

STATE OF THE COUNTY OF LINN 2017

Presented by:

Brent C. Oleson, Chairman Linn County Board of Supervisors

Linn County, Iowa

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Good afternoon. I'm Brent Oleson, Chairman of the Linn County Board of Supervisors. I represent all 220,000 citizens of Linn County on the Board of Supervisors and every four years I stand accountable to the people of District 4, which comprises the great cities of Marion, Central City, and Bertram, and rural townships.

Today I have the high privilege of presenting to you the State of the County address.

First, I would like to recognize and thank some special guests, some in attendance at this luncheon and many who helped organize this event. Please join me in showing some appreciation for all the hard work that the League of Women Voters does to put on this event and to make sure that citizens are informed about the public policy issues of the day and those seeking elective office who would implement them. We applaud you for those efforts!

My colleagues on the Board of Supervisors:

Supervisor Jim Houser – District 1 western Cedar Rapids.

Supervisor Stacey Walker – District 2 downtown and southern Cedar Rapids.

Supervisor Ben Rogers – District 3 northern Cedar Rapids.

Supervisor John Harris – District 5 from Palo and my rural partner in representing residents outside of Cedar Rapids.

I also want to recognize our Linn County Auditor Joel Miller, Treasurer Sharon Gonzalez, Recorder Joan McCalmant, Sheriff Brian Gardner, and Linn County Attorney Jerry Vander Sanden. Your Board of Supervisors and these Elected Officials represent 220,000 citizens and work with more than 800 Linn County employees to provide effective and efficient county services to the public.

I also want to thank all of the other elected officials here today...Mayors, city council members, school board members and our state legislators. We work hand in hand, especially the last few years, to make this community one that we can be proud of and prosper within.

Typically at these state of the state, state of the city or state of the county speeches we get to hear all the facts and figures of how great things are, what the levy rate is, what we did with your money in terms of paving roads, enhancing parks, strengthening social service programs, or providing an array of other government services. This is where I'm supposed to say the State of the County is STRONG and go through every major department and program and highlight successes and accomplishments.

I didn't do that when I presented the State of the County in 2012 and again I'm not going to do that today. You will get some of that, but I would like to try another approach.

Let me start out by saying, that I love my job. I'm one out of five Supervisors working for the people of Linn County. Soon to be one out of three, if the voters decide what I've been working on is deserving of another term. In the end, I'm just one public servant though. One.

And we're just one county. One out of ninety-nine squares and rectangles that make up Iowa's county system. If you're a county employee, you're just one out of 800 employees in Linn County. One out of 10,000 plus in Iowa. If you're like me, you can wonder sometimes, what difference can I make as one individual? One employee in a large organization? That is one organization with the same functions as 99 other organizations. What is the power of one? I think the answer to that question is demonstrated each day at Linn County. It's exemplified in times of crisis like the Flood of 2008 and the most recent mobilization against the Flood of 2016. The power of one, when internalized, valued, and nurtured, is the power of many. The collective becomes even stronger than the many parts. It's no longer as strong as the weakest link, but like Kevlar, an interwoven impenetrable force doing truly great and exceptional things.

Linn County has an amazing budget director in Dawn Jindrich. She's won awards. She's recognized and distinguished in her field. Our Finance Director, Steve Tucker, has also won awards and is recognized in his field. One of each, combining to make a strong financial team. Combining even further with our department heads and the Board, who empower and support them, makes the power of many work for excellent financial leadership for Linn County taxpayers.

Steve and Dawn are integral to the efficient management of Linn County government. Every year we report the state of the county to the citizens and talk about our Aaa bond

rating, and our 25% budget reserves, and our indebtedness being less than 1% of what we have the power to bond for.

Linn County maintains a Aaa bond rating, unheard of for most county governments in the nation and we're one of only two counties in Iowa to be rated as such by Moody's, which is the highest rating possible. Our 25% budget reserve has been restored since the Flood of 2008 and remains a strong budgeting practice for us.

