

Staying in Touch

A communication from the Washington County Board of Commissioners

Commissioner Karwoski serving as board chair in 2024

Commissioner Stan Karwoski, District 2, will serve as Washington County Board of Commissioners' board chair in 2024.

Commissioner Fran Miron, District 1, was elected to serve as board vice chair for the year.

Karwoski was first elected to the County Board in a special election in November 2016 to serve District 2, and was reelected in 2018 and 2022. Karwoski served four terms on the Oakdale City Council and was elected mayor in 2014, prior to his service on the County Board.

Karwoski is active in many civic organizations, such as the Oakdale, Woodbury, and St. Paul Chambers, and the St. Paul Winter Carnival.



Commissioner Stan Karwoski

He is a retired 38-year employee of Graco, Inc., where he was a principal designer. He holds nine invention patents.

Karwoski is past president and former member of the Independent School District 622 Education Foundation. He is past chairman and former member of the Washington County Park and Open Space Commission. He has served with the Yellow Ribbon Network, and on the city of Oakdale's planning and park commissions. Additionally, he has volunteered as a student reading mentor and a robotics mentor.

Karwoski, a native of St. Paul, has lived in Oakdale since 1987. He is a graduate of Harding High School. He also earned a vocational school Design Degree and a Bachelor's Degree in Business Administration from Metropolitan State University.

County Board adopts legislative priorities for 2024



Minnesota State Capitol, St. Paul.

Photo credit: Visit Saint Paul

The Washington County Board of Commissioners adopted its 2024 state legislative priorities Jan. 2, 2024. The county collaborates with the state to advance local, regional, and state goals that benefit the safety and wellbeing of the public. This year's platform items include transportation, parks, housing, and recycling projects.

Review the 2024 Legislative Platform on the county website at www.co.washington.mn.us/LegislativePriorities.

Washington County prepares for 2024 Presidential Primary



The Vote Center at Cottage Grove Service Center.

Eligible voters in Washington County may vote during the March 5 Presidential Primary. The Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party, Republican Party, and Legal Marijuana Now Party will participate in this primary. Voters will be required to request a ballot for the party of their choice and will vote for a presidential candidate; no other offices will be on the ballot.

A voter's choice of party ballot will be recorded and must be provided to the chair of the political party selected.

How a voter votes on the ballot remains secret.

Voters have multiple options to cast their vote, including early voting by mail or in-person, as well as in-person voting on Presidential Primary Election Day, March 5.

Where to vote

On March 5, polling locations will be open in Washington County from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. Find the correct polling location and other election information at mnvotes.gov.

In-person absentee voting opened Jan. 19 and will run through March 4 at the following Vote Centers:

- Cottage Grove Service Center, 13000 Ravine Parkway S., Cottage Grove.
- Forest Lake Headwaters Service Center, 19955 Forest Road N., Forest Lake.
- Washington County Government Center, 14949 62nd St. N., Stillwater.
- Woodbury City Hall, 8301 Valley Creek Road, Woodbury.

Starting Feb. 16, in-person absentee voting will also be available at Oakdale City Hall, 1584 Hadley Ave. N., Oakdale.

Vote Center hours:

- Monday-Friday, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
- Saturday, March 2, 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.
- Monday, March 4, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

For questions, contact Washington County Election Administration at 651-430-6790 during regular business hours, Monday-Friday from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., or email elections@co.washington.mn.us. For more information, see the Washington County website at www.co.washington.mn.us/Elections.

County preparing 20-year Long Range Transportation Plan

Washington County is preparing its first-ever Long Range Transportation Plan. A Long Range Transportation Plan is a 20-year visioning document capturing transportation goals, needs, and priorities for all modes of transportation as part of the county's network. This planning process will build upon previous planning efforts, including the county's existing 2040 Comprehensive Plan, and support decision-making around five-year Capital Improvement Planning.

This planning process is an opportunity to holistically review and assess system performance, document system needs, and centralize information needed to support decision-making, in order to move toward identified transportation system goals. The Long Range Transportation Plan will involve an 18-month planning process.

To stay involved and share input, see the project page and subscribe to receive email updates at www.co.washington.mn.us/LRTP, or contact project manager Maddie Dahlheimer at 651-430-4338 or madeline.dahlheimer@co.washington.mn.us.

New Bielenberg Bridge open in Oakdale and Woodbury



The Bielenberg Bridge spanning Interstate 94.

The new Bielenberg Bridge, connecting Helmo Avenue in Oakdale and Bielenberg Avenue in Woodbury across Interstate 94, opened to vehicle, pedestrian, and cyclist traffic in December. The bridge has dedicated lanes in the center for the METRO Gold Line bus rapid transit corridor scheduled to open in 2025.

