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**Date:** Sept. 27, 2022  
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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

The following actions were taken at the Sept. 27, 2022, Washington County Board of Commissioners meeting at the Government Center in Stillwater, Minnesota

**Regional Rail Authority extends agreement with Forest Lake schools**

The Washington County Board of Commissioners, sitting as the Washington County Regional Rail Authority (WCRRA) Sept. 27, extended an agreement with the Forest Lake School District, to allow the district to park school buses on regional rail land along the Hardwood Creek Trail.

The Forest Lake School District has parked buses on the Hardwood Creek Trail property since 1994, using approximately 21,440 square feet. The WCRRA issued a five-year permit starting in 2018 with a fee that increased by 20% each year to reach the standard \$1.50 per square foot fee the WCRRA Property Management Plan requires.

The school district has requested another five-year permit to continue to authorize parking of the buses on WCRRA property and has agreed to pay \$32,160 for each year 2023 through 2027. This timeline will allow the school district to continue to investigate permanent bus storage in another location. The school district use does not impede the use of the trail and the future Rush Line corridor is not anticipated to be implemented within the next five years on this WCRRA property.

This agreement is the same as it would be for any other property owners seeking a permit for right-of-way.

**Contact: Lyssa Leitner, Public Works Planning Director, 651-430-4316**

**CliftonLarsonAllen will continue to do county financial audit**

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CliftonLarsonAllen LLP will continue to audit the financial statements for Washington County governmental activities after the County Board approved a contract with the firm Sept. 27.

The firm audits the blended component units, each major fund, and the aggregate remaining fund information, which collectively comprise the basic financial statements of Washington County. The current contract with the firm expires Sept. 30, 2022.

Washington County issued a Request for Proposal for external auditing services in July 2022, and received two proposals. A selection committee comprised of county staff scored the proposals based on the evaluation criteria in the request and recommended that the county award the contract for external auditing services to CliftonLarsonAllen LLP from Oct. 1, 2022, through Sept. 30, 2027.

The 2022 cost for audit service is \$89,250 with an increase of 4.7% to 5% each year. The total contract's "not to exceed amount" is \$491,085.

**Contact: Tabatha Hansen, Accounting and Finance Director, 651-430-6027**

### **County Board approves contracts with case management services**

The Washington County Board of Commissioners approved contracts Sept. 27 with case management services for county residents with intellectual/developmental disabilities.

BestView Care Options and Handy Help LLC will provide the services.

Washington County is responsible for providing case management services to more than 1,655 children and adults with intellectual/developmental disabilities, as well as 1,085 children and adults receiving case management services related to other disabilities. The case management for these individuals is performed by social workers and registered nurses in the county or contracted through private agencies.

Bestview Care Options provides contracted case management services for all case management types in Washington County. Handy Help LLC is a new provider to expand contracted case management options through private agencies for Washington County that will cover all case management types with a focus on mental health case management services. Both agencies will expand the case management services provided to include individuals with other disabilities and those older than 65.

Services will now also be billed directly to the State of Minnesota.

**Contact: Denise Landry, Community Services Division Manager, 651-430-4145**

### **Washington Conservation District will do boat cleaning at Square Lake Park**

The Washington Conservation District will maintain the boat cleaning stations at Square Lake County Park with its aquatic invasive species inspectors, after the Washington County Board of Commissioners agreed to the use of the park Sept. 27.

The conservation district receives a portion of the county's program aid for Aquatic Invasive Species funding to prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species (AIS). The approval allows the conservation district to maintain the boat cleaning stations at Square Lake Park with its aquatic invasive species inspectors. Providing boat cleaning tool stations can help lake users reduce the likelihood of AIS spread to other lakes.

**Contact: Dan MacSwain, Natural Resources Coordinator, 651-430-4323**

### **Ride and Glide Bike and Ski Club makes donations for snowshoe rentals**

The Washington County Board of Commissioners accepted \$1,968 from the Ride and Bike Ski Club Sept. 27 for the purchase of snowshoes for Washington County Parks at Lake Elmo Park Reserve and St. Croix Bluffs Regional Park.

Ride and Glide Bike and Ski Club has had a long relationship with Washington County Parks. In addition to holding club events within the parks, the club also assists the county with the planning and implementation of outdoor programming. The Ride and Glide Bike and Ski Club's focus is to promote getting outdoors and being active. The club members wish to continue supporting outdoor activities in county parks by providing a donation for the purchase of rentable snowshoes.

Providing snowshoes for rent allows users to try the activity at a relatively low cost, removing the barrier of having to purchase snowshoes, and improving equitable access to recreation.

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

### **County, courts will do upgrades to courtroom audio-visual equipment**

Washington County will work with the Tenth Judicial District to modernize the existing audio-visual equipment in six courtrooms in the courthouse on the Stillwater Government Center campus.

The County Board approved a memorandum of understanding with the judicial district Sept. 27, and approved contracts with Bluum Technology to work on the project.

The audio-visual systems in the courtrooms are outdated and increasingly unreliable. There is a need to replace the analog audio with digital and provide the courts with appropriate in-room amplification.

The county's share of the upgrade costs would be strictly for audio enhancements for hearing accessibility, while the state and the Tenth Judicial District would cover the video and system controls portion of the project.

The cost proposal from Bluum Technology came through state contract pricing.

