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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The following actions were taken at the Dec. 7, 2023, Washington County Board of Commissioners meeting at the Government Center in Stillwater, Minnesota.

County Board makes appointments to advisory groups

The Washington County Board of Commissioners made two appointments to county advisory boards Dec. 7.

The appointments are:

- Dr. Gabriel Warren, Woodbury, appointed to the Community Corrections Advisory Board as the BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and people of color) community representative to a first full term expiring Dec. 31, 2026.
- Traci Leffner appointed to the Workforce Development Board as a business representative to a first term expiring Dec. 31, 2026.

Contact: Holly Hess, Administrative Assistant, 651-430-6015

County Board accepts grant to pay for child support enforcement

Washington County will receive \$1.07 million from the Minnesota Department of Human Services to support the county's child support enforcement services from Jan. 1, 2024, through Dec. 31, 2025.

The program will be overseen by the county's Community Services Department, the Sheriff's Office, and the County Attorney's Office.

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Washington County is an equal opportunity organization and employer

The purpose of the Child Support Enforcement Program is to establish paternity and secure financial support for minor children who are living apart from one or both parents as set forth in the Social Security Act.

This agreement for calendar years 2024 and 2025 is the same agreement used in previous years. In 2022, the county coordinated the collection of child support of \$19,771,450 and served more than 5,590 families.

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

County Board conducts public budget meeting on proposed 2024 budget

The Washington County Board of Commissioners conducted a public meeting Dec. 7 on the county's 2024 county property tax levy and 2024 budget.

After a presentation on the proposed budget, one resident spoke at the meeting.

The Washington County Board of Commissioners set a preliminary property tax levy to support the proposed 2024 county budget Sept. 12. The board also adopted a proposed budget for next year.

After setting the preliminary levy, the board may reduce it when it sets the final levy Dec. 12, but the board cannot increase it. The certified proposed property tax levy payable in 2024 is \$132.7 million, which includes \$1.2 million for the Land and Water Legacy Program. The board also set a levy for the Regional Rail Authority at \$660,000, the same as in previous years.

The recommended levy would be an increase of 3.95% over 2023. The combination of an increase in the value of commercial property in the county, the addition of new construction to the county's tax base, and a moderate increase in the levy would result in the county tax rate being reduced by an estimated 7.3%.

It is anticipated that under the proposed budget, the owner of a median-valued home in the county, which is valued at \$417,000, and which had an 8.2% value increase from 2023 to 2024, would see a \$9 increase in the county portion of property taxes for 2024, or a 1% increase.

The board also adopted a proposed budget for 2024 at its Sept. 12 meeting. The final budget will be approved Dec. 12. The proposed budget includes expenditures of:

- \$236.7 million in operating expenses.
- \$63.8 million in capital projects.

- \$15.3 million in debt service.

The difference between what the levy supports and what the budget calls for in revenue will be provided by funding from other sources, including state County Program Aid. That is funding from the state Legislature designed to reduce local property tax levies, while providing support for local programs. Without the additional County Program Aid provided by the Legislature in 2023, along with additional state aid for county probation services and county parks, the same proposed budget would have more than doubled the increase in the county property tax levy.

The county will also receive additional state aid to boost public safety services, housing assistance, and library and public health programs.

Elements that shaped the proposed budget include changes in service delivery to residents, including a digital evidence management system and staffing to manage it in the County Attorney's Office, as well as the expenses of managing elections in 2024. The county is also planning additional support for those in need of mental health stabilization, and therapeutic programs for those served by Community Corrections. Population growth in the county is requiring additional services in libraries and other programs that provide direct service to residents. Inflationary pressures for salaries and wages, fuel for vehicles, such as squad cars, and the increased costs to maintain roads and buildings are also influencing budget requests.

With the proposed budget, the county would maintain the same ratio of five employees per 1,000 residents, which has been stable for the past several years. In comparison to six other metropolitan counties, Washington County remains below the average for property tax rates, meaning that a similarly valued property would be taxed at a higher rate in every other metropolitan county but one, Dakota.

The proposed budget was first presented to the County Board in a livestreamed workshop Aug. 1. Additional workshops with individual departments occurred through August and September. All budget presentations may be found on the county website. Archived livestreamed meetings may be found on the county website at www.co.washington.mn.us/countyboard. Budget documents presented at the workshops may be found at www.co.washington.mn.us/budget.

It is expected that the County Board will approve the county's 2024 property tax levy and budget at its meeting Dec. 12.