

# Staying in Touch

A communication from the Washington County Board of Commissioners

## Public budget meeting to be held Dec. 2, final vote Dec. 16

The Washington County Board of Commissioners will hold a public budget meeting at 6 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 2, to discuss the proposed 2026 budget and preliminary property tax levy. The board will vote on the final 2026 budget and levy Tuesday, Dec. 16.

On Sept. 23, the board approved a preliminary property tax levy of \$148.9 million, a 6.9% increase from last year. The Regional Rail Authority levy remains at \$660,000, and the Land and Water Legacy Program levy remains at \$1.2 million.

The county has the third-lowest property tax levy per capita statewide and the second-lowest tax rate in the seven-county metro area. That means a similarly valued property would be taxed at a higher rate in every other metro county except Dakota.

For homes that saw a median increase in value from last year, the county portion of property taxes is estimated to increase by:

- \$31 (4.2%) for a home valued at \$330,000
- \$41 (4.2%) for a home valued at \$423,700
- \$58 (4.4%) for a home valued at \$550,000

### 2026 Proposed Budget Highlights

The total proposed county budget for 2026 is \$434.2 million, which includes:

- \$299.9 million for operating expenses
- \$117.5 million for capital investments
- \$16.8 million for debt service

### What's driving the budget

Several factors shape the 2026 budget, including:

- Federal and state cost shifts for mandated services.
- Employee compensation and rising health care costs.
- Inflation in construction, equipment, fuel, and wages.



The Washington County Board Room at the Government Center in Stillwater.

- Population growth, which is driving demand for services.

### Planned 2026 capital investments

The county will make capital investments in:

- Park Grove Library improvements.
- Central Yard Waste Site upgrades.
- Road construction and bridge projects.
- Park improvements.

The budget also addresses waitlists and backlogs in human services due to higher service demand and more complex assessment requirements. Under this budget, the county will maintain its long-standing staffing ratio of five employees per 1,000 residents.

The full budget proposal is available at [WashingtonCountyMN.gov/Budget](https://WashingtonCountyMN.gov/Budget). County board meeting presentations are available at [WashingtonCountyMN.gov/CountyBoard](https://WashingtonCountyMN.gov/CountyBoard).



## County earns Triple Crown Award for financial reporting

Washington County again received the Triple Crown award from the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) for excellence in financial reporting.

### The Triple Crown Award includes:

- A Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting for the 2023 Annual Comprehensive Financial Report (ACFR).
- An Award for Outstanding Achievement in Popular Annual Financial Reporting (PAFR) for 2023.
- A Distinguished Budget Presentation Award for the 2025 budget.

“Earning the Triple Crown is a reflection of the county’s long-standing commitment to sound financial management and transparency,” said Commissioner Stan Karwoski, District 2. “These awards show residents and rating agencies alike that Washington County is dedicated to being a good steward of taxpayer dollars while making sure our financial information is clear and accessible to the public.”

This is the 39th consecutive year that the county has received the Certificate of Achievement for its ACFR,

recognizing its strong financial reporting.

For the sixth consecutive year, the county has also won the GFOA Award for Outstanding Achievement in PAFR. This report is meant to be easy for the public to read, using simple language, charts, and graphs to explain the county’s finances.

The county also received the Distinguished Budget Presentation Award for its 2025 budget, marking the 28th consecutive year it has won this award. The budget was reviewed by peers to make sure it met national standards and passed all 14 required criteria.

Washington County is one of the few counties in Minnesota and the U.S. to receive all three awards, known as the GFOA’s Triple Crown. This award program started in 1998 and is the only national program for government budgeting awards.

The county’s ACFR and PAFR are available at the Washington County Government Center (14949 62nd St. N, Stillwater), at Washington County Library branches, and online at [WashingtonCountyMN.gov/AFD](http://WashingtonCountyMN.gov/AFD). The county’s budget is available online at [WashingtonCountyMN.gov/Budget](http://WashingtonCountyMN.gov/Budget).

## Broadband internet expanded across Washington County

More than 1,600 households across Washington County now have access to broadband internet for the first time, thanks to partnerships between the State of Minnesota, internet service providers, cities, and Washington County.

Expansion projects supported by funds from Washington County and completed by MidCo and Comcast connected 1,626 homes to high-speed service in Forest Lake, Scandia, May Township, Afton, Grey Cloud Island, Hugo, Grant, and Stillwater Township.

