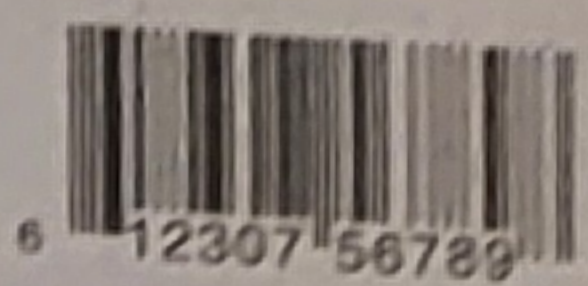


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Local

LIKE WE DO



Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers announces at the Janesville Area Convention & Visitors Bureau's offices in downtown Janesville on Tuesday that his proposed 2023-25 capital budget includes \$15 million for the Woodman's Sports and Convention Center project in Janesville.

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A step closer to a big boost

Gov. Evers proposes \$15 million for Woodman's Center in budget plan

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JANESVILLE — Gov. Tony Evers has included \$15 million in his proposed state capital budget to help construct the Woodman's Sports and Convention Center in Janesville, Evers announced during a visit Tuesday.

The state funding is part of \$3.8 billion in recommended investments included in Evers' proposed 2023-25 capital budget.

It follows the announcement in December that the Woodman's Center,

envisoned to be built at the Uptown Janesville mall on Milton Avenue, had been awarded \$5 million in federal funding through the U.S. Senate's Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023. That's the federal government's \$1.7 trillion annual funding bill.

The current estimate to construct the Woodman's Center on the site of a shuttered Sears department store at Uptown Janesville is at least \$50 million. Some of that would be covered by private donations, including \$3 million pledged by Woodman's Market for naming rights, and by up to \$17.3 million the city council has voted to borrow for the project.

The governor's capital budget proposal must still be approved by the State Building Commission, by the legislature's Joint Committee on Finance and then by the

The current estimate to construct the Woodman's Center on the site of a shuttered Sears department store at Uptown Janesville is at least \$50 million.

full legislature as a part of the 2023-2025 state biennial budget.

Evers said in a release prior to his appearance Tuesday at the downtown offices of the Janesville Area Convention & Visitors Bureau, that his proposal to fund \$1.9 billion of the capital projects instead of borrowing for them will save

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IMAGE COURTESY CITY OF JANESVILLE

An artist's rendering of the proposed Woodman's Sports & Convention Center at Uptown Janesville.



SPORTS

Matt Kirk scored 21 points to help Milton advance in the WIAA boys basketball playoffs.

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LOCAL

Janesville residents will be able to mingle with city manager finalists Thursday at Rotary Botanical Gardens.

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STATE

The DNR is preparing to release public comments made in response to the agency's draft wolf management plan.

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Evers proposes \$3.8 billion for projects

Nearly half of amount allotted to UW System

ASSOCIATED PRESS

MADISON—Democratic Gov. Tony Evers on Tuesday proposed spending \$3.8 billion on building projects in 28 counties around the state, with nearly half directed toward work across the University of Wisconsin System.

The plan will first go to the state building commission on March 23 for consideration,

but it would ultimately need the approval of the Republican-controlled Legislature. Republicans slashed Evers' spending proposals on building projects in each of his past two budgets.

Two years ago, Republicans approved spending \$1.5 billion on building projects out of the \$2.4 billion that Evers proposed. In 2019, Evers' first budget, Republicans approved \$1.9 billion out of \$2.5 billion that Evers wanted.

Republican Rep. Mark Born, co-chair of the Legislature's budget committee, accused Evers

of proposing "massive spending and unrealistic growth." He said the Legislature's plan, which is likely to be finalized in June, will prioritize projects that "ensure we're in a strong position for the future."

Unlike in previous years, which relied heavily on borrowing to pay for the projects, Evers this time proposed paying for about half of the work in cash, citing the state's record-high budget surplus of about \$7 billion.

"Our historic surplus means we have historic opportunity and

responsibility to invest in key projects that have long been neglected while still staying well within our means, keeping borrowing low, and saving taxpayers money in the long run," Evers said in a statement.

