

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

Date: Dec. 17, 2024
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The following actions were taken at the Dec. 17, 2024, Washington County Board of Commissioners meeting at the Government Center in Stillwater, Minnesota.

County Board makes appointments to advisory groups, watershed district

The Washington County Board of Commissioners made two appointments to advisory groups and a reappointment to a watershed district Dec. 17.

The appointments are:

- Eric Linner to a first term on the Historic Courthouse Advisory Committee as a District 1 Representative starting Jan. 1, 2025, and expiring Dec. 31, 2027.
- Karissa Goers to a partial term on the Personnel Board of Appeals starting Dec. 18, 2024, and expiring Dec. 31, 2026.

The reappointment is:

- John Waller, City of Hugo, to a seventh term beginning Jan. 19, 2025, and expiring Jan. 18, 2028, as Manager on the Rice Creek Watershed District.

Contact: Megan Carlson, Administrative Assistant, 651-430-6001

Nexus Family Healing to continue providing emergency youth shelter services

The Washington County Board of Commissioners renewed a contract with Nexus Family Healing to provide emergency youth shelter services at Aspen House Youth Shelter Dec. 17.

The contract, not to exceed \$815,000, is for a two-year term starting Jan. 1, 2025, and expiring Dec. 31, 2026.

In 2021, the County Board approved a one-time capital expenditure to use American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to partner with Dakota County to acquire a property in Mendota Heights to be used for Aspen House Youth Shelter and be licensed as a Children's Residential Facility. Washington County entered into a contract with Nexus Family Healing on Aug. 2, 2022, as a service provider for this facility. The contract with Nexus Family Healing was set to expire Dec. 31, 2024.

In July 2024, Dakota County released a Request for Proposals for Youth Shelter Support Services and Maintenance of Shelter Site and selected Nexus Family Healing to continue as the service provider for Aspen House Youth Shelter.

Contact: Jennifer Castillo, Community Services Director, 651-430-6461

County renews Coordinated Mental Health Response Program agreements with city police departments

The City of Stillwater Police Department and the City of Woodbury Police Department will continue to partner in the county's Coordinated Mental Health Response Program through 2026.

The Washington County Board of Commissioners approved the agreement with the City of Stillwater Police Department for approximately \$275,000 and the City of Woodbury Police Department for approximately \$687,000 Dec. 17. The agreements are 50% city-funded and 50% county-funded and run through Dec. 31, 2026.

Under the program, social workers are integrated into mental health-related emergency responses. The program reduces law enforcement patrol contacts for mental health calls and increases opportunities and the likelihood of connecting individuals to appropriate mental health and substance-use disorder services.

In 2021, the Washington County Community Services Department partnered with the Washington County Sheriff's Office and the City of Woodbury to launch the Coordinated Mental Health Response Program to address mental health-related calls. The City of Stillwater was added to the partnership in

2023. One of the goals of the program is to reduce criminal justice system involvement and create timely access to social services.

In 2024, Washington County decided to expand the program to additional city partnerships, including the City of Cottage Grove Police Department. Following the County Board's direction, the cost share for the Coordinated Mental Health Response Program is 75% county-funded and 25% city-funded in the first year, and 50% county-funded and 50% city-funded in the second year and thereafter.

Contact: Jennifer Castillo, Community Services Director, 651-430-6461

County Board approves funding for 4-H programs and services through 2027

The Washington County Board of Commissioners approved an agreement with the University of Minnesota Extension Service to fund and staff 4-H programs and services Dec. 17.

The county regularly enters agreements with the University of Minnesota Extension Service which outlines the relationship between the two parties for funding, staffing, and in-kind services. The agreement supports 4-H program activities in the county. The agreement for 2025 includes 3.75 full-time equivalent (FTE) of Extension Educator, 4-H Youth Development, and Master Gardener Volunteer Program Coordinator. The program coordinators are employees of the university and are co-located within the Department of Public Health and Environment. In addition, the county supports one 0.8 FTE Administrative Support Specialist position. The total Washington County cost for these services for 2025 is \$420,000.

The term of this memorandum of agreement is for three years from Jan. 1, 2025, to Dec. 31, 2027. The local position prices for each FTE have been established by agreement between the University of Minnesota Extension and the Association of Minnesota Counties. The annual adjustment of costs for the program coordinator is 3%.

