



WISCONSIN TOWNS ASSOCIATION

Empowering Town Officials

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WTA Summary of 2021-23 Executive Budget Proposal

Governor Evers delivered his budget address and released his proposed 2021-23 Executive Budget on February 16, 2021. Proposals impacting town government are highlighted below. WTA will work with the administration, Joint Committee on Finance, and legislature to ensure that the budget enhances the ability of town governments to provide quality foundational services that support citizens and businesses throughout the 95% of Wisconsin in which town officials provide leadership.

Broadband

- Invest \$204.4 million in broadband, including \$76.8 million in 2021-22 and \$74.9 million in 2022-23 in the Broadband Expansion Grant Program, plus \$20 million annually to improve Internet access affordability.
- Create a broadband planning and leadership grant program to assist municipalities as they develop plans to expand broadband service and access funded at \$300,000 annually.
- Establish a grant resource team within the Department of Administration that will assist local governments in navigating state and federal grant application processes, building on the success of the broadband connector technical assistance pilot in 2020.
- Increase Internet Service Provider (ISP) transparency so taxpayer investments are made most efficiently and effectively by requiring ISPs to provide more granular and detailed mapping data.
- Allow utilities and electric cooperatives holding an easement to install, maintain, or own broadband infrastructure on that easement.
- Establish a broadband line extension program that provides grants or financial assistance up to \$4,000 per eligible household to subsidize the cost of line extension from existing broadband infrastructure to a residence that lacks 25/3 mbps service, funded at \$1.75 million in 2021-22 and \$3.5 million in 2022-23. This will help address the costly “last mile” problem of providing broadband service to individual households.
- Continue the TEACH infrastructure grant program funded at \$3 million annually to improve the technology infrastructure of rural school districts and libraries.

- Create broadband consumer protections that mirror protective regulations governing cable, satellite, and multichannel video services. Current state law does not provide the same level of consumer protection for broadband service as it does for telecommunication and video services. There are no specific regulations that address consumer access, consistent speed delivery, service interruptions, outages, and disconnections.
- Reduce some of the requirements that make it difficult for unserved and underserved municipalities to directly invest in broadband infrastructure in their communities.

Economic Development

- Increase funding for ATV/UTV trail maintenance and development by \$250,000 annually, and increase county and local ATV/UTV trail project and support facility funding by \$617,500 annually.
- Provide \$200,000 for snowmobile trail mapping in each year of the biennium.
- Convert 3.0 FTE project positions in the Office of Outdoor Recreation to permanent positions.
- Create a biennial appropriation of \$200 million to assist small businesses in recovering from the pandemic, including assistance for retention of current employees and rehiring former employees.

Elections

- Require and fund an automatic voter registration system developed by the Wisconsin Elections Commission and WisDOT.
- Allow county and municipal clerks to canvass absentee ballots on the day prior to an election after working with WEC to ensure it will be conducted fairly and securely.
- Eliminate restrictions on how soon a person may complete an absentee ballot in person and allow for in person absentee ballot completion until 7:00pm on the Friday before an election.
- Modify special election scheduling to ensure there is enough time to comply with federal military and overseas voter requirements.
- Authorize WEC to reimburse counties and municipalities for certain costs incurred as a result of special election administration.
- Modify the WEC recount appropriation process so local governments can be reimbursed in a timely manner.
- Require polling places to post a Voters Bill of Rights.

Fire/EMS

- Allow towns to fund emergency medical services via the same mechanisms allowed for fire protection, including the ability to charge up-front fees across the community.
- Restore funding for the Emergency Medical Services Funding Assistance Program back to the 2007-09 biennium level of \$2,200,000.
- Direct DSPS to develop a program that ensures that relevant military training and credits fulfill the licensure requirements for certain emergency medical certifications.
- Provide \$50,000 to implement a pilot youth volunteer firefighter training grant program.

