

**OFFICIAL PROCEEDINGS OF THE REGIONAL RAILROAD AUTHORITY
WASHINGTON COUNTY, MINNESOTA
FEBRUARY 28, 2023**

The Washington County Regional Railroad Authority (WCRRA) met in regular session at 9:00 a.m. in the Washington County Government Center, County Board Room. Present were Commissioners Miron, Karwoski, Kriesel, Bigham, and Clasen. WCRRA Chair Karla Bigham presided. Also present were Kevin Corbid, County Administrator; Susan Tice, County Attorney Civil Division Chief; Stephanie Kammerud, Administrative Assistant; and county staff.

The Board recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Approval of WCRRA Minutes from January 10, 2023

Commissioner Miron moved to approve the WCRRA meeting minutes from January 10, 2023. Commissioner Clasen seconded the motion, and it was adopted unanimously.

PUBLIC WORKS

Amend Existing Option Agreement for Outlot A at Newport Transit Station

Planning Director Lyssa Leitner presented Amendment No. 4 to extend the existing option agreement between Washington County Regional Railroad Authority and Washington County Community Development Agency, for the purchase of the remaining excess property at Newport Transit Station until March 1, 2024.

Ms. Leitner reported that in 2010, the WCRRA purchased Outlot A on Maxwell Avenue in the City of Newport for construction of the Newport Transit Station. The Transit Station was constructed in 2014, and after WCRRA Board review and direction, WCRRA entered into an option agreement with the Washington County Community Development Agency (CDA) for the purchase of the remaining excess real property no longer needed for transit purposes in 2017.

Ms. Leitner reported that key points of the agreement allow CDA to demonstrate site control and continue negotiations with interested developers. Proceeds from the sale will be added to the WCRRA fund balance. The existing agreement expires on March 1, 2023. Amendment No. 4 extends the current agreement until March 1, 2024.

Ms. Leitner reported that Amendment No. 4 maintains the 2017 appraisal value of \$1,547,550. The current county assessed value for the land is \$1,367,600. However, the 2017 appraisal continues to reflect a reasonable valuation for this property. If it was to be adjusted, it would require a new appraisal and new agreement, and would likely negatively impact the CDA and potential buyer purchase agreement.

Commissioner Miron moved to adopt Amendment No. 4 to extend the existing option agreement between Washington County Regional Railroad Authority and Washington County Community Development Agency, for the purchase of the remaining excess property at Newport Transit Station until March 1, 2024. Commissioner Clasen seconded the motion, and it was adopted unanimously.

Resolution to Join the Great River Rail Commission

Senior Planner Sara Allen presented a resolution for the WCRRA to join the Great River Rail Commission as a financial member.

Ms. Allen presented a brief review of the county's previous involvement with the Great River Rail Commission. In 2017, Washington County staff began monitoring meetings of the group when it was called the High Speed Rail Commission. In 2019, the WCRRA became a member of the reformed and re-named Great River Rail Commission, and updated the joint powers agreement. On September 14, 2021, WCRRA withdrew as a member of the Great River Rail Commission. On February 13, 2023, the WCRRA received an invitation from the Great River Rail Commission to re-join.

Ms. Allen reported that in 2022, funding was secured for capital improvements to establish the Amtrak "Second Train" service between Twin Cities – Milwaukee – Chicago (TCMC), which could begin as early as mid-2023. The commission seeks to secure funding for Minnesota's share of start-up operating costs.

Great River Rail Commission goals include increasing transportation alternatives by expanding passenger rail service between the Twin Cities and Chicago, increasing freight rail capacity along the corridor, bolstering economic development in the State of Minnesota, and increasing safety for rail and highway users.

Ms. Allen reported that this membership request includes appointing Commissioner Bigham as representative on the Great River Rail Commission, and Commissioner Clasen has indicated interest in being alternate to the commission. Pro-rated dues in 2023 would be \$2,980 and are covered by existing budgeted revenue. Annual membership dues are \$4,470.

Commissioner Karwoski moved to adopt the resolution to join the Great River Rail Commission as a financial member, and it was seconded by Commissioner Clasen.

Commissioner Karwoski supports this membership, which will allow Washington County to be at the table and support rail safety. Commissioner Karwoski said the connection at Union Depot in St. Paul is also a Gold Line Bus Rapid Transit stop, and he hopes this route will lead to other routes throughout the country.