Our levy rate of \$6.14 has not been raised for four consecutive years. It is lower than when I took office in 2008. This should demonstrate we prioritize government needs and the fact that taxpayers deserve to see their burden lessened when prudent. Currently, our levy makes up 16% of your local government that is funded through property taxes if you live in the incorporated areas.

Truly, Linn County is blessed to have such great financial leadership in this duo of Steve and Dawn, who are not shy about informing our policy decisions, and provide trusted leadership on budget and financing decisions.

Our stellar financial condition has allowed us to position ourselves for success in the future with key infrastructure improvements, acquisitions of land, and program developments. Let me uplift a few examples for you.

Public Health & Youth Services

Linn County and OPN Architects are nearing completion for the design of a new Public Health and Child & Youth Development Services building near the medical district and NewBo. The estimated schedule is to select a construction contractor in late July 2017 allowing construction to begin this year. The projected move in date is August 2018.

Linn County employees and community members, including the Oakhill Jackson Neighborhood Association, provided significant input for the design of the building and associated uses of the site.

The location for the approximately 55,000 sq. ft. building is Linn County-owned property, formerly home to Options of Linn County, roughly two blocks south of Mercy Hospital bordered by 10th and 11th Avenues SE.

The building includes a playground and gymnasium integral to the programming of Child & Youth Development Services and a community meeting room for use by all departments in the building. These features serve as both essential building elements and as community amenities open to the public after business hours and on weekends.

Linn County is committed to high energy efficiency and sustainable design, construction, operation and maintenance standards. This building will attain LEED certification and includes features such as a cistern for the collection and re-use of rainwater. This is a \$20 million-plus project that will be built by local labor, I promise you that, despite what the legislature thinks it has done to us with their anti-PLA and build local legislation. I've got a work-around to this legislation and my professional bricklayers, plumbers, electricians, and other craftsman can have faith that I will always go to bat for them when we do infrastructure projects. This project will be an awesome addition on the former Options site near downtown.

Tower Terrace Interchange

About two years ago, a few of us from Marion, Hiawatha and Robins decided to push once and for all to get the Tower Terrace Interchange on the state's five-year plan. A few leaders didn't think we had much of a chance, kinda shrugging their shoulders and

wishing us well in that fool's errand. Now, we are nearing formal approval for the \$20 million interchange to be built in 2020 or 2021, with the State wanting to partner with us to redo the Boyson Road interchange after that. The power of one, the power of many in full display when you don't give up. Stay tuned for an update after the next DOT commission meeting.

Regional Transit

Right now, Linn County is partnering with Cedar Rapids, Hiawatha, Marion, and other members of our Metropolitan Planning Organization to study the feasibility of forming a Regional Transit Authority. Public transit is important to all of our communities. Not everyone has the luxury of filling up an SUV and heading out to pick up the kids, go to their job, run some errands, or even head to their weekly dialysis appointment at Mercy Hospital. Tom Hardecopf, our LIFTs director, and the whole LIFTs team, get the disabled, the elderly, the infirmed, or those without transportation means to their necessary destination each day. It's time for other communities to help shoulder the financial investment that Linn County and Cedar Rapids have made in public transit. It makes sense to regionalize this service and create an independent transit authority that all communities benefit from and financially support. This is where the power of many can do so much more than just one.

Conservation

If it's my year to do the State of the County, then you know you're going to hear something about Linn County Conservation. We have the absolutely best parks, trails, conservation, and outdoor recreation department in the state, bar none, not even a debate. From Dan Biechler our leader, to Dennis Goemaat his Siamese twin, to our park rangers, naturalists, planners, seasonal staff, and each and every one who has the

privilege to work for this department. If I had it all to do over again, I would major in Conservation and beg for an internship under Dan and Dennis. The Linn County Conservation team has over 7,000 acres of natural area to enjoy, from parks, trails, waterways, and even a state of the art shooting range. I could go on and on about our department, the gems we offer to the community, but I am limited with my time I am told by the League of Women Voters.