“High-speed internet has become essential for work, school, health care, farming, and small businesses,” said Commissioner Bethany Cox, District 3. “By expanding service into previously unserved areas, these projects will improve the quality of life and create new opportunities for community members.”

Washington County invested \$2 million from American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding in direct grants and matching contributions. That investment included \$1.1 million in matching funds that allowed partnered communities to access \$5.5 million in state broadband grants.

Beyond the projects supported with county funding, city governments have led grant-funded projects connecting



Local officials and representatives from Comcast celebrate the completion of the Stillwater Township broadband expansion project.

more than 850 additional households in Scandia and more than 300 additional households in Forest Lake.

With the completion of these expansion projects, 97% of households in Washington County have access to high-speed internet that meets or exceeds the state’s goals of 100 megabits per second (Mbps) download speeds and 20 Mbps upload speeds.

For more information about how Washington County used ARPA funding to make other investments, visit [WashingtonCountyMN.gov/ARPA](http://WashingtonCountyMN.gov/ARPA).

# Measles: Know the symptoms, risks, and how to prevent it

Measles cases are increasing in Minnesota, across the U.S., and worldwide. This year, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has confirmed more than 1,500 cases in the U.S. — the highest number reported since 1992.

Washington County offers low- or no-cost immunizations, including the MMR (measles, mumps, and rubella) vaccine, to eligible community members.

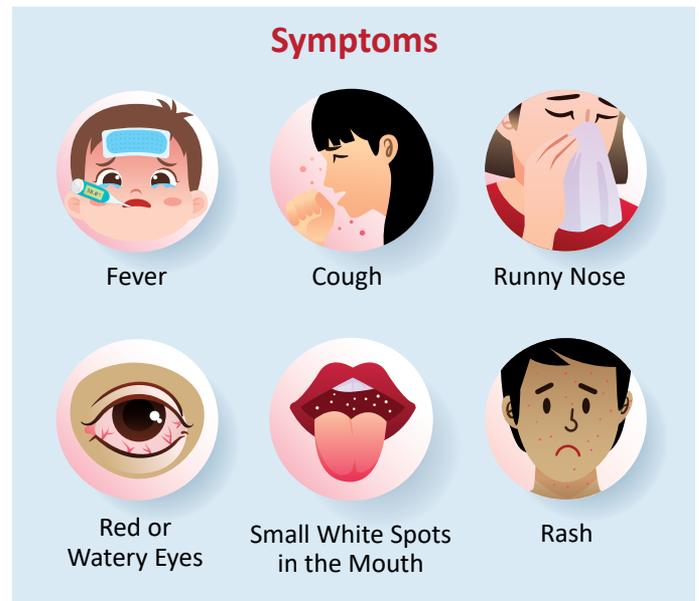
“As a community, we all share the responsibility to look out for one another,” said Commissioner Michelle Clasen, District 5. “By making sure you and your family are vaccinated, you’re helping protect not only your loved ones but also infants, seniors, and others who may be more vulnerable to measles.”

## What is measles?

Measles is a highly contagious illness spread through coughing, sneezing, or being in the same room with an infected person. Measles can be serious — especially for babies and young children — sometimes leading to hospitalization or even death. According to the CDC:

- 1 in 5 people who get measles are hospitalized.
- 1 in 20 children with measles develop pneumonia.
- 1 to 3 people out of every 1,000 with measles die.

Symptoms can include fever, cough, runny nose, red or watery eyes, small white spots in the mouth, and a rash that typically starts on the face and spreads across the body. Cold-like symptoms usually appear eight to 12 days after exposure. The rash may appear between seven to 21 days after exposure, often around 14 days.



## What prevents measles?

The MMR vaccine is the best defense against measles. Children are recommended to receive a first dose at 12 to 15 months and a second at 4 to 6 years. Adults who haven’t been vaccinated can still receive the vaccine.

The MMR vaccine is safe, effective, and has a proven history of reducing disease. Two doses are about 97% effective at preventing measles; one dose is about 93% effective. You can check your immunization records or talk with your health care provider to confirm you and your children have received the vaccine.

Learn more about immunizations and eligibility requirements at Washington County Public Health Clinics by visiting [WashingtonCountyMN.gov/Immunizations](http://WashingtonCountyMN.gov/Immunizations) or calling 651-430-4036.



