

Staying in Touch

A communication from the Washington County Board of Commissioners



Park Grove Library closes for construction February 28

Park Grove Library will close for construction at 5 p.m., Saturday, February 28.

A temporary library location at the Washington County Cottage Grove Service Center (13000 Ravine Parkway South) will open on Monday, March 2. Library hours at the Service Center are:

- Monday, Wednesday: 10 a.m. to 7 p.m.
- Tuesday, Thursday, Friday: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.
- Saturday: 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

“Libraries are an important part of daily life for families, students, and older adults in our community,” said Commissioner Karla Bigham, District 4. “Even during construction, we’re committed to keeping services, programs, and connections available close to home.”

The temporary library will offer basic library services, such as getting a library card, holds pickup, a small browsing collection, and access to

public computers and printing.

Library staff will offer regular storytimes, book clubs, tax assistance, and tech programs at the Service Center. Plans are also in development to offer programs at the Cottage Grove Armory.

Ongoing programs at the **Cottage Grove Service Center** include:

- Wednesdays at 10:30 a.m. – Music and Movement Storytime (Families)
- Thursdays at 3:30 p.m. – Contraption Club: 3D Printing (Ages 9-12)
- Second Wednesday at 1 p.m. – Daytime Book Club (Adults)
- Fourth Wednesday at 5:30 p.m. – Evening Book Club (Adults)

Additionally, library staff will host programs out in the community.

Upcoming special events at **Cottage Grove Ravine Regional Park** include:

- Tuesday, March 3 at 12:30 p.m. – Mindful Magnets

- Tuesday, March 3 at 4 p.m. – Duniya Drum & Dance
- Tuesday, April 7 at 3:30 p.m. – Roe Family Singers
- Tuesday, May 5 at 12 p.m. – Clay City

These events are planned for the first Tuesday of the month when entrance to Washington County Parks is free, no vehicle permit required.

Planning begins for R.H. Stafford Library project

This spring, Washington County will begin planning for a major renovation at R.H. Stafford Library in Woodbury. During the design process, there will be opportunities for community members to share their hopes and ideas for remodeling the library.

You can learn more about the project at WashingtonCountyMN.gov/RHStaffordLibraryProject

For project updates, sign up for email alerts and follow Washington County Library on social media at @WashCoLib.

Find upcoming programs and library services during the closure at WashCoLib.org/ParkGrove.

Bigham elected board chair, Cox vice chair for 2026

Commissioner Karla Bigham, District 4, was elected in January to serve as the Washington County Board of Commissioners' board chair in 2026.

Commissioner Bethany Cox, District 3, was elected to serve as board vice chair for the year.



Commissioner Karla Bigham, District 4, Vice Chair

Bigham, elected in 2022, is in her second tenure on the Washington County Board after serving previously from 2015 to 2018. In addition to her county-level experience, she has served in the Minnesota State Senate for five years, in the Minnesota House of Representatives from 2007 until 2011, and on the Cottage Grove City Council from 2005 until 2007. Prior to the city council, she chaired the Cottage Grove Public Safety,

Health, and Welfare Commission. Bigham was chair of the Cottage Grove Charter Commission and was a member of the Cottage Grove Environmental Commission. To learn

more about Chair Bigham's background and duties, visit WashingtonCountyMN.gov/Bigham.



Commissioner Bethany Cox, District 3, Vice Chair

Commissioner Bethany Cox was elected to the County Board of Commissioners in November 2024 to represent District 3. Before being elected to the County Board, Cox worked as the Director of Development at the Wild Rivers Conservancy of the St. Croix and Namekagon from 2019 to 2024. Cox served on the City of Stillwater Planning Commission from 2022 to 2024 and the Public Library Board of Trustees from 2018 to 2022. To

learn more about Vice Chair Cox's background and duties, visit WashingtonCountyMN.gov/Cox.

The board also set its meeting dates for 2026. Information on board meetings can be found at WashingtonCountyMN.gov/CountyBoard.