Contact: David Brummel, Public Health and Environment Director, 651-430-6662

County Board accepts public health grant funding through 2029

The Washington County Board of Commissioners approved a five-year grant agreement providing funding to Washington County Public Health and Environment (PHE) Dec. 17.

The two grants are the Local Public Health Grant and the Foundational Public Health Responsibilities Grant. The approved grant agreement is for Jan. 1, 2025, through Dec. 31, 2029, and the funding in the first year totals \$849,248.

The Local Public Health grant provides funding to community health boards to meet statutory responsibilities under the Local Public Health Act. PHE will use the funds to address areas of public health responsibility and essential public health services. The Foundational Public Health Responsibilities grant provides funding to community health boards to ensure the foundational areas and capabilities of local public health are met.

Both grants are state grants administered by the Minnesota Department of Health through this five-year grant agreement. Funding is awarded annually through grant amendments, which will be reviewed and approved by the director of PHE.

Contact: David Brummel, Public Health and Environment Director, 651-430-6662

County acquires right-of-way, easements for road improvement projects in Cottage Grove, Stillwater

The Washington County Board of Commissioners approved the acquisition of necessary right-of-way and easements for two road construction projects in Cottage Grove and Stillwater Dec. 17.

The board approved the acquisition of right-of-way, permanent road easements, drainage and utility easements, and temporary easements as a part of the road and intersection reconstruction of County Highway 19 (Keats Ave.) and 80th St. in the City of Cottage Grove. The project aims to improve intersection controls, treatment of highway drainage/run-off, and pedestrian and bicycle facilities. The cost estimate of the acquisition is approximately \$200,000 and is funded by State Aid and local contributions. Construction is planned for 2026.

The board also approved the acquisition of right-of-way, permanent road easements, drainage and utility easements, and temporary easements as a part of the road reconstruction of County Highway 5 (Olive St. W.) in Stillwater. The project aims to add pedestrian accommodations, resurface the roadway, and replace curb and gutter, storm sewer, and roadway signs. The cost estimate is approximately \$200,000 and is funded by State Aid, the Transportation Advancement Account (TAA), and local contributions. Construction is planned for 2026.

Contact: Mindy Leadholm, Right of Way Specialist, 651-430-4361

County Board approves electrical, mechanical services contracts at county facilities

The Washington County Board of Commissioners approved two contracts with vendors for electrical and mechanical services in 2025 at county facilities Dec. 17.

The first contract is with Metropolitan Mechanical Contractors for \$415,580 for mechanical services throughout Washington County. Under the contract, the company will provide routine and preventative maintenance and repair of major building mechanical systems for 21 buildings within Washington County. This includes boilers, chillers, and plumbing systems.

The second contract is with Collins Electrical Construction Co. for \$390,446 for electrical services throughout Washington County. Under the contract, the company will provide for both routine and complex work on major and minor building electrical systems at 21 locations throughout Washington County.

Both contracts include predictive analysis of major equipment, consultation on energy optimization, and a one-hour emergency response time 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Contact: Christina Mastro, Management Analyst I, 651-430-6239

Sheriff's Office receives Hugo Yellow Ribbon Network donation for Shop with a Cop event

The Washington County Sheriff's Office hosted its annual Shop with a Cop holiday event Dec. 11 and 12.

The Hugo Yellow Ribbon Network donated \$1,500 to the event, which was held at Walmart in Oak Park Heights. Deputies, Correctional Officers, and Sheriff's Office personnel shopped with approximately 20 children from the Afton-Lakeland area and children whose parents are in the military.

Shop with a Cop is about building 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 approved county cannabis ordinance

The Washington County Board of Commissioners approved Washington County Cannabis Ordinance #219 Dec. 17.

State law requires that cannabis and hemp retailers obtain a registration from the city or town as part of the licensing process. This law also allows cities and towns to delegate registration duties to the county. Five communities within Washington County have delegated registration duties to the county: Afton, Landfall, Marine on St. Croix, May Township, and West Lakeland Township. Therefore, the county was required to draft an ordinance to govern the registration of cannabis and hemp retailers.

Cannabis Ordinance #219 is intended to ensure responsible cannabis retailing, allowing legal sale and access without promoting increases in use, and to discourage violations of cannabis-related laws, especially those that prohibit or discourage the marketing, sale, or distribution of cannabis and cannabis products to youth under 21 years of age.

State law authorizes the county to adopt this ordinance, including reasonable standards on the manner of sale of cannabis and hemp products.

