

Top Stories in 2016 – Strong Finances, New Jail and Waste Management Facility

At the close of 2015, the County's most recently released audit shows a combined ending fund balance of \$25,030,430, an increase of \$497,988. Becker County now holds Standard and Poors second highest bond rating of AA which speaks to the County having a "very strong" capacity to meet its financial commitments.

Construction of a new \$16 million jail facility is slated to start next year. Currently, the County houses inmates in several other county jails at an estimated cost in 2017 of more than \$600,000. Approximately \$2.5 million of the construction costs for the new jail will come from county reserves with the remaining costs being financed largely in part with the significant savings from outside boarding costs. The new jail is expected to open in the fall of 2018.

The County recently completed a new \$2.9 million, 16,000–square-foot- transfer station. The facility is designed for smoother and safer traffic by separating commercial haulers from residents dropping off junk in trailers and dump trucks. The transfer station was paid for with the help of a \$2 million state grant. The County is also planning a new recycling facility in 2017.

The Detroit Lakes Airport has been approved by the FAA for nearly \$18 million in runway and airport improvements in the future. The County is an equal partner with the City in ownership of the airport and will be responsible each for a 2 ½ percent match on the project.

The Sheriff's department has added a new K-9 police dog. The new program was funded with community donations. The department has been without a police dog since 2008. The Sheriff's department is also proud of having one of the highest crime clearance rates for any department in Minnesota.

Becker County is adding another specialty court, veteran's court, to help reduce repeat offenders and better serve the specific needs of our veterans. The program is in cooperation with the court, county attorney, and veteran services.

In 2016, Becker County and two other counties were sued by the State Auditor for complying with a new state law giving counties greater ability to hire outside auditors to conduct required financial reviews. In many cases these outside audits can be done at substantial savings to the taxpayer. Becker County prevailed in a lower court decision. The case is now on appeal.

A new public fishing pier was constructed at Dunton Locks and the water tram was re-opened to the public this summer.

The County's timber auction produced \$385,145 in revenue this year. The County also planted 117,960 trees on 131 acres

A new county assessing program was put on-line in 2016. The new system will enhance the County's ability to better classify property assessments.

Becker County continued to lead counties in Minnesota with a voter turnout of more than 93 percent in the fall's general election. The County also saw nearly 2,400 people register on Election Day.

The highway department completed \$5.5 million in construction projects this year. They also completed 50 miles of sealcoating, 50 miles of surfacing, 58 miles of shouldering, 90 miles of crack sealing and 230 miles of lane striping.

In the area of social services, the County has increased staffing at child protection to better serve our community. Public safety and the protection of those vulnerable in our communities are top county priorities.

For additional information on individual county departments, please review their web pages.