Getting you where you need to go.

Need help finding transportation information? Visit [GoWashingtonMN.com](http://GoWashingtonMN.com) for information about options in your area. Watch a short video on the “About Us” page to learn about services and available travel training for residents. We can help new riders learn how to pay, how to ride, and how to get started.

Can't find what you need? Contact the Transportation Navigator by clicking on "Contact Us" on the site, or by calling 651-430-6651.



GoWashington is funded in part by the Minnesota Department of Transportation.

# CDA offers free, confidential foreclosure counseling



Facing foreclosure can feel overwhelming, but homeowners don't have to go through it alone.

Foreclosure is the legal process a lender or homeowners' association (HOA) uses to take back a property when payments fall behind. The Washington County Community

Development Agency (CDA) offers free, confidential counseling to help residents navigate this process.

The CDA's housing counselors are certified by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). They work with homeowners to understand their rights, explore possible solutions, and communicate with lenders or HOAs. Together, they can create a recovery plan focused on protecting long-term financial stability.

Many homeowners don't realize HOAs can also initiate foreclosure — sometimes for relatively small unpaid balances. Once an account is sent to an attorney, resolving the issue becomes harder and more expensive. Seeking help early may prevent the problem from escalating, while also saving money on collection and foreclosure fees.

Housing costs should remain a top priority during financial hardship. A home is not only a place to live — it's often a family's largest investment. Protecting that asset is critical.

## Steps to take when facing foreclosure

- 1. Talk to your lender or loan servicer.** Only they can change loan terms.
- 2. Seek expert advice.** HUD-certified counselors provide free, confidential support.
- 3. Stay in touch.** Ask about workout options and respond quickly to notices.
- 4. Watch for scams.** Never pay for foreclosure "help," guaranteed loan modifications, or to sign over your home. Trusted counseling is always free.
- 5. Know your rights.** In Minnesota, homeowners may be able to postpone a foreclosure sale by up to five months, creating valuable time to find solutions.

To take the first step toward protecting your home and peace of mind, contact the CDA's homeownership team at 651-202-2822, email [Homeownership@WashingtonCountyCDA.org](mailto:Homeownership@WashingtonCountyCDA.org), or visit [WashingtonCountyCDA.org](http://WashingtonCountyCDA.org).

**YOUR CAREER  
AWAITS AT**

**Washington  
County**

Washington County values your experience, perspective, and unique identity.

**Join our team.**

**Apply Online!**

**[GovernmentJobs.com/Careers/WashingtonMN](http://GovernmentJobs.com/Careers/WashingtonMN)**



# PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT PROGRAM

For more than 20 years, Washington County has measured the performance of its departments to ensure residents receive high-quality, efficient services. Tracking results helps the county understand what is working well, identify areas for improvement, and make informed decisions about how best to serve the community.

This is a snapshot of the Annual Report on Community Indicators (ARCI), which highlights progress, outcomes, and the county's commitment to accountability and continuous improvement.

For information on Washington County's continuous efforts to improve its performance and the full ARCI, see the county website at [WashingtonCountyMN.gov/PerformanceMeasures](https://WashingtonCountyMN.gov/PerformanceMeasures).



## HOUSEHOLD HAZARDOUS WASTE

In 2024, the Washington County Environmental Center diverted more than 5 million pounds of household hazardous waste, recyclables, organics, and electronics from landfills through collection activities. This improves safety by keeping hazardous waste out of the solid waste stream and making it safer for processing.

## LIBRARY TOTAL CIRCULATION

In 2024, the library circulated more than 2.7 million items. Community members access the library's collection by visiting branch locations, browsing the library's online catalog, or through various online applications.



## PARK VISITOR SATISFACTION

In 2024, 97.3% of county park users surveyed said that they were either very satisfied or satisfied with their visit. Hiking/walking, camping, biking, using picnic areas, and playgrounds were identified as the top five activities from county park survey respondents. Washington County uses the feedback gathered from the survey to assess and improve its programs, services, and facilities.





## IMMUNIZATION RATES

Washington County monitors the percentage of children living in the county who receive the recommended vaccines. The percentage of 2-year-olds who received vaccines was 76% in 2024, which is higher than the state average of 63%.

