

STATE OF THE COUNTY ADDRESS

I would like to thank the Aitkin County Board of Commissioners for electing me their Chair for 2018. It is an opportunity and a challenge and I welcome both. It is a great privilege to work with all the Aitkin County Department Heads and their staff and I am proud to report we are being served by the best of the best.

This year Aitkin County Highway Engineer John Welle was voted Engineer of the Year. He reports that the maintenance staff at the highway department is transitioning from winter maintenance activities to the spring and summer maintenance program. Major activities planned for the summer, beyond routine maintenance, includes crack sealing 22 miles of recently re-surfaced roads and hauling 60,000 tons of gravel on various gravel-surfaced roads throughout the county.

In 2017 Aitkin County Environmental Services Director, Terry Neff was awarded the MN Association of County Planning and Zoning Administrators Exemplary Duty Award. He reports that Aitkin County Environmental Services now offers on-line permitting. Anyone interested in testing their homes for Radon can obtain a free Radon Test Kit from the Aitkin County Environmental Services Department. On May 5th Aitkin County will be hosting a Household Hazardous Waste collection event for residents of Aitkin County and on June 16th Aitkin County a waste electronics collection event that is free to Aitkin County residents.

Aitkin County Assessor and Regional Director of the MN Association of Assessing Officers, Mike Dangers reports that the Assessor's Office values and classifies all real estate in Aitkin County. This information is used as a basis for the property tax assessment. The Office has appraisers that visit all properties in the County at least once every 5 years to update property information. We maintain a computer system that holds and organizes all this data. Many people in the real estate community request this data on a regular basis for their jobs. Arguably the most significant classification that the Office maintains is the homestead classification. People who own and occupy property typically qualify for this classification but they must apply for it first. This classification usually reduces the tax burden on a property and grants eligibility for the Minnesota Property Tax Refund program and other tax related programs.

Cynthia Bennett, Aitkin County Health and Human Services Director reported that the MN Department of Human Services has commended her staff for a "perfect performance in meeting the Department of Human Services (DHS) financial reporting requirements for calendar year 2017;" a recognition received for the last three years. The county's child protection workers have also met the performance threshold criteria for monthly contracts with children in foster care 98.1% of the time and timeliness of initial contact with the children 90.8% of the time. This earned the agency an additional \$12,530.08.

Ross Wagner, Economic Development Coordinator was successful in applying for and making the first cut regarding a Small Cities Development Program Grant which if awarded, will fund fourteen homes in Wagner and Williams Townships.

Mark Jacobs, Aitkin County Land Commissioner is the recipient of the Partnership Award from the Dept. of Natural Resources & Professional Development Award from the MN Forest Resources Partnership. He is recognized statewide for his innovation in forest and land management practices.

Kirk Peyser, Aitkin County Auditor, is the recipient of the MN Association of County Officers Honor Roll award and manages the Auditor's Office with experience and professionalism.

Penny Harms, Veterans Service Officer, is now located in the Sheriff's conference room where she will continue to aid Veterans throughout Aitkin County.

Aitkin County Treasurer, Lori Grams and her staff keep our finances in a healthy state ensuring our investments are growing to increase our funds.

Aitkin County Recorder, Mick Moriarty and his staff ensure recorded documents are maintained and secured for future references.

Aitkin County Sheriff, Scott Turner, Aitkin County Attorney Jim Ratz and Aitkin County Corrections Director, Kameron Genz work together to ensure that our communities are safe and secure.

They are responsive to those involved in the criminal justice system employing evidenced based practices to ensure a successful re-enter to society.

Aitkin County is excited to announce that the building of the new Government Center will begin this spring bringing with it heightened security and accessibility for all.

I am honored to work with such professional and qualified individuals and am delighted to report the State of the County is great!

Anne Marcotte, Aitkin County Board Chair