“The Bielenberg Bridge is an important connection between these two communities, and the Gold Line created an opportunity to bring this infrastructure to life.

We are already seeing the economic development from this connection and future transit in both Oakdale and Woodbury,” Commissioner Stan Karwoski, District 2, said.

“This is an exciting piece of infrastructure for our community that will provide a safe regional, multi-modal connection for pedestrians, bicyclists, and drivers crossing I-94 and help relieve traffic congestion on major roads like Radio Drive,” Commissioner Michelle Clasen, District 5, said.

The METRO Gold Line is a 10-mile BRT line serving St. Paul, Maplewood, Landfall, Oakdale, and Woodbury with dedicated bus-only lanes. The corridor’s western terminus will be across the street from St. Paul’s Union Depot Station. The eastern terminus will be Woodlane Drive Station in Woodbury. The Gold Line will provide frequent, all-day service in both directions. There will be 16 stations with enhanced features, four park-and-rides, and connections to new upgraded trails and sidewalks. It is part of a network of transit options and routes that connect people to destinations throughout the Twin Cities region.

Federal funds paid nearly \$7 million of the cost of building the \$9.5 million bridge. The Gold Line is anticipated to open in 2025.

For more information on the Gold Line see metrotransit.org/gold-line-project or call 651-602-1919

Food Scraps Pickup Program continues rollout in communities



Ramsey and Washington counties are rolling out a new way for residents to recycle food scraps from home — the Food Scraps Pickup Program. The Food Scraps Pickup Program is currently available to all residents of Maplewood, North St. Paul, Cottage Grove, and Newport. The program is rolling out over multiple years and will eventually be available for free to all residents of the two counties.

Food scraps make up about 20% of trash by weight collected in Ramsey and Washington counties. The Food Scraps Pickup Program is a way to recover this material so that it can be turned back into soil, rather than becoming waste. Recovering food scraps from trash will help reach the

state’s recycling goals and provide health, environmental, and economic benefits to the community.

Not yet eligible to participate? Sign up to receive email notifications when the program becomes available to new areas by visiting FoodScrapsPickup.com, or call 651-661-9393 to learn more about the program.



Washington County Library finalizes strategic plan for 2024-28

After a two-year planning process, Washington County Library has finalized a strategic plan outlining the department's priorities and work for the next five years.

The strategic planning process began in early 2022 with a staff and community engagement campaign to learn more about the state of the library system and opportunities for growth.

As part of those efforts, the library launched a community survey with unprecedented results — it received nearly 8,000 responses from library users residing in both Washington County and throughout the greater metro area, as well as from individuals whose use of their library had lapsed.

The library also conducted interviews and focus groups with communities that have been historically underserved, including many communities of color and residents over the age of 65 in Washington County.

Thanks to these efforts, the library gathered essential feedback on what Washington County residents need from their library and how services can evolve to better serve them. Several themes emerged from this analysis:

- Library users value the range of materials available for checkout and are interested in opportunities to make them more accessible through additional types of materials, books in more languages, and additional library hours.
- Users also value library facilities, emphasizing the need for safe, welcoming spaces for reading, studying, and gathering that are accessible to residents of all ages.
- Community members appreciate responsive customer service at the library and express support for staff development and innovation.
- There is strong interest from library users and staff to develop partnerships that address community needs.
- Community members and staff are interested in increased communication from the library to build awareness of services and programs.

The library's strategic plan addresses each of these themes by outlining its goals for the future and identifying concrete actions and implementation steps to accomplish that work.

“Washington County's libraries are valued public spaces where residents find sources of information, access to technology, and connection with each other,” said Commissioner Karla Bigham, District 4. “With the Library's strategic plan completed, the county can get down to the important work of making the necessary improvements to our library system that will benefit all users.”

Over the next five years, the county will focus on evaluating and improving the delivery of library services, strengthening organizational culture and operational effectiveness, enhancing physical spaces and technology infrastructure, and expanding the reach of the library.



A family reads at R. H. Stafford Library in Woodbury.



A librarian assists a visitor at Wildwood Library in Mahtomedi.

Community members are invited to view the library's completed strategic plan in person at their nearest library branch, or online at WashCoLib.org/StrategicPlan. Community members can also contact the Library with additional questions at 651-275-8500.

Free, confidential STD testing available for chlamydia, gonorrhea

Chlamydia and gonorrhea are two of the top reported infectious diseases in both Minnesota and Washington County.

These diseases can often go unnoticed due to the absence of symptoms. However, if left untreated, both diseases can lead to serious long-term health consequences. Regular checkups and early detection for sexually active individuals are key to maintaining a healthy and active lifestyle.