## RECIDIVISM RATES

Tracking the rate of recidivism, or how often offenders commit another crime, helps the county gauge its success in meeting the goal of promoting health and safety. In 2024, 78% of adult offenders and 95% of juvenile offenders were not convicted of a new felony offense within three years of leaving probation.



## ABSENCE OF MALTREATMENT

The “absence of maltreatment” measures the percentage of children who did not have confirmed abuse reported again within 12 months of the first report. In 2024, 100% of children in Washington County did not experience further abuse, which is up from 98.9% in 2023.

## FOOD SUPPORT CASES

To promote health and safety, Washington County administers the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to residents who meet federally established income guidelines. SNAP helps individuals and families get access to the food they need for nutritious and well-balanced meals. In 2024, the county averaged 5,531 open food support cases per month, representing a 32% increase compared to 2019.





## WIC BREASTFEEDING

Washington County's Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program helps families eat well and stay healthy. Breastfeeding education and support are central to this. In 2024, Washington County's efforts to promote breastfeeding initiation continued to show promise, with the breastfeeding initiation rate remaining steady at 81%.

## HOMELESS OUTREACH

The Homeless Outreach Services Team (HOST) is the county's point of access for individuals and families experiencing homelessness or who are at risk of becoming homeless. The number of combined phone and face-to-face contacts served by the outreach team is an indicator of the need for affordable housing resources and homelessness services. In 2024, HOST had 3,869 contacts, representing a 4.4% decrease in contacts from 2023.



## PAVEMENT CONDITION INDEX (PCI)

Maintaining pavement in good condition is recognized as important for both user satisfaction and long-term performance. In 2024, the county's Pavement Condition Index (PCI) overall rating was 67, which fell below the county's goal of 72 on a 0-100 scale but is well above the minimum PCI goal of 40.

## CRIMINAL CHARGING TURNAROUND TIME

Turnaround time for criminal charging is important because the decision to initiate a criminal prosecution impacts public safety and the lives of victims, witnesses, and suspects within the county. The Washington County Attorney's Office averaged six days to make a charging decision in 2024, surpassing the current goal of 14 days.



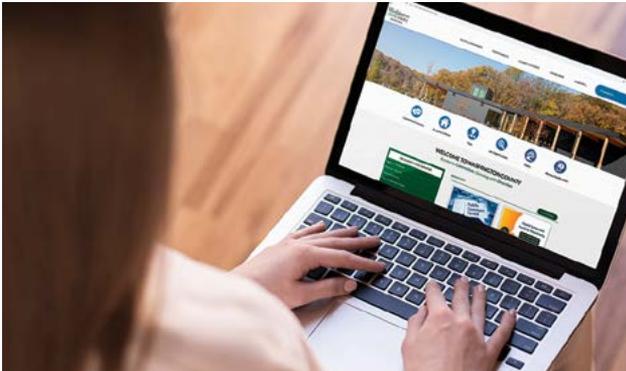
## LEVY PER CAPITA

Tracking taxes or costs per person helps ensure that county tax dollars are spent wisely with only small changes in the tax burden each year. Washington County has the third lowest levies per person among all 87 Minnesota counties.



## 2024 WEBSITE VISITS

In 2024, more than 3.7 million visits were made to the county's website with community members seeking information about libraries, parks, road construction, voting, and other services provided by the county. The website serves as a central hub for information and resources for residents.



## ENERGY USAGE INTENSITY

Improving energy efficiency is an important part of making Washington County more sustainable. Setting guidelines or benchmarks helps the county compare the energy use of buildings that are similar in size and use. Significant milestones in energy performance were achieved in 2024, with the average energy usage intensity across all county buildings decreasing by 3%. The Washington County Government Center led with a 26% reduction in energy usage intensity.



These highlights are from the 2024 ARCI. This annual report reflects Washington County's continued commitment to high-quality service that meets and exceeds the needs and expectations of Washington County residents. The 2024 ARCI is the 25th annual report and is available at Washington County Library branches, the county's service centers, and on the county's website [WashingtonCountyMN.gov/PerformanceMeasures](https://WashingtonCountyMN.gov/PerformanceMeasures).

# Park Grove Library to close for redesign project in early 2026

Washington County's Park Grove Library branch in Cottage Grove will close in early 2026 for a major redesign project due to the aging building.