County Board sets the 2026 legislative priorities

The Washington County Board of Commissioners set the county's 2026 legislative priorities in January and shared them with local lawmakers.

Each year, the County Board outlines key issues and funding requests that are important to Washington County. For 2026, they are asking the Legislature for:

- \$4 million for land and equipment to process wood waste and diseased trees.
- \$1.1 million for the Minnesota Department of Health to conduct biomonitoring of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in the East Metro.
- \$2 million to design and construct intersection improvements at County State Aid Highway (CSAH) 10 (10th Street), CSAH 17 (Lake Elmo Avenue), and County Road 17B in Lake Elmo.
- \$500,000 for intersection improvements at CSAH 18 (Bailey Road) and CSAH 19 (Woodbury Drive) in Woodbury.
- \$22.5 million to build the County Road 19A (Innovation

Road) and 100th Street Realignment Project in Cottage Grove.

- \$3 million to build a trailhead and trail connection from CSAH 5 (Stonebridge Trail North) to the Brown's Creek State Trail in Stillwater.
- Legislation protecting the current formula for distributing Transportation Advancement Account funds and Regional Transportation Sales Tax.
- Legislation granting a sales tax exemption on construction materials, supplies, and equipment for two major regional public facility projects in 2027.
- \$3 million for trail lighting at Cottage Grove Ravine Regional Park.
- State bonding funds for capital projects in the Metropolitan Regional Park System.

Washington County also supports the legislative priorities of Association of Minnesota Counties and Minnesota Inter-County Association.

For more details on the county's legislative priorities or specific projects, visit WashingtonCountyMN.gov/LegislativePriorities.

New and expanded transit services in Washington County

Metro Transit is Washington County's primary transit provider. The county also partners with local organizations to expand transportation options for residents. Below are updates on new and expanded routes, on-demand services, and community circulators throughout the county.

“As our population ages and our communities grow denser, the demand for reliable transit continues to rise,” said Commissioner Stan Karwoski, District 2. “Strong transit service improves mobility, expands access to jobs and services, and supports economic development across Washington County.”

Route 345 – Metro Transit

Route 345 connects Woodbury, Newport, West St. Paul, MSP Airport, and the Mall of America. Park-and-ride locations include Woodlane, Newport Transit Center, and 30th Avenue Station.

Fares: \$2, or \$1 for riders 65 and older and children ages 6-12

Hours: Daily, 6 a.m. to 8 p.m., every 60 minutes



TransitLink on-demand in Forest Lake, Stillwater, and Oak Park Heights

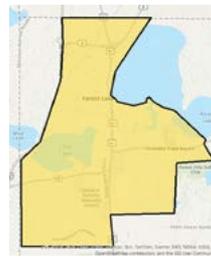
TransitLink on-demand provides curb-to-curb service within a designated zone in the Forest Lake area and parts of Stillwater and Oak Park Heights.

Fare: \$3.50 one way

Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Community Circulator Updates

Community circulators are bus loops connecting residents to local destinations. Riders can request nearby on-demand stops, and rides are free with optional donations. Circulator routes operate once a week in Forest Lake, Mahtomedi, Oakdale, and Cottage Grove.



Forest Lake circulator expansion

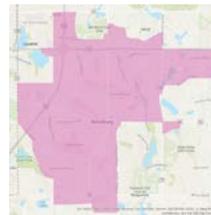
The Forest Lake circulator will expand service in early spring with extended hours and additional residential stops. Through coordination with the Forest Lake Senior Center, the expanded service will improve access to community events and activities.

Hours: Wednesdays, 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.



New: Newport and St. Paul Park circulator

A new circulator route connecting Newport and St. Paul Park to Cottage Grove will begin in early spring. Operating once a week, the shuttle will serve multiple apartment buildings and provide transportation to grocery stores, medical appointments, and social activities. More details to come.



Metro Micro – Metro Transit

Metro Micro is an on-demand, curb-to-curb service that connects riders to the METRO Gold Line or destinations within the service zone. The newly expanded zone serves portions of Woodbury, Oakdale, and Lake Elmo.