Washington County held a public hearing on the adoption of Washington County Cannabis Ordinance #219 Dec. 3. No members of the public spoke during the public hearing.

Contact: Caleb Johnson, Senior Community/Environmental Health Program Manager, 651-430-6680

County Board approves 2025 levies and budget

The Washington County Board of Commissioners approved the county's 2025 budget Dec. 17, and the property tax levy that will support it.

The approved amounts are:

- \$140,479,200 for the certified property tax levy, which includes \$1,200,000 for the Land and Water Legacy Program.
- \$660,000 for the Regional Rail Authority levy.

The County Board also consented to a \$6,578,185 levy for the Washington County Community Development Agency.

The approved property tax 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 approved 2025 budget includes expenditures of:

- \$278,342,100 in operating expenses.
- \$64,952,400 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 2025 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 operating expenses.

With the approved budget, the county maintains a ratio of five employees per 1,000 residents, the same as the past several years.

The 2025 budget was first presented to the County Board in a livestreamed workshop Aug. 6. Additional workshops with individual departments occurred through August and September. A public budget hearing was held on Nov. 26. 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.

County Board approves 5-year Capital Improvement Plan

The Washington County Board of Commissioners approved a capital improvement plan (CIP) Dec. 17 which will oversee projects throughout the county through 2029.

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 plan covers five years, with the first-year projects included in the county's adopted budget.

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.

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

The County Board reviewed the draft 2025-2029 Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) in a workshop Oct. 1. Following the workshop, the draft CIP was released for community comment. The County Board conducted a public hearing on the draft CIP Nov. 19 and reviewed community comment letters submitted by 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.

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

Commissioner Gary Kriesel honored for 20 years on County Board

Commissioner Gary Kriesel, District 3, was honored for serving 20 years on the Washington County Board of Commissioners Dec. 17.

Fellow county commissioners, State Senators Karin Housley and Judy Seeberger, and Stillwater City Council Members Mike Polehna and Larry Odebrecht spoke at the board meeting recognizing Kriesel's accomplishments and service to the county and the Lower St. Croix Valley. Sen. Housley presented a senate resolution, and the County Board presented a plaque commending Kriesel on his service to Washington County and District 3.

Kriesel thanked his family, fellow commissioners, the county administrator, sheriff, and attorney, along with county staff and community partners, who he worked with over his tenure on the board.

Kriesel was elected in November 2004 to represent the residents of District 3. He was reelected in 2008, 2012, 2016, and 2020. Kriesel chose not to run for reelection in 2024. Before serving on the county board, he served two years on the city council for the City of Stillwater. He has been an active member in many civic organizations and on advisory boards of Washington County.

Kriesel was instrumental in the acquisition of Lumberjack Landing, a state, county, and city partnership. Commissioner Kriesel also championed the Brown's Creek Trail, which connects the Gateway State Trail to the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway, and Bayport Park. His work with the St. Croix River Crossing Coalition also led to a new design for the Stillwater Lift Bridge, which reduced the roadway's environmental impact while also preserving its historic structure.

Financial stewardship was also a core component of Commissioner Kriesel's work. During his time serving as the Audit Advisory Committee Chair, Washington County maintained its AAA bond rating. The

bond rating is the highest obtainable from both Standard & Poor's Rating Services and Moody's Investor's Services and indicates strong leadership, robust management policies, and continued growth within the county. Commissioner Kriesel served on the Finance Committee and advocated for allowing counties to set their tax levies and to manage issues related to a rapidly growing population.

Kriesel, a U.S. Navy veteran, has been a steadfast advocate for veterans in the county. His efforts to support military families through the stress of deployment led to Washington County being named the first Yellow Ribbon County in the state of Minnesota.

Photo cutline: Commissioner Gary Kriesel holds a plaque in recognition of his 20 years of service on the Washington County Board of Commissioners. Left to right: Stillwater City Council Member Larry Odebrecht (Ward 3), State Senator Judy Seeberger (District 41), Stillwater City Council Member Mike Polehna, Washington County Commissioner Karla Bigham (District 5), Lake Elmo Mayor Charles Cadenhead, Commissioner Gary Kriesel (District 3), State Senator Karin Housley (District 33), Commissioner Fran Miron (District 1), Stillwater Mayor Ted Kozlowski, Commissioner Michelle Clasen (District 5), and Commissioner Stan Karwoski (District 2).

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