

## **Clay County, Minnesota State of the County Address – 2020**

Good Morning and Happy New Year! As one of the fastest growing counties in the State of Minnesota, Clay County has experienced another busy year, with numerous accomplishments. Our campus has been one of transition over the past years. We are nearing the end of phase II of our adult correctional facility. This facility has numerous programs that are rehabilitative in nature and aimed at providing skills, if utilized, to lower recidivism rates. The juvenile center has also been responding to the increasing needs of our most at-risk youth. Since the spring of 2018, the facility has been under a remodel and expansion project. The new facility will have more space to provide quality programs and will continue to be responsive to the needs of the county/region. In addition to the increased space, the juvenile center has increased the programming that it offers. The new juvenile center will ensure that the needs of Clay County youth are properly and effectively met for many years to come.

2019 has been a year of change for the Planning and Zoning Department. Matt Jacobson was hired as our Planning & Zoning Director this spring. In order to address increased growth in the County, a Planning Technician was hired to more effectively serve the needs of citizens. The department was also very busy, approving 140 building permits, 11 conditional use permits, 20 variances, 30 minor subdivisions, one major subdivision and conducting inspections verifying compliance.

The Assessor's Office has also experienced another busy year. In May, County appraisal personnel started work in the following jurisdictions: Alliance, Barnesville, Flowing, Highland Grove, Riverton, Skree, Spring Prairie, Tansem and Dilworth. These jurisdictions were made up of 3,750 parcels or approximately 26% of out-county taxable parcels. Along with mass appraisal, staff reviewed over 400 zoning certificates/building permits that were issued in 2019, along with 550 property sales on record.

The Recorder's office continues to digitize and update the land records to improve the process for the public in locating the records they need. The Recorder's Office provides excellent customer service in providing vital records to the public as more individuals apply for their REAL ID. In 2019, the Recorder's Office welcomed a GIS technician into the office space. This has made for better collaboration with land record departments and GIS and better service to our citizens.

GIS Staff worked to improve online map capabilities and rolled out a new mobile friendly mapping application this year. Several mapping applications are now available to make GIS data more accessible. Work began preparing our mapping data for Next Generation 9-1-1 use. This project will continue through 2020. GIS staff also worked diligently to provide current and accurate property parcel maps. The GIS department also manages our County web site which received an average of 44,000 visits each month. In addition to local cable providers, Clay County Commission meetings are now live streamed on YouTube and Facebook, making Board meetings more accessible.

Human Resources continues to strive to meet the needs of the 579 full-time, part-time, variable and seasonal employees. One of the areas that is driving the growth in Clay County is the opportunities for employment. While we are pleased that low unemployment can provide our citizens with multiple employment options, it has also created many challenges in recruiting and retaining a quality workforce. This year HR researched and helped implement two major projects. The first project was a wage classification study. With the support of this board, the study looked to ensure that Clay County's wages will remain competitive with the surrounding areas now and into the future. The second significant project focused on the re-structure of Clay County's health insurance benefit package. Through the efforts of our Commissioners, the insurance committee and Human Resources the County was able to provide increased benefits to employees, while projecting thousands of dollars in future savings to taxpayers.

The County Attorney's office services continue to be in high demand, both with the public and internal needs of the county. In addition to prosecuting all the County cases, they draft contracts and review all County legal documents. They also work closely with Social Services representing the State in both child and adult cases.

Clay County social services continues to see an increase in demand for services in all program areas. Social Services carries out many duties on behalf of the federal government and State of Minnesota which are defined thru laws and statutes. Services focus on meeting the needs of our citizens who are most vulnerable and without support would be at risk of harm or not have their basic needs met. Social Service staff participate in various community committees aimed at prevention and intervention of issues such as homelessness, truancy, sex trafficking, affordable housing, transportation, childcare shortages, cultural responsiveness, and a multitude of others.

Points of interest for 2019:

1. completed over 5,500 intakes for services,
2. served over 245 children in out of home care,
3. conducted over 322 child protection assessments and 122 Adult protection assessments.
4. served over 900 individuals who are elderly or have disabilities and need support to remain in the community.
5. licensed or certified over 400 homes for Day Care, Child Foster Care and Adult Foster Care
6. screened over 150 individuals for Mental Health and/or Chemical Health Civil Commitments
7. conducted over 400 Chemical Health Assessments

Our 16-bed Clay County Detoxification Program continues to serve multiple agencies and counties in our region. They work closely with area hospitals to accept clients that would otherwise require services provided by the Emergency Rooms. By admitting these clients, we can reduce the strain on the resources within the Emergency Rooms and provide a safe environment for the clients to detoxify.

Dealing with those in need of mental health services continue to be one of the main focuses of Public Health. They currently coordinate a community initiative called **Rethink Mental Health**. Over the past year this initiative has provided a yearlong mental health cohort training program for 20 separate worksites, trained more than 750 professionals and citizens on the use of the Columbia Suicide Scale and provided training for more than 40 schools in hopes of better understand the impacts of childhood trauma with their students. Public Health also continues to provide services with the WIC program, Public Health Emergency Preparedness and Nurse Home Visiting program.

