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**Date:** Sept. 24, 2019  
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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The following actions were taken at the Sept. 24, 2019, Washington County Board of Commissioners meeting at the Government Center in Stillwater, Minnesota

### **Washington County will receive grant for victims, witnesses programs**

Washington County will receive a \$280,000 grant from the Minnesota Department of Public Safety for ongoing services to victims of crime, after the County Board accepted the grant Sept. 24.

The money is to be used for fiscal years 2020 and 2021.

State law requires victim notification of events in the criminal and juvenile justice systems. State and federal funding for personnel costs associated with victim witness services have been in place since 1990 in varying amounts.

**Contact: Pete Orput, County Attorney, 651-430-6124**

### **Washington County will set aside portion of proceeds of tax-forfeited lands for parks**

Washington County will set aside 20 percent of the proceeds of tax-forfeited land in the county to buy or maintain parkland, after the County Board approved the process Sept. 24.

State law allows the County Board to set aside up to 20 percent of the net proceeds from the sale of tax-forfeited property for the acquisition and maintenance of county parks or recreational areas. The County Board must approve the set aside of these funds on an annual basis.

The ownership of property that forfeits because of the non-payment of property taxes rests with the state, and the counties are tasked with the management and disposition of the property. When a tax-forfeited property is sold to a governmental agency or the public, the proceeds are deposited into the

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county's tax-forfeited sale fund. Prior to any distribution of funds from this account, the department recovers the costs for management of the tax-forfeited land in the county.

From the net proceeds remaining, the distribution established in state law is 20 percent of fund proceeds go to the county for acquisition and maintenance of county parks and recreational areas, and of the remaining amount, 40 percent is distributed to the county general fund, 40 percent to the school district, and 20 percent to the city or township.

The financial implications for the county vary by year, depending on the amount of sale proceeds from tax-forfeited land and maintenance costs.

**Contact: Jennifer Wagenius, Property Records and Taxpayer Services, 651-430-6182**

### **County Board reviews temporary on-sale liquor license for Big River Farms**

The Washington County Board of Commissioners reviewed an application for a one-day temporary on-sale liquor license from The Food Group, which is Big River Farms, Sept. 24.

The group plans a one-day event Sept. 29 at the farm in May Township.

The Sheriff's Office has been notified of this event. The requirements for issuing the license have been met, and the appropriate fee has been provided by the applicant.

**Contact: Jennifer Wagenius, Property Records and Taxpayer Services, 651-430-6182**

### **County Board amends purchase agreement to buy land to add to St. Croix Bluffs Regional Park**

The Washington County Board of Commissioners amended a purchase agreement it approved June 11 to purchase 102 acres north of St. Croix Bluffs Regional Park from the Rowe Trust to add to the park in Denmark Township.

Since the June agreement, the title to the property revealed a recreational easement for the adjacent property on a portion of property that abuts the St. Croix River. Additionally, the appraisal was amended to reflect a reduction in value for the recreational easement.

The board agreed Sept. 24 to amend the purchase agreement to reflect that the purchase is subject to a recreational easement and a \$15,000 reduction in the purchase price of \$2.95 million to address the value change for the encumbrance of the recreational easement.

The purchase price will be funded by the county's Land and Water Legacy Program proceeds. The county will request reimbursement from the Metropolitan Council for 75 percent of the acquisition cost.

The purchase was initiated by the property owner, Rowe Trust, that advised the county of its interest in selling the property.

**Contact: Sharon Price, Right-of-Way Specialist-Property Manager, 651-430-4391**

### **County will receive grant for radiological emergency preparedness**

Washington County will receive a \$229,000 grant for radiological emergency preparedness from the Minnesota Department of Public Safety, Homeland Security and Emergency Management, after the County Board approved a grant agreement Sept. 24.

The Radiological Emergency Preparedness grant funds will be used to provide and maintain local emergency response services, assure responders receive complete annual radiological training, provide equipment and training for the Cottage Grove Radiological Reception Center, and to conduct a Federal Emergency Management Agency evaluated exercise once every eight years in compliance with federal and state regulations.

The grant term is through June 30, 2021, and there is no local match required for this grant.

**Contact: Sheriff Dan Starry, 651-430-7601**

### **County Board reviews annual report to HUD**

The Washington County Board of Commissioners reviewed the 2018 Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Report (CAPER) from the county's Community Development Agency Sept. 24.

