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Date: Aug. 4, 2020
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The following actions were taken at the Aug. 4, 2020, Washington County Board of Commissioners meeting at the Government Center in Stillwater, Minnesota

Forest Lake business receives property tax relief after fire

The Washington County Board of Commissioners agreed to property tax relief Aug. 4 for a property owned by Lakes Holding LLC that was partially destroyed by a fire in 2018.

The property tax relief will include \$3,485 from the City of Forest Lake, \$2,956 from the Forest Lake School District 831, \$2,626 from Washington County, \$3,224 from the State of Minnesota, and \$521 from special taxing districts, including watershed districts.

As required by law, the county gave the city and the school district a 20-day notice of the property tax relief, and no comments were received from them.

Contact: Joanne Helm, Property Records and Taxpayer Services Deputy Director, 651-430-6195

County Board will hear comments on implementing county cross-country ski pass

The Washington County Board of Commissioners will conduct a public hearing Sept. 15 to consider revisions to the county's fee schedule to allow the implementation of a Washington County specific cross-country ski pass beginning this winter.

A public hearing is required for revisions to the county fee policy to allow the collection of a county-specific pass program. The hearing will be during the County Board meeting at 9 a.m. Sept. 15 in the County Board Room of the Government Center in Stillwater.

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Washington County has been part of the Great Minnesota Ski Pass since 1980. The state-run program has seen no increase in revenue since 2008 to assist in the maintenance of cross-country ski trails. In recent years, the fund has not generated enough revenue to off-set grant expenses, which has delayed payments to Washington County and has the potential for funding gaps. State grant requirements for the county to receive funding have also increased, which takes additional county administrative time and limits the county's ability to collect revenue.

Creating a county cross-country ski pass will reduce an administrative burden for county staff, maintain revenue, create a lower barrier to entry for new skiers, and allow more flexibility in county operations.

Contact: Wayne Sandberg, Public Works Deputy Director/County Engineer, 651-430-4339

TKDA will do planning for trail in Newport south of Wakota Bridge

TKDA will do preliminary engineering to eliminate a gap in a multi-use trail along County State Aid Highway (CSAH) 38 in Newport, after the Washington County Board of Commissioners agreed to a \$130,700 contract with the company Aug. 4.

This section of county highway was re-built in 2003, in conjunction with the Wakota Bridge project, led by Minnesota Department of Transportation. Due to right-of-way challenges at the time, pedestrian accommodations were not installed in this area, leaving a gap in the area's multi-use trail. Washington County received \$460,000 in federal grants to construct the project.

This preliminary engineering work will include project coordination, preliminary engineering, public engagement, environmental investigations, geotechnical analysis, and utility coordination necessary to build the trail. The project is scheduled for construction in 2023.

Contact: Kevin Peterson, Engineer II, 651-430-4330

Valdes Lawn & Snow Removal will do landscaping at Hadley, Highway 36

Valdes Lawn & Snow Removal LLC will do landscaping at the Highway 36 and Hadley Avenue interchange that was built last summer.

The Washington County Board of Commissioners approved a \$140,292 contract with the company Aug. 4 for the work.

The contract includes a two-year warranty for plantings that are installed.

The County Board also approved a cost-sharing agreement with the City of Oakdale for the project, which will pay about 38% of the cost, or \$84,516. The Minnesota Department of Transportation will also pay about 38% of the cost, or \$86,623.

Contact: Kevin Peterson, Engineer II, 651-430-4330

Sheriff's Office will add investigator to work on mental health response with federal grant

The Washington County Sheriff's Office will add a full-time deputy sheriff investigator, using a \$125,000 federal grant, administered by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, to be used between July 1, 2020, and June 30, 2023.

The County Board accepted the grant, and approved a \$182,400 local match for the three-year grant, which is required for acceptance of the money.

The grant will allow the Sheriff's Office to dedicate one full-time deputy sheriff to mental health crisis responses. The deputy sheriff will work collaboratively with county social workers.

Contact: Sheriff Dan Starry, 651-430-7601

County will use federal CARES funds to keep elections safe

Washington County will use funds from the federal CARES (Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security) Act to ensure the health and safety of in-person voters and election officials.

The County Board approved the use of the funding, and the submittal of a request to the Secretary of State Aug. 4.

The Office of the Secretary of State received federal funding "to prevent, prepare for, and respond to coronavirus, domestically or internationally, for the 2020 Federal election cycle," including distributing money to local governments for use consistent with the state and federal requirements.

