

Kent County
MARYLAND

Annual Report 2026

Commissioners' Letter

Kent County has always been defined by its strong communities, rich agricultural heritage, scenic waterways, and rural small-town character. As Commissioners, we are proud to serve a county that values both tradition and progress — a place where preserving what makes Kent County special goes hand-in-hand with planning responsibly for future generations.

This inaugural Annual Report is intended to provide residents with a clearer understanding of Kent County government's work and investments by highlighting key accomplishments, ongoing initiatives, and future priorities aimed at preserving, improving, and preparing Kent County for the future. These accomplishments are made possible by the dedication and professionalism of Kent County's employees whose commitment to public service is one of Kent County's greatest strengths. Not only does this report share the important financial decisions and capital projects underway in the County, it also shares the stories, partnerships, and daily efforts that help keep our communities strong.

This past year the County continued making strategic investments in the infrastructure, public facilities, and community assets that support our residents every day. From advancing the Kent County Middle School project and preparing to modernize the Millington Wastewater Treatment Plant to expanding housing opportunities in Millington and Kennedyville, these investments position Kent County for thoughtful, sustainable growth.

At the same time, Kent County remains dedicated to protecting its rural landscape, productive farmland, waterways, and environmental resources. Smart growth means preserving the agricultural heritage and natural beauty that define our county. Through investments in public landings and recreation, partnerships with our municipalities, and careful planning along the Route 301 corridor, we continue to balance opportunity with stewardship.

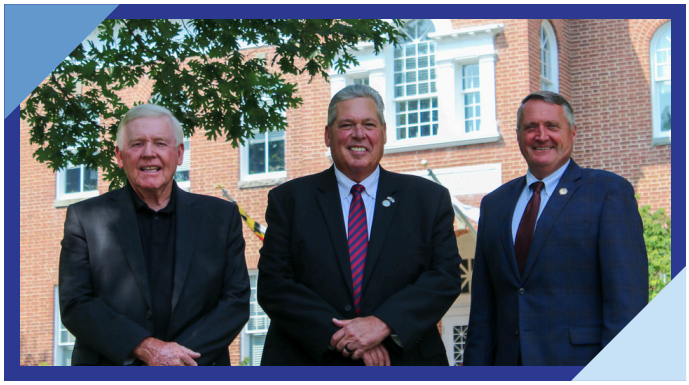
We also recognize the responsibility entrusted to us as fiscal stewards and remain focused on living within our means and maintaining strong reserves. Along with managing taxpayer dollars, the County continues to leverage state and federal funding, securing significant grant funding for major infrastructure improvements. These efforts will protect public investments for the long term and support strategic planning for future capital needs.

Looking ahead, we remain focused on investing strategically, preserving what makes Kent County special, and continuing to provide the high quality of life that current and future residents value and deserve. We extend our sincere appreciation for the hard work and dedication of all Kent County employees and residents.