## Where can I access library services during the closure?

The county will offer library services in at least two temporary locations in Cottage Grove during construction, which is anticipated to last until early 2027. These locations include:

- Cottage Grove Service Center – Basic library services, such as getting a library card, holds pickup, a small browsing collection, and access to public computers and printing. Hours of operation are still to be determined.
- Cottage Grove Armory – Outreach programming, such as storytimes, book clubs, baby playdates, and sewing and crafting classes. Some programming will also be done off-site in the community.

## Why are you redesigning the library?

The current building was constructed



Rendering of the renovations at Park Grove Library in Cottage Grove.

in 1984 and no longer meets our community's current needs. Parking and visibility are also a challenge. A redesigned library will maintain quality services in an energy-efficient, modern, and welcoming facility.

"Park Grove Library has long been a

gathering place for Cottage Grove and the surrounding community," said Commissioner Karla Bigham, District 4. "This renovation ensures the library will remain a welcoming space that inspires connection and a lifelong love of reading for generations to come."

## How can I get updates on the project?

Washington County Library will share information on its social media pages (@WashCoLib) and email newsletter. Community members can sign up for email project updates on the project website at [WashingtonCountyMN.gov/ParkGroveLibraryProject](https://WashingtonCountyMN.gov/ParkGroveLibraryProject) under the "Public Involvement" tab.

# Washington County's Name a Snowplow contest is back



Washington County residents are invited to help name two of the county's snowplows again this year. The submission form opens Monday, Nov. 24, and closes on Friday, Dec. 19.

County staff will review the submissions and present the top ideas for final voting in January 2026, when the public will select the two winning names. Any submissions that include profanity or other inappropriate language will not be considered.

Last year's winners included Land of 10,000 Flakes, seen in the southern part of the county, and Sir Plows A lot, seen in the northern part.



Entries can be submitted online beginning Monday, Nov. 24 by scanning the QR code or visiting: [SurveyMonkey.com/r/WCNameAPlow](https://SurveyMonkey.com/r/WCNameAPlow).

# New system helps 911 operators provide improved assistance

When you call 911, every second matters. That's why it's critical that public safety telecommunicators have the best tools and information to get help to you quickly.

In 2024, more than 97% of 911 calls to Washington County's Emergency Communications Response Center (ECRC) were answered within 10 seconds. Now, telecommunicators have an advanced new system designed to dispatch first responders even faster and help them be better prepared when they arrive on scene.

The ECRC recently launched TotalResponse Computer-Aided Call Handling, which gives dispatchers structured, real-time guidance during emergency calls. After years of planning and testing, the system is being used initially for medical emergencies, with plans to gradually expand it to cover all types of incidents.

"Representing a rural part of the county, I know how critical every minute can be when someone calls 911," said Commissioner Fran Miron, District 1. "The TotalResponse

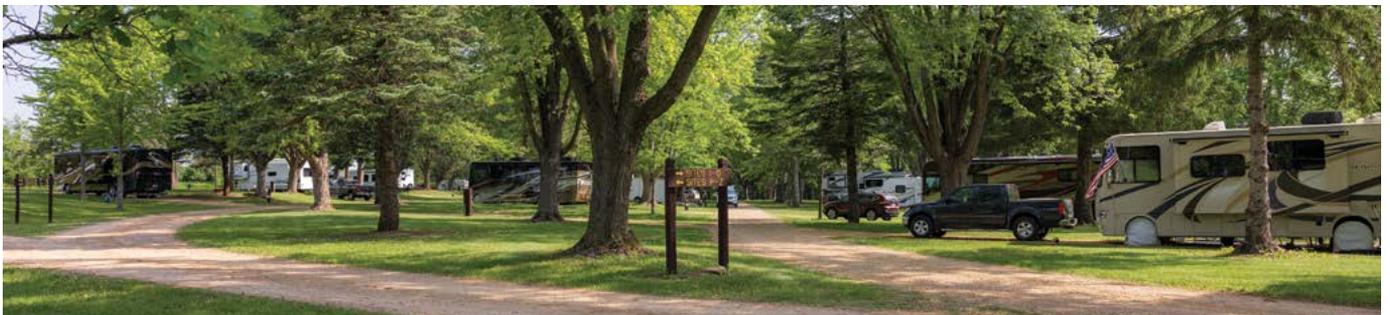


The Sheriff's Office Emergency Communications Response Center at the Law Enforcement Center in Stillwater.

system shows our continued commitment to investing in both technology and training within the Sheriff's Office so our communities get the fastest, most effective help possible."