Fares: \$2.50 for up to 2.5 hours (\$3.25 Peak hours), or \$4 for a day pass. Reduced fares of \$1-\$2 available. Free for Metro Mobility riders and disabled veterans.

Hours: Weekdays, 5:30 a.m. to 10:30 p.m.; weekends, 7 a.m. to 10:30 p.m.

For more transportation information, visit GoWashingtonMN.com, or call 651-430-6651.

Tax system upgrade improves access and clarity

Washington County property taxpayers will see improvements with the launch of an upgraded webpage for the county's tax system. The upgrade makes property tax information easier to find and online payments simpler to complete.

The updated public website offers a clearer, more user-friendly property search. Taxpayers can view payment history, including partial and pending payments, in one place. New charts and summaries show how tax dollars are distributed among local taxing authorities, helping residents better understand where their money goes.

Added verification steps for online payments help reduce errors that can lead to returned payments. Taxpayers can clearly choose whether they are paying current or delinquent taxes, providing more control and confidence when submitting a payment.

This upgrade reflects the county's commitment to accessible and responsive service.

Learn more or make a payment at WashingtonCountyMN.gov/PayPropertyTax.

Family Child Care Providers Needed



Washington County families need quality child care. Family child care providers care for children in their own homes, offering a safe, nurturing environment while building a rewarding career. If you enjoy working with children, this is an opportunity to make a real difference, right from your home.

Upcoming Orientation Meetings

Thursday, February 26
6-8:30 p.m. (Virtual)

Tuesday, March 24
6-8 p.m. (In person)

Wednesday, May 6
1-3:30 p.m. (Virtual)

For more information, visit:
[WashingtonCountyMN.gov/
Become-A-Child-Care-Provider](https://WashingtonCountyMN.gov/Become-A-Child-Care-Provider)



Woodbury WIC clinic provides nutrition services to community

Washington County's Central Service and License Center opened to the public last August and offers a wide variety of services to community members, including a Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) clinic.

WIC is a federally funded nutrition and breastfeeding program, created with the goal of helping families eat well and stay healthy. It supports families by providing:

- Improved access to healthier foods.
- Personalized nutrition education.
- Breastfeeding support.
- Referrals to other health and community programs.

Managed by Washington County Public Health and Environment, the program serves women who are pregnant, breastfeeding, or recently postpartum; infants (up to age 1); and children (up to age 5). Households must meet WIC income guidelines or be enrolled in either Medicaid or the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, known as SNAP.

"The WIC program helps build healthy families by providing critical support to eligible women, infants, and children," said Commissioner Michelle Clasen, District 5. "Having a WIC clinic right here in Woodbury means more families can access these resources closer to home, and that's something worth celebrating."

The Woodbury clinic in the Central Service and License Center is located at 1261 Woodlane Drive. It is across the street from the eastern terminus of the Metro Transit Gold Line Bus Rapid Transit line at Woodlane Drive Station Park & Ride and within the service area of Metro micro, a shared ride service through Metro Transit.

WIC participants are eligible for the



The Central Service and License Center in Woodbury.

Transit Assistance Program, which provides a year-long reduced fare pass on a Go-To card. Customers can use a bus or train for just \$1 per ride with a 2.5-hour transfer window. More information is available at MetroTransit.org/Tap-Riders.

Other county WIC clinic locations include the Stillwater Government Center, Cottage Grove Service Center, and Headwaters Service Center in Forest Lake. Washington County residents can call the WIC program at 651-430-6658 to see if they qualify and to schedule an appointment (hours of operation vary by location). Language services are available.

EXCITE Program helps educators prepare students for future careers

At its annual Winter Conference in January, the Economic Development Association of Minnesota honored a local workforce initiative with the Metro Innovation Award. The Exploring Careers through Industry Teacher Externships (EXCITE) Program was developed by area high schools with support from the Washington County Community Development Agency, the Northeast Metro Perkins Consortium, and the Greater Stillwater Chamber of Commerce.