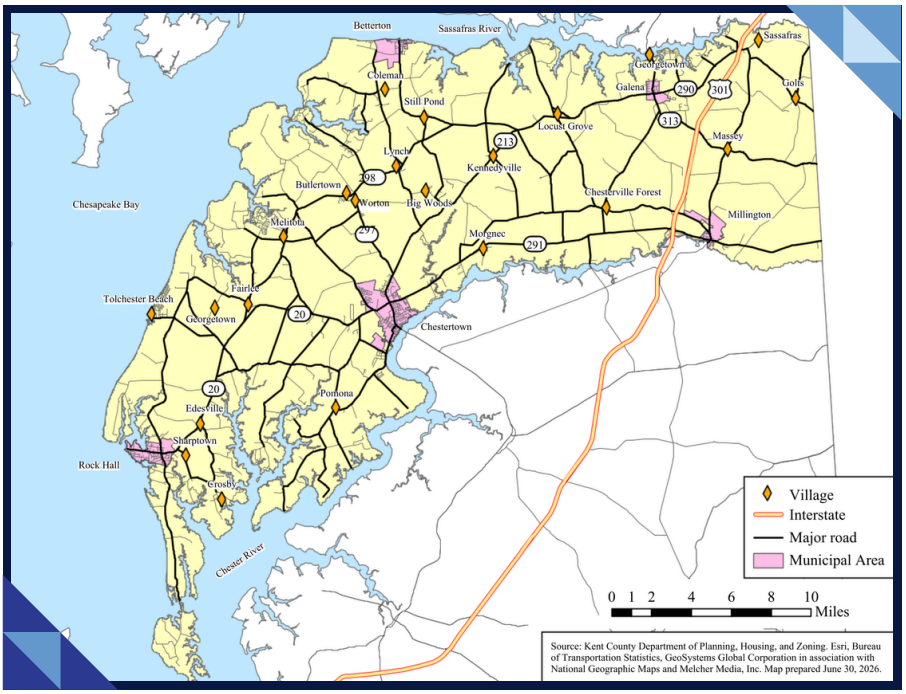
Sincerely,

Kent County Board of Commissioners

Ronald H. Fithian, President
Albert H. Nickerson, Commissioner
John F. Price, Commissioner



Kent County at a Glance



19,565
Population

48.6
Median Age

15%
Of Residents are Under 18 Years Old

30%
Of Residents are Ages 65+

277
Square Miles of Land

343
Miles of Shoreline

396
Farms

$80,147
Median Household Income

141,662
Acres of Farmland

8,493
Households

UNITED FOR ALICE®

42%
of Kent County households live below the ALICE* threshold.

**ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) households earn above the federal poverty level but struggle to afford basic necessities.*

One Team

Ronald H. Fithian
President
Albert H. Nickerson,
Commissioner
John F. Price
Commissioner
Shelley Heller
County Administrator

Department Directors
Scott Boone
Information Technology
Jill Coleman
Parks and Recreation
Carla Gerber
Planning, Housing, and Zoning
Pete Landon
Emergency Services
Dan Mattson
Public Works
Carrie Klein
Public Works
Katie LeMaire
Kent Family Center
Joanne McNamara
Grants and Contracts
Bob Gast
Finance
Rosemary Ramsey-Granillo
Local Management Board
Hilary Siakor-Sirleaf
Detention Center Warden
Michael Sutton
Human Resources
Jamie Williams
Economic and Tourism Development

Kent County Government is committed to providing high-quality public services, maintaining infrastructure, supporting families and businesses, protecting public safety, and preserving the quality of life that makes Kent County unique. While each department serves a distinct role, they work together to deliver the services residents depend on every day.

From emergency response and infrastructure maintenance to economic development, community planning, and administrative support, County employees provide efficient, responsive services that strengthen communities, preserve Kent County's heritage, and prepare for the future.

Supporting County Government Behind the Scenes

Information Technology (IT)

- Maintains county technology systems and cybersecurity.
- Supports communications, software, and digital services.
- Ensures departments have the tools needed to serve residents effectively.

Finance Department

- Oversees budgeting, accounting, purchasing, payroll, and financial reporting.
- Maintains fiscal stewardship of taxpayer resources.
- Supports strategic financial planning and long-term sustainability.

Office of Grants & Contracts

- Identifies and pursues external funding opportunities.
- Supports grant management and compliance.
- Helps departments secure resources for infrastructure, community development, and public services.
- Connects community priorities with state and federal funding opportunities.

Human Resources (HR)

- Recruits and supports the county workforce.
- Administers employee benefits and personnel programs.
- Provides training, policy guidance, and organizational support.
- Helps attract and retain the talented employees who serve Kent County every day.

One Mission

Planning, Housing, and Zoning
- Guides responsible growth, land use, and long-range planning.
- Administers zoning, permitting, and development review.
- Supports housing initiatives while preserving farmland and rural character.
- Maintains GIS mapping and planning data to support informed decision-making.