To learn more about the ECRC, visit [WashingtonCountyMN.gov/ECRC](https://WashingtonCountyMN.gov/ECRC).

# Parks camping reservation process updated for 2026 season



Campsites at St. Croix Bluffs Regional Park.

Washington County Parks is updating its campground reservation system for the 2026 season to make booking easier, more accommodating, and fairer.

## What's changing:

- Instead of opening all reservations on a single day in January, sites will now be available on a rolling basis.
- Campsite reservations will open 120 days before the campers' desired arrival date.

## How it works:

- Reservations for the first day of the 2026 camping season — April 24, 2026, at Lake Elmo Park Reserve and St. Croix Bluffs Regional Park — will open Dec. 26, 2025.
- Reservations will continue to open up 120 days before the

arrival date. For example, to camp Memorial Day weekend with an arrival date of Friday, May 22, 2026, reservations will open on Friday, Jan. 23, 2026.

## Why the change:

In past years, all reservations opened on one day in January, which caused heavy website traffic, errors, and frustration for campers. The new rolling system spreads bookings throughout the year, giving campers more flexibility and a better chance to reserve sites as they make their plans.

Reservations can be made online at [WashingtonCountyMN.gov/Parks](https://WashingtonCountyMN.gov/Parks). For questions, email staff at [Parks@WashingtonCountyMN.gov](mailto:Parks@WashingtonCountyMN.gov) or call 651-430-4300.

# Washington County Board commissioners



**District 1 - Fran Miron**

Fran.Miron@WashingtonCountyMN.gov  
651-430-6211



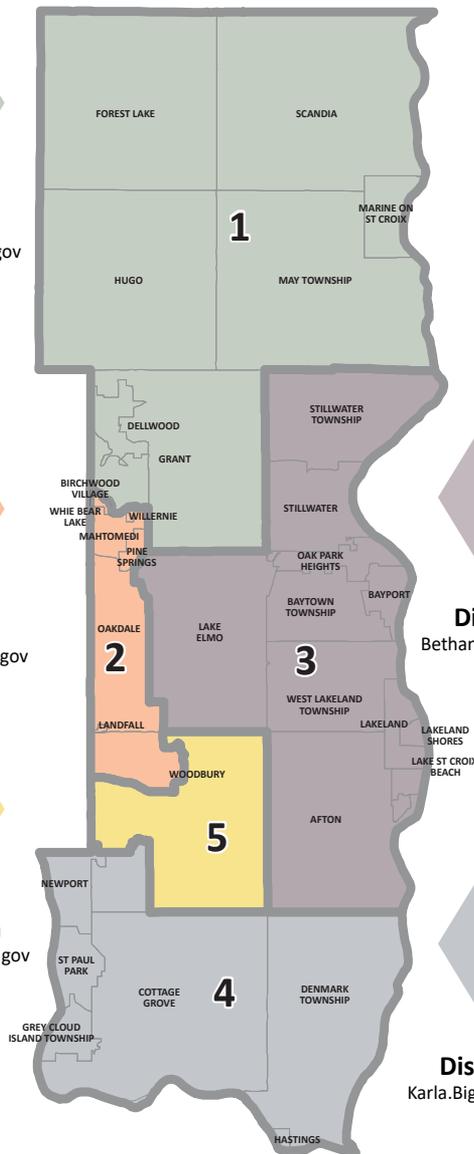
**District 2 - Stan Karwoski**

Stan.Karwoski@WashingtonCountyMN.gov  
651-430-6212



**District 5 - Michelle Clasen**

Michelle.Clasen@WashingtonCountyMN.gov  
651-430-6215



**District 3 - Bethany Cox**

Bethany.Cox@WashingtonCountyMN.gov  
651-430-6213



**District 4 - Karla Bigam**

Karla.Bigam@WashingtonCountyMN.gov  
651-430-6214



## Washington County Board of Commissioners

Washington County commissioners develop policy and make decisions that govern the county. For information, visit [WashingtonCountyMN.gov](http://WashingtonCountyMN.gov) or call 651-430-6000 (Teletypewriter (TTY): 651-430-6246).