The audio portion of the Bluum proposal will be \$311,902, which falls within the anticipated estimate for this project. The Tenth Judicial District's portion of the cost will be \$390,054, bringing the total cost of the project to \$701,956.

**Contact: Joe Welter, Building Services Project Manager, 651-430-6226**

### **Ravine Landing receives award from Finance & Commerce**

The Washington County Board of Commissioners recognized an award from Finance & Commerce that was given to Ravine Landing, the new parks facility in Cottage Grove Ravine Regional Park.

The facility was selected for a 2021 Top Projects Award for achievement in the construction industry and the community. Top Projects is the premier recognition program for Minnesota's built environment and honors the best building and construction projects in the state.

For 134 years, Finance & Commerce has delivered economic development, commercial real estate, and construction industry news to Minnesota's regional business leaders, developers, and housing and community advocates. The award program centers on the region's construction and real estate business, bringing together the development community. The Top Projects program is one of the area's largest events celebrating women in the industry.

Washington County Public Works staff Eden Rogers, engineer, and Sandy Breuer, parks director, along with the county's project partners, H+U Construction and HGA, accepted the award at the annual awards reception earlier in the year.

This is the third award that Ravine Landing has received, including:

- Minnesota Recreation and Parks Association (MRPA) – Award of Excellence
- National Association of Counties (NACo) – Achievement Award
- Finance & Commerce – Top Projects

**Contact: Sandy Breuer, Parks Director, 651-430-4371**



**The Washington County Board of Commissioners received an award the county was presented by Finance & Commerce for the Ravine Landing project in Cottage Grove Ravine Regional Park. Noting the award are Eden Rogers, engineer who worked on the project, commissioners Stan Karwoski, District 2, Lisa Weik, District 5, Wayne Johnson, District 4, and Fran Miron, District 1, Sandy Breuer, parks director, Commissioner Gary Kriesel, District 3, and Frank Tickner, Public Works Deputy Director.**

### **County Board certifies 2023 proposed budgets, levies**

The Washington County Board of Commissioners certified the county's proposed budgets and levies for 2023 Sept. 27.

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:

- \$127.6 million for the general levy; and
- \$660,000 for the Regional Railroad Authority levy.

The board also consented to a \$5.899 million levy for the Community Development Agency.

Under the proposed budget, the county net levy would increase 4.88% over 2022, and non-levy revenue would be \$108.3 million, a decrease of 18.5% from 2022.

The proposed budget includes a 4.88% increase in net levy for the operations of Washington County, a 6% levy change for the Land & Water Legacy Program, and a 0% levy change for the Washington County Regional Railroad Authority.

Throughout August and September, individual departments provided detailed presentations of their budgets and answered questions from commissioners during televised workshops which were open to the public.

As in nearly all counties, property owners in Washington County have experienced increased property values from the rise in sales prices, especially for residential properties. The median value of a home in the county went up about 20% between 2021 and 2022. The proposed levy combined with new construction and the rising valuations results in the county's tax rate decreasing by 14.5%.

Should the proposed budget and levy be approved, the median valued home in the county, which is \$386,500, assuming that its value increased by 20% in the past year, would be taxed \$919 for 2023 by the county, a \$40 or 4.6% increase over 2022.

New costs in the budget will be to pay for areas of public safety for which the county is responsible, such as deputies who patrol county communities, correctional officers who serve in the County Jail, and dispatchers who manage 9-1-1 calls in the Sheriff's Office. High turnover, growth in vacancies, and a small pool of applicants have created an employment atmosphere which makes it necessary for the county to expend more effort to retain employees and attract employees when there are open positions. Additional new costs in the budget for 2023 would pay negotiated wages and benefits for employees. There has been an increase of applications for service and more need for the health and human services that the county provides, such as services for those with mental health needs and for homelessness prevention. The proposed budget calls for investments in employees to review applications, determine eligibility, and provide services.

Inflationary costs are having an impact on managing the county's vehicles, such as plow trucks and deputies' vehicles. The cost of replacement machinery, fuel, salt for clearing roads, and construction and building materials have risen substantially over 2022, raising the cost of doing business for the county. Also, the county's Information Technology costs related to data management, data security, data storage, and technology infrastructure are increasing.

The proposed budget calls for 20 new positions countywide, which is typical in an average year. The increase in employees results in a slight decrease in the ratio of employees to residents from 2022.

Washington County is a rapidly growing county in population, which is reflected in the growth in the request for services.

The proposed budget includes Gold Line construction costs, the bus-rapid transit line that will be built from downtown St. Paul to Woodbury, roughly along Interstate 94 and then south along Bielenberg Drive in Woodbury. While money for construction is part of the proposed budget, no property tax dollars will be used to build the line. It is funded through the local option sales tax and federal money.

An evening public budget meeting will occur at 6 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 6, in the Board Room of the Government Center in Stillwater. The public is invited to attend to comment on the 2023 budget.

The budget workshops may be viewed through webstreaming of the County Board meetings. See the county website at [www.co.washington.mn.us](http://www.co.washington.mn.us) and search "County Board." See budget materials on the same website by searching "budget."

**Contact: Jennifer Wagenius, Deputy County Administrator, 651-430-6007, and Jan Lucke, Deputy Administrator, 651-430-6003**