Department of Public Works
- Maintains county roads, bridges, public landings, and facilities.
- Operates water and wastewater systems.
- Manages parks, marinas, and public access infrastructure.
- Delivers capital improvement projects that support residents, businesses, and future growth.

Office of Emergency Services
- Provides emergency medical services and 9-1-1 communications.
- Coordinates emergency preparedness and disaster response.
- Leads public safety training, hazard mitigation, and emergency notification programs.
- Helps ensure Kent County is prepared for emergencies and resilient in times of crisis.

Economic Development and Tourism
- Supports business attraction, retention, and expansion, by connecting businesses with resources, incentives, and growth opportunities.
- Promotes entrepreneurship and workforce development.
- Advances strategic initiatives such as the Route 301 Growth Corridor.
- Markets Kent County as a destination for visitors and investment.

Kent County Parks and Recreation
- Provides accessible parks and facilities for Kent residents and visitors.
- Delivers diverse recreation programs and events for all ages.
- Builds community through partnerships and collaborations.
- Invests in developing and maintaining park amenities, fields, courts and trails that ensure safe, welcoming, high-quality experiences.

Kent County Local Management Board
- Convenes cross sector efforts to improve outcomes for children, youth, and families.
- Coordinates the Local Care Team, connecting families with schools, nonprofits, and agencies.
- Drives the community-led KNOCK! initiative in alignment with Maryland priorities, including the ENOUGH Act.
- Administers grants and funds programs.

Detention Center
- Provides secure detention services.
- Supports rehabilitation, treatment, and reentry programming.
- Partners with community organizations to reduce recidivism and improve public safety.
- Helps individuals successfully transition back into the community.

Kent Family Center
- Provides parenting education and family support services.
- Connects families with community resources.
- Supports early childhood development and family strengthening initiatives.
- Helps children and families build strong foundations for success.

Community Voice...

1,000+

Doors Knocked

260

Resident Interviews

6

Community Conversations

9

Local Residents Hired as Canvassers

From Community Voice to County Action

Through the Kent County Local Management Board's KNOCK! Chestertown initiative, **K**ids & **N**eighbors **O**rganizing for **C**hange in **K**ent, residents, community partners, and local organizations came together to answer one important question: What would make Kent County a great place to be a kid—and raise a family? Through one of the county's most extensive community engagement efforts, the Local Management Board helped transform resident priorities into a shared vision. The priorities identified through KNOCK! closely align with the County Commissioners' investments and future vision, demonstrating the power of community-driven planning.

Housing: A Shared Priority

Residents identified affordable housing, homeownership opportunities, and housing for seniors and working families as top priorities.

Community Voice

- 70% of Kent County residents spend more than 45% of their income on housing and transportation.
- Housing affordability remains a major barrier to family stability and economic opportunity.

County Action

- Countywide Housing Study
- Millington Regional Wastewater Treatment Plant
- Millington Senior Housing (52 units)
- Village at Kennedyville
- Route 301 Growth Corridor

Education, Youth, and Community Well-Being

Residents prioritized safe schools, youth opportunities, mental health, and stronger connections among schools, families, and the community.

Community Voice

- Education was identified as one of the three highest community priorities.
- Residents prioritized safe schools, youth enrichment, and mental health supports.
- Families called for stronger connections between schools, community organizations, and local resources.

County Action

- Kent County Middle School Replacement
- Worton Community Center improvements
- Recreation facility upgrades
- Playground enhancements
- Youth-focused community initiatives
- Citizens' Academy and civic engagement opportunities

...Meets County Action

Economic Mobility: Creating Opportunity

Residents prioritized jobs, workforce training, transportation, and support for local businesses.

Community Voice

- 41% of KNOCK! respondents identified economic concerns.
- More than 70% of Kent County High School graduates complete a Career and Technical Education pathway.
- Chesapeake College enrollment by Kent County residents increased 17%, while non-credit enrollment increased 131%.