The Sheriff's Office has had a very busy year. On January 3rd, Lt. Mark Empting was sworn in as 21st Sheriff of Clay County. Several organizational changes and promotions took place over the past year which is believed will provide even better service to our citizens. The Sheriff's office has experienced continued demands with 15,733 calls for service, an increase of approximately 30% over the past five years. Providing transportation, for 795 people traveling 93,080 miles, kept deputies busy. The Sheriff's Office will continue to strive to fulfill their "mission to provide services to the citizens of Clay County that will enhance their quality of life."

Clay County continues to contract with the Minnesota Department of Corrections to provide probation services to all juvenile offenders in Clay County, as well as adult misdemeanor/gross misdemeanor offenders. The probation agents continue to see a significant rise in chemical addiction and unmanaged mental health. A new collaboration with the Courts, law enforcement and the Clay County Correctional facility, has probation agents providing pre-trial supervision. Understanding that education is a key in reducing recidivism, probation agents continue to utilize evidence programs with clients.

The County Extension Office continues to provide horticulture and agriculture education assistance to county citizens, addressing over 700 citizen inquiries, conducted over 90 home and farm visits and 20 educational presentations were delivered to over 250 people. Clay County 4-H programs continues to offer positive education programming across the county for our youth. There are 390 youth participants in 14 community clubs. Afterschool and summer programming account for another 432 youth, with programming in every school district in the county.

Our Veterans Service Office continues to do an outstanding job serving the 3,736 identified veterans in Clay County. In addition to the office appointments, the VSO continues to offer outreach events throughout the county in hopes of increasing the number of identified veterans. VSO employees also remain active with the Veterans Court.

The Technology Services Department continues to supply quality customer support services to all county departments. They focus to continually stay current with technologies so County users have dependable and secure access to the applications and data they need to serve the public.

The Highway Department works diligently at maintaining 1600 miles of road in Clay County. In addition to the county road system, the highway department continues to service most township roads in Clay County. 2019 provided the Highway department with the most significant challenges in recent memory. Working with our legislatures in creating sustainable funding for transportation continues to be one of Clay Counties top priorities.

Solid Waste services continue to be in high demand. Working with townships on drop-site programs, holding collection events throughout the County and providing community education programs are just a few highlights. 2019 found Solid Waste preparing for a cell expansion at the County landfill. Solid Waste also continues to be a regional partner with the Prairie Lake Regional Solid Waste Facility. This partnership is designed to extend the life of our landfill. Solid Waste continues to work closely with the City of Moorhead in hopes to securing legislative funding for a new, shovel-ready transfer station.

As our campus grows, so does the demand on our building maintenance staff and custodial services. They continue to provide excellent customer service to our departments, while maintaining the County campus that we can be proud of.

The Auditor-Treasure office is responsible for the collection of taxes, distribution of revenues, classifying tax assessments ratings, paying the County's bills, County payroll and certifying our accounting process to meet the government's standards of acceptable practices. This fall, they also shared their expertise with the City of Moorhead for the special elections.

Clay County continues to support a two-year tax abatement program, which involves the cooperation of the cities and school districts in Clay County. The tax abatement program has led to new home construction, providing competitive incentives for citizens to build and reside in Clay County.

The Minnesota State Auditor's Office presented its report to the County Board referencing the year ending on December 31, 2018. In the issuance of this Audit Report, the State Auditor has issued an "unqualified opinion" of the County's financial statements, verifying we conform to the applicable accounting standards.

The County Board recently adopted the Annual Operating Budget and Tax Levy for the year 2020. The total expenses for 2020 are estimated to be \$94,775,196. The revenue sources necessary to cover these expenses include a \$35,014,703 property tax levy, State aids, numerous grants, services, etc. The property tax represents a

7.09% increase over the 2019 tax levy. Clay County witnessed a net growth in the tax base of 1.24% due to new construction, leading to a net levy increase of 5.85% for 2020.

As we look ahead to 2020, with the County's growth, the demand for services continue to increase. This growth has led to departmental re-organizations and additional staff being hired to meet state mandates and service expectations of our citizens over a number of years. Clay County has found that it is in need of additional office space to accommodate the request from the State for additional courtrooms and for departmental demands. In early 2020 a Campus Master Planning Study, that began last fall, will be presented to the Clay County Commissioners for consideration. With continued growth projected for Clay County, the goal of this study is to provide a strategic path to ensure campus needs can be met for the next 10 to 15 years.

Flood protection also continues to be a point of emphasis. County Commissioners and personnel continue to work with the F-M Diversion Authority and other flood mitigation committees. Commissioners are committed to working toward permanent flood protection for Clay County.

In closing, the Clay County Board of Commissioners would like to thank our citizens for their on-going support. As stewards of your tax dollars, this Board is committed to providing the services you have come to count on in the most efficient, cost-effective and professional manner possible. I also would like to thank my fellow Commissioners for their leadership and hard work. Lastly, I would like to acknowledge the work of our County employees who implement the vision of this board on a day-to-day basis. Please feel free to contact any of the County Commissioners or County Administration at any time if you would like to share your feedback or suggestions.

Thank you and best wishes for a wonderful 2020.

Grant Weyland, Chair  
Clay County Board of Commissioners