Now in its fourth year, EXCITE connects educators with local businesses through a three-day summer externship. Teachers shadow professionals, participate in interactive panels, and tour worksites, gaining firsthand insight into in-demand skills and career pathways.

“Programs like EXCITE strengthen our workforce by connecting education and industry,” said Commissioner Fran Miron, District 1. “When teachers understand what employers need, students are better prepared for careers that support both their futures and our county’s economy.”

In 2025, 57 teachers participated, exploring industries that included

agriculture and natural resources, financial services, nonprofits, health care, manufacturing and engineering, and public-sector organizations.

The externships delivered strong results. Teachers reported improved ability to enhance curriculum, identify hands-on learning opportunities, and guide students toward informed career choices. Participating businesses also expressed interest in continued collaboration, recognizing educators as key partners in building a strong local workforce.

High school educators interested in future participation should contact school leadership. Applications will open in early summer 2026. Businesses and organizations interested in hosting externs may contact Mike Miron, Career and Technical Education Coordinator at Forest Lake Area Schools, at mmiron@flaschools.org or 651-982-8510, or Bob Manning, Career Pathways Coordinator at Stillwater Area Public Schools, at manningr@stillwaterschools.org.

Through partnerships like EXCITE, schools, employers, and the community are working together to ensure students — and Washington County — are well-positioned for the future.

Community names two Washington County snowplows

Washington County recently conducted its third annual “Name a Snowplow” contest and received more than 1,400 submissions from the public.

The list was narrowed to 10 finalists, including Kirill the Chill, Slick Seven, 67, Life of a Snowgirl, Plowasaurus Rex, Chuck the Plow Truck, Blizzard of Oz, K Pop Blizzard Hunter, Duck Duck Orange Truck, and Claire D. Way.

More than 2,600 people voted to help name two of the plows. Duck Duck Orange Truck was the top vote-getter at 873 votes with Blizzard of Oz coming in second with 795 votes. Blizzard of Oz can be mostly seen in the northern half of the county, whereas Duck Duck Orange Truck will be located in the southern part of the county.

Washington County Needs Foster Parents



Washington County is facing a shortage of foster care homes. Children in crisis need safe, stable homes in their own community.

You don’t need to be perfect — just caring and willing to help. Single adults, couples, renters, homeowners, and families of all kinds are welcome.

Upcoming Informational Meetings

Tuesday, March 3
10 a.m.-noon (Virtual)

Wednesday, May 13
6-8 p.m. (Hybrid)

For more information, visit:
WashingtonCountyMN.gov/ChildFosterCareLicensing



A New Voice in Crisis Response

Washington County's Emergency Communications Response Center (ECRC) is the heartbeat of public safety in the county. Public Safety Telecommunicators answer 911 calls and dispatch emergency services to community members in need. Since last October, community members may have also received assistance from the county's first embedded social worker in the ECRC.

In 2025, the ECRC received 3,183 crisis-related calls, ranging from mental health emergencies to suicide attempts and threats.

Under Travis' Law, "911 shall include a referral to mental health crisis teams, where available." By positioning a social worker directly in the ECRC, Washington County helps prevent unnecessary law enforcement or EMS responses and ensures follow-up care through the Washington County Crisis Response Unit.

Funded by a state grant, the social worker completes critical documentation and prepares cases for the Crisis Response Unit. This allows telecommunicators to stay focused on other emergencies.



Senior Social Worker Jenica Jones in the Emergency Communications Response Center.

In a mental health crisis, the right voice can change everything for a person. The ECRC's social worker is able to have conversations with callers experiencing a mental health crisis and discuss the different resources and support available. Those conversations are essential to getting the right help, at the right time, from the very first call.

Reminder: You can call, text, or chat with 988, the national suicide and crisis lifeline. You can also reach Washington County's Crisis Response Unit directly at 651-275-7400. If someone does call 911, the Washington County Sheriff's Office will ensure they get the appropriate help.