Washington County offers a free, confidential sexually transmitted diseases (STD) clinic that provides testing and treatment for chlamydia and gonorrhea, as well as free sexual health products. The STD clinic offers a welcoming, discreet, and non-judgmental environment to ensure that everyone can access the care and information they need to make informed decisions about their sexual health. All samples are self-collected, and testing is free of charge regardless of insurance status.



To learn more or make an appointment for testing, visit www.co.washington.mn.us/STD, call 651-430-6655, or use the QR code.



Washington County Parks purchases all-terrain wheelchairs

Two all-terrain wheelchairs will be available for visitor use at Cottage Grove Ravine Regional Park and Lake Elmo Park Reserve beginning in the spring of 2024.

Washington County Parks used funds from the Minnesota Department of Health Statewide Health Improvement Partnership to purchase two GRIT all-terrain wheelchairs for individuals to check out free of charge while visiting Washington County Parks.

These lever-driven off-road chairs are a cross between a mountain bike and a wheelchair that allow individuals to access more rugged trails and terrains.



GRIT all-terrain wheelchair at Lake Elmo Park Reserve.

For more information, see the county's website, www.co.washington.mn.us/Parks, or contact Parks staff at parks@co.washington.mn.us and 651-430-8370.



Connect with Washington County!

Meet the Task Force at the front lines against human trafficking

January was Human Trafficking Awareness Month, reminding people that they need to educate themselves, be vigilant, and take action to stop this crime. Human trafficking is a serious issue in the United States, and occurs in Washington County. People from all over the world can take advantage of vulnerable individuals, using force, lies, or coercion for sexual or labor exploitation.

In Washington County, the East Metro Human Trafficking Task Force (EMHTTF) is the main defense against human trafficking. This group includes law enforcement agencies and the Washington County Attorney's Office. Their job is to investigate, arrest, and charge those responsible for human trafficking. They work with local, state, federal, and community partners to conduct operations and provide victims of human trafficking with the resources and support to escape rather than relying on criminal prosecution.

In 2023, the EMHTTF investigated 43 human trafficking cases in Washington County, with 25 of them involving young people. Many cases are connected to runaways who often end up in the world of trafficking. Nowadays, runaways can easily connect with people globally through social media, making it easy for them to acquire the means to escape far from home. Compounding this danger is the fact that juveniles are often "groomed" on social media apps by those with ill intentions, falling victim to manipulative schemes disguised as relationships.

Parents, educators, and community members have important roles in preventing trafficking and helping those who might be at risk. Parents should keep an eye on their children's social media use, understand the apps they use, and be aware



of their contacts. Look out for changes in behavior, such as withdrawing from friends, hanging out with older groups, or changing appearance. Educators should be alert to unusual behavior at school, address unexplained absences, and notice changes in social circles. Community members should be proactive by having conversations, spreading awareness, and reporting anything suspicious.

"Together, we can build a shield of protection for our community that leaves no room for the darkness of human trafficking to persist," County Attorney Kevin Magnuson said.

"Every vigilant eye, every informed guardian, and every caring community member is a crucial force in the collective effort to safeguard our communities," Washington County Sheriff Dan Starry added.

Learn more about human trafficking by seeing the county's website, www.co.washington.mn.us/HumanTrafficking. Those with information may contact the East Metro Human Trafficking Task Force anonymous tip line at 651-430-7825.

Public feedback needed for downtown Scandia study

Washington County, in partnership with the City of Scandia, is creating a plan to improve connections for pedestrians, bicyclists, and other modes of travel within the city's center.

This plan will identify ways to address safety and better connect residents and visitors throughout downtown Scandia. This project is motivated by planned improvements to the Scandia Arts and Heritage Center, along with

the future construction of the Gateway State Trail Extension and Trailhead, and incorporates information from a recent Scandia Parks and Recreation Plan. The study will focus on creating a vision for multi-modal connectivity that will set the stage for future roadway, trail/sidewalk, and public space improvements.

During the first phase of the project, the county will gather ideas and

concerns from the public about safety and mobility throughout the heart of Scandia.

"With the planned development of Scandia buildings and trails, this study is coming at the right time to present residents an opportunity to develop a safer, better connected downtown Scandia for today's community members and future generations," said Commissioner Fran Miron, District 1.

Residents may get involved by seeing the project website at www.co.washington.mn.us/ScandiaCityCenterStudy. Contact staff directly by emailing PW-ScandiaCityCenter@co.washington.mn.us or calling 651-430-4363.

