

Our Mission: We strive to provide exceptional services that enhance quality of life and promote a safe, healthy, and welcoming community for all.

Date: Nov. 19, 2024
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The following actions were taken at the Nov. 19, 2024, Washington County Board of Commissioners meeting at the Government Center in Stillwater, Minnesota.

County Board approves actions to transfer tax-forfeited land

The Washington County Board of Commissioners took several actions Nov. 19 to transfer tax-forfeited land from the county to other owners.

The County Board approved selling six tax-forfeited properties in Woodbury, Bayport, Mahtomedi, and West Lakeland to nearby property owners. These parcels can't be developed, so selling them to neighbors is the best option. The sale will happen on Feb. 21, 2025, at 11:00 a.m. through sealed bids. Adjacent owners will get a notice at least 30 days before the sale. Parcels will go to the highest bidder, but not for less than the set price. Payment is cash-only.

The County Board agreed to sell tax-forfeited land in Newport to the city for \$13,300, plus \$94.89 in fees. The parcel, identified as parcel 35.028.22.44.0003, will be used for stormwater management. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources declined to buy the property but approved the sale to the city.

The County Board approved the sale of a tax-forfeited parcel 08.031.21.41.0013 in Hugo at a public auction on Jan. 24, 2025, at 1:30 p.m. in Conference Room LL14 in lower level of the Washington County Government Center, Stillwater. The board set the terms and conditions of the sale and the minimum sale price. Information about the sale will be published, mailed to nearby property owners, and posted on the county's website.

The County Board updated its tax-forfeited property policy to match current laws, including changes following the Supreme Court's *Tyler v. Hennepin* decision.

The County Board also adopted a resolution setting aside 20% of the profits from tax-forfeited property sales for county parks. The remaining funds will go to the county's general fund (40%), schools (40%), and cities or townships (20%).

Contact: Amy Stenftenagel, Property Records and Taxpayer Services Director, 651-430-6182

County Board conducts public hearing on the county's capital improvement plan

The Washington County Board of Commissioners conducted a public hearing Nov. 19 to receive comment on the county's five-year capital improvement plan, or CIP.

No residents spoke at the hearing. Comment letters were received from a county resident, Brown's Creek Watershed District, and from the cities of Afton, Cottage Grove, Hugo, Lake Elmo, Marine on St. Croix, Oakdale, Scandia, Stillwater, St. Mary's Point, and Woodbury. The comments will be entered into the record of the hearing.

The county released its Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) for 2025-2029 in early October. After comments on the plan are received, it is anticipated that the board will adopt the plan, along with the county's 2025 budget, Dec. 17.

Capital improvement planning is one of the fundamental building blocks in the county's budget and financial management. The CIP establishes a guide for making capital investment decisions logically, and in a deliberate and accountable fashion.

The 2025-2029 CIP includes just more than \$399 million in community investment across 90 projects or programs. The CIP outlines plans to maintain current infrastructure and includes projects for new roadways, buildings, and park facilities to address a growing county population and service demands.

The investments in the CIP help keep roadways safe and facilities efficient and effective and provide amenities that serve the needs of county residents. The five-year plan calls for 81% of the funds to be spent on roads and bridges, with 15% of the funds being spent on public facilities, and 4% spent on parks and land. CIP funds also pay for the maintenance of 294 miles of county highway, along with separated trails, intersections, signs, culverts, and roundabouts.

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Funding sources for the CIP are intergovernmental revenue, meaning funds coming from other levels of government, as well as the county's transportation tax and wheelage tax, and bond proceeds.

Projects planned to be completed in 2025 are included in the 2025 countywide budget, as well as the CIP. Parks projects planned for 2025 include improvements at Square Lake Park and Point Douglas Regional Park, Central Greenway Trail wayfinding, and pavement preservation.

Major road projects planned for 2025 include:

- The 58th St. and County State Aid Highway (CSAH) 15 connection project in Stillwater.
- The Highway 61 and CSAH 8 intersection improvement project in Hugo.
- Pavement preservation and rehabilitation on county roadways that may include CSAH 25 (Century Ave. S.) to Brookview Dr. E. in Woodbury.

The county maintains 4,800 acres of parkland, with 75 miles of trails and five beaches. The five-year CIP includes more than \$16.6 million in investments through 15 projects in the county's parks. Those include:

- Design, construction, maintenance, and improvements for the regional trail system.
- Pavement preservation for parks and trails.
- Design and reconstruction of the play areas at Lake Elmo Park Reserve pavilions.
- Planning and design of lighting for multi-use trails at Cottage Grove Ravine Regional Park.
- Improvements at Square Lake Park to trails, stormwater infrastructure, the boat launch, and the fishing pier.
- Campground improvements at St. Croix Bluffs Regional Park.