County Action

- Route 301 Growth Corridor planning
- Workforce and business development initiatives
- 45 Micro Ag Grants totaling $309,224
- Nourish Grants
- Small business mentoring and support programs
- Expansion of tourism spending to $74.3 million annually

Infrastructure Supports Community Goals

Strong infrastructure supports housing, jobs, education, transportation, and quality of life. County investments are creating the foundation for future growth, public safety, and community development.

County Action

- County support for School Capital Improvements (Middle School)
- Parks, Recreation and Water Access improvements
- Road maintenance and facility upgrades
- Emergency Services Upgrades and Hazard Mitigation Planning
- Water and wastewater modernization projects (Millington Regional Wastewater Treatment Plant)

A Shared Vision for Kent's Future

KNOCK! confirmed that residents and County leadership share many of the same priorities. Investments in housing, infrastructure, economic opportunity, education, and quality of life reflect the community's vision while building a stronger future for Kent County. Together, community voice, thoughtful planning, and strategic investment are creating opportunities for children, families, businesses, and future generations.

KNOCK! CHESTERTOWN
KIDS & NEIGHBORS ORGANIZING FOR CHANGE IN KENT

170
Phone Numbers Collected

40
Households Requesting Direct Support

3
Action Teams Created

6
Community Named Goals Developed

Information Technology and Human Resources

Information Technology

The Information Technology Department keeps County government connected through reliable, secure technology. By supporting every department, the IT team enhances daily operations and improves access to County information and services for residents.

Department Highlights

Completed an $11 million countywide broadband expansion.

Improved website accessibility for residents, businesses, and visitors.

Expanded digital tools with maps, dashboards, and public information.

Added online Everbridge registration for emergency alerts.

Looking to the Future

The IT Department will continue enhancing digital services, expanding online tools, strengthening cybersecurity, and supporting departments with technology solutions that improve efficiency and customer service.

Human Resources

Behind every County service is a dedicated team of employees committed to serving Kent County residents. The Human Resources Department recruits, develops, and supports this workforce by providing the tools, training, and resources employees need to deliver exceptional public service.

Department Highlights

Achieved an 83.2% employee retention rate for a workforce of 232 employees including seasonal staff.

Strengthened a workplace culture where employees are respected, supported, and recognized.

Enhanced employee recognition through service awards and appreciation programs.

Expanded workplace safety training with First Aid, AED, Stop the Bleed, and Active Shooter preparedness.

Looking to the Future

Human Resources will continue expanding professional development and leadership training opportunities while strengthening employee wellness, engagement, and recognition. By investing in our employees, Kent County is investing in exceptional public service for our residents.

Finance

The Office of Finance manages Kent County's financial operations with transparency, accountability, and responsible stewardship of taxpayer resources. From budgeting and payroll to financial reporting and revenue collection, the department works closely with County leadership to ensure fiscal stability while supporting essential public services.

Department Highlights

Expanded the County's Capital Investment Reserve to $12 million, strengthening long-term financial stability and preparing for future infrastructure and capital investments.

