back as much as we'd like, we do not have the additional revenue to pay this price.

So what do we do? While we remain confident we will meet anticipated revenue this fiscal year, given the potential criminal justice investments we face we must be very prudent in how we utilize taxpayer dollars. As a county we've got to make hard decisions about what services and projects we fund and scrutinize funding requests very closely to ensure they are wise investments that align with our strategic plan to help us separate what is truly needed from what is merely desired.

This is not just a function of supervisors and managers—we all play a role in avoiding unnecessary spending and doing our best to contain costs and be more efficient in how we conduct the public's business.