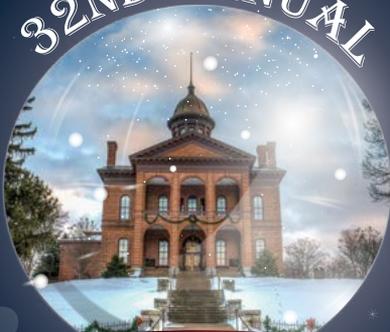
## County Board Meetings

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 at [WashingtonCountyMN.gov/Livestream](http://WashingtonCountyMN.gov/Livestream), where they are also archived. Board meetings may also be cablecast in some areas.

32ND ANNUAL



HOLIDAY  
BAZAAR

CHRISTMAS

AT THE

COURTHOUSE

Washington County Historic Courthouse  
101 West Pine Street, Stillwater, MN



Saturday, Nov. 22  
10 a.m.-2 p.m.  
Sunday, Nov. 23  
11 a.m.-3 p.m.

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



11/15/2025/127,752

## Winter Parks Events and Programs

### Monthly Bird Hikes

Second Saturday of every month, 9-10:30 a.m. location rotates throughout the Washington County Park system, free with vehicle permit

Take part in a guided bird hike at Washington County Parks. Whether you're a beginner or experienced birder, these hikes are a great way to get outdoors, listen to the sounds of nature, and learn to identify the birds that call the St. Croix Valley home. Visit [WashingtonCountyMN.gov/BirdHikes](http://WashingtonCountyMN.gov/BirdHikes) for more details.

### Solstice under the Stars

Friday, Dec. 19, 6-8 p.m., Lake Elmo Park Reserve, Nordic Center, free with vehicle permit

Join us for a magical evening as we welcome the return of the light. Enjoy a short, family-friendly hike, warm up by the bonfire, create nature crafts, and take time to set intentions for the winter ahead. This all-ages event is a perfect way to connect with nature, community, and the spirit of the season.

### Winter Outdoor Camp

Tuesday, Dec. 30, 1-4 p.m., Lake Elmo Park Reserve, Nordic Center, \$35 per person

Kids will learn winter skills like shelter and fire building, explore the outdoors, and play fun winter games. This is a hands-on way to stay active over winter break for children in grades 3 to 5. Registration is required. Visit [WashingtonCountyMN.gov/Programs](http://WashingtonCountyMN.gov/Programs).

### Full Moon New Year's Hike

Friday, Jan. 2, 6 p.m., Lake Elmo Park Reserve, Eagle Point Trailhead, free with vehicle permit

Begin 2026 with a peaceful three-mile hike beneath the glow of the first full moon of the year. Wander the winter trails around Eagle Point Lake on uneven terrain and reflect on the year ahead. No registration necessary.

### Winter Maker's Market

Saturday, Jan. 17, 10 a.m.-3 p.m., Cottage Grove Ravine Regional Park, free with vehicle permit

Celebrate the season at our Winter Maker's Market. Stroll the beautiful winter trails, browse handmade goods from local craft vendors, and purchase a bite from the food truck.

### Winter Constellations

Friday, Jan. 23, 6:30-8 p.m., Lake Elmo Park Reserve, Nordic Center, \$5 per person, kids 6 and under are free

Get to know the constellations like The Big Bear, Orion the Hunter, Gemini the Twins, and hear some of the great stories behind them. We'll also use large visual telescopes, among the largest mobile telescopes in Minnesota, for close-up views of Jupiter, Saturn, star clusters, and more.

### Blizzard Bash

Saturday, Feb. 14, 11 a.m.-3 p.m., Cottage Grove Ravine Regional Park, free with vehicle permit

Join us for a fun-filled winter celebration. Enjoy free snowshoeing, ice fishing demos from 11 a.m.-1 p.m., winter crafts, tasty bites from food trucks, and cozy up by the bonfire.

A vehicle permit (\$7/daily or \$30/annual) is required for entry to all Washington County parks except the Historic Courthouse. Learn more about upcoming Parks events at [WashingtonCountyMN.gov/Programs](http://WashingtonCountyMN.gov/Programs) or contact staff at [Parks@WashingtonCountyMN.gov](mailto:Parks@WashingtonCountyMN.gov) or 651-430-4300.