$80,923,944

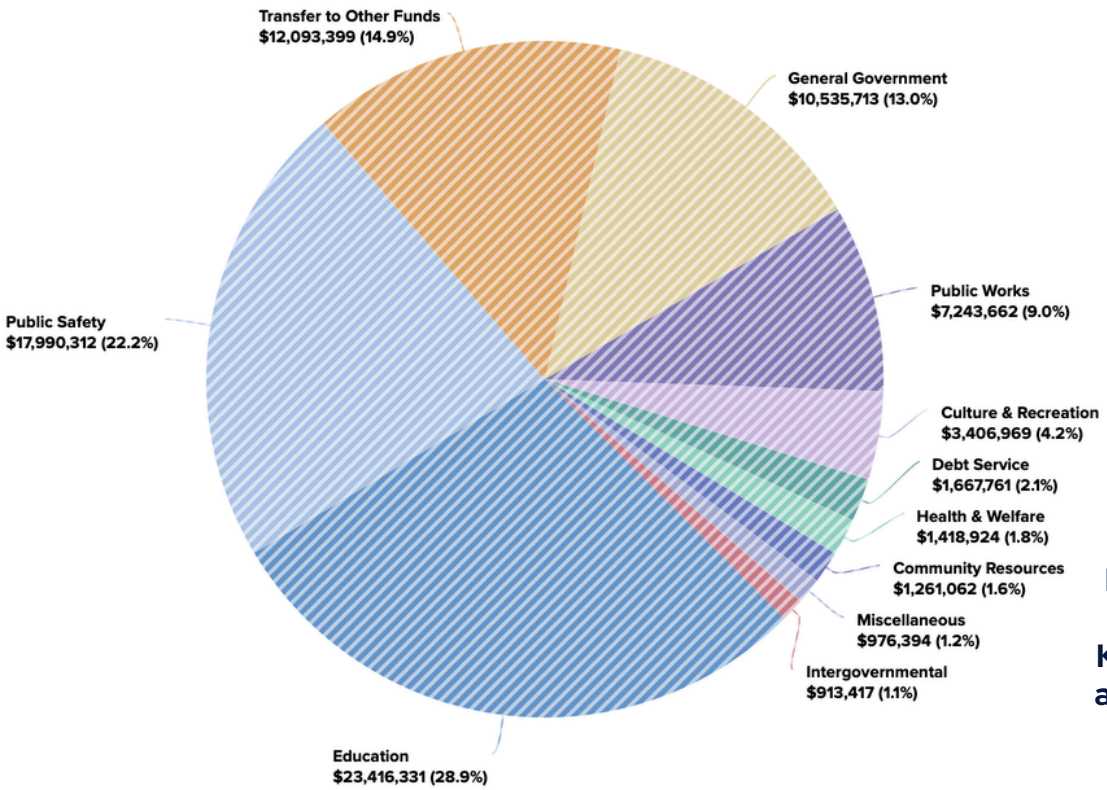
County Budget

Continued to support County leadership in developing a balanced budget that meets current operational needs while planning for Kent County's future.

Looking to the Future

The Finance Department remains committed to sound financial management, long-range capital planning, and transparent budgeting practices that position Kent County to meet future needs while maintaining the high-quality services residents expect.

Fiscal Year 2027 County Budget by Allocation

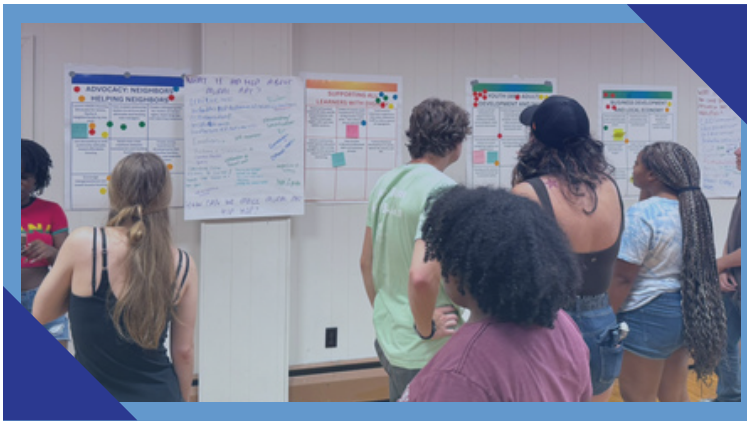


Following public review and budget work sessions, the Kent County Commissioners adopted the FY2027 Budget on June 3, 2026.

Serving Kent County



The County Department of Public Works maintains more than 275 miles of roads throughout the County ensuring residents can get to the places they need to go.



In 2026 1,000+ Kent County residents helped the Kent Local Management Board identify high priority needs for residents.



Kent County is committed to providing all staff with training and professional development to ensure the health and safety of staff and residents. Here, Parks & Recreation staff receive CPR and First Aid training from the Department of Emergency Services.