General Government

- Provide a 2% increase in County and Municipal Aids (shared revenue) in 2021 and a successive 2% increase in 2022.
- Modify levy limits to allow for an increase of 2% or the percentage change in net new construction, whichever is greater.
- Allow a 0.5% municipal (over 30,000 in population) sales tax and/or an additional 0.5% county sales tax if approved by local referendum.
- Eliminate the negative levy limit adjustment when towns increase fees for covered services, including garbage collection, fire protection, snow plowing, street sweeping, and stormwater management.
- Eliminate the negative levy limit adjustment for services transferred from one local unit of government to another.
- Increase County Forest acreage payments in lieu of taxes from \$0.30 to \$0.63 per acre.
- Restore municipal services payments to 2011 levels, providing \$2.065 million annually to local governments serving tax-exempt state property.
- Reinstate prevailing wage and right to work laws.
- Establish collective bargaining rights for state and local government front-line workers and their bargaining units.
- Modify the Wisconsin Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) to: apply to smaller employers (25 employees rather than 50); permit leave to care for a grandparent, grandchild, or sibling with a serious health condition; expand the definition of "qualifying exigency" to include deployment of a spouse or child, and an unforeseen or unexpected school or child care facility closure; extend FMLA coverage to be used for medical quarantines; reduce the hours

of work requirement to qualify for FMLA from 1,000 to 680 hours; and extend the FMLA complaint statute of limitations from 30 to 300 days.

- Implement reforms to close the dark store property tax assessment loophole.
- Increase the threshold for charging an open records location fee from \$50 to \$100.
- Require local units of government to revise employee grievance procedures to address employee discipline, workplace safety, and a just cause standard of review for termination.
- Allow the Department of Revenue to assess the manufacturing assessment fee to municipalities by reducing the shared revenue payment.
- Increase the competitive bidding threshold from \$25,000 to \$50,000.
- Allow a municipality to designate by ordinance a special event lasting fewer than eight consecutive days during which bars and restaurants may be open until 4 a.m.

Natural Resources / Agriculture

- Require municipalities to develop a comprehensive plan to address climate change.
- Establish a technical assistance grant program to assist municipalities in developing a plan to be carbon-free by 2050.
- Create a Great Lakes Erosion Control revolving loan program to assist municipalities and home owners on Lake Michigan and Superior where the structural integrity of municipal buildings or homes is threatened.
- Provide \$1 million in one-time grant funding for the purchase of deer carcass disposal sites.
- Reauthorize the Stewardship Program for 10 years at \$70 million annually, including \$700 million in bonding authority.
- Eliminate the sunset date of June 30, 2021 for the Private On-Site Wastewater Treatment Replacement or Rehabilitation program and fund at \$840,000 in each year of the biennium.
- Increase annual fees for concentrated animal feeding operations and establish an application fee for new operators.
- Provide \$10 million in each year of the biennium for a municipal grant program for the testing and remediation of PFAS.

- Provide \$1 million in fiscal year 2021-22 for the collection and disposal of firefighting foam that contains PFAS.
- Modify state statute to allow farmland preservation planning grants to be used for activities that implement certified farmland preservation plans.
- Provide \$161,500 in expenditure and position authority to implement the Good Neighbor Authority program, which allows the USDA Forest Service to enter into agreements with DNR to do critical management work to keep forests healthy and productive.
- Provide \$1,000,000 annually to fund the well compensation program.
- Require the Department of Natural Resources to issue a general permit for wetland, stream, and floodplain restoration and management activities that will result in a net improvement in hydrologic connections, conditions, and functions.

Transportation

- Provide a 2% increase in General Transportation Aids in 2021-22 and a successive 2% increase in 2022-23. This will raise the per mile aid from \$2,628 in 2021 to \$2,681 in 2022, and to \$2,734 in 2023.
- Continue the Local Road Improvement Program – Supplement (LRIP-S) through a Multimodal Local Supplement Program at a funding level of \$75 million.
- Create a \$15 million Local Roads Critical Infrastructure pilot program targeted toward bridges and culverts to proactively address known problem areas impacted by persistent flooding.
- Reduces the GTA penalty for late submission of required financial data to not more than \$100/day.
- Create a levy limit exemption for communities that create cross-boundary transit routes and meet a series of additional criteria.
- Increase general transit operating assistance by 2.5% in each year of the biennium.
- Prohibit the sale and use of sealants that contain coal tar, coal tar pitch, coal tar volatiles, or high concentrations of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons.
- Provide \$20 million for the creation and funding of a capital transit assistance program.
- Restore local government authority to use eminent domain for the creation of nonmotorized paths.