Washington County Board commissioners



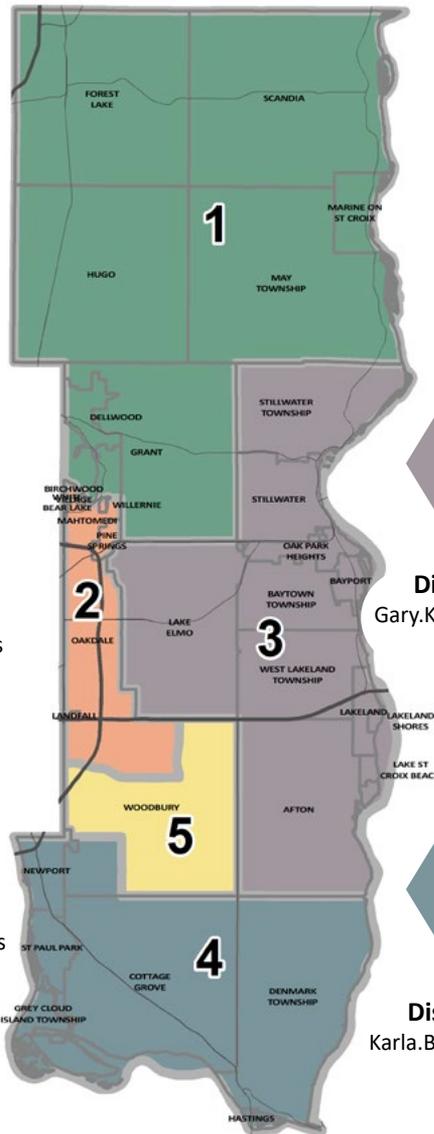
District 1 - Fran Miron
 Fran.Miron@co.washington.mn.us
 651-430-6211



District 2 - Stan Karwoski
 Stan.Karwoski@co.washington.mn.us
 651-430-6212



District 5 - Michelle Clasen
 Michelle.Clasen@co.washington.mn.us
 651-430-6215



District 3 - Gary Kriesel
 Gary.Kriesel@co.washington.mn.us
 651-430-6213



District 4 - Karla Bigham
 Karla.Bigham@co.washington.mn.us
 651-430-6214



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

Washington County Board of Commissioners

Washington County commissioners develop policy and make decisions that govern the county. For information, see www.co.washington.mn.us or call 651-430-6000 (TTY - 651-430-6246).

County Board Meetings

The County Board generally meets most Tuesdays at 9 a.m. in the Government Center, 14949 N. 62nd St., Stillwater. Meeting information is online, or call the Office of Administration at 651-430-6001.

Livestreaming and cablecasting

Board meetings are livestreamed, and are at www.co.washington.mn.us/Livestream, where they are also archived. Board meetings may also be cablecast in some areas.

4 important tips to stay safe around snowplows this winter

When a winter storm hits, Washington County's snowplow drivers are on the job ensuring the county roads are safe to travel. The drivers clear the roads of ice and snow along 26 different routes equaling 296 traffic miles. When snowplows are out, follow these four tips to stay safe.

1. Stay back at least 500 feet. If a motorist cannot see the rear-view mirrors on the plow truck, the operator cannot see the motorist.
2. Don't pass snowplows. Snowplows create a snow cloud that makes it almost impossible for a motorist to verify that it is safe to pass the snowplow. Don't take a chance.

3. Slow down and stay away. Oncoming vehicles should slow down and move safely to the right, away from the plow.
4. Don't play close to the road. Discourage children from playing next to a road. The snowplow could hurt unseen children when plowing snow.

Following these tips helps reduce accidents and ensures plow drivers can do their important jobs safely and efficiently.

**Name a Snowplow Contest winners:
 Plowabunga and Taylor Drift**

******ECRWSS****
Postal Customer



01/25/2024/118,500

PACT Act expands health care, benefits eligibility for veterans

The PACT Act is a new federal law that expands Veterans Administration, or VA, health care and benefits for Veterans exposed to burn pits, Agent Orange, and other toxic substances.

The law expands and extends eligibility for VA health care for Veterans with toxic exposures and Veterans of the Vietnam, Gulf War, and post-9/11 eras. It adds 20-plus more presumptive conditions for burn pits, Agent Orange, and other toxic exposures. The law also adds more presumptive-exposure locations for Agent Orange and radiation. The VA is required to provide a toxic exposure screening to every Veteran enrolled in VA health care. The law also helps improve research, staff education, and treatment related to toxic exposures.

“U.S. military Veterans made great sacrifices during their service and the PACT Act helps provide generations of Veterans exposed to toxic substances and their survivors with the care and benefits they’ve earned and deserve,” said Commissioner Gary Kriesel, District 3. “Washington County’s Veteran Services Officers are ready to help our county’s Veterans navigate the new legislation, including learning about eligibility and how to receive the new care and benefits.”

The full name of the law is The Sergeant First Class (SFC) Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act.



For information on the PACT Act or other available Veteran or survivor benefits, call Washington County Veterans Services for an appointment at 651-430-6895 or email VSO@co.washington.mn.us.