



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

Date: Aug. 3, 2021
Contact: Yvonne Klinnert, Public Information Manager
Phone: 651-430-6026, after hours 952-807-3723
E-mail: yvonne.klinnert@co.washington.mn.us

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The following actions were taken at the Aug. 3, 2021, Washington County Board of Commissioners meeting at the Government Center in Stillwater, Minnesota

County Board approves comments for Oakdale TIF district

The Washington County Board of Commissioners approved comments to be added to a public hearing that the City of Oakdale will conduct Aug. 10 to consider a tax increment financing (TIF) district in the city.

The board reviewed the comments Aug. 3.

TIF is used to assist in development or redevelopment by capturing the increased property taxes generated by the development to pay for the project.

TIF (Housing) District No. 1 is proposed to be a redevelopment district with a maximum life of 25 years with 71 units of housing, of which at least 40% shall be available for rent by persons whose incomes do not exceed 60% of areawide median family income, as adjusted for family size.

By law, the city must provide a 30-day notice to the county and the county may provide comments to the city for the record of the public hearing.

The county expressed its support for the housing project, which is consistent with the County Board's goals through the Community Development Agency (CDA) to support efforts of cities within the county to increase access to affordable housing for residents. Also, a review of the draft TIF plan determined that the proposed development would not increase the use of county roads; the county also had comments on the platting and property values used for the project.

Contact: Jennifer Wagenius, Deputy County Administrator, 651-430-6007

A great place to live, work and play...today and tomorrow

Tornado siren will be added to Big Marine Park Reserve

A tornado siren will be added to Big Marine Park Reserve after the Washington County Board of Commissioners approved a grant agreement Aug. 3 with the Federal Emergency Management Agency to assist with the purchase and installation of the siren.

Washington County will provide up to \$15,000 toward the project, which will have a total cost not to exceed \$33,062.25.

Big Marine Park Reserve has a risk of thunderstorms and lightning during the summer when peak visits occur. The park reserve is in a rural area of Washington County with no near access to a tornado siren to alert visitors to the threat of severe weather. The park has more than 227,000 visits annually. Also on the park boundaries is the Disabled Veterans Rest Campground, which has an additional 30,000 visitors each year. A tornado siren will increase the time for visitors and staff to take shelter, which can reduce the chances of a casualty.

Contact: Alex McKinney, Parks Manager, 651-430-4364

County Board reviews 2020 performance measurement report

The Washington County Board of Commissioners received the county's 2020 Performance Measures and Indicators Report Aug. 3, along with an update on countywide performance measurements and quality improvement efforts.

Since the mid-1990s, Washington County has tracked, reported, and monitored performance measures to support decision-making and to drive continued improvement in its core functions and the services it provides.

Measures from the current report highlighted the county's outstanding debt per capita, the energy usage intensity of county buildings, and library programs that served residents during the pandemic.

The complete report may be found at www.co.washington.mn.us/performanceasures.

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

County Board receives awards from National Association of Counties

Each year, the National Association of Counties (NACo) sponsors a program to showcase county achievements under a variety of categories.

Washington County was recognized with four awards this year, and the County Board received them Aug. 3.

The county submits entries to the program, which are reviewed by peers. Those receiving recognition are noted at the organization's national conference and exposition. This year, Washington County received five 2021 Achievement Awards. They are:

- In the Arts, Culture and Historic Preservation Category, Parks received an award for Nature's Art Gallery. The Nature's Art Gallery invited park visitors to see nature from an artist's perspective. 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
- In the Children and Youth Category, the Library received an award for Reaching Families During the Pandemic: Virtual Storytimes and Story Strolls. When libraries closed to the public in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and in-person programming was cancelled, library leadership and staff were committed to serving communities and fulfilling the library's mission. The library found ways to reach families, make connections, and build relationships through virtual storytimes and story strolls. These programs had high levels of participation, and many families shared personal stories about the joy they provided during the challenging pandemic.
- In the Information Technology Category, the Library received an award for Hotspots and Chromebook Kits Program. According to the 2018 American Community Survey, more than 9,000 households in Washington County do not have a computer with a broadband internet subscription (about 10 percent of Washington County households, according to Census data). As a result, many county residents rely on libraries for their internet connection. During the COVID-19 pandemic, accessing the internet through the library was not possible. Washington County Library's hotspot and Chromebook program increased internet access through the distribution of devices. More than 900 people have had reliable access to the internet at home

at no cost to them. This program continues beyond the COVID-19 pandemic and meets a crucial need.

- In the Libraries Category, the Library received an award for its Library Curbside Pickup Program. Washington County Library launched curbside pickup just one day after Washington County suspended public-facing services at all county facilities. Washington County Library was also the first library system in Minnesota to make curbside pickup available to its residents during the pandemic. Access to library materials supported distance learning, provided access to information, and promoted the health and well-being of Washington County communities during the pandemic. From March 19 to Dec. 31, 2020, patrons scheduled almost 26,000 curbside pickup appointments, checking out more than 137,000 items. Countless patrons called, emailed, and commented on social media about how grateful they are for the service during the pandemic.
- In the Parks and Recreation Category, the Parks received an award for Wayfinding in Lake Elmo Park Reserve. 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, skjoring, 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.

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Washington County commissioners and staff celebrated the awards the county received from the National Association of Counties Aug. 3. Those acknowledging the awards for county parks and libraries are Wayne Sandberg, Deputy Public Works Director, Alex McKinney, Parks Manager, commissioners Gary Kriesel, District 3, Fran Miron, District 1, Lisa Weik, District 5, Wayne Johnson, District 4, and Stan Karwoski, District 2, Don Theisen, Public Works Director, and Amy Stenftenagel, Library Director.