

**Date:** Aug. 5, 2025  
**Contact:** Tina Elam, Communications Manager  
**Phone:** 651-430-6004 (office), 651-592-5989 (after hours)  
**E-mail:** Tina.Elam@WashingtonCountyMN.gov

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

The following actions were taken at the Aug. 5, 2025, Washington County Board of Commissioners meeting at the Government Center in Stillwater, Minnesota.

## **County makes appointment to Workforce Development Board**

The Washington County Board of Commissioners approved an appointment to the Workforce Development Board Aug. 5.

The board appointed Holland Locke to a first term on the Workforce Development Board as a Workforce Representative starting Aug. 6, 2025, and expiring Dec. 31, 2028.

**Contact: Tina Elam, Office of Administration Communications Manager, 651-430-6004**

## **County to continue offering housing support for people with disabilities**

Washington County received a \$200,000 Community Living Infrastructure (CLI) grant from the Minnesota Department of Human Services (MN DHS) to help fund the county's Housing Support Program and integrate housing resources into the health and human services delivery system.

The CLI grant program funds activities to provide support for people with disabilities and housing instability who want to live in their community. Washington County uses CLI funding to deliver outreach services as well as manage and expand the use of the state's Housing Support program.

The Washington County Board of Commissioners approved the grant Aug. 5 for the period of July 1, 2025, to June 30, 2027. Washington County Community Services Department has been receiving CLI grant funds since 2018.

**Contact: Sarah Tripple, Community Services Division Manager, 651-430-6480**

## County Board approves conservation easements along Valley Creek in Afton

The Washington County Board of Commissioners approved two conservation easements, in partnership with the Belwin Conservancy, for property along Valley Creek in Afton Aug. 5.

The conservation easements are being done through the county's Land and Water Legacy Program (LWLP) for two property protection projects, called the Thomas and Cremens projects. The Thomas project is a total of 5.24 acres located along Valley Creek Trail South, and ranks "Very High" for protection priority according to LWLP criteria and "Very High" for site habitat quality. The Cremens project is 3.24 acres also located along Valley Creek Trail South. This project contains over 700 feet of Valley Creek streambank, and ranks "High" for protection priority according to LWLP criteria and "Medium" for site habitat quality.

The Thomas and Cremens properties are owned by the Belwin Conservancy, with long-term plans to restore the properties and provide public access via guided tours for the public. The properties are directly adjacent to an existing LWLP conservation easement that closed in 2022, called the "Blasko" property, which is also owned and managed by the Belwin Conservancy.

The cost of the Thomas project easement is \$395,000 and \$520,000 for the Cremens project easement. The county will be reimbursed 50% of the conservation easement value by Minnesota Department of Natural Resources grants.

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## County Board continues review of 2026 budget recommendations

The Washington County Board of Commissioners continued its review of the recommended 2026 departmental budgets in livestreamed and recorded workshops Aug. 5.

The countywide budget recommendation is for a 6.9% levy increase to \$148.8 million. If the recommended levy is adopted, the owner of a median-valued home that had a median increase in value in the county would see a \$50 increase in the county portion of property taxes for 2026, or a 5.1% increase from 2025. The county has the second-lowest tax rate and the third-lowest property tax levy per capita in the seven-county metro area.

The County Board reviewed the recommended 2026 Public Works Department budget, the Washington County Community Regional Rail Authority budget, and the Gold Line budget.

The Public Works Department is made up of the following six divisions that are responsible for:

- Building Services: Updating and maintaining county buildings.
- County Surveyor: Managing the county's plats and the tax parcel map.
- Internal Services: Tracking and managing more than \$108 million in department and capital budgets.
- Parks: Managing the county's eight parks, three regional trails, and one conservation area.
- Planning: Providing planning services to county projects and on regional committees, applying for grants, and enforcing the county's development code.
- Transportation: Maintaining 296 miles of road, 145 miles of trails, and runs 20 snowplow routes in the winter.

The recommended 2026 budget for Public Works is \$36.9 million. This is made up of \$15.3 million in internal revenue (property tax levy and other taxes) and \$21.6 million in external revenue (intergovernmental revenue, rent, licenses and permits, service fees, and other financing sources). Key factors impacting the Public Works budget for 2026 are increasing demands for infrastructure and services from population growth and urbanization in the county, increasing construction, utility, and inflation-related expenses, and investments to mitigate climate impacts and support sustainability.

The Washington County Regional Rail Authority (RRA) staffs multiple commissions and partnerships that bring regional partners together, works with cities and townships on regional rail rights of way permitting, and leads studies on future transit corridors and coordinates with transit expansion with partners. The 2026 recommended budget for the RRA is \$849,800, which is a 4.7% decrease from 2025. Key factors impacting the RRA budget are continued changes in transit use and regional route changes as travel patterns fluctuate, increasing requests for additional transit, and the continued need to manage existing regional rail rights of way.

The METRO Gold Line Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) line opened in March 2025. Some final construction items and warranty work will continue into 2027, and right-of-way acquisitions are ongoing. The county, via the Joint Powers Board, will have funding responsibilities through at least 2027 depending on the right-of-way acquisition process. The recommended 2026 budget for the METRO Gold Line BRT is \$13.1 million.

The board will hear recommended budget presentations from additional county departments on the following dates:

- Aug. 12: Community Corrections, Community Services, and Public Health and Environment including the University of Minnesota Extension.
- Aug. 19: Property Records and Taxpayer Services and Library/Law Library.
- Aug. 26: Attorney's Office and the Sheriff's Office.

After the department budget presentations, the board will follow a budget process from September through early December, which will include:

- Sept. 23: Setting a preliminary levy.
- Dec. 2: Conducting a public meeting on the proposed 2026 budget and levy.
- Dec. 16: Adopting a budget and property tax levy for 2026, and the capital improvement plan.

All budget presentations can be found on the county website. Archived livestreamed meetings may be found on the county website at [WashingtonCountyMN.gov/CountyBoard](https://WashingtonCountyMN.gov/CountyBoard). Budget documents presented at the workshops may be found at [WashingtonCountyMN.gov/Budget](https://WashingtonCountyMN.gov/Budget).

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