

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

**Date:** July 27, 2021  
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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The following actions were taken at the July 27, 2021, Washington County Board of Commissioners meeting at the Government Center in Stillwater, Minnesota

### **County Board accepts donations received by county in second quarter 2021**

The Washington County Board of Commissioners accepted donations that the county received in the second quarter of 2021 at its meeting July 27.

The Library received \$656.40 from donation boxes, the Washington County Library Partners, and from an individual who designated the donation to be used to buy paperbacks and audiobooks and support book clubs.

The Parks received \$168 through the donation boxes at the Historic Courthouse.

The Sheriff's Office received donations of \$1,010, to be used for community engagement and the Explorers Program. A donation was also provided by the City of Landfall Village for the Cops and Kids Fishing Event.

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### **County Board makes appointments to citizen advisory groups**

The Washington County Board of Commissioners made citizen advisory appointments July 27.

Those appointments are:

- Chris Loth, Forest Lake, was appointed to a partial first term as a manager on the Comfort Lake-Forest Lake Watershed District to a term expiring Sept. 23, 2022;

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- Peter Koerner, Cottage Grove police chief, was appointed as the law enforcement representative on the Community Corrections Advisory Board to a partial first term that will expire Dec. 31, 2021; and
- Kelly Ammerman, Stillwater, was appointed to the Disabled Veterans Rest Camp Association Board to a partial first term expiring Dec. 31, 2022.

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

### **County will receive state money to provide services to those without homes**

Washington County will receive \$120,000 annually for the next three years from the Minnesota Department of Human Services to provide services to those who are without permanent homes.

The County Board accepted the grant July 27.

The county had a grant for \$240,000 through the Department of Human Services for the Project for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH) that ran through the end of June. The money is used to fund outreach and case management for individuals experiencing homelessness and diagnosed with a mental illness or substance use disorder.

The majority of the next grant, 77%, will be dedicated to staff costs; 18% of the grant will be used for direct assistance for people served, such as application fees, damage deposits, and first months' rent; and the remaining 5% of the funds will be used for administrative expenses.

Outreach is conducted by social workers on the HOST (Homeless Outreach Services Team) team, who engage with individuals through the county's housing walk-in hours, as well as through contact with residents at highway rest areas, drop-in centers, libraries, and parks. Once engaged with households, HOST staff can provide ongoing case management and assist individuals in accessing housing and other services needed.

**Contact: Kathy Mickelson, Community Services Division Manager, 651-430-6532**

### **County Board appoints deputy registrar**

The Washington County Board of Commissioners appointed Neng Lor as the Washington County Drivers License Agent and the Washington County Deputy Registrar July 27.

Lor will oversee the offices in Forest Lake, Stillwater, and Woodbury. State laws provide for the appointment of a County Drivers License Agent and Deputy Registrar. Lor serves as the Division Manager of the county's license and service centers.

**Contact: Debra Ledvina, Property Records and Taxpayer Services Director, 651-430-6182**

### **Parks projects recognized by Minnesota Recreation and Park Association**

Washington County Parks was recognized for two projects by the Minnesota Recreation and Park Association. The awards were presented to the County Board July 27.

The Minnesota Recreation and Park Association (MRPA), Awards of Excellence Program, is an annual program that recognizes agencies or organizations in Minnesota for outstanding achievements in parks, recreation, and leisure service. The awards recognize programs, projects, or initiatives implemented or revised in 2020.

Washington County received MRPA awards in the Marketing and Communications Category for Lake Elmo Park Reserve Wayfinding and in the Program and Events Category for Nature's Art Gallery

The wayfinding project was an overhaul of all trail signs at Lake Elmo Park Reserve, a 2,179-acre park with trails along different landscapes, including prairies, oak savannah forests, and wetlands. Trails are designated for hiking, horse riding, and mountain biking in the summer and snowmobiling, skiing, skijoring, and snowshoeing in the winter. The Wayfinding Project is a tool to gain a fundamental understanding of where park users are within the park. In the end, more than 200 new signs/maps were ordered and placed throughout the park. Benches and bike racks have been purchased and will be installed to create better user experiences, and five new trailheads were developed for people accessing trails within the park. The top priority for the wayfinding project was to keep it simple for new park users to understand.