Spring Parks Events and Programs

Free Tuesday

March 3, April 7, May 5, all day at county parks
Take advantage of all that Washington County Parks have to offer with free entry on the first Tuesday of the months in 2026.

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

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 for more details.

Valentine's Walk Forest Bathing

Saturday, Feb. 14, 2-4 p.m., Lake Elmo Park Reserve (Eagle Point Trailhead), \$45 per person
Celebrate Valentine's Day with a restorative forest bathing experience focused on self-care, relaxation, and connection with nature. All are welcome to take part in this peaceful, guided experience in nature.

Blizzard Bash

Saturday, Feb. 14, 11 a.m.-3 p.m., Cottage Grove Ravine Regional Park, free with vehicle permit
Enjoy free snowshoeing, ice fishing demos provided by

Fishing for All from 11 a.m.-1 p.m., winter crafts, tasty bites from Brick Oven Food Truck, and cozy up by the bonfire. Experience the best of winter all in one day.

Spring Equinox Forest Bathing

Saturday, March 21, 2-4 p.m., Lake Elmo Park Reserve (Eagle Point Trailhead), \$45 per person
Celebrate the return of light and the renewal of spring with a guided forest bathing experience honoring the Spring Equinox and International Day of Trees.

Spring Maker's Market

Saturday, April 11, 10 a.m.-3 p.m., Cottage Grove Ravine Regional Park, free with vehicle permit
Celebrate spring at the park with a Maker's Market featuring local craft vendors, hands-on nature crafts, food trucks, and time to explore trails and fresh spring growth.



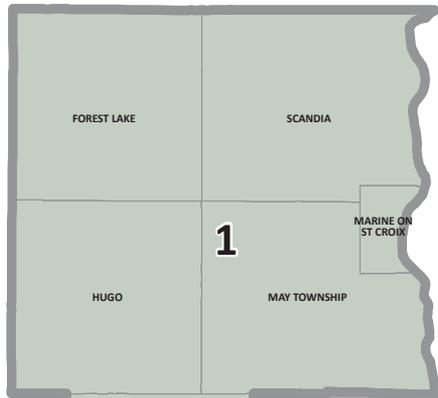
A vehicle permit (\$7/daily or \$30/annually) is required for entry to all Washington County parks except the Historic Courthouse. Learn more about upcoming Parks events by scanning the QR code, visiting WashingtonCountyMN.gov/Programs or contact staff at Parks@WashingtonCountyMN.gov or 651-430-4300.

