Wayne County enters its new budget year with a balanced $1.45 billion budget that continues progress made last year in reestablishing the county’s financial stability.

“There are still challenges that remain for us, but we have balanced this budget without cutting any of the services county residents expect and depend upon,” Commission Vice-Chair Alisha Bell said.

“We have even been able to expand funding in some key areas.”

One of those areas is the county’s Meals on Wheels program for homebound senior citizens. Continuing on the efforts made last year, the program will see a budget increase to ensure continuation of the program many seniors depend upon.

The 2017-18 fiscal year budget also represents a reduction from the $1.56 billion budget approved last year.

The county has also trimmed spending by roughly $185 million over the past four years. In addition, it has eliminated its structural deficit, which once ran as high as $52 million a year, nearly eliminated $88 million in accumulated debt, and increased funding for the county pension system.

Commissioner Bell serves as vice-chair of the Commission’s Committee on Ways and Means, which held several hearings this summer on the budget. At those hearings, each county department head presented a proposed budget for their respective department to the committee members.

The committee then gave recommendations to the Commission’s Committee of the Whole, which provided further review before forwarding the budget to the full Commission for a final vote.

Jail plans become clearer as negotiations continue

Wayne County Executive Warren Evans has announced his administration has entered into negotiations with developer Dan Gilbert’s Rock Ventures on a new site for the proposed Wayne County Jail as well as a new county court building.

If negotiations are successful, Wayne County will turn over the unfinished jail site on Gratiot Avenue and I-375 and several other county-owned properties to Rock Ventures which will develop the Gratiot site into an entertainment complex that could include a new soccer stadium as well as other features.

In return, the county would receive a completely new jail and courthouse, built several miles to the north of the uncompleted Gratiot jail site.

See Proposal, Page 2

Summer smiles

Commissioner Alisha Bell welcomed residents throughout District 7 to her annual Evening in the Park held July 27 in the Warrendale area of Hines Park.
Commissioner Bell introduces resolution in fight against racism and bigotry

Following the Aug. 12 events in Charlottesville, Va., Wayne County Commissioners took a unanimous stand against racism and bigotry and called for investigations of domestic hate groups.

The commission on Aug. 24 denounced all forms of bigotry, especially that promoted by white supremacist, neo-Nazi, Ku Klux Klan and anti-Semitic movements, in a resolution introduced by Commission Vice-Chair Alisha Bell.

“We are reaffirming our opposition to bigotry in all forms,” Commissioner Bell said in presenting the resolution. “Hate crimes have no place in our society and we must take such stands to bring our country together.”

The resolution urges federal and law enforcement authorities to recognize white supremacist, neo-Nazi, Ku Klux Klan and anti-Semitic groups as domestic terrorists and investigate and prosecute hate crimes as they would all other terrorist acts.

Though recognizing the fundamental American right to free speech, the resolution notes that, “these extremist hate groups promote agendas that are in irreconcilable conflict with our nation’s foundational principles of liberty and justice for all.”

The resolution further states that extremist hate groups “have promoted intimidation and violent repression of individuals solely on the basis of their race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation and immigration status.”

County Land Bank institutes pilot program to seek quick rehabilitation of properties

The Wayne County Commission recently authorized transferring 141 tax-foreclosed properties to the Wayne County Land Bank in a pilot program designed to strengthen neighborhoods and reduce evictions.

The properties involved are located in Detroit, as well as 17 other communities throughout the county.

Of the 141 properties, 71 -- just over half -- are located in Detroit.

Commission Vice-Chair Alisha Bell said the goal is to have these properties rehabilitated quickly by local developers rather than being purchased at auction by developers who could sit on the properties for years.

The agreement also includes a provision that would allow renters to remain in these foreclosed properties rather than being evicted after they are acquired by the new owners.

While the properties represent a small portion of the roughly 8,000 county properties in foreclosure, the program could be greatly expanded in future years.

Under the program, developers acquire the properties by paying back taxes, plus administrative fees that will be used by the land bank.

“Anything we can do to keep people in their homes builds neighborhoods and strengthens communities,” Commissioner Bell said. “The goal always is to avoid foreclosure. This is a fraction of the properties in foreclosure and something we hope we can build on.”

Commission weighing offers

Proposal, from Page 1

The value of the Rock Ventures offer has been estimated at more than $520 million.

Despite the announcement, the county is continuing its “two track” plan regarding the Gratiot site.

Even though the Rock Ventures proposal is now the county executive’s preferred proposal, an alternative proposal by Walsh Construction to complete the unfinished jail remains on the table. The Walsh plan would move forward if an agreement cannot be reached with Rock Ventures.

