

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. 26, 2024
Contact: Tina Elam, Communications Manager
Phone: 651-430-6004 (office), 651-592-5989 (after hours)
E-mail: tina.elam@co.washington.mn.us

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The following actions were taken at the Nov. 26, 2024, Washington County Board of Commissioners meeting at the Government Center in Stillwater, Minnesota.

County to expand mental health care services with additional grant funding

Washington County received \$3,453,216 in grant funds from the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) for 2025 and 2026, which will allow the county to expand its mental health care services.

The Adult Mental Health Initiative (AMHI) and Community Support Program (CSP) grant fund allocation to the county is \$1,290,390 more than the previous grant cycle due to a new allocation formula implemented by DHS as part of a statewide AMHI reform. The Washington County Board of Commissioners approved the grant agreement for the funds Nov. 26.

The additional funds will support innovative projects such as a new Mental Health Outreach Van Program as well as allow for the stabilization of core mental health services that require additional support due to growth and increase in community needs.

The county will use the funds to enhance current mental health services by adding additional housing subsidy funds, Adult Rehabilitative Mental Health Services (ARMHS), and Critical Incident Training opportunities. Washington County's Community Services Department is planning to request additional staff positions in areas experiencing a significant increase in volume and acuity, including Forensic Case Management, a Stabilization/Civil Commitment Case Manager, and a lead Social Worker in the Mental Health Outreach Program.

Contact: Kathy Mickelson, Community Services Division Manager, 651-430-6532

County will continue to work with Washington Conservation

Washington County will continue to work with the Washington Conservation District to provide technical assistance and educational services to promote and apply soil and water conservation practices throughout the county.

The County Board approved a \$305,568 contract with the agency Nov. 26 to pay for services for 2025.

Funding is for the organization's administrative activities and services in the areas of local water management, land and water treatment, and public education. The cost of the 2025 contract reflects a 4.9% increase over the 2024 contract amount to cover inflationary costs.

Contact: Jessica Collin-Pilarski, Senior Planner, 651-430-6703

County Board approves Lower St. Croix Watershed Partnership 2025-2026 workplan

The Washington County Board of Commissioners approved the Lower St. Croix Watershed Partnership 2025-2026 workplan Nov. 26.

Washington County and its partners developed the collaborative and comprehensive Lower St. Croix One Watershed, One Plan to guide the protection and restoration of priority natural resources within the Lower St. Croix watershed.

This work plan represents all work expected to be accomplished in priority areas of the Lower St. Croix watershed in 2025 and 2026 — including projects and programs funded with Watershed Based Implementation Funding (WBIF), as well as work completed with local funding from partners and other grants. Projects in the work plan will focus on soil health improvement, nitrogen and pesticide pollution reduction in groundwater, phosphorus reduction, wetland restoration, shoreline restoration, and habitat conservation, among other goals.

The work plan is necessary to receive watershed-based implementation funds from the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources. The 2025-2026 work plan has been compiled and reviewed by staff from the partner agencies, including Washington County staff from the Department of Public Health and Environment. Approval of the biennial work plan requires two-thirds of the governing bodies of the existing parties. The previous work plan was approved by the County Board on Nov. 28, 2023.

Government Center | 14949 62nd Street North | P. O. Box 6 | Stillwater, MN 55082-0006
P: 651-430-6001 | F: 651-430-6017 | TTY: 651-430-6246
WashingtonCountyMN.gov

Washington County is an equal-opportunity organization and employer

The Lower St. Croix Policy Committee reviewed and recommended local approval at its October 2024 meeting.

Washington County has been a member of the Lower St. Croix Partnership, through a Joint Powers Agreement, since December 2020.

Contact: Jessica Collin-Pilarski, Senior Planner, 651-430-6703

Sheriff's Office receives donations for Shop with a Cop charity event

The Washington County Sheriff's Office received \$9,300 in donations to support its annual Shop with a Cop charity event.

