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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The following actions were taken at the June 15, 2021, Washington County Board of Commissioners meeting at the Government Center in Stillwater, Minnesota

Hammons named to Workforce Development Board

The Washington County Board of Commissioners appointed Bobby Hammons from Schwieters Companies in Hugo as a business representative to the county's Workforce Development Board June 15.

Hammons will serve in a partial first term that will expire Dec. 31, 2023.

Contact: Alyssa Soderlund, Administrative Assistant, 651-430-6015

County to receive money to serve homeless during pandemic

The Washington County Board of Commissioners accepted a \$25,832 grant from the Minnesota Department of Human Services June 15.

The money will be used to provide financial support for emergency shelter and outreach to those experiencing homelessness throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Contact: Sarah Tripple, Community Services Planning & Program Manager, 651-430-6480

County to receive money to prevent fraud

The Washington County Board of Commissioners accepted a \$260,000 grant from the Minnesota Department of Human Services June 15 for a fraud prevention investigation program.

The money will fund the program from July 1 through June 30, 2023.

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The county's Community Services Department works with the county Sheriff's Office to operate a fraud prevention investigation program, and the funding will cover costs related to the program.

Contact: George Stone, Community Services Division Manager, 651-430-6472

County Board continues public hearing to update current Washington County transportation sales tax, approves update

The Washington County Board of Commissioners continued a public hearing June 15 to consider increasing the transportation sales tax to a rate up to 0.5%, and to review an update to the list of projects eligible to use revenue from this tax.

The hearing was opened for comment June 1. After closing the public hearing June 15, the board approved the update to the transportation tax. The tax will start Oct. 1.

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. With an increase, it is estimated that the tax 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.

County Board members stated that the tax reduces the reliance on property tax to fund road and bridge projects.

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