

Washington County, Minnesota

Board of Commissioners - Actions

Actions at the Tuesday, August 23, 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.

Birttnen will serve on WorkForce Investment Board

Jeffery Birttnen, Oakdale, will join the Washington County Workforce Investment Board as a labor representative, after the Washington County Board of Commissioners made the appointment Aug. 23. Birttnen will serve his first term, which will expire June 30, 2013.

The purpose of the board, established by state statute, is to determine the most effective designation of administrative entities, grant recipients and program operators for the Workforce Service Area, and provide on-site review and oversight of performance of the Workforce Investment Board programs.

Lynch reappointed to the Comfort Lake-Forest Lake Watershed District

John Lynch, Forest Lake, was reappointed to the Comfort Lake-Forest Lake Watershed District by the Washington County Board of Commissioners Aug. 23. Lynch's term will expire Sept. 22, 2014. The appointment was recommended by Commissioner Dennis Hegberg, District 1. A recommendation for Lynch was also made by the City of Forest Lake.

Watershed district governance, required by state statute, helps to control or alleviate damage by flood waters; improve stream channels for drainage or navigation; reclaim or fill wet or overflow lands; oversee water supply for irrigation; regulate the flow of streams; divert or change water courses; provide and conserve water supply; and provide for the protection of groundwater and regulation of groundwater use.

Community Corrections budget will be reduced by \$35,100 for remainder of year

The annual budget for the Washington County Department of Community Corrections was reduced by \$35,100 for the remainder of the year, after the Washington County Board of Commissioners took action on the budget Aug. 23. Washington County receives \$1.58 million through the Community Corrections Act annually from the state to assist with local correctional expenses. Recent legislation reduced the amount of funding by \$28,200 for the remainder of 2011, which will require an equal reduction in expenditures.

The reduction will be realized through \$21,625 in wages and benefits and \$6,575 in payments and materials. The reduction in wages and benefits will come through current vacancies. The remainder amount will be saved through a reduction in moving from three to two service providers in the 2012 proposed budget. The reduction in wages and benefits is based upon current vacancies. The direct materials/payments is used to contract for juvenile diversion services. Eliminating the lowest volume contractor is based upon an overall reduced need for juvenile diversion services. In addition, the department has also received a reduction of \$6,900 in Caseload/Workload Grant funds that were to be received through Dec. 31, 2011. The department will reduce its expenses by the same amount through a reduction in wages and benefits.

Traffic signal timing coming to Stillwater, Oak Park Heights

Washington County Public Works is working with the Minnesota Department of Transportation and SRF Consulting Group to develop a synchronized traffic signal system along Stillwater Boulevard (County and State Highway 5) in the cities of Stillwater and Oak Park Heights.

The Washington County Board of Commissioners approved a cooperative agreement with the City of Oak Park Heights for work on the project; a similar agreement already exists between the county and the City of Stillwater.

This coordination system will be the fourth and final system completed by the county under the Energy Efficiency and Transportation Block Grant (EECBG) program, administered by the U.S. Department of Energy under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). These traffic signal synchronization systems reduce the number of stops and delays to traffic by providing sequential green lights, thereby reducing energy consumption.

When coordinating traffic signals along an arterial roadway, it is often beneficial to include signals adjacent to the corridor on side streets to further reduce delay. This project will include the intersection of Market Boulevard and Curve Crest Boulevard in Stillwater and the intersection of 58th Street and Neal Avenue in Oak Park Heights.

The county will provide coordination times to Oak Park Heights at no cost under the project, and accepts no new maintenance responsibilities for the city's intersection. Oak Park Heights agrees to install and maintain a communications link to the rest of the system at no cost to the county or state and obtain all necessary permits. The city's participation is voluntary and it may disconnect from the system at any time, and retain authority to make timing modifications to the city's intersection at 58th Street and Neal Avenue.

Residents will rent county-owned house in Afton

New renters will occupy a home acquired by Washington County in 2008 to allow for the construction of a 800 MHZ radio tower, part of the county's public safety communication system, in Afton.

The existing residence was rented to the original property owners who subsequently vacated. Scott and Moira Schomburg have made application and met the requirements to lease the house. The term of the house lease with Scott and Moira Schomburg will be Sept. 1, 2011, to Aug. 31, 2013.