This year, the County Commissioners cut the ribbon on the new Emergency Services facility. Emergency Services provides 24/7 Emergency Medical Services, responding to 2,601 calls in the first 6 months of 2026.

A Year in Action



Community outreach and engagement to keep residents informed is a top priority for all County Departments.





Kent County continued its commitment to providing access to high quality indoor and outdoor recreation areas, completing major rehabilitation projects at Worton Park.

Working together, Public Works and Parks and Recreation completed replacement of the Betterton Beach Boardwalk and added a Mobility Mat to help beachgoers with mobility issues access the shoreline.





The Kent Family Center celebrated its 10 year anniversary in 2026. The Center provides early learning and family engagement supports to Kent households with children 5 and under.

With support from the Maryland 250 Commission, the County Commissioners launched Kent's first Citizens' Academy.

Economic Development and Tourism



Growing Opportunity, Supporting Businesses, and Showcasing Kent County

By investing in people, places, and partnerships, Kent County is creating opportunities for economic growth while preserving the character, quality of life, and sense of community that make the county a special place to call home.

Department Highlights

Route 301 Corridor planning and infrastructure investments continue to prepare the area for future business growth, jobs, and housing.

More than $309,000 in grants awarded through the Micro Ag Grant Program since its inception to support local agriculture and small businesses.

$2 Million

EZ Tax Credits issued to Kent County Businesses

2,023 subscribers receive monthly information and updates from the Department's Economic Development and Tourism newsletters.

Tourism spending reached $74.3 million in 2024, continuing a decade-long trend of growth and support for local businesses.

490%

Growth in Tourism Spending Since 2012

Looking to the Future

Kent County's economic future depends on aligning infrastructure, housing, workforce development, and business growth. Key priorities include advancing development along the Route 301 corridor, expanding housing options, implementing opportunities identified through the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), strengthening support for small businesses, and growing the tourism economy through strategic marketing and destination development. The County will update the EDC Strategic Plan in 2027. It is committed to continuing to develop partnerships with municipalities, regional organizations, businesses, and residents to build a strong, sustainable economy for future generations.

Planning, Housing, and Zoning

Guiding Responsible Growth While Preserving Kent County's Rural Character

Through thoughtful planning and collaboration, the Department is helping Kent County create opportunities for future generations while protecting the agricultural heritage, natural resources, and quality of life that make the county a special place to live.



Department Highlights

Launched a countywide Housing Inventory and Analysis to identify housing needs and guide future policy and investment decisions.

Continued protecting farmland, open space, and natural resources through agricultural preservation and land-use planning programs.

Supported housing projects, including the Millington Senior Housing Project, which will add 52 housing units for older adults, and moved forward revitalization efforts in the “Village at Kennedyville” subdivision.

Improved development services through technology enhancements and GIS mapping tools that support planning, permitting, infrastructure management, and emergency services.

Advanced planning for the Route 301 Growth Corridor and Millington Growth Area, including approximately 900 acres of future mixed-use development.

$43,000

Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development and Upper Shore Regional Council funding for a Kent County Housing Study

Looking to the Future

As Kent County prepares for the 2028 Comprehensive Plan update, Planning, Housing & Zoning will continue leading efforts to support responsible growth, expand housing opportunities, and preserve the county's unique character. Key priorities include completing the Housing Inventory and Analysis, advancing the Route 301 Growth Corridor master planning process, supporting strategic housing development initiatives, modernizing development review systems, and ensuring that future growth aligns with community values and long-term sustainability goals.

Public Works



Building, Maintaining, and Improving the Infrastructure that Supports Everyday Life

The Kent County Department of Public Works maintains the infrastructure and public facilities residents rely on every day. Through strategic investments and ongoing maintenance, the Department supports public safety, protects natural resources, and prepares the county for future growth.

Department Highlights

Advanced the Millington Regional Wastewater Treatment Plant, supporting future housing, business growth, and environmental protection.

