



Our Mission: Providing quality services through responsible leadership, innovation and the cooperation of dedicated people

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The following actions were taken at the June 1, 2021, Washington County Board of Commissioners meeting at the Government Center in Stillwater, Minnesota

County Regional Railroad Authority elects leadership, amends budget

The Washington County Board of Commissioners, sitting as the Regional Railroad Authority June 1, elected its leadership for 2021, electing Commissioner Wayne Johnson as chair and Commissioner Stan Karwoski as vice chair.

The authority also approved a budget amendment to a contract with Kimley-Horn and Associates to add \$13,000 to increase the scope of the study that the company is doing on the Highway 36 Corridor Transit Feasibility Study.

The Highway 36 Corridor Transit Feasibility study is exploring transit opportunities in the highway's corridor through analysis of existing and emerging mobility needs within the corridor. The Washington County Regional Railroad Authority approved the initial budget amendment and study contract with Kimley-Horn and Associates in March 2020. The study scope expanded beyond the initial key tasks to support public engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic and add a fourth transit scenario and the related analysis.

Contact: Emily Jorgensen, Planner II, 651-430-4338

County will receive funds to help decrease auto theft

Washington County will receive \$116,200 in an auto theft prevention grant after the County Board accepted the grant from the Minnesota Department of Commerce June 1.

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The money will be used over the next two years.

The Washington County Attorney's Office has been receiving this specific grant since 2005. The grant amount fluctuates each grant cycle.

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

County Attorney's Office to receive reimbursement for prosecuting prison inmates

The Washington County Attorney's Office will be reimbursed for the cost of prosecuting inmates in the Stillwater and Oak Park Heights correctional facilities who are involved in criminal activity.

The County Board approved an agreement with the state Department of Corrections, Facilities Division, June 1 to receive the funds. The agreement goes through June 30, 2022.

The state reimburses the expenses of the county attorney resulting from activities involving inmates of state correctional institutions in the county.

Contact: Attorney Pete Orput, 651-430-6124

County Board conducts public hearing on county development code to coordinate membership between citizen advisory groups

The Washington County Board of Commissioners conducted a public hearing June 1 to consider amendments to the Washington County Development Code to enable coordination of membership between the Planning Advisory Commission (PAC) and the Board of Adjustment and Appeals (BAA) as recommended by the Planning Advisory Commission.

In 2018, a significant amount of land use authority was assumed by townships, resulting in a reduction in the volume of work for the PAC and BAA, with less frequent meetings. That created practical challenges for the efficient functioning of the committees and for making effective use of the time of residents' who serve as members. The County Board has reviewed the potential changes, and set the public hearing to receive public comments on the changes.

To implement the changes, sections of the Washington County Development Code that set out the makeup of the two boards need to be repealed and replaced. The County Board referred the issue to the PAC for its study, report, and recommendation. At its meeting in April, the PAC made a

recommendation to the County Board to repeal and replace sections of the Development Code by ordinance.

Under the merger, the county will maintain the two boards, with identical membership, with seven members each. Meetings will be conducted on the same date, one after the other.

After the public hearing, the County Board will consider the input gathered before officially repealing and replacing sections of the code by ordinance. The transition to the new configuration of the PAC and BAA would occur as individual appointments expire or resignations occur, and no current member will be asked to relinquish an appointment.

The board could act as soon as June 15.

Contact: Kurt Howard, Planner II, 651-430-4307

County Board conducts public hearing update current Washington County transportation sales tax

The Washington County Board of Commissioners conducted a public hearing June 1 to consider increasing the transportation sales tax to a rate up to 0.5%, and an update to the list of projects eligible to use revenue from this tax.

The hearing remains open for comment until June 15.

The board had previously studied the proposal for nearly a year during 2019, but suspended discussion once the COVID-19 pandemic emerged in March 2020.

The tax, generally referred to as the Local Option Sales Tax, is imposed by a state law that allows local governments to levy a sales and use tax of up to .5% and a vehicle excise tax of up to \$20 per vehicle. Washington County currently has a .25% sales and use tax, and a \$20 vehicle excise tax. Fifty-one other counties in the state have similar taxes. The County Board must conduct a public hearing to raise the tax.

The revenue raised by the tax may be used for roads or bridges, and for both capital and operating costs of transit projects.

Previously, the board reviewed a list of projects that would benefit from the increased sales tax. If the tax were to be increased, it is estimated that it would raise an additional \$10 million annually.

With Washington County's population growth, the county is responsible for expanding highways to meet that growth, and rebuilding interchanges to improve safety for the traveling public.

General road maintenance is also falling behind, and the pavement on county roads is deteriorating more quickly than there are resources to repair it. Other road projects in the county are backlogged.

If the board chooses to move the tax increase ahead, it would make a decision, possibly at its June 15 meeting. The county must report its decision to the state Department of Revenue before the tax may be collected.

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

County Board proclaims Summer at Your Library

The Washington County Board of Commissioner proclaimed June 1 to Aug. 31 as Summer at Your Library in Washington County.

The board made the proclamation June 1.

Washington County Library is getting ready to celebrate its summer learning program, Summer at Your Library. The program includes events and activities to encourage children, teens, and adults to make reading and learning part of their summer plans.

The board's proclamation noted that libraries are at the heart of their cities, towns, counties, and communities, serving as accessible and inclusive places that foster a sense of belonging and connection. They also offer opportunities for everyone to explore new worlds and become their best selves through access to technology, collections, and programs. In times of crisis, such as during the pandemic, libraries and library workers play an invaluable role in supporting their communities both in person and virtually, and the Washington County Library staff worked to creatively offer support and services to community members throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, participation in summer library programs can neutralize summer learning loss, and improve comprehension and memory skills for children and teens, and summer programs and activities encourage library users of all ages to become lifelong readers and learners.

Contact: Aubrey Fonfara, Communications Specialist, 651-275-8504

County will continue participation in Performance Measurement Program

Washington County will continue to participate in the Performance Measurement Program and submit the report on the 11 standard measures created by the Council on Local Results and Innovation to the Office of the State Auditor.

The County Board agreed to participation June 1, the 11th year that the county has participated. In 2010, the Legislature created the Council on Local Results and Innovation, tasked with creating a standard set of 10 measures for cities and 10 measures for counties. The list of measures was reviewed by the council and revised in 2013, when the council released an expanded set of performance measures.

Participation in the standard measures program is voluntary. A county that elects to participate in the standards measures program may be eligible for a reimbursement of 14 cents per capita in county program aid, not to exceed \$25,000.

Washington County has a longstanding commitment to performance measurement and quality improvement and is able to report the standard set of measures with little additional work.

The county will report the results of the 10 adopted measures to residents on the county website at www.co.washington.mn.us/performanceasures, as well as including the report in its budget documents and filing a copy with the Office of the State Auditor.

Contact: Amanda Hollis, Senior Planner, 651-430-6021