



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

Date: Sept. 14, 2021
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The following actions were taken at the Sept. 14, 2021, Washington County Board of Commissioners meeting at the Government Center in Stillwater, Minnesota

County Regional Rail withdraws from Great River Rail Commission

Now that the Great River Rail Commission has achieved its goal of a second passenger rail train between the Twin Cities and Chicago, the Washington County Board of Commissioners, sitting as the Regional Railroad Authority Sept. 14, voted to withdraw from the organization.

The commission has 18 members representing communities from St. Paul to La Crosse, Wis. The annual membership dues for Washington County was \$4,000.

The Great River Rail Commission advocated for the development of the Twin Cities-Milwaukee-Chicago Second Train Project, a daily round-trip passenger train between the Twin Cities and Chicago. In 2021, the commission achieved a milestone with its advocacy for the Amtrak Twin Cities-Milwaukee-Chicago Second Train, acquiring matching funds from the Minnesota State Legislature for a Federal Railroad Administration grant to be used for final design and construction and service planned to begin in 2024.

The commission requires a 90-day written notice to withdraw Washington County Regional Railroad Authority from the commission, which will be in the beginning of 2022.

Contact: Sara Allen, Planner II, 651-430-4363

Members reappointed to Brown's Creek Watershed District

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

The Washington County Board of Commissioners made two reappointments to the Brown's Creek Watershed District board of managers Sept. 14.

Gerald Johnson, Stillwater, and Celia Wirth, Grant, were both reappointed to another term as managers on the Brown's Creek Watershed District, both of which will expire Oct. 21, 2024.

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

County Board approves comments on TIF district in Stillwater

The Washington County Board of Commissioners approved comments Sept. 14 on a tax increment financing redevelopment district proposed for the City of Stillwater.

Tax increment, or TIF, allows for the increased property tax income from an improved property to be used to assist in financing the project.

The City of Stillwater will conduct a public hearing Sept. 21 to consider the creation of a new tax increment financing (TIF) district for a redevelopment district with a maximum life of 25 years to redevelop blight within the city.

The project is the development of a new 61-unit apartment building with 73 below-grade parking stalls at the intersection of Chestnut and Myrtle streets in downtown Stillwater. After reviewing the proposed new district, the county expressed its support for the project as outlined in the TIF plan.

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

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

Washington County will continue as partners for joint juvenile facility

Washington County will continue as a partner in the East Central Regional Juvenile Center, after the County Board agreed to a continued joint powers agreement Sept. 14.

In 1995, Washington County entered into a Joint Powers Agreement with other counties to build and operate a juvenile detention facility. Anoka County operates the facility under this agreement on behalf of the member counties. This agreement was set to expire Dec. 31. The five-year term of the new agreement is automatically renewable for a second five-year period.

Because the facility is regional, Washington County can meet its needs for a juvenile detention facility, without operating a full-service detention facility, which reduces costs, shares fiscal liabilities, and allows for more complete services to those detained than would be economically feasible in a single county facility. The East Central Regional Juvenile Center (ECRJC) is a 36-bed facility. Washington County contracts five beds daily.

Contact: Terry Thomas, Jr., Community Corrections Director, 651-430-6951

County Board receives report on work of the Community Development Agency

The Washington County Board of Commissioners received a report on the work of the county's Community Development Agency (CDA) Sept. 14, reviewing the progress toward meeting its goals of the 2020-2024 plan.

The projects were undertaken with the 2020 Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and the Home Investment Partnerships (HOME) program funds. The report communicates to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and policymakers how funds are spent and the impact the programs make in the community. The full report can be viewed on the Washington County Community Development Agency's (CDA) website at www.washingtoncountycda.org. Washington County's Program Year 2020 accomplishments include nine home improvement loans; electrical pedestal replacements, retaining wall improvements, and a playground renovation in Landfall; the acquisition and improvement of four single-family homes scattered throughout Washington County; and construction of four single-family homes in Hugo.

Through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Securities (CARES) Act, Washington County received an additional \$1.1 million in CDBG funding. During 2020, these funds were used to prevent homelessness by providing services of rental and hotel stays to 2,208 people with housing emergencies. An additional 23 households were provided emergency homeownership grants when they fell behind on their housing payments due to COVID-19.

The draft CAPER was released for public comment and published on the CDA's website with instructions on how to comment Aug. 27. The public comment period will be open until Sept. 21. A public hearing will be Sept. 21 at the Washington County CDA Board meeting.

The report will be sent to HUD by Sept. 28.

Contact: Karly Schoeman, Deputy Executive Director, 651-458-6556

September is Library Card Sign-Up Month

The Washington County Board of Commissioners proclaimed September as Library Card Sign-Up Month Sept. 14.

This national campaign emphasizes the importance of library cards to a child's education and to combat illiteracy. The campaign first started in 1987 as a response to then Secretary of Education William Bennett who encouraged a campaign because "every child should obtain a library card and use it."

Washington County Library is celebrating September as Library Card Sign-up Month by promoting the benefits of signing up for a library card, including access to materials and resources that serve students of all ages, as well as lifelong learners, job seekers, small business owners, and more. To acknowledge the important role libraries play in communities and to encourage everyone to sign up for their own library card, September 2021 was declared as Library Card Sign-Up Month in Washington County.