Enhanced Betterton Beach with a new accessible boardwalk and Mobility Mat, expanding access to the Chesapeake Bay.

Supported public safety through road maintenance, infrastructure upgrades, and completion of the new EMS Headquarters and station improvements.

1810

Water and Wastewater Work Orders Completed

Completed the reconstruction of Bayside Landing Marina, improving facilities, utilities, and public access.

Secured millions in grant funding through strategic partnerships, maximizing taxpayer investment in County priorities.

275+

Miles of Road Maintained

Looking to the Future

The Department is focused on projects that strengthen infrastructure, support responsible growth, and preserve Kent County's quality of life. Priorities include continuing to advance construction of the Millington Regional Wastewater Treatment Plant, anticipated to come online in the next 2 years, completing major roof replacement projects at county facilities including Kent County Public Library, Kent County Detention Center and Worton Elementary School, and continuing investments in waterway access, parks and other infrastructure.

Parks and Recreation



Creating Healthy Communities Through Parks, Programs, and Partnerships

Kent County Parks & Recreation enhances quality of life by providing accessible parks, recreational programs, and community events for residents of all ages. Through park improvements, expanded programming, and strong community partnerships, the Department continues to create welcoming spaces that promote healthy, active living.

Department Highlights

Invested in parks and facilities with improvements at Worton Park, Betterton Beach, Turner's Creek, and other community spaces, creating safer and more accessible places to gather.

Expanded access to outdoor recreation with the Betterton Beach boardwalk and Mobility Mats, StoryWalk and Sensory Path installations, and park habitat improvements.

28,224
Pool Visits

2,856
Program Registrations

43
Community Events

Expanded recreation programs for youth, families, adults, and seniors through summer enrichment, swim lessons, leagues, and outdoor recreation.

Strengthened community partnerships by hosting Fall Fest and collaborating with local organizations to provide affordable programs for over 900 residents.

Looking to the Future

Kent County Parks & Recreation will continue investing in modern park facilities, expanding recreation programs, strengthening community partnerships, and creating inclusive opportunities that improve health, wellness, and quality of life in the County. Priorities include park improvements, enhanced outdoor recreation, expanded youth and family programming, and strategic investments to keep County parks welcoming for future generations. Through these efforts, the Department will continue creating opportunities for residents of all ages to play, learn, and grow.

Office of Grants and Contracts

Expanding Resources, Strengthening Partnerships, and Delivering Community Impact

The County Commissioners established the Office of Grants and Contracts in FY25 to identify and pursue funding opportunities, as well as strengthen fiscal compliance in grants and contracting activities. The Office is staffed by a Director, who serves as a strategic partner to county departments, quasi-governmental organizations, and community stakeholders, and a Contracts Specialist, who supports procurement and contracting activities countywide.



Department Highlights

$8,292,575

New Competitive Grant Funding Awarded

Supported the Turner's Creek Community Garden with $22,000 in grants, expanding student learning and improving access for volunteers and Master Gardeners.

Launched grant programs using funding from National Opioid Settlement and Community Repair and Reinvestment, awarding $228,457 to 21 organizations.

Obtained $20,000 in grants from the Maryland 250 commission to: launch Kent County's first Citizens' Academy, Inclusive History Project, and support for municipal 250 celebrations.

Leveraged $6.2M in federal funding, including the first major federal appropriation in Kent County's history, to support the Millington Regional Wastewater Treatment Plant.

18

New Competitive Grant Funding Sources Added to the County

Looking to the Future

The Office of Grants and Contracts will continue expanding Kent County's ability to secure external funding and help departments and community partners pursue competitive grant opportunities. Priorities include supporting housing, infrastructure, and economic development initiatives, growing community grant programs, and strengthening partnerships that bring new resources to Kent County. The Office will continue turning local priorities into funded projects that benefit residents today and in the future.