Washington County Board commissioners



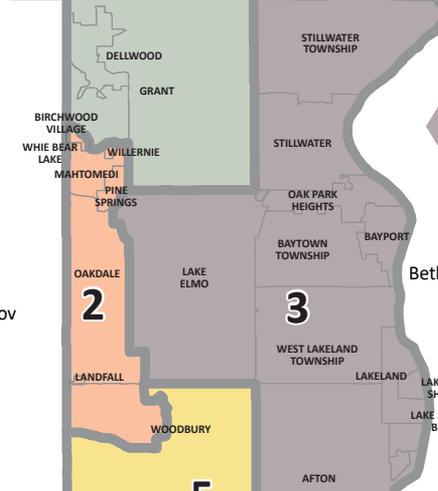
District 1 - Fran Miron

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



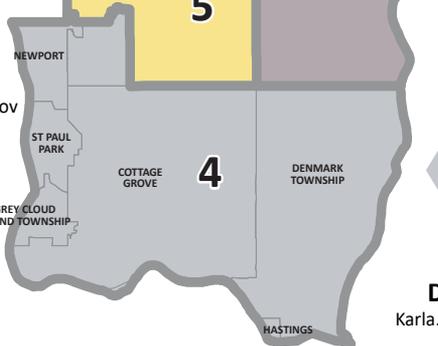
District 2 - Stan Karwoski

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



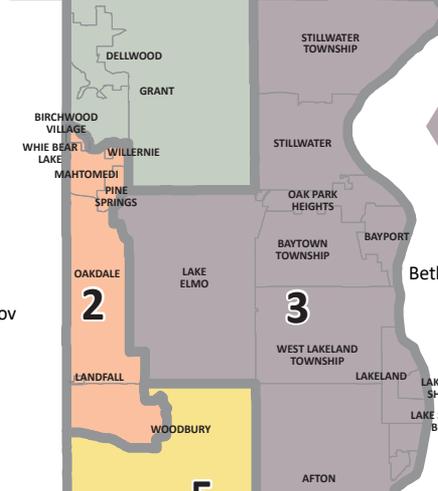
District 5 - Michelle Clasen

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



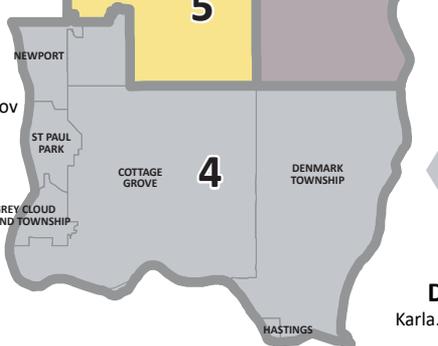
District 3 - Bethany Cox

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



District 4 - Karla Bigham

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



Rooted in **Connection**
Growing with **Direction**

Washington County Board of Commissioners

Washington County commissioners develop policy and make decisions that govern the county. For information, visit 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, where they are also archived. Board meetings may also be cablecast in some areas.

We are

HIRING

Parks Seasonal Positions

Sunshine overhead, grass underfoot, and money in your pocket. Apply today for a seasonal summer job in Washington County Parks!

Lifeguard \$17.52-\$20.20 (\$300 hiring incentive)

Beach Coordinator \$20.89-\$22.50 (\$300 hiring incentive)

Outdoor Recreation Instructor \$17.52-\$18.86

Guest Services Attendant \$16.85-\$18.15

Maintenance Assistant \$17.52-\$18.86

Parks and Outdoor Recreation Intern \$18.77-\$20.22

GovernmentJobs.com/Careers/WashingtonMN

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County conserves land along Valley Creek in Afton

Washington County partnered with Belwin Conservancy to permanently protect land along Valley Creek in Afton through the county's Land and Water Legacy Program (LWLP).

In November, the county finalized two conservation easements protecting 8.4 acres and 700 feet of Valley Creek streambank. The easements were funded by the LWLP, with additional support from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Scenic and Natural Areas Grant Program.

The newly protected properties sit on both sides of land Belwin Conservancy preserved through a county conservation easement in 2022. After acquiring the parcels, Belwin

Conservancy worked with the county to ensure long-term protection.

"This project reflects what's possible when voters, partners, and landowners work together to protect our natural resources," said Commissioner Bethany Cox, District 3. "By conserving land along Valley Creek, we're safeguarding a valuable resource for the community today and for generations to come."

The LWLP partners with willing landowners to preserve open space, water resources, and natural habitat through voluntary conservation easements that permanently limit

future development. Belwin Conservancy plans to fully restore the land and offer limited public access, such as guided educational tours, to help protect Valley Creek's shoreline.

The LWLP is a voter-approved initiative that helps protect natural areas by purchasing land or land interests. Over the last 20 years, the program has invested nearly \$20 million, with an additional \$30 million invested by partners and landowners, to conserve more than 1,900 acres of high-quality natural land in Washington County through partnerships like this one.

To learn more about the program, visit WashingtonCountyMN.gov/LWLP or contact staff at Administration@WashingtonCountyMN.gov and 651-430-6001.

 *be an*
Election Judge

Election judges help ensure elections are conducted fairly, accurately and securely. Serving as an election judge is a meaningful way to give back to the community and take part in the democratic process.

- Positions are paid and include paid training.
- 2026 statewide elections will be held in August and November.



To learn more and apply, scan the QR code or visit WashingtonCountyMN.gov/WaysToServe