So let me just say, this last year alone, we have begun to manage a significant addition to Morgan Creek Park that could have been strip malls, but is now under our management for the benefit of all the citizens. We acquired 485 acres adjacent to Squaw Creek Park that could have been sold for more stately acreages and homes to be built, but we claimed it for the park and the restoration of the woodland and the streamland that can be enjoyed by the next generation. We have built a new lodge at Squaw Creek, finished paving more miles on the Cedar Valley Nature Trail, acquired more private lands in conservation easements and wetlands, and planned some amazing projects for the next decade.

Most significantly, we all passed a \$40 million bond initiative to invest in water quality, parks, and trails projects...not by the smallest of margins in a divisive campaign, but by huge 74% margins with near total support from all areas and types of people in the county. That vote is a reflection and a testament to my earlier assertion that this is best Conservation Department in the state, with the most trusted and respected administrators, board members, and staff from top to bottom. The power of one, with an idea, and then taking that and building a team to convey the vision, and having the trust of public in that team and that department, in that one director, that one Park Ranger, that one project that was done right, and then over and over again seeing that

one director, that one employee, that one project be successful time after time to where it permeates to everyone who works and volunteers for this organization...that type of success is the power of each one, becoming the many. The power of many now will take \$40 million of our hard earned dollars, and work to leverage it to four or five fold, over the next decade to make a quarter of a billion dollar investment in these vital programs and projects. While others dither on water quality, on conservation measures, on investing in the outdoors, we just come together and take the trail less traveled these days, because we know it will make all the difference for the next generation. We are leaving Linn County better than we found it folks. That is the campers' creed to leave an area cleaner and better than before you got there.

And that brings me to our latest initiative. A trail following highway 100. We will get this done. The MPO is set to approve \$750,000 for the start of the trail from 42nd street to run along Xavier High School and through the Rock Island Prairie reserve, across the Cedar River, all the way to Morgan Creek Park and Fairfax. From Morgan Creek Park, it will connect with the Cherokee Trail and we will have a new connection to the Cedar River and along Ellis Road to downtown Cedar Rapids. So you could bike or walk from NewBo someday, cross the Cedar River via the Sleeping Giant, head up the Cedar Valley Nature Trail to 42nd street, head down to Xavier and hop on to the new trail...and you'll come to the preserve where the Cedar River will once again greet you. How do we traverse this river?

I say we traverse the same way the Milwaukee Road railroad did over 100 years ago...with a bridge. A brand new bridge. And while the Sleeping Giant Bridge is an awesome idea, a sleek two-sided cable span modern bridge, we simply can't do that here. We're Linn County. We're about conservation.

About preservation. About saving something from the past and the present for the next generation. So not to be outdone by Cedar Rapids or my good friend Dale Todd, today I present to you our concept for the northern end of this Giant Trail Loop. Biechler Bridge.

Biechler Bridge is a nod to the old trainbridge that spanned this space. A double decker bridge of solid stature representing the architecture of generations past. A nod to our covered bridge history. A façade of ghost traincar representations, of railroad lanterns lighting the way at night, a statement that we respect our history and are reclaiming it. Reclaiming the piers that now sit there rising from the Cedar waiting to support our new vision for the next generation. And the name honors our Conservation Director, Dan Biechler, who has given his adult professional life, over three and a half decades, to serve the people of Linn County by literally making this one rectangle in Iowa, the absolute best place to live and recreate. Biechler Bridge. I love naming bridges after people I respect and admire. So it's fitting that the Mary Lundby Bridge will have a rival now in the Biechler Bridge. (Invite Dan up to receive framed depiction)

Transition

Bridges usually help you reach something very far away. The Iowa legislature did not need a bridge for their overreaching this year, just a hammer. Iowans have never seen a legislative session with so many anti-local government bills, with so much disrespect for local government. Traffic cameras, minimum wage, construction contracts, workers compensation, civil rights protections, unfunded mandates, and even outlawing counties and cities from regulating plastic grocery sacks (which I did not know was a pressing issue). The state knows best. Big government at its finest. However, do not take my word for it that this legislative session was a lot of extremist overreaches. Let

us hear from somebody who rarely agrees with me on political matters, our esteemed Auditor Joel Miller on the Elections Modernization Act, commonly known as Voter ID.

