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Washington County Board takes comment on 2021 budget

The Washington County Board of Commissioners presented the county's proposed 2021 budget at an evening meeting Dec. 1.

No county residents commented during the meeting. Some residents did view the discussion virtually.

The Washington County Board of Commissioners took the first formal steps in approving the county's 2021 budget Sept. 15.

The board:

- certified the proposed property tax levy payable 2021 for Washington County, with a net levy of \$114.5 million, no change from 2020;
- certified the proposed property tax levy payable 2021 for the Washington County Regional Rail Authority of \$660,000, also no change from 2020;
- adopted the Washington County proposed 2021 budget, with operating expenditures of \$195.3 million, an increase of .24% over 2020, and capital expenditures of \$48.4 million, an increase of 21.7% from 2020;
- adopted the Washington County Regional Rail Authority proposed 2021 budget of \$669,200; and
- consented to the proposed property tax levy of \$5.4 million payable 2021 for the Washington County Community Development Agency.

The proposed budget includes non-levy revenue of \$115.8 million, an increase of 7.82% from 2020, and expenditures of \$24.9 million for the Gold Line Transit project.

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If the proposed levy is adopted, the county's tax rate, which is also determined by growth in the county's tax base, would decrease 5.7%, and the county's property tax on the median-valued home in the county would decrease by 3.4%. Should the recommended levy be approved, the impact on the owner of the median valued home in the county, which is \$307,500, would be a decrease of \$28 a year in county taxes.

The county tax rate would continue to decrease, as it has in the four previous years. The tax rate would continue to be the second lowest county tax rate tax rate in the seven-county metropolitan area. The county's fiscal position during the budget process shows a decreasing tax rate, an increasing tax base, a drop in excess interest earnings, a stable fund balance that meets county policy, and continued response to rising service demands from a county that continues to grow and develop. Uncertainties for the county during its budget process included the impact of COVID-19 on county revenue, employee labor agreements that remain open for 2021, a desire to minimize the need for a levy increase; and lower amounts of one-time revenue from reduced interest earnings.

Major construction projects included in the budget are the Manning Avenue/Highway 36 interchange, a signal and trail project at Interstate 694 and County State Aid Highway (CSAH) 14, a traffic signal communication upgrade, and an upgrade of Woodbury Drive between Bailey Road and Dale Road. The budget's final adoption will be Dec. 15. While the board has set the proposed property tax levy payable in 2021, it may still lower that levy before Dec. 15, but it may not raise it.

All budget workshops were webcast, and archives are on the county's website, www.co.washington.mn.us, found by searching "County Board Meeting Webstream."