The Nature's Art Gallery invited park visitors to see nature from an artist's perspective through a new program at Washington County Parks. The goal of the program was to encourage visitors to hike park trails while enjoying views and natural elements as if they were at a gallery. Natural elements were "framed" using simple black picture frames installed with metal stakes at regular intervals throughout a park trail to highlight form, composition, function, and color. The location of the installations were

selected to highlight areas of the parks that had unique features, stunning views, or quiet and reflective locals. Slow looking was encouraged, meaning visitors could take time, slow down, and enjoy the art of nature. The ever-changing, natural surroundings allowed for a different view every hour of the day. The objectives were for participants to gain a greater appreciation for the beauty of nature that is often overlooked and to allow for a more deliberate focus on the natural resources the parks contain.

**Contact: Sandy Breuer, Parks Director, 651-430-4371**



**Washington County Parks received two awards from the Minnesota Recreation and Park Association, one for Programming and Events, for which it won for Nature’s Art Gallery, and one for Marketing and Communication, for which it won for Lake Elmo Park Reserve Wayfinding Project. With the awards July 27 are Commissioner Fran Miron, District 1, Parks Director Sandy Breuer, Steve Benoit, representing the association, commissioners Lisa Weik, District 5, Gary Kriesel, District 3, Wayne Johnson, District 4, and Stan Karwoski, District 2, and parks staff Sara Armstrong, Tori Slawik, Elise Gardner, and Megan Arney-Johnston.**

## **County Board receives Audit Advisory Committee report for 2020**

The Washington County Board of Commissioners received the Audit Advisory Committee report for 2020 July 27.

Washington County established an Audit Advisory Committee in 1984. The Audit Advisory Committee is comprised of a County Board member, the county administrator, and two citizen members, who are James Honsvall and Frank Rheinberger.

The role of the Audit Advisory Committee is to provide assurance to the County Board concerning the internal and financial controls of the county and to provide greater independence and objectivity to auditing.

Honsvall presented the 2020 annual report to the County Board.

The Audit Advisory Committee met three times, once during each quarter except the April 2020 meeting, due to COVID-19 restrictions. At each meeting, the internal auditor reviewed her quarterly report of the test of disbursements and purchasing cards.

Purchasing cards are used by employees who are approved to make smaller purchases on behalf of the county. At each committee meeting, the internal auditor reviewed her testing purchases made by employees using a purchasing card. The internal auditor also does random, unannounced cash counts of all change funds. All of these were reported to the Audit Committee.

The county's external auditors from CliftonLarsonAllen participated in two of the committee meetings in 2020. At the first meeting, the audit manager reviewed the progress of the 2019 audit, and the second meeting was the closing meeting and discussion of the 2019 Comprehensive Annual Financial Report. Another meeting in December opened the 2020 audit.

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## **County Board declares July 27 as County Staff Appreciation Day**

The Washington County Board of Commissioners proclaimed July 27 as County Staff Appreciation Day.

Gov. Tim Walz officially proclaimed July 27 as "County Staff Appreciation Day" in recognition of all the hard work and dedication shown by Minnesota county employees during the pandemic. This

recognition is a testament to all that Minnesota county employees have done to continue serving residents in the midst of a public health crisis.

The county's proclamation noted that county staff went beyond expectations, taking on personal risks, to continue delivering essential services to the residents of Washington County during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to their regular duties, many county staff were called upon and accepted new and challenging responsibilities during the pandemic, such as expediting the distribution of thousands of dollars in economic recovery appropriations, empowering the survival of local business community; successfully managing a deluge of mail-in ballots in an unprecedented federal election; and retooling local public health education outreach to flatten the pandemic curve. It also noted that, although the state has turned the corner on the COVID-19 pandemic, county staff continue their exemplary work, assisting with recovery through vaccination roll outs and preparing for the American Rescue Plan's multi-year recovery effort.

The proclamation also stated that county staff kept the doors of the county open and the community safer, healthier, and productive throughout months of unprecedented global transition.

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