After a market analysis of the rents in the area, staff determined a rental rate of \$1,150 per month, plus the tenant pays utilities and performs routine maintenance including lawn care and snow and ice removal.

Revenue received from the house rental supplements the Parks Division Operations Fund and helps pay for the maintenance of the property.

County to purchase property records management system

The Washington County Board of Commissioners agreed to purchase a new property records management system Aug. 23. The duties of the county recorder to index and exhibit records are required by state statute.

The current property records management system was developed in-house and has been in use for more than 25 years. Since its inception, this system has been enhanced and improved; however, the current system does not allow Washington County to fulfill today's industry requirements to electronically record real property documents and provide extensive online services. The system contains 1.6 million documents, four million image pages and 68,000 Certificates of Title. A new system should provide electronic recording, enhance web services, automate workflow, and interface with the county's tax and mapping systems.

After a demonstration, the West Central Indexing RecordEASE system was found to have a superior fit with the Washington County requirements. Washington County workers collaborated with Hennepin and Ramsey counties to evaluate vendors and create training materials, standards and systems improvements, which helped reduce the cost of the project by more than \$30,000.

The cost for software and hardware will be paid from the recording technology fund; no levy funds will be used. Costs of the project include license agreement for \$320,000; software maintenance and support for \$4,000 a month for 60 months beginning 90 days after software acceptance; and software development and implementation services agreement for \$196,200. Additional costs will include purchasing servers for \$60,000 and costs for hardware maintenance of \$12,800 a year.

County will sell truck to county in need

Washington County will sell a plow truck to Clay County, a move that will help the west central county replace three plow trucks it lost to a fire in its highway shop in 2010. The Washington County Board of Commissioners approved the sale Aug. 23. After the fire, Clay County officials sought help from other Minnesota counties. Washington County had planned to trade in the tandem truck in 2011.

The L8513 Sterling, model year 2000, has 100,413 miles on it and was purchased in 2000. Clay County wishes to purchase the truck at the fair market value of \$40,078.13, which includes the tax that will be incurred by Washington County due to not having a trade-in.

State law allows the county to transfer its personal property to another public corporation for public use without going out for bid if the transfer is authorized by the County Board. The proposed Bill of Sale stipulates no warranty on the truck.

Commuter bus service to Forest Lake will continue

Funds are available to allow for another year of operation of the Rush Line Commuter Coach between Forest Lake and St. Paul, and the Washington County Board of Commissioners agreed at its Aug. 23 meeting to spend the money to support another year of operations on the route.

Route 285 provides transit service from the Forest Lake area to the Union Depot in downtown St. Paul, with a stop in White Bear Lake. It offers four inbound morning and four outbound afternoon trips that serve the Union Depot, downtown St. Paul, White Bear Theater Park and Ride, Running Aces Park and Ride, and the Forest Lake Transit Center. Ridership on the route has grown steadily from the start of service Oct. 18, 2010, and now averages approximately 130 trips a day.

Funding for Route 285 is provided by federal and local funds. The federal funds are available for service until they are spent. The local funds, which were provided by Anoka, Chisago, Ramsey and Washington counties, were provided for a one-year demonstration service and continued access to each funding partner's unspent funds requires their authorization.

Earlier in August, the Rush Line Corridor Task Force authorized the extension of Route 285 service to Oct. 21, 2012. The reasoning is new routes are typically given 18 to 24 months to show market potential. Over the eight months that the commuter coach service has been operating, ridership has grown by 50 percent. It is thought the route should be given the opportunity to continue its steady growth so that a clearer picture emerges on its viability once it has been in operation for 18 months.

Also, funding for the service will not require additional funds, only the authorization of the use of funds that have already been allocated by the counties. Federal funding is available to offset the local cost of providing a portion of the service. If service doesn't continue, the funds will no longer be available to the Rush Line Corridor.

The action taken by the Task Force is contingent upon approval by the funding partners for use of their unspent portions of the \$472,200 that was originally committed, or approximately \$61,000 per county.

Washington County approved its funding commitment of \$118,050 Dec. 16, 2008. The initial resolution specifically limited the funding to a one-year demonstration. Actual contract operating costs have been less than expected, and there remains enough funding for a second year of service, if each funding partner agrees to allow its unspent funds to be used. If it had not been approved, the service would have ceased Oct. 31.