Auditor Joel Miller speaks

Thank you Joel for the update on these changes coming our way when we attempt to vote in the next election!

Collective Bargaining Overreach – value our employees; transformation of org

Continuing with extreme changes facing the county is the decimation of the bi-partisan 40-year-old collective bargaining laws. Not one Supervisor or elected official in Linn County supported this legislation. We value our employees in Linn County. We empower them to be the best they can be in their chosen profession of serving the public.

As Supervisors, we have always negotiated in good faith with our collective bargaining partners, AFSCME, IBEW, PPME, AFL-CIO, IC/CR Building & Trades, & the members of the Hawkeye Labor Council. We do not roll over. We negotiate tough but fair. There was no need for this legislation; it was a slap in the face to all our employees who serve the public. We will continue to negotiate in good faith on all matters of employment, from wages to workplace rules to health insurance.

Moreover, our employees appreciate our relationship. The state of the County is good because of our employees and our investment in them, financially and how we empower them to provide the best customer service possible. Linn County, over the last two years, has invested significantly in human resource programs and tools to transform the way we do business and interact with our customers, the taxpayers and

citizens of Linn County and our co-workers. I want to introduce Les Beck, our Planning & Development Director, to walk through these truly transformative processes and programs we have utilized to bring about organizational change in how we do our jobs and engage the public.

Les Beck, Director of Planning & Development and Chair of Linn County's Customer-Centered Culture Steering Committee speaks

Transformed Org & Flood response

Thank you, Les. And because of these investments in our employees and how they operate in the Linn County organization at-large, we saw the transformation of how we serve the public and operate as one multi-faceted organization during the Flood Response of 2016. Truly amazing.

I would like to introduce Steve Estenson, our Risk Manager, and the man we went to when learning that another epic flood event was headed our way in the fall of 2016. Our first decision to make as a Board in preparing for the flood event was to promptly designate Steve Estenson as Incident Commander. Steve was our fearless on-the-ground leader and did a fantastic job. Please welcome Steve as he showcases how the power of one and the power of many distinguished themselves during this critical event.

Steve Estenson, Risk Manager speaks

Conclusion

Logo discussion

I would like to conclude today with one last announcement, somewhat related in my theme of empowering one to empower the many. I have always hated our logo. With a passion. It's just something that has bothered me since I took office in 2008. So today, as one Supervisor, I would love to by fiat change that logo. But alas, while I am one person with an idea, I need many to accomplish it. So, I would like to announce that the Board of Supervisors will be issuing a call for a new logo and companion seal to be submitted by any Linn County resident, student, or public/private organization, for consideration by the Board of Supervisors, with one being chosen by July 1st this summer. Details will be put out to the public shortly on further requirements. But for now, the 1980's rectangle that is our logo is walking the plank.

And I plan on submitting this particular logo for consideration among the hopefully hundreds that we receive. This logo is a tip of the hat to our Marvin Cone and Grant Wood heritage with a simple depiction of how we might have found Linn County in 1839.

I challenge each one of us as citizens, to harness the power of one individual making a difference in the community. When we do that, we become the power of many. We become a powerful and progressive community. Making changes big and small.

People make up your local government. People use your government to better their lives and the lives of others. Our government is people trying to be a better community so that the collective experience is enriched and uplifted.

Ladies and Gentleman, the state of our County is strong, because the state of our County is as resilient and robust as the ones behind it who make it work, who lead it, who use it, and who live in it.

Thank you.