Kent Family Center and Local Management Board

Supporting Children and Strengthening Families

For more than 10 years, Kent Family Center has supported young children and families through early childhood programs, parenting education, and basic needs assistance. Working with schools, healthcare providers, community partners, and the county's Judy Centers, the Center helps families build strong foundations for lifelong success.

Department Highlights

Expanded basic needs support through essential supplies, food distributions, and family resource events.

91

Children Served

Provided developmental, social-emotional, and immunization screenings for every child in center programs.

Looking to the Future

Kent Family Center will continue expanding support for young children and families through stronger partnerships and increased access to resources. Priorities include launching a Teen Parent Support Program with Kent County Public Schools and expanding early childhood services that promote family stability and child well-being.

Community-Led Solutions for Children, Youth, and Families

The Kent County Local Management Board (KCLMB) brings together residents, schools, nonprofits, businesses, and government partners to improve outcomes for children, youth, and families. Through collaboration, strategic planning, and community engagement, the Board helps turn local priorities into action.

Department Highlights

Strengthened community partnerships to advance housing, education, youth development, workforce development, and family well-being.

Aligned County priorities with state initiatives to expand funding, and support resident-driven solutions.

Looking to the Future

The Kent County Local Management Board will continue leveraging community voice, data, and partnerships to pursue additional funding opportunities, strengthen cross-sector collaboration, and ensure that residents remain at the center of decision-making. By aligning local priorities with state and regional initiatives, the KCLMB is helping build a stronger, more equitable, and more opportunity-rich future for Kent County.

Office of Emergency Services



Protecting Kent County Through Preparedness, Response, and Resilience

Kent County Emergency Services protects lives through preparedness, collaboration, and strategic investment. By enhancing training, emergency communications, public outreach, and critical infrastructure, the Department helps ensure residents, businesses, and visitors are prepared for emergencies, and supported when they occur.

Department Highlights

Opened the new EMS Headquarters and completed improvements to EMS stations, strengthening emergency response across Kent County.

Installed AED stations at five County locations, expanding access to lifesaving equipment in partnership with other County departments.

33,381

Total Emergency Calls for Service

2,601

EMS Calls for Service

Prepared communities for emergencies through risk assessments and training for schools, camps, faith-based organizations, and community partners.

Strengthened emergency communications by expanding Everbridge alerts and public notifications during severe weather and emergencies.

Looking to the Future

Kent County Emergency Services will continue strengthening emergency preparedness through strategic investments, advanced technology, enhanced training, and strong community partnerships. Priorities include completing EMS station improvements, launching a countywide Drone Program, expanding emergency preparedness training, strengthening shelter operations, and increasing public outreach to help residents prepare for emergencies and build a more resilient community.

Detention Center

Strengthening Operations, Enhancing Safety, and Building for the Future

The Kent County Detention Center provides safe, secure, and professional correctional services while protecting the community and supporting the well-being of those in its care. Under new leadership, the Department strengthened operations, invested in staff development, improved facility security, and expanded partnerships that support rehabilitation and successful re-entry.



Department Highlights

Strengthened staff engagement through one-on-one meetings, leadership development, and operational improvements that support a safe and accountable workplace.

Enhanced facility safety and security through HVAC and boiler upgrades, expanded camera coverage, control room improvements, and facility maintenance projects.

24/7

Continuous Public Safety Operations

21

Full Time Staff Members

Improved inmate services by consolidating medical care, mental health, medication-assisted treatment, and re-entry services under a single provider.

Expanded rehabilitation and re-entry efforts by restoring work release planning, increasing faith-based programming, and strengthening community partnerships.

Looking to the Future

The Kent County Detention Center will continue modernizing operations while investing in its staff, facilities, and technology. Priorities include expanding medical space, strengthening recruitment and career pathways, enhancing security systems, and growing rehabilitation, work release, and community partnership programs that support successful re-entry and reduce recidivism. By strengthening both operations and rehabilitation services, the Department will continue providing safe, secure, and professional correctional services that protect the community and prepare individuals for successful reintegration.



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kentcounty.com

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