Evers called for spending \$1.8 billion on projects at UW campuses. That includes \$347 million to demolish and replace the engineering building on the UW-Madison campus; \$231 million to demolish the science building at UW-Eau Claire and build a new facility to

house several programs; \$182 million to demolish and replace the science building at UW-La Crosse, and \$169 million to partially demolish, renovate and build a new art building at UW-Madison.

Two years ago, Republicans approved nearly \$629 million in projects at UW, down from the \$1 billion Evers wanted.

Other proposed projects include \$41 million in fiberoptic upgrades at the state Capitol to improve cellular service; \$225 million for health services facilities; an additional \$60 million

for the already approved construction of a new state history museum near the Capitol; and \$84 million for improvements at a variety of Wisconsin National Guard facilities.

There are a host of local projects, including funding for the Milwaukee Iron District, Woodman's Sports and Convention Center in Janesville, Green Bay National Railroad Museum, Marquette University School of Dentistry and the Door County Peninsula Players Theatre.

Center/

taxpayers nearly \$1 billion in future debt payments.

During Tuesday's appearance, Evers said the \$15 million for the Woodman's Center will augment private fundraising, federal grants, and city of Janesville borrowing to build a facility that will host conventions, community events and sports competitions.

Evers said the Woodman's Center is exactly what the capital budget is designed to support. He said it will draw crowds from big cities like Chicago and will drive traffic to local hotels and restaurants.

'TRANSFORMATIONAL'

Janesville City Council President Paul Benson said at Tuesday's event that the Woodman's Center will be "transformational" for the city. Everyone is competing for jobs and workers and this project will make Janesville stand out, Benson said.

Benson said when operational, the center is expected to make a \$23 million annual local economic impact, continuing "an amazing decade of growth and progress here."

"Cities and states are always rising or falling; if you think you can just tread water and



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Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers shakes hands with Oakleigh Ryan after his announcement of a \$15 million investment to support the Woodman's Sports and Convention Center project in Janesville.

maintain the status quo you are probably falling behind," Benson said. "The Woodman's Center is the exact kind of amenity that is going to help keep and attract our best and brightest right here in Janesville."

"It will rejuvenate the Milton Avenue corridor and make sure we aren't known as the city with a dead mall in the middle of it."

REACTION

State Rep. Sue Conley, D-Janesville, state Sen. Mark Spreitzer, D-Beloit, and other local leaders joined Evers as he announced the proposed

Woodman's Center investment.

In addition to its expected \$23 million annual economic impact, the Woodman's Center is expected to generate 228 new full and part-time jobs and over 400 construction jobs, Conley said in a release.

"I was thrilled to join Gov. Evers today as he made this announcement. The positive community and economic development impact will be a valuable asset to the city of Janesville and the greater Rock County community," Conley's release said. "This project will help make Janesville a destination for young athletes and

their families and make hosting conventions possible."

"This \$15 million investment is critical to completing the Woodman's Sports and Convention Center project, a central piece of the redevelopment of Uptown Janesville and the whole Milton Avenue corridor. From hosting conventions and events to bringing young athletes and their families to Janesville, this facility will help Janesville and Rock County continue to be a leading destination in the region and promote economic growth," Spreitzer said in a release.

KANDU

Linda Ross, fund development director at KANDU Industries, Inc. in Janesville, said KANDU clients love being out in the community and love being part of the Special Olympics.

But there hasn't been a place in Janesville for clients to go and participate in Special Olympics for many years; they have had to drive to Madison or Rockford.

"It's very fulfilling for them to be able to be a part of the Special Olympics," but without a local facility, participation is limited, Ross said. The Woodman's Center would be a new

local space they could use, Ross said.

Sean Knott is a member of Friends of the Woodman's Center, a private group that has backed its construction and announced in mid-February it would shift a capital campaign it launched in 2021 to privately raise \$9 million for the planned ice arena, sports arena and convention hall at Uptown Janesville on Milton Avenue.

The group said that it now has \$6 million in hand, largely through major corporate commitments for naming rights at the facility. It hopes now to shift toward a more public-facing campaign to try to amass the final few million a steering committee of private backers had set out to raise.

Knott said the proposed state funds are not only a big deal for the city but also for his family. Knott said his children are in many different sports and he must drive them to Green Bay or Madison to compete.

He said a local facility for sports is "next level".

"If you don't invest in yourself, just like any other business, you are going to get left behind," Knott said. "That's what Janesville is doing, it's investing in itself."

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