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Date: May 24, 2022
Contact: Yvonne Klinnert, Communications Specialist, Senior
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 May 24, 2022, Washington County Board of Commissioners meeting at the Government Center in Stillwater, Minnesota

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, May 24 to receive the funds. The agreement goes through June 30, 2023.

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

Contact: Laura Perkins, Law Enforcement Public Information Officer, 651-430-7994

County Board approves application for American Legion's liquor license

The Washington County Board of Commissioners approved an application May 24 for a one-to-four-day temporary on-sale liquor license from Hesley Jensen American Legion Post 491 for the Yellow Ribbon Randy Kopesky Field of Bands Event at the Washington County Fairgrounds Sept. 17.

The fairgrounds are in Baytown Township. The county manages these applications within the county's townships.

The County Sheriff's Office, County Attorney's Office, and the Public Health & Environment Department completed compliance/verification checks. The license fees pay for the administrative costs of the county for these verification checks.

After approval by the County Board, the application is sent to the state Alcohol and Gambling Enforcement Board for consideration.

Contact: Christine Piskura, Taxpayer Services & Elections Division Manager, 651-430-8272

County Board accepts grant to pay for assistive voting equipment

The Washington County Board of Commissioners accepted a grant of \$139,992 May 24 from the Minnesota Secretary of State's Office to pay for assistive voting equipment.

The grant requires a 50% match.

Assistive voting devices are required by federal law to be available in each polling place, which allows for private and independent voting for voters with disabilities. The required match is funded using two sources, \$77,935.83 from the 2022 Help America Vote Act Grant and \$62,056.97 from the American Rescue Plan Act.

Local municipalities that use this equipment in their polling places provide funding to the county to cover maintenance and support costs.

Contact: Christine Piskura, Taxpayer Services & Elections Division Manager, 651-430-8272

County will participate in DNR program to maintain snowmobile trails

Washington County Parks will participate in the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) snowmobile trails assistance program, after the request was approved by the County Board May 24.

The county administers the program for the Star Trail Association. The County Board entered into an agreement with the Star Trail Association in 1991, whereby the county agreed to sponsor the snowmobile club and act as a pass-through agency for funds from the DNR snowmobile trail maintenance and grooming grants-in-aid program. The snowmobile club cannot receive the grant funding directly.

The term of the grant will be from now to June 30, 2023. All grant revenue received by the county on behalf of the Star Trail Association will be forwarded to the club as a reimbursement for costs expended for trail maintenance during the 2022-2023 snow season. The grant varies from year to year, but averages around \$42,000.

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

County Board approves grant to address drug trafficking

Washington County Board of Commissioners accepted a grant for \$141,000 from the Office of National Drug Control Policy for participation in the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas (HIDTA) program.

The term of the grant agreement is Jan. 1, 2022, through Dec. 31, 2023.

The HIDTA program is designed to provide resources to federal, state, local, and tribal agencies to coordinate activities to address drug trafficking in designated areas of the county. This program helps to identify and disrupt/dismantle drug trafficking and money laundering organizations; reduce drug-related crime and violence; and identify and respond to emerging drug trends.

No county match is required.

Contact: Laura Perkins, Law Enforcement Public Information Officer, 651-430-7994

County Board reappoints Veterans Service Officer, receives update

The Washington County Board of Commissioners reappointed Ryan Carufel as the county Veterans Service Officer May 24 and received an update on county services to veterans.

The County Board appointed Carufel as the Washington County Veterans Service Officer for a four-year term June 3, 2014, and reappointed him in 2018.

Carufel leads a team of three Assistant Veterans Service Officers who provide services to approximately 14,000 veterans. They also assist surviving spouses, active duty, reserve, and national guard members residing in Washington County who are seeking or applying for federal, state, and local benefits.

Careful provided the County Board with an update of services provided in the county. In 2021, the office received 4,904 telephone calls, up more than 400 calls in 2020. Veterans Affairs claims have also increased, and new claims for presumptive conditions for Agent Orange and Particulate Matter exposure for Vietnam and Gulf War veterans has resulted in an increased workload and number of claim submissions. While VA suspended many services throughout the pandemic, it is now fully operational and

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is reducing a backlog; however, it continues to have difficulty processing claims in a timely manner. Also, in 2020:

- the VA expended \$58,313,000 in service-connected compensation and pension benefits within the county;
- the value of medical care received by Washington County veterans at VA hospitals and community-based outpatient clinics was \$55,549,000; and
- the State Soldier's Assistance Program provided \$264,394 within the county.

Contact: Ryan Carufel, Veterans Service Officer, 651-430-6857

SRF will provide project coordination, design for CSAH 32 improvement project

SRF Consulting Inc. will provide project coordination, preliminary design engineering, and public stakeholder engagement for improvements on County State Aid Highway (CSAH) 32 in Forest Lake after the Washington County Board of Commissioners approved a \$459,003 contract with the company May 24.

The project is to improve the safety of CSAH 32, or 11th Avenue Southwest, from Interstate 35 on the west to Highway 61, or Lake Street, on the east for all users. CSAH 32 is an important east-west route connecting CSAH 33 to Highway 61 via the newer overpass over I-35. This 1.25-mile corridor is a regionally important route that has increased in traffic, resulting in the need to evaluate improvements to this corridor. Improvements are anticipated to include:

- pedestrian and bicycle accessibility and safety improvements;
- pavement improvements;
- surface water management and drainage improvements;
- improved traffic capacity, safety, and operations; and
- access management.