This year's Shop with a Cop will be held Dec. 11 and 12 at Walmart in Oak Park Heights. The event is a partnership between the Sheriff's Office, the Oak Park Heights Police Department, Hugo and Lower St. Croix Valley Yellow Ribbon Network, Creative Homes, and Walmart. The Yellow Ribbon Network donated \$300, Creative Homes donated \$4,000, and Walmart donated \$5,000 for the event. The Washington County Board of Commissioners approved the donations Nov. 26.

Deputies, Correctional Officers, and Sheriff's Office staff will be shopping with approximately 20 children from the Afton-Lakeland area and children of military families. Shop with a Cop aims to build positive relationships between Deputies, Correctional Officers, and children while pairing them up to shop together during the holiday season. This ensures everyone has a gift to open and creates an unforgettable bonding experience with law enforcement and the communities the Sheriff's Office serves.

Contact: Laura Perkins, Law Enforcement Public Information Manager, 651-430-7994

County Board adopts 2025 county fee schedule

The Washington County Board of Commissioners adopted the 2025 county fee schedule Nov. 26.

The fee schedule was adopted after the board conducted a public hearing on the proposed fee schedule Nov. 19.

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.

There also must be 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 fees for data that are now available online at no cost.

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

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

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

County Board conducts public budget meeting on proposed 2025 budget

The Washington County Board of Commissioners conducted a public meeting Nov. 26 on the county's 2025 county property tax levy and 2025 budget.

After a presentation on the proposed budget, several residents spoke at the meeting and tax assessors were available to answer questions.

The Washington County Board of Commissioners set a preliminary property tax levy to support the proposed 2025 county budget Sept. 24. The board also adopted a proposed budget for next year.

After setting the preliminary levy, the board may reduce it when it sets the final levy on Dec. 17, but the board cannot increase it. The certified preliminary property tax levy payable in 2025 is \$140,479,200.

The board also set a levy for the Regional Rail Authority at \$660,000 and the Land and Water Legacy Program at \$1.2 million, the same as in previous years.

The preliminary levy is an increase of 5.9% over 2024. The county tax rate will remain stable with recent years, increasing slightly from 22% in 2024 to 23.7% in 2025. A decline in existing home values in 2025 contributes to the increase in tax rate. Since 2020, the county's tax rate has fallen a total of 5.2% and Washington County remains below the average for property tax rates in the metro area. The county had the third-lowest levy per capita in Minnesota. It also had the second-lowest tax rate in the seven-county metro area in 2024, meaning that a similarly valued property would be taxed at a higher rate in every other metropolitan county but one, Dakota.

The budget includes expenditures of:

- \$277,177,100 in operating expenses.
- \$64,672,300 in capital investments.
- \$17,441,400 in debt service.

The difference between what the levy supports and what the budget calls for in revenue will be provided by funding from other sources, including state County Program Aid. That is funding from the state Legislature designed to reduce local property tax levies while providing support for local programs.

The county will also receive additional state aid to boost public safety services, housing assistance, and library and public health programs.

Elements that shaped the proposed budget include changes in service delivery to residents, including expanding the county's coordinated response team that responds to mental health crisis service calls and opening two new county facilities with the North Environmental Center in Forest Lake and Central Service and License Center in Woodbury. The county is also planning capital investments in 2025 for the Emergency Housing Services Building, county facility upgrades, electric vehicle charging station installation, road construction, and park improvements. Population growth in the county is requiring additional services in libraries and other programs that provide direct service to residents. Inflationary pressures for salaries and wages, fuel for vehicles, and the increased cost of construction of buildings are also influencing budget requests.

With the proposed budget, the county would maintain the same ratio of five employees per 1,000 residents, the same as the past several years.

The proposed budget was first presented to the County Board in a livestreamed workshop Aug. 6. Additional workshops with individual departments occurred through August and September. All budget presentations may be found on the county website. Archived livestreamed meetings may be found on the county website at WashingtonCountyMN.gov/CountyBoard. Budget documents presented at the workshops may be found at WashingtonCountyMN.gov/Budget.

The County Board is expected to approve the county's 2025 property tax levy and budget at its meeting Dec. 17.