The report details Washington County's progress toward meeting the goals outlined in Washington County's 2015-2019 Consolidated Plan and projects undertaken with 2018 Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and the Home Investment Partnerships (HOME) program funds. The CAPER is a means to communicate to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and policymakers how funds are spent and the impact the programs make in the community. The full

report may be viewed on the Washington County Community Development Agency's (CDA) website at [www.washingtoncountycda.org](http://www.washingtoncountycda.org).

Washington County's Program Year 2018 accomplishments include providing nine home improvement loans, a rectory conversion into a five-bedroom emergency shelter, sewer drain improvements in Landfall, capital improvements to 184 rental units in Cottage Grove, the acquisition and improvements of a single-family home in Forest Lake, construction of four single-family homes in Hugo, and the acquisition of six vacant lots in the Red Rock Corridor.

Funds also were used to prevent homelessness by providing public services to 1,702 people who had housing emergencies.

The draft CAPER was released for public comment and published on the CDA's website with instructions on how to comment in August, and comment was open until mid-September.

The funds from the federal programs were used to leverage \$2.1 million in other funding for the projects.

**Contact: Melissa Taphorn, Community Development Agency Deputy Executive Director, 651-202-2821**

### **County Board takes first formal action on 2020 county budget**

The Washington County Board of Commissioners took the first formal steps in approving the county's 2020 budget Sept. 24.

The board:

- certified the proposed property tax levy payable 2020 for Washington County, with a net levy of \$114.5 million, a 5.94 percent increase from 2019;
- certified the proposed property tax levy payable 2020 for the Washington County Regional Rail Authority of \$660,000, with no change from 2019;
- adopted the Washington County proposed 2020 budget, with operating expenditures of \$194.7 million, an increase of 3.78 percent over 2019, and capital expenditures of \$39.8 million, a decrease of 51.48 percent from 2019;
- adopted the Washington County Regional Rail Authority proposed 2020 budget of \$689,000; and

- consented to the proposed property tax levy of \$5.4 million payable 2020 for the Washington County Community Development Agency.

The proposed budget includes non-levy revenue of \$134.2 million, a decrease of 3.91 percent from 2019, and expenditures of \$26.9 million for the Gold Line Transit project.

The board will continue to review the budget through the fall, until a public hearing on the budget is conducted Dec. 3, and the adoption of the final budget Dec. 10. While the board has set the proposed property tax levy payable in 2020, it may still lower that levy before December, but it may not raise it.

The board received its first overview of the county's 2020 budget at a workshop Aug. 13, and continued the review with individual county departments presenting more detailed proposed budgets at workshops through September. The presentations reviewed by the board may be found on the county website [www.co.washington.mn.us](http://www.co.washington.mn.us) by searching "budget."

The proposed budget reflects the continued population growth in the county, which is now the third fastest growing county in the state, growing at an annual rate of 1.8 percent. Increased population requires additional road improvements, increased county services, and buildings in which to house those services. More people place demands on recreational opportunities in county parks, and services at county libraries.

The property tax levy set Sept. 24 translates into a 2.8 percent decrease in the county's tax rate. This would be the sixth time in the last seven years that the county tax rate would fall. Should the proposed levy be approved, the impact on the owner of the median-valued home in the county, which is \$295,200, would be an increase of \$33 a year in county taxes.

The proposed budget:

- provides increased investment in public safety;
- provides the technology infrastructure improvements needed to secure and protect data, increase efficiency, and fund license agreements;
- addresses deferred maintenance within parks facilities, parks maintenance, and staffing;
- uses a state aid increase for capital costs and equipment to provide greater budgetary flexibility;
- includes even-year election staff and election operations;

- provides additional service staff in license centers to reduce wait times;
- pays for increasing replacement costs in Public Works and Sheriff's Office fleet; and
- adds staff to handle increasing caseloads and service demands throughout the organization.

Should the proposed budget be adopted in December, the county would reduce its number of employees per 1,000 residents from 4.9 to 4.8, and both its operating expenses and its tax rate are expected to be second lowest among the seven counties in the Minnesota metropolitan area.

**Contact: Kevin Corbid, Deputy Administrator, 651-430-6003**