The five-year CIP includes plans for 15 projects valued at \$61.4 million for public facilities in the county. Plans include funding for the construction of the Emergency Housing Services Building in Stillwater, improvements to the Law Enforcement Center in Stillwater, improvements at Oakdale Library, and renovations at Park Grove Library in Cottage Grove and R.H. Stafford Library in Woodbury. The plan also calls for improvements to the county's South Shop and North Shop that house the highway maintenance facilities to serve the county.

Major roadway improvements planned for the coming five years include:

- A grade-separated intersection at Highway 36 and County State Aid Highway (CSAH) 17 at the border of Grant and Lake Elmo.
- Intersection improvements at CSAH 18 (Bailey Rd.) and Settlers Ridge Parkway and CSAH 16 (Valley Creek Rd.) and Settlers Ridge Parkway in Woodbury.
- Highway expansion and trail construction on CSAH 13 (Radio Dr.) from Hargis Parkway to CSAH 20 (Military Rd.) in Woodbury.
- Intersection improvements at CSAH 22 (70th St. S.) and Highway 95 in Cottage Grove.
- Highway and pedestrian and bicycle facility improvements on Highway 120 (Century Ave.) from I-694 to CSAH 12 (Wildwood Rd.) in Mahtomedi and White Bear Lake.

Contact: Wayne Sandberg, Public Works Director, 651-430-4339

County Board conducts public hearing on the county's fee schedule

The Washington County Board of Commissioners conducted a public hearing Nov. 19 to receive comments on the county's fee schedule.

No residents spoke during the public hearing.

The fee schedule includes any updates for county fees for 2025. According to state law, county fees may be assessed:

- To record, file, certify, or provide copies of any instrument, document, or paper.
- For service provided by any county office, official, department, court, or employee.

They also must have a reasonable relation between the fee and the cost of providing the service.

Changes to the fee schedule updated any fees that may have changed due to guidance from state departments that determine eligibility for services, or removed fees that may no longer be relevant, such as previously charging fees for data that is now available online at no cost. Other fees were updated to reflect price increases made by vendors, or changes made by state law updates. Licensing

fees with the Public Health and Environment Department are increasing by 3% to offset the cost of inspections and technology.

Other fee changes were made to align the fees with the cost of processing an application or providing services.

New to the fee schedule are cannabis and hemp retail registration fees, which include a Cannabis/Medical Cannabis Business initial registration fee of \$500 and renewal fee of \$1,000 and a Hemp Business initial registration and renewal fee of \$125.

Any comments received at the public hearing will be considered before the County Board's action Nov. 26 to consider the adoption of the fee schedule for 2025.

Contact: Tina Elam, Communications Manager, 651-430-6004 (office), 651-592-5989 (after hours)

County Board declines Scandia land donation bequest

The Washington County Board of Commissioners declined a land donation bequest in Scandia Nov. 19.

In March 2024, Washington County received notice of the potential donation of approximately 300 acres left as a bequest from the estate of Joyce Heinisch's Revocable Trust. The bequest of land along the border of Washington and Chisago counties and County Highway 3 required the establishment of a public park on the property. After careful consideration, the County Board determined that establishing a county park on the property, which is already protected by a conservation easement, was not feasible.

The conservation easement in place protects the natural habitat and character of the property and limits the uses of the property to passive recreation activities, such as hiking, bird watching, and potentially some hunting. The conservation easement also prohibits any development on the property including public facilities such as bathrooms, pavilions, playgrounds, and paved parking.

The fact that the land is already protected under the conservation easement, the limitations of the uses, and the liabilities that would come with accepting the donation were the factors the County Board weighed in their decision to decline the bequest.

Contact: Sharon Price, Senior Right of Way Specialist, 651-430-4391

November 20 is Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Day in Washington County

Nov. 20 is officially Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Day in Washington County. The Washington County Board of Commissioners made the declaration and honored the county's GIS staff for the impactful work they have accomplished in the community Nov. 19.

In 1999, the first Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Day was held to celebrate GIS-based technologies. This year marks the 25th anniversary of GIS Day and is dedicated to showing, teaching, and inspiring others about the importance of GIS work in a wide range of businesses, including government.

Geography has played a defining role in the settlement, history, and cultural heritage of Washington County. GIS professionals work in departments throughout the county to improve operations to better serve its residents and make useful geographic information open and easily available to the public.

Contact: Brianna Johnson, Administrative Assistant, 651-430-6416