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\$475,000 in budget for area

By Jeff Bollier
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A federal budget bill approved by Congress Thursday includes \$475,000 in funding for Beloit and Rock County projects.

The City of Beloit will receive \$225,000 that will help solve parking issues downtown. The School District of Beloit will receive \$150,000 to install phone systems in five elementary schools. And UW-Rock County will receive \$100,000 to upgrade biology and chemistry equipment and computers.

"All the difficulties with the bill have been worked out," said U.S. Rep. Baldwin, D-Madison. "I'm pleased to announce these three special things for the Rock County community."

The City of Beloit will use the funding to acquire property at the southwest corner of the East Grand Avenue and State Street for the construction of a 57-stall parking lot.

The lot will provide an alternative place for Kerry Ingredients employees to park so the parking deck over the Rock River can be removed in accordance with a Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources mandate.

"It was really nice. I was especially pleased the congresswoman took the time to call herself," City Manager Jane Wood said. "We were all counting on the federal grant because we're so strapped for cash. We make an effort every year to bring additional federal dollars to Beloit and for the past five years, we've been successful. It's not a bad track record."

The Beloit City Council still must approve a plan to acquire the property for the parking lot. The plan has a guarantee that Kerry will keep 400 jobs in Beloit for at least the next five years if the lot is built.

"Beloit cannot afford to lose any more jobs," Baldwin said. "Sen. (Herb) Kohl was a key ally in securing these dollars. It was an honor to work with city leaders on securing funding for this project. It was a very long and intense effort to include these urban renewal dollars."

"Keeping and creating jobs is a vital part of any community's economic strength," Sen. Kohl, D-Wis., said. "These federal funds will make a

difference in an area of Beloit that has been hard hit by job loss and increased poverty. I'm pleased this project was approved by Congress today."

School District of Beloit Director of Operations Ron Nortier said the district will use the \$150,000 to install phone systems, including voice mail, in classrooms at Burdge, Cunningham, Gaston, McLenegan and Todd Elementary Schools.

"We've been working towards placing telephones with voice mail in all of our classrooms in the district for the past five years," Nortier said. "Teachers in those five schools can't call parents with concerns or questions. Right now, they'd have to run to the main office and do it the old-fashioned way. Congresswoman Baldwin's efforts ... have made a huge difference in parent/teacher communication in the other schools. Now everyone will benefit."

The phone systems should be installed within the next two months, Nortier said.

"This program was a priority that sold itself," Baldwin said. "This money will enable parents to play a greater role in their children's education. This is an exciting program and I am very happy that I could help the district complete this project."

UW-Rock County requested the \$100,000 to purchase a digital camera system for biology microscopes, lab equipment for microbiology classes, DNA equipment for genetics classes and an infrared networked computer system for chemistry classes, UW-Rock County Dean Janet Philipp said.

"We're thrilled Rep. Baldwin would think about helping provide resources for the UW-Rock County campus," Philipp said. "We have nearly 40 students in our baccalaureate pre-nursing and pre-professional health programs, so the equipment will be well used."

"UW-Rock County needs to secure more modern equipment, especially for its pre-nursing courses considering the state's shortage of nurses," Baldwin said. "The university currently has an inadequate supply of computer equipment. This will enhance their technology."

Philipp said UW-Rock County has been looking for ways to pay for the equipment for years.

"They've been on a wish list for a number of years," Philipp said.

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