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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The following actions were taken at the Sept. 4, 2018, Washington County Board of Commissioners meeting at the Government Center in Stillwater, Minnesota

County commits Land and Water Legacy Program funds to potential conservation project in Bayport

Eleven acres along the St. Croix River in Bayport may be protected by a conservation project funded by the Washington County voter-approved Land and Water Legacy program, after the County Board agreed to be a funding partner Sept. 4.

The land is on four contiguous parcels south of Andersen Corporation and north of Lakeside Park on the river. The three property owners informed the City of Bayport that they are interested in selling the properties for conservation and public use.

City leaders consider this a valuable opportunity to protect and conserve a critical area along the St. Croix River and the project ranks as a high priority area for the county's Land and Water Legacy Program. Appraisals were completed; the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources has committed \$500,000 in grant funds for the project.

The county would provide \$745,000 from its voter-approved Land and Water Legacy program bond funds for the acquisition of the property. In return, the city would provide to the county a permanent conservation easement and a plan for natural resource management and recreational use of the property to enhance the quality of the natural resources and public access to open space on the river.

Contact: Kevin Corbid, Deputy Administrator, 651-430-6003

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County celebrates Library Card Sign-up Month

The Washington County Board of Commissioners recognized September as Library Card Sign-up Month Sept. 4.

The month is noted as a time when the American Library Association and libraries across the country remind parents that a library card is the most important school supply of all. This year marks the 30th anniversary of Library Card Sign-up Month, a national observance that was launched in 1987 to ensure every child obtain a library card and use it. Since then, thousands of public and school libraries join each fall in a national effort to ensure every child does just that.

More information on Washington County libraries can be found at www.washcolib.org.

Contact: Bethany Venable, Communications Specialist, 651-275-8504

SRF will provide final design work for Bailey Road upgrade

SRF Consulting Group will do final design work on a portion of the Bailey Road, or County State Aid Highway (CSAH) 18, management and safety project in Woodbury, after the Washington County Board of Commissioners approved an amendment to the company's contract Sept. 4.

In March 2017, Washington County contracted with SRF Consulting Group, Inc., to complete preliminary engineering design, project coordination, public agency involvement, and environmental documentation for the CSAH 18 Corridor Management and Safety Improvement Project. The work along the roadway has been split up into three projects, which involve roadway reconstruction and expansion, increased capacity and safety, and improving pedestrian and bicyclist accommodations. The preliminary design phase of the projects is complete. The contract amendment adds final design engineering not included in the original contract with SRF Consulting Group, Inc.

Bailey Road is a five-mile long corridor that provides access to Interstate 494, schools, churches, businesses, and neighborhoods, and is frequently used by pedestrians and bicyclists. Because of the current and future growth the area, it is expected that traffic on the road will grow by 50 percent to 100 percent in the next 20 years. Through public involvement, community members have said that they have safety concerns at intersections, that there is traffic congestion especially at school start and end times, and that there is a lack of bike and pedestrian connections on the roadway.

The projects' purpose is improved traffic operations, pedestrian and bicycling trail improvements, and improved safety at intersections and pavement quality.

This work pertains to the second project of the three projects that will improve Bailey Road, which is between Woodlane Drive and Radio Drive. Construction is anticipated in 2020. Funding will come from highway state aid funds, and local contributions.

Contact: Nathan Arnold, Engineer, 651-430-4384

County Board continues review of 2019 budget

The Washington County Board of Commissioners continued review of the 2019 budget Sept. 4, reviewing budgets for the Library, the Law Library, and the Department of Property Records and Taxpayer Services.

The board began work on the 2019 budget Aug. 14. Commissioners will review the recommended budget of separate departments throughout August and September, and set a preliminary property tax levy Sept. 18. Once the preliminary levy is set, it may be lowered, but cannot be raised in the final budget vote.

The recommended net property tax levy would increase 5.47 percent over the 2018 levy, and would result in a drop of the county's tax rate by 1.5 percent. If approved, it would be the fifth year in the last six that the county's tax rate decreased. Should the recommended levy be approved, the impact on the owner of the median valued home in the county, which is \$273,200, would be an increase of \$36 a year in county taxes, offset by a \$1 reduction in the county's Regional Rail Authority levy.

That is based on the average home's value increasing 5.7 percent during the past year.

The increase in the levy is spurred in part by service demands from a population that grew 1.5 percent during the last year, and inflationary costs of goods and services that is currently close to 3 percent annually.

The board reviewed specific budgets for the Library, the Law Library, and the Department of Property Records and Taxpayer Services Sept. 4.

The proposed 2019 budget for the library is \$8.2 million. Initiatives for 2019 include community engagement kits, and collaborative space updates at R.H. Stafford branch in Woodbury and Hardwood Creek branch in Forest Lake. The county will also use \$1.2 million to make improvements

at Valley Branch Library, and work will continue on upgrading the Park Grove and Wildwood libraries.

The Law Library, which is located in the Government Center in Stillwater, has a proposed budget of \$320,000. It is supported primarily by court fines and fees, and expenditures are for personnel, materials, and services.

The Department of Property Records and Taxpayer Services has just more than 100 employees, who work in service and license centers around the county, as well as in the Government Center in Stillwater, providing licensing, vital records, election services, taxation, and property records services. The department is proposing expenditures of \$8.4 million for personnel, and \$1.6 million for materials and professional services. Of that, 65 percent is paid for with non-levy fees, such as fees and payments from cities for property valuation services.

The department added 6.5 positions during 2018 to manage changes in the state licensing and registration system used in the county's licensing centers. Future challenges will be managing the increased time needed to process Real IDs, and the 2020 national and local elections.

A public hearing on the county's budget will be conducted Dec. 4, and the final budget will be adopted Dec. 11.

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