

Washington County, Minnesota

Board of Commissioners - Actions

Actions at the Tuesday, December 8, 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.

County receives positive change in ratings outlook

Washington County received notice Dec. 7 that Moody's Investors Service completed its assessments of the rating outlooks for states and local governments, and has moved the county's ratings from negative to stable. The change was reported to the County Board Dec. 8.

Moody's assigned negative outlooks to five states and 161 local governments Aug. 4, following the Aug. 2 confirmation of the U.S. government's Aaa sovereign rating and assignment of a negative outlook.

"Today's actions are based on an expanded evaluation of the exposure each municipality has to the U.S. government, including economic sensitivity to federal spending reductions, dependence on federal transfers and exposure to capital markets disruptions," said Naomi Richman, Moody's Managing Director in a news release issued by the ratings service. Moody's analysis includes specific metrics such as federal procurement activity, federal employment and healthcare employment as indicators of economic sensitivity. Medicaid expenditures for states and public hospital expenditures for local governments as indicators of direct exposure to federal spending are also considered along with the presence of short-term or puttable debt as an indicator of exposure to capital markets disruptions.

This means that Washington County again holds the highest rankings possible from two ratings firms. This will result in lower interest costs for any future bond issues or refinancing as the county will be considered a secure investment.

County Board conducts annual Truth in Taxation hearing

The Washington County Board of Commissioners conducted its annual Truth in Taxation hearing the evening of Dec. 8, to receive comments from property owners on the proposed 2012 budget and the property taxes proposed for 2012. Two residents spoke at the hearing.

The board is considering a \$139.8 million operating budget for 2012, which is a 4.1 percent decrease in expenditures from 2011. The net tax levy proposed to be paid by property owners is \$86.5 million, which is a .3 percent reduction from 2011.

Factors affecting the proposed property taxes paid by property owners include budget decisions, market value changes, and changes in the property tax system. This year, a change in the property tax system has eliminated the homestead credit and replaced it with a homestead market value exclusion. The result generally in Washington County is that if the homestead credit would have stayed in place, the typical Washington County homestead would have experienced a \$25 reduction in taxes. Under the new law, the typical homestead is experiencing a \$22 increase.

The County Board, which approved a preliminary budget in September, will approve a final budget and tax levy at its meeting Tuesday, Dec. 13, starting at 9 a.m. in the Board Room of the Washington County Government Center.

County Board approves agreements with housing organizations

The Washington County Board of Commissioners approved three agreements Dec. 8 with housing organizations to provide funding for the organizations.

The funds are from the 2011 federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and Home Investment Partnerships Program (HOME) grants. Annual grant funds for CDBG and HOME programs are used to fund high and medium priority activities identified in the Consolidated Plan approved by the County Board and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Projects approved as part of the Annual Action Plan are:

- Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity, Scattered Site Single Family from HOME funds of \$90,366. This project includes the purchase of three vacant infill lots in the cities of Cottage Grove, Forest Lake, Hugo, Newport, Oakdale or St. Paul Park, and construction of three homes for households with income at or below 80 percent of the area median income;
- Two Rivers Community Land Trust Single Family Acquisition and Rehab from HOME funds of \$94,053. Two Rivers Community Land Trust will acquire and rehabilitate three affordable homes in Washington County for households with incomes at or below 80 percent of area median income;
- Charter Oaks LLC with CDBG funds of \$209,472. Charter Oaks LLC will acquire and rehabilitate the Charter Oaks Townhomes located in Stillwater.

County Board approves new contract with mental health agency

The Washington County Board of Commissioners approved a new contract Dec. 8 with the Bridges II program, a partnership that assists low-income people with serious mental illnesses maintain housing in the community.

The Bridges II program is a partnership between the Washington County Community Services Department's Adult Mental Health units, the Washington County Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA), and Human Services, Inc. (HSI), in operation since the 1990s.

The county applies for and provides funding through a grant from the Minnesota Department of Human Services. It also provides case management for clients in the Bridges II program. The HRA provides income eligibility determination, computes and issues rental assistance, and ensures rental units meet quality standards. HSI provides housing support services such as housing search assistance, crisis response, and coaching on landlord/tenant relationships.

Bridges II assists Washington County residents who have a mental illness find and keep affordable housing by providing a housing subsidy and necessary support services. On average, nine households are served per month and many more are on the waiting list. Eligible households include individuals and families where at least one member of the household has a serious and persistent mental illness; whose income is less than 50 percent of the area median income, which is \$43,049 for family of four; and, whose assets are less than \$10,000. Clients pay between 30 percent and 40 percent of their gross income as rent and the remainder is paid by this subsidy.

The new contract adds \$8,000 to the program for 2011, allowing it to serve an additional household, and bringing the 2011 total cost to \$54,440. The new contract for 2012-2013 continues the program at \$51,440 per year.

Elevators will be brought up to code

Elevators in the Washington County Historic Courthouse in Stillwater and the Service Center in Woodbury will be brought up to state code, after the Washington County Board of Commissioners voted Dec. 8 to direct a vendor to do the project.

Washington County contracts with ThyssenKrupp Elevator Corporation to provide preventative and emergency

maintenance of county elevators. After a recent audit by the company, several items were noted that need to be addressed to bring the elevators up to 2007 Minnesota State Code standards.

The proposal to upgrade the elevator at the Historic Courthouse is \$7,316; the proposal to upgrade the elevator at the Woodbury Service Center is \$5,732.50.

Tax forfeited property will go to bank

A property in Cottage Grove will be turned over to TCF Bank after a vote by the Washington County Board of Commissioners Dec. 8, and a payment of taxes and penalties by the bank.

The property was forfeited for nonpayment of property taxes in July 2011. TCF Bank, which holds a mortgage on the property, applied to purchase the property, and provided the necessary funds. With the back taxes and penalties paid by TCF Bank, the board accepted the application by the bank, which will return the property to private ownership.