The county executive’s announcement represents a major step forward in the long-delayed jail project, but there are two important things to remember:

• It isn’t a final decision. A possibility remains that the new jail could still be built on the Gratiot site.
• The Wayne County Commission must give final approval on any jail site proposal.

With that in mind, Commissioner Bell asks anyone with questions or comments about either proposal to contact her by phone at (313) 224-0936, by email at abell3@.waynecounty.com or by writing to: Wayne County Commissioner Alisha Bell, 500 Griswold, 7th Floor, Detroit, MI 48226.
Wayne County Commissioners took steps this summer to strengthen Street Outreach Court Detroit, a partnership between government and nonprofit agencies designed to help homeless individuals resolve minor court cases and help them find jobs and housing.

A memorandum of understanding that authorizes reserve Wayne County Sheriff’s Deputies to act as bailiffs for the program’s offsite court hearings received unanimous approval.

Founded in 2012 by a coalition of community organizations, Street Outreach Court Detroit brings 36th District Court proceedings to facilities at the Capuchin Soup Kitchen and St. Leo’s Soup Kitchen, making them more accessible for homeless individuals who often lack transportation to the courthouse.

“This provides a number of people a much-needed opportunity to get their lives together and once again become productive members of society,” Commission Vice-Chair Alisha Bell said. “Ultimately, that helps everyone.”

Some 243 individuals have taken part in the program to date, though organizers said lack of a memorandum of understanding authorizing the reserve deputies’ participation had slowed its progress.

Attending the offsite hearings allows those individuals to resolve low level misdemeanors and outstanding civil infractions, such as parking tickets, which hamper their ability to seek employment.

Program participants must first meet with a social service worker to create an action plan aimed at finding a home.

They can apply for a Street Outreach Court hearing after a minimum of 30 days of demonstrated progress toward reaching that goal.

Through the hearing, individuals can have outstanding fines suspended while they complete their action plan. Social service providers update court officials on the each individual’s progress.

Those participating in the program can also receive free legal counseling to permanently resolve their court issues.

Allowing reserve deputies to serve as Street Outreach Court bailiffs adds no additional costs for the county an analysis by county staff indicated.

Organizers said the program has saved society more than $420,000 to date, through a combination of factors, including reduced medical costs to providers serving homeless individuals, court case consolidation, reduced recidivism rates and payment of parking fees.

The Street Outreach Court Detroit coalition involves the Wayne County Prosecutor’s Office, Wayne County Sheriff’s Office, 36th District Court, the Detroit Law Department and the Detroit Municipal Parking Department.

The coalition also involves non-governmental organizations, including the Detroit Action Commonwealth, the Capuchin Soup Kitchen, Neighborhood Legal Services of Michigan, St. Leo’s Soup Kitchen, Southwest Economic Solutions, Volunteers of America of Michigan and Street Democracy, a legal organization providing assistance to the poor and dedicated to ending poverty.
Wayne County Commission Vice-Chair Alisha Bell will serve on the Women In Government Leadership Forum for 2018, in a program designed to develop and provide mentorship to the nation’s next generation of female leaders.

Commissioner Bell joins a class of 25 female officeholders from throughout the United States selected for the leadership forum. More than 150 women were nominated.

“I am truly honored to have been selected and look forward to joining such a distinguished class,” Bell said.

This year’s class includes Baltimore Mayor Catherine E. Pugh, Rhode Island Secretary of State Nellie M. Gorbea and Arizona State Senator Kimberly Yee. Grand Rapids Mayor Rosalynn Bliss is also a member of the class.

The program is sponsored by the Governing Institute, an affiliate of Governing magazine.

Commissioner Bell and other members of this year’s class will be profiled in the February 2018 issue of Governing, a national publication focusing on state and local government. They will also participate in Governing events throughout the coming year.

“The women in the Class of 2018 are subject matter experts, negotiators, civic activists and pioneers,” said Julia Burrows, director of the Governing Institute.

“Each year, the program adds to a national network, with 25 new members who establish deep friendships, provide consultation and campaign support and recruit future female candidates.”

The Class of 2018 will hold its first leadership conference Nov. 4-5 in Phoenix, Arizona.

In May, Commissioner Bell was a featured speaker at the 2017 Governing Michigan Leadership forum, held at Michigan State University. At that event, she shared her personal leadership and management skills and discussed ways to increase the number of women serving in government and management positions.

The forum was presented by e.Republic, the national multimedia organization which publishes Governing magazine.
Wayne County Commission Vice-Chair

Alisha Bell
Invites you to a
Public Safety
Town Hall Meeting

Thursday, October 12, 2017
6:30 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.
Location: Citadel of Praise
20280 Lyndon, Detroit, MI

Commissioner Bell will be joined by
Wayne County Sheriff Benny Napoleon
and other law enforcement officials.

For more information, contact Commissioner Bell’s office at 313-224-0936