Commissioner Kriesel noted that the county has been a member of the commission previously, and subsequently withdrew its membership. Commissioner Kriesel said that he does not see the benefit to Washington County of this membership. Commissioner Kriesel stated he would rather see this item tabled until March, so staff can provide the board with additional information.

Commissioner Miron noted that he shares Commissioner Kriesel's concerns. Commissioner Miron said he understands the value to the region and to Ramsey County. However, he believes Washington County does not have any rationale for becoming a member again of this commission. Commissioner Miron said in regards to ranking county priorities, there are other priorities that constituents would support, that would be of higher priority than this for him.

Commissioner Bigham expressed appreciation for Commissioner Kriesel and Commissioner Miron's opinions. During the past few years, the Washington County Board supported the appropriation from the state for the TCMC Second Train to Chicago, and since that passed, there is now state and federal dollars being appropriated for Amtrak that will increase passenger rail. Commissioner Bigham said for the short-term, this membership is to help; not only as a scheduling conduit with Amtrak, but Washington County needs to have a voice/vote at the table. The TCMC Second Train goes directly through Commissioner Bigham's district. For the long-term, Commissioner Bigham hopes to have a discussion in the future about a station stop with Amtrak in Newport. There is significant federal money and commitment for rail safety. Commissioner Bigham does not want Washington County to be a flyover county, she wants us to be at the table and to be heard in a meaningful way. Commissioner Bigham believes this is a good investment to help with economic development.

Commissioner Miron moved to table this item to the second meeting in April, seconded by Commissioner Kriesel. Motion did not prevail.

Commissioner Clasen reiterated that the TCMC Second Train goes through Commissioner Bigham's district, and the county has infrastructure that goes around that area, such as the Recycling & Energy Center and the Newport Transit Station. Commissioner Clasen said with Commissioner Bigham at the table, the county is able to protect its infrastructure and future plans for the area.

Resolution No. RRA-2023-002:

**RESOLUTION TO JOIN THE GREAT RIVER RAIL
COMMISSION AS A MEMBER OF THEIR
JOINT POWERS BOARD**

WHEREAS, The Minnesota High Speed Rail Commission (Commission) was established in 2009 as a joint powers board under the provisions of Minnesota Statutes Section 471.59 and Chapter 398A; and

WHEREAS, the Commission is established by a Joint Powers Agreement by and between 16 local and regional governments from St. Paul to La Crosse; and

WHEREAS, in 2019, the High Speed Rail Commission was Re-Established as the Great River Rail Commission (the Commission) with the Authority approving the JPA by Resolution No. RRA-2019-002; and

WHEREAS, the Commission advocates for the development of faster and more frequent passenger rail service between Chicago and Saint Paul along the Twin Cities-Milwaukee-Chicago (TCMC) Corridor; and

WHEREAS, the Commission has recently achieved its primary objective of securing support and funding for the implementation of the Twin Cities-

Milwaukee-Chicago (TCMC) Second Train project, a new daily addition of a 411-mile round-trip passenger train between the Twin Cities and Chicago that could begin service as early as mid-2023; and

WHEREAS, the Commission is now to help secure funding for Minnesota's share of the start-up operating cost, and pursue a long-range vision for additional investment in passenger rail service supported by an established state rail fund; and

WHEREAS, the Washington County Regional Railroad Authority (WCRRA) received a letter dated February 13, 2023, from the Chair of the Commission, inviting the WCRRA to join the Commission as a Financial Member.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Washington County Regional Railroad Authority hereby accepts the invitation from the Great River Rail Commission to join the Great River Rail Commission Joint Powers Agreement, consistent with Agreement terms, and authorizes the Chair and Chief Clerk to execute the Agreement.

The resolution was adopted 3-2 with a Roll Call vote as follows: Ayes, Commissioners Karwoski, Clasen, and Bigham. Nays, Commissioners Miron and Kriesel.

Appoint Representative and Alternate to the Great River Rail Commission

Commissioner Clasen moved to appoint Commissioner Bigham as representative to the Great River Rail Commission. Commissioner Karwoski seconded the motion, and it was adopted unanimously.

Commissioner Karwoski moved to appoint Commissioner Clasen as alternate to the Great River Rail Commission. Commissioner Kriesel seconded the motion, and it was adopted unanimously.

Adjournment

There being no further business to come before the WCRRA, Chair Bigham adjourned the meeting at 9:31 a.m.

Attest:



Kevin Corbid
County Administrator



Karla Bigham, Chair
Washington County Regional Railroad Authority