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

Alliant Engineering will do final design on County Road 65 improvement project

Alliant Engineering Inc. will do final design on the County Road 65, or Oakgreen Avenue, improvement project, after the Washington County Board of Commissioners approved a \$537,180 contract with the company Sept. 14.

County Road 65 is a major collector roadway in West Lakeland and Baytown townships, and serves about 3,000 vehicles per day. This roadway has a number of existing deficiencies, including no engineered drainage system, heaving during spring thaw, severe cracking, no turning lanes, and sightline concerns.

A preliminary design study was conducted in 2018 and 2019 to identify the needs along County Road 65 now and into the future. Through the preliminary design process, the project team engaged with the public to create project goals and a preferred design. In 2019, a preferred design layout was finalized that meets the needs of the county, the townships, and the public. As this is a larger

improvement project on a non-state aid highway, with the pavement on this roadway amongst the worst in the county, this project was selected as one the county's first sales tax projects.

The roadway received minor pavement preservation work in 2016, when it was determined that the roadway would need a major improvement in the near future.

Construction is expected in 2023. The contract will be funded through proceeds from the sales tax.

Contact: Andrew Giesen, Engineer II, 651-430-4336

County Board proclaims September Workforce Development Month

The Washington County Board of Commissioners proclaimed September Workforce Development Month in the county Sept. 14.

The County Board noted that investment in the education, training, and career advancement of Minnesota's workforce is crucial to the ability of the state to compete in the global economy, and that collaboration between the workforce system and business, education, and private-public partners is critical to align training and workforce needs.

Changes in the state's demographics between 2015 and 2035, including more than a half-million people reaching the age of 65 and a decline in the share of the working-age population from 62% to 57%, means employers and Minnesota's workforce system must work together to bring all of the population who need sustainable employment into the workforce, including those from the communities of color or Indigenous population.

The county's CareerForce programs provide tailored resources to help meet the needs of all Minnesota employers and career seekers, and commits to customer-focused services and puts equity at the center of all its work.

Contact: Rick Roy, Workforce & Veteran Services Division Manager, 651-275-8660

County Board certifies 2022 proposed budgets, levies

The Washington County Board of Commissioners certified the proposed budgets and levies for 2022 Sept. 14.

The board will continue to receive public comment on the proposed budgets and levies through their final adoption in December. Once the levies are certified, they may be reduced before final adoption, but they cannot be raised.

The proposed levies are:

- \$122 million for the general levy;
- \$660,000 for the Regional Railroad Authority levy; and
- \$5.68 million for the Community Development Agency.

The Office of Administration presented the recommended 2022 county budget to the board in July, including the budget for the Washington County Regional Railroad Authority. The recommended budget includes an estimated 0.6% increase in the county tax rate, a 5.78% increase in net levy for the operations of Washington County, and a 0% levy change for both the Land & Water Legacy Program and the Washington County Regional Railroad Authority.

Through July and August, individual departments provided detailed presentations of their budgets and answered questions from commissioners during televised workshops, which were open to the public. Because the County Board approved a levy with no increase for 2021, the increase in the county tax between 2020 and 2022 for those with median-valued homes in the county is estimated to be \$5.

Should the board approve the proposed levies in December, it is expected that the owners of a median-valued home in the county, which is valued at \$318,700 for taxes paid in 2022, would pay an additional \$30 in county property taxes in 2022, compared to 2021.

The county continues to respond to the pandemic with services that meet clients' needs. At the same time, much like other service providers, the county has found ways to deliver some county services in a more efficient, less costly way, which will continue in the future. This has included upgrades to county facilities that made them safer places to receive services and work.

New funding in the budget will pay for negotiated salaries and benefits for existing employees. The recommended budget includes only a small number of new employees and few changes in the services or programs delivered. It is also designed to reduce the county's reliance on debt for capital improvements.

The recommended budget includes investments in the county's technology infrastructure to maintain and enhance data and network security. Other infrastructure planned includes a northern

environmental center, money for road construction and pavement preservation, as well as restoration at the Historic Courthouse and park and trail improvements. The budget funds a fairly substantial increase in election costs for 2022 as more people vote absentee, which adds to the cost of managing an election. The budget also funds replacements in the public works fleet to ensure the ability to maintain and provide snow removal on county roads.

The recommended budget is impacted by reduced revenue in a variety of areas, including reduced county program aid, a state aid provided to reduce the reliance on property taxes to fund mandated services, and reduced fees for services that have been impacted by the pandemic.

The County Board will approve a final budget for 2022 Dec. 14. An evening public budget meeting will occur at 6 p.m. Tuesday, Nov. 30, in the Board Room of the Government Center in Stillwater, which will be open for public comment.

All budget documents are on the county website at www.co.washington.mn.us, by searching “budget,” and the budget workshops were webstreamed, and remain in the board meeting archives on the county website.

Contacts: Jennifer Wagenius, Deputy Administrator, 651-430-6007, and Jan Lucke, Deputy Administrator, 651-430-6003