The county will receive \$218,118, and almost half will be shared with cities and townships.

State law outlines the categories for which the funds can be used, including ensuring the health and safety of election officials and in-person voters, including the purchase of sanitation and disinfectant supplies; public outreach to outline social distancing guidelines; preparation for increased absentee

voting, including voter education materials, printing, and postage; training local election officials in preparation of new polling place locations; and purchasing an electronic roster system.

The grant requires a 20% financial match for eligible expenditures.

Contact: Debra Ledvina, Property Records and Taxpayer Services Director, 651-430-6182, or Steve Gransee, Taxpayer Services & Election Division Manager, 651-430-8272

Washington County board begins review of 2021 county budget

The Washington County Board of Commissioners began its review of the county's 2021 budget Aug. 4.

The board will review the county's recommended operating and capital budgets over the next several months. Tuesday's presentation included budgets for the county's internal services departments, the Office of Administration, Accounting & Finance, Human Resources, and Information Technology.

The board's budget calendar calls for workshops on individual department budgets, which are open to the public and webcast from the county's website, through August and September. The board is expected to adopt a preliminary 2021 levy Sept. 15. Once the County Board sets the preliminary levy, it may lower it but it cannot raise it in the final budget.

The County Board will conduct a public hearing on the budget after 6 p.m. Dec. 1, and is scheduled to adopt a final budget Dec. 15.

The County Board is beginning work on the 2021 budget during a time of great uncertainty created by the response to and economic recession caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Washington County continues to be growing in households and population. That growth increases the demand for county services.

At the same time, the county is the safety net level of government for residents who may be experiencing economic hardship due to the pandemic, and the county may be called upon to provide more human services for residents in the coming year.

The recommended budget calls for a .63% increase in the county's tax levy, which, when combined with the growth in the county's tax base, would translate into an almost 5% decrease in the county's tax rate. Should the recommended levy be approved, the impact on the owner of the median valued

home in the county, which is \$308,000, would see a decrease of \$21 a year in county taxes. The recommended levy would fall from \$431 per capita in 2020 to \$429 in 2021.

In addition to the uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, no county employee labor agreements have been negotiated for 2021. The county recommended budget anticipates receiving less revenue than previously from the state for infrastructure projects, such as roads and bridges, with a reduction in the state's gas tax and leased vehicle tax revenue. The capital projects being considered in the recommended budget include pavement and roadway reconstruction, as well as the construction of an interchange at Manning and Highway 36 in Stillwater, traffic signal and trail work at Interstate 694 and County State Aid Highway (CSAH) 14 in Oakdale, and work on CSAH 19 from Dale Road to CSAH 18 in Woodbury.

The budget proposes seven new employee positions for 2021, with one being paid for with levy dollars, and the other six being paid for with state and federal human services funding. If the recommended positions are to be added, the county's employees per 1,000 capita would fall from the current 5 to 4.9.

The recommended net levy for 2021 would be \$115.2 million, with recommended non-levy revenue of \$115.5 million; operating expenditures are recommended to be \$195.3 million; and capital expenditures are recommended to be \$48.2 million.

The recommended budgets for the departments reviewed Tuesday – the Office of Administration, Accounting & Finance, Human Resources, and Information Technology – have few recommended changes from 2020. The Information Technology Department had increased demands placed on it earlier in the year to maintain data security while providing infrastructure to support telework and other remote working programs for county employees who worked from home during the stay-at-home order from the governor earlier in the year.

The Community Development Agency also presented its recommended budget for 2021 Aug. 4. The agency oversees housing in the county, including senior housing. The agency also works with landlords to expand housing choices in the county, and preserve existing affordable housing, and to provide rental assistance for families, veterans, seniors, and people with disabilities.

The agency promotes economic development opportunities in the county by furthering development opportunities, creating shovel-ready sites, and leveraging private investment through the Open to Business program and its predevelopment finance fund.

The agency's income comes from rental revenue from its properties, grants, investment income, and the property tax levy. Next year's recommended property levy of \$5.4 million would be the same as it was for 2020.

Additional information on the proposed 2021 budget may be found on the county's website www.co.washington.mn.us by searching "budget."

Contact: Jennifer Wagenius, Deputy Administrator, 651-430-6007, or Jan Lucke, Deputy Administrator, 651-430-6003