

Washington County, Minnesota

Board of Commissioners - Actions

Actions at the Tuesday, May 10, 2011 Board Meeting

This page is a brief view of the actions taken by the Washington County Board of Commissioners. For further information, please telephone 651-430-6001.

Washington County's mission is to provide quality public services in a cost-effective manner through innovation, leadership, and the cooperation of dedicated people.

Washington County will strengthen ties to cooperate with other counties

Washington County will boost its exploration of more ways to cooperate with other counties to create efficiencies and cost savings, after the Washington County Board of Commissioners approved an agreement with other counties May 10. County administrators of the seven metropolitan counties and Olmsted County are exploring opportunities for collaborations among their organizations. The administrators began meeting on a regular basis within the past year to find opportunities for shared services among participating counties.

So far, the group has focused on improving fiber connectivity among the counties to enhance the ability to share technology applications, and developed proposed legislation to improve eligibility determination for income and medical assistance, which counties carry out under the direction from the Minnesota Department of Human Services. The latter effort, with the assistance of the human service directors from each county, has led to the inclusion of an "administrative simplification" proposal in the House Omnibus Health and Human Services Finance bill at the Minnesota Legislature. The group will examine future opportunities for sharing information technology infrastructure and processes in each county. The group is creating a forum for sharing technology plans for each county. The information technology directors from member counties are reviewing opportunities for sharing items such as fiber, servers, data center space, and software applications, as well as emerging technologies.

Staff from each county will review whether any opportunities for efficiencies present themselves, and whether any new program would be worth implementing. After the forum's review, the county administrators will identify which opportunities should be carried out in any of the counties.

Engle will join Mental Health Advisory Council

Lydia Engle, Lakeland, was appointed to the Washington County Mental Health Advisory Council by the Washington County Board of Commissioners May 10. Engle will serve a first term expiring Dec. 31, 2013, as a former consumer representative.

State statute requires that the county have a local adult mental health advisory council. The purpose of the advisory committee is to bring the community perspective and make recommendations to the County Board on the local mental health system. The committee arranges for input from the regional treatment center review board regarding coordination of care between the regional treatment center and community-based services, and input from local system of care providers regarding coordination of care between services.

County will continue to work with Star Trail Association to maintain snowmobile trails

Washington County will continue its relationship with the Star Trail Association, which helps maintain snowmobile trails in the county, after the Washington County Board of Commissioners affirmed the relationship May 10.

The County Board began working with the Star Trail Association in 1991. The county agreed to sponsor the snowmobile club and act as a pass-through agency for Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) snowmobile trail maintenance and grooming grants. The snowmobile club cannot receive the grants in aid directly.

The County Board voted to support the funding applications to the DNR under the Minnesota Snowmobile Trails Assistance Program. This grant money would be for the 2011-2012 snow season. The county will receive funding for the Star Trail Association as a reimbursement for costs expended by the club for snowmobile trail maintenance during the snow season and forward the money to the club.

Sidewalks will be repaired at the Headwaters Service Center, Hardwood Creek library

A section of the sidewalk at the Headwaters Service Center in Forest Lake will be repaired by Bailey Construction, after the Washington County Board of Commissioners agreed to the work at its meeting May 10. The building is also home to the Hardwood Creek branch of the Washington County Library.

This winter's ground "heaving" between the building's entrances and sidewalks was especially damaging due to the clay and expansive soils in the area. Several techniques to smooth out the sidewalks have been attempted, but they didn't work. Bailey Construction submitted the lowest bid of \$49,890 to do the work.

The project will remove the front entry sidewalk, and drain tile will be installed to eliminate the heaving. Work will also be done on the building's other entrances, which require about 10 feet of sidewalk replacement.

County begins 2012 budget process

The Washington County Board of Commissioners received a budget outlook for the county for 2012 at a workshop May 10.

Workshops are conducted to provide the board with background information, and no action is taken during a workshop. In preparing its 2012 budget, the county is building on its fiscal accomplishments of a low tax rate and a low per capita spending and property tax. The county recently had its top bond ratings reaffirmed by both Moody's and Standard & Poor's ratings agencies.

At the same time, the county is writing a budget after having experienced state aid reductions of more than \$7.2 million over the past three years. Aid has been reduced in the overall county program aid, as well as in block grants that pay for social service programs, child support collection services, medical transportation grants and community corrections programs.

The County Board is currently awaiting decisions of the 2011 Legislature to learn if any other state revenue is at risk. Possible sources of county aid that could be reduced by the Legislature is additional county program aid, community services grants, and aid that goes to state highways, community corrections and local public health programs. When comparing the proposed 2012 budget with previous budgets, numbers show that in 2002, 51 percent of the county's revenue came from sources other than the property tax levy; in 2011, 44 percent of the county's revenue came from sources other than property taxes. Over the course of the past 10 years, the state's county program aid per capita was \$43.02 in 2000; in 2010 that number fell to \$42.60, after being adjusted for inflation.

In 2010, Washington County had the lowest operating cost per capital in the seven-county metropolitan area, and the second-lowest property tax per capita. The number of county employees has continued to fall every year since 2009, and the county currently has 1,068 employees, compared to 1,113 in 2009. Washington County's number of employees per capital is the second-lowest in the seven-county metropolitan area.

At the same time, food support cases that the county processes have more than tripled since 2004, and health care cases have grown from 6,500 to almost 8,000 between January 2008 and January 2010.

The 2012 budget will be crafted amidst continued economic uncertainty and uncertain state funding levels, while the county attempts to maintain its service quality. It is expected that there will continue to be a high demand for safety net services by county residents.

The County Board will continue to review the budget during the summer, with public hearings in the fall and final adoption in December.