Preliminary design along with a public engagement plan will determine the final project scope, right-of-way acquisition requirements, and estimated costs to complete the project.

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The contract is funded by the City of Forest Lake and County Transportation Sales Tax. Project construction is scheduled to begin in 2026.

Contact: Ryan Hoefs, Engineer II, 651-430-4314

Kimley-Horn will provide final design for CSAH 28/Highway 95 project

Kimley-Horn will provide final design for improvements to County State Aid Highway (CSAH) 28 at Highway 95 in Denmark Township after the Washington County Board of Commissioners approved a \$182,925 contract with the company May 24.

When the Minnesota Department of Transportation improved Highway 95, or Manning Avenue, in the area, it lowered the highway at the CSAH 28 intersection. The steeper CSAH 28 approach grade from lowering the intersection resulted in undesirable roadway design for users approaching the intersection from the east.

Last year, the county received state Local Partnership Program funding of \$710,000 to be used to do the project next year. However, with flexibility in the funding, the county is allowed to take advantage of an earlier construction year due to the challenges this intersection poses, especially during winter. To do construction in 2023, the design will need to start this year.

Contact: Erin Clarkowski, Engineer II, 651-430-4384

County Board approves 2 Land and Water Legacy Program projects

The Washington County Board of Commissioners approved two projects under the county's Land and Water Legacy Program May 24.

The program, approved in a voter referendum in 2006, uses funds to improve water quality of rivers, lakes, and streams; protect drinking water sources; purchase parkland, including trail corridors; preserve wetlands and trees; protect land along water bodies from development; and increase public access to natural areas.

The two most recent projects are in Hugo and in Afton.

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The Keystone Woods project in Hugo will place 69 acres under a permanent conservation easement. The owner approached the Minnesota Land Trust to create the easement. Washington County will contribute \$120,000 toward the conservation easement cost, and \$275,000 will be contributed by the Minnesota Land Trust (MLT). The easement will be co-held by the county and MLT and MLT will monitor the property. This is the county's third protection project in Keystone Woods, a Land and Water Legacy Program Top Ten High Priority Area and recharge area for groundwater aquifers.

The project's natural features include 2,975 feet of pond shoreline, 34 acres of trees, 29 acres of water and wetlands, and 6 acres of grassland. There are rare, endangered and/or threatened species within 3 miles of the property and it is a Department of Natural Resources Wildlife Action Network focus area. The project will protect surface water and likely protect groundwater.

In Afton, the county will place a permanent conservation easement over approximately 18 acres to be owned by Belwin Conservancy. The landowner approached the county for this project.

The project area, hosting high bluffs, extensive tree cover, 1,350 feet of Valley Creek, and small areas of grassland, is in the Land and Water Legacy Program's Valley Creek Corridor high priority protection area. The project will protect surface water and likely protect groundwater. A diverse array of wildlife will be protected, including threatened, endangered, and special species of concern located on or within one mile of the property. It is adjacent and near 1,800 acres protected by Belwin Conservancy and the Minnesota Land Trust.

The project partnership involves a county contribution of \$532,525 and a Minnesota Department of Natural Resources contribution of \$260,500, funding provided by the Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund as recommended by the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources to acquire the conservation easement.

The City of Afton will contribute up to \$25,000 for project costs. The county will also pay for transactional costs and hold and monitor the conservation easement. Belwin Conservancy is separately purchasing the underlying fee title and will own and care for the property. There will be a small network of unpaved paths or foot trails on the property, with the possibility of a small parking lot. There will be public access for educational and historical programming, as well as research and data collection.

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In the 15 years of the Land and Water Legacy Program, more than \$13 million in county and \$23 million in partnership funds have been invested to protect 1,100 acres to date, involving 34 projects throughout the county.

Contact: Jan Lucke, Deputy Administrator, 651-430-6003

Commissioner Weik, District 5, announces she will not run for 6th term of office

Washington County Commissioner Lisa Weik, District 5, announced that she will not seek re-election to the County Board.

She will complete her term, which concludes at the end of 2022.

“I have enjoyed my nearly 14 years on the County Board and am proud of what has been accomplished for Washington County and the City of Woodbury,” Weik said of her tenure on the board.

“This is a good time for me to step back as a number of the major projects I have been working on for years are in really good shape, including the Gold Line Bus Rapid Transit project, the enhancements at the Recycling and Energy Facility to allow for curbside collection of food waste, and the redrawing of the county election districts following redistricting is complete,” Weik said.

“I plan to continue to be involved in the Woodbury community and know the city and county have a tremendous future.”

Commissioner Weik was elected to serve the residents of District 5 in a special election in November 2008. She was re-elected in 2010, 2012, 2016, and 2020. She has served her community as a parent volunteer for the Woodbury Athletic Association and Woodbury schools, and is active in the Woodbury Lions Club, and a member of the Woodbury Chamber of Commerce

Weik has a business background in medical device compliance and as a healthcare professional in clinical laboratory medicine, and has a special interest in issues concerning science and medicine, public health and safety, seniors and transportation.

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