

My name is Mitch Ruedebusch, and I live in District 3 here in St. Croix County with my family. I'm a retired Army Colonel with more than 27 years of service and currently work as a Department of the Army civilian, where my background in engineering and leadership has focused on problem-solving and teamwork. My family chose to live here because of the strong communities, natural beauty, and quality of life this county offers. Those experiences have shaped my belief that leadership should be grounded in listening, collaboration, and responsible decision-making. My top three priorities are protecting our land and water resources, ensuring responsible and well-planned growth, and maintaining strong public services and infrastructure while being good stewards of taxpayer dollars.

1. CAFOs

Agriculture is an important part of St. Croix County's economy and identity, and many farm families have deep roots here. At the same time, large-scale operations like CAFOs can raise concerns about water quality, infrastructure, and impacts on neighboring properties. My position is that these operations should meet all state regulatory requirements and be evaluated based on sound science and local impact. The county's role is to ensure transparency, engage residents, and work collaboratively with farmers and regulators. The goal should be to support agriculture while protecting the health, environment, and quality of life for the broader community.

2. Nitrates and Water Quality

Groundwater is the primary source of drinking water for most residents in St. Croix County, so protecting it is critical. County data has identified nitrates from agricultural practices as a key concern, and that requires a balanced, practical approach. The county should continue investing in well testing, public education, and conservation programs that help reduce nutrient runoff. Supporting the Land and Water Conservation Department's work with farmers on nutrient management and soil health is especially important. Ultimately, the goal is to protect safe drinking water while preserving productive farmland and supporting a sustainable agricultural economy.

3. Housing

Affordable and diverse housing is a growing challenge across the county, particularly for young families, workers, and seniors. While zoning decisions are made at the local level, the county can play a valuable role in coordination and support. This includes sharing data, aligning infrastructure planning, and encouraging collaboration across municipalities. Supporting a range of housing options helps ensure communities remain vibrant and accessible. The focus should be on balancing growth with infrastructure capacity and maintaining the character of our communities.

4. Xcel Energy Solar Project

Projects of this scale are primarily regulated by the Wisconsin Public Service Commission, so the county's authority is limited. However, the county plays an important role in representing local interests and ensuring community input is part of the process. That includes raising considerations around land use, environmental impact, drainage, and infrastructure. The county can help facilitate communication between residents, developers, and state regulators. The goal is to ensure any project aligns as closely as possible with local priorities and long-term planning.

5. Population Changes

St. Croix County has experienced strong growth due to its proximity to the Twin Cities, but future projections suggest that growth may slow. This shift could impact tax revenue, workforce availability, and long-term planning decisions. It also creates an opportunity to focus more on maintaining infrastructure and strengthening existing communities. Strategic planning will be important to ensure continued economic vitality and service delivery. The county should take a proactive approach to adapting to these changing trends.

6. Jail Expansion and Infrastructure

Public safety and reliable infrastructure are essential responsibilities of county government, and facilities must meet current and future needs. At the same time, a \$46 million investment is significant and requires careful evaluation. Decisions should be based on data, including current capacity, projected needs, and potential alternatives. Transparency with taxpayers about costs and long-term financial impacts is critical. The goal is to ensure safety and functionality while being responsible with public resources.

7. Federal Funding Cuts (Health and Social Services)

County health and human services rely in part on federal funding to support residents, particularly those who are most vulnerable. If funding is reduced, the county will need to carefully assess impacts and prioritize essential services. Collaboration with state agencies, healthcare providers, and community organizations will be key to maintaining access. The county should also look for efficiencies and innovative ways to deliver services. The priority is ensuring residents continue to receive the support they need while managing resources responsibly.