Discussion on 2012 budget continues for county board

Budget presentations by individual departments continued before the Washington County Board Aug. 23, after the board heard an overview of the 2012 budget Aug. 9. The 2012 budget presented by the Office of Administration would reduce the county's portion of the property tax, as well as the county's operating expenditures. This is the second year in a row in which the county has not raised its portion of the property tax.

The proposed budget shows a decrease in operating expenditures to \$139.8 million, a decrease of 4.1 percent from 2011. The county has also experienced a reduction in state aid payments of \$11.6 million over the past four years.

The county expects to maintain a low tax rate and low per capita spending and property tax compared to other counties. Each department is presenting its budget during August and September. After the budgets are presented, the County Board will set a preliminary property tax levy for 2012 Sept. 13. After that, the levy may be reduced, but not raised before it is finalized in December.

Department budgets presented Aug. 23 were the Community Corrections Department, the Sheriff's Office and the Attorney's Office. The Community Corrections Department assists the state courts, provides community supervision, such as probation and parole; and oversees out-of-home placement and alternatives to jail. The department's 2012 budget calls for revenue of \$9.5 million, of which \$6.55 million will come from the county levy. State revenue will provide \$2.48 million. The remainder will be paid for by fees. The budget anticipates a 2.5 percent reduction in state funding, a 4 percent reduction in fees, and a 6 percent reduction in the use of property tax dollars.

Expenditures will be \$6.64 million for wages and benefits; \$1.98 million in direct payments; and \$880,200 in operating expenses. The department will supervise more than 7,800 people on probation in the community in 2012, with specialized supervision for offenders with a higher risk of reoffending. The department has introduced the Offender Recovery Program, which is a form of specialty court for offenders who are a high risk to re-offend and who are chemically dependent. The Sentence to Service Program continues to supervise work crews in the community, which allows offenders to complete sentences outside of jail, to reduce the use of the jail and contribute to the community. The program saves 32 beds per day in the jail.

The department also supervises 500 juveniles on probation, and uses community-based services as an alternative to more expensive residential care for juveniles. The 2012 budget calls for a 20 percent reduction in the juvenile placement budget, in which 7 percent of placements account for nearly 50 percent of the placement budget.

The Sheriff's Office prepared a budget with 231.50 full-time equivalent employees, in administration, patrol, investigation, jail and special services divisions. Of those, 22 are contracted to work specifically in schools or patrol in communities in the county which do not have police departments.

The Sheriff's Office is on track to make just more than 1,000 arrests in 2011, with about a third of them for driving while intoxicated (DWI). The office records about 36,000 calls for service and citations in a year, and investigates about 1,300 cases each year, with about 200,000 calls received by its Communication Center. The jail population stands at just more than 150 for 2011, with the number of inmates from other counties falling, along with the revenue paid for their stay in the jail. The Sheriff's Office will transcribe about 6,000 reports this year, and will serve about 5,800 civil papers. In the coming year, the Sheriff's Office will receive levy proceeds of \$21.47 million, fee revenue of \$3.47 million, and intergovernmental revenue of \$1.3 million. Wages and benefits will require almost \$20 million of the expenditures.

Budget challenges include fluctuating fuel costs, the costs of medical and mental health services for jail inmates, the costs for capital improvements and medical examiner services, and the reduction in revenue from leasing jail beds to other counties.

The County Attorney's Office is facing the challenge of caseloads that now include mortgage fraud, felony DWIs, domestic strangulation and failure to register as a predatory offender, all crimes that didn't exist years ago. There is also an increase in computer-based crimes, such as identity theft that are prosecuted. The office is also managing 700 pending real estate tax appeals, and a continued heavy caseload in child support. The office will review more than 1,300 adult felony cases, and 1,500 juvenile cases, including child protection and termination of parental rights cases.

The office has reduced the turnaround time for all case decisions, and more cases are being prosecuted than in the past. At the same time, the office has eliminated a victim witness supervisor position, and moved the victim witness coordinators to each division to improve services to victims. At the same time, attorney specialties have been identified and are being used in areas of computer and white-collar crime, vulnerable adult abuse cases, mortgage fraud and juvenile concerns.

The office will introduce efficiencies by working more closely with those working in other areas of the criminal justice system to identify areas for change. Initiatives for 2012 include reducing truancy, developing a comprehensive program on fighting domestic abuse, and creating a veterans diversion program.
