

**Date:** Sept. 23, 2025  
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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

The following actions were taken at the Sept. 23, 2025, Washington County Board of Commissioners meeting at the Government Center in Stillwater, Minnesota.

## **County Board sets preliminary levy, proposed budget for 2026**

The Washington County Board of Commissioners set a preliminary property tax levy to support the proposed 2026 county budget Sept. 23. 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 in December, but the board cannot increase it. The certified preliminary property tax levy payable in 2026 is \$150.2 million. 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 6.9% over 2025. The county tax rate will remain stable with recent years, increasing slightly from 23.9% in 2025 to 24.4% in 2026. Market appreciation and a slight decrease in new construction in 2025 are contributing factors to the increase in the tax rate. Since 2020, the county's tax rate has remained below the average for property tax rates in the metro area. The county has the third-lowest levy per capita in Minnesota. It also has the second-lowest tax rate in the seven-county metro area in 2025, meaning that a similarly valued property would be taxed at a higher rate in every other metropolitan county but one, Dakota.

It is anticipated that under the preliminary property tax levy, the owner of a median-valued home that had a median increase in value in the county would see a \$41 increase in the county portion of property taxes for 2026, or a 4.2% increase from 2025. The median value home is valued at \$423,700 in Pay 2026, which includes the median increase in value of 1.7% from 2025.

The board also adopted a proposed budget for 2026. The countywide budget provides critical funding for mandated and core services that directly impact residents' lives and support the community.

Community feedback shows this work is making an impact. In the most recent Community Survey, community members rated the overall quality of Washington County services well above the national benchmark — and higher than the county’s 2022 rating.

The proposed 2026 budget includes expenditures of:

- \$299,943,900 in operating expenses.
- \$117,457,900 in capital investments.
- \$16,793,900 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.

Elements that shaped the proposed budget include cost shifts from the federal government to the county for existing mandated services, capital investments in county facilities, roads and bridges, and parks, and adjustments to employee compensation and increases to healthcare costs.

The county is planning capital investments in 2026 for the Central Yard Waste Site, Park Grove Library, electric vehicle charging stations, road construction, and parks improvements. Population growth in the county requires 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. The proposed budget also responds to waitlists and backlogs in our human services area due to growing service demands and lengthier assessment requirements.

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

The proposed budget was first presented to the County Board in a public workshop July 29. Additional workshops with individual departments occurred through August. All budget presentations may 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).

The board will follow a budget calendar through early December, which will include:

- Oct. 7: Review the county’s five-year capital improvement plan.
- Nov. 24: Conduct a public hearing on the five-year capital improvement plan.
- Dec. 2: Conduct a public hearing on the proposed 2026 budget and levy; the public hearing will occur after 6 p.m.
- Dec. 16: Adopt a budget and property tax levy for 2026, and the capital improvement plan.

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

## **County receives donation for wildlife fencing along County Road 4 near Big Marine Lake**

Washington County received \$52,000 in donations from the Pollinator Friendly Alliance and the Minnesota Herpetological Society to purchase 900 feet of wildlife fencing along County Road 4 (170th Street) just south of Big Marine Park Reserve.

The Washington County Board of Commissioners approved the donations Sept. 23.

The donations will replace 900 feet of wildlife fencing on the south side of County Road 4 that helps lead wildlife to a “turtle tunnel” under the roadway.

The turtle tunnel consists of a concrete box running under the roadway with openings in the roof that allow daylight into the structure from above, which encourages wildlife to pass through.

The turtle tunnel and wildlife fence were first installed in 2014 by the county and the Washington Conservation District. The crossing site was chosen due to a documented high mortality of reptiles and amphibians, including a state-threatened species called the Blandings Turtle. Washington County staff have since maintained the tunnel and fencing.

The Pollinator Friendly Alliance is contributing \$48,000 received from Kelly Larson Foundation, Sioux Shakopee Community, and the Dreyfus Foundation. The Minnesota Herpetological Society is contributing \$4,000.

**Contact: Dan MacSwain, Parks Natural Resources Coordinator II, 651-430-4323**

## **County accepts bench donations for Lake Elmo Park Reserve, Big Marine Park Reserve**

The Washington County Board of Commissioners accepted two \$3,500 donations Sept. 30 for steel benches and plaques to be placed in Lake Elmo Park Reserve and Big Marine Park Reserve.

Greg and Mary Palank donated \$3,500 for the installation of a steel bench and plaque at Lake Elmo Park Reserve. The bench will recognize the Palanks' two grandsons. For the past 11 years, the Palanks have brought their grandchildren to the park regularly, creating countless cherished memories.

Michelle Krieg and the Albrecht family donated \$3,500 for the installation of a steel bench with a plaque at Big Marine Park Reserve, near the boat launch. Before the establishment of Big Marine Park Reserve, the Albrecht family owned and operated the Shady Birch Resort along Big Marine Lake for more than 50 years on land that is now part of the park reserve. The proposed bench would serve as a tribute to the family's long history with the area and the legacy of their resort.

**Contact: JJ Williams, Parks Manager, 651-430-8245**

## **County Board approves annual report for development agency**

The Washington County Board of Commissioners approved the county Community Development Agency (CDA) 2024 Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Report Sept. 23 for submission to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

The Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Report (CAPER) details Washington County's progress toward meeting the goals outlined in Washington County's 2020-2024 Consolidated Plan and projects undertaken with 2024 Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and the Home Investment Partnerships (HOME) program funds.

The CAPER is a means to communicate to the HUD and policymakers how funds are spent and the impact the programs make in the community.

Washington County's Program Year 2024 accomplishments included:

- Nine home improvement loans that assisted households in making necessary repairs to their homes.
- Two Rivers Community Trust's acquisition of 10 single-family homes, six of which have been sold to income-eligible homebuyers.
- The construction of 51 units of affordable housing by MWF Properties.
- Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity's acquisition of a single-family home and finalizing its six-unit Pullman Development in St. Paul Park.

Utilizing CDBG funds, Washington County Community Services also provided resources for homelessness prevention to 2,340 people.

The draft CAPER was released for public comment and published on the CDA website Aug. 22 with instructions on how to comment. The public comment period closed Sept. 16. The CDA conducted a public hearing at its Sept. 16 meeting. No public comments were received at the public hearing or during the public comment period.

The CAPER and certifications will be submitted to HUD by Sept. 28. The full report can be viewed on the CDA's website at [www.washingtoncountycda.org](http://www.washingtoncountycda.org).

**Contact: Karly Schoeman, Community Development Agency Deputy Executive Director, 651-458-6556**

## **County receives Minnesota Governor's Workplace Safety Award**

Washington County received a silver achievement award in the annual Minnesota Governor's Workplace Safety Awards, recognizing excellence in workplace safety and health, during the Minnesota Safety Council's 2025 Minnesota Safety and Health Conference in May.

The Washington County Board of Commissioners recognized staff for the award.

Washington County received the award for having a consistent, outstanding record with incident rates that are better than the 50th percentile of the industry's state and national average, and having a continuously improving and satisfactory safety program. The Minnesota Safety Council has over 3,800 member organizations.

Since 1934, the annual Minnesota Governor's Workplace Safety Awards program has honored Minnesota companies and organizations that have exceptional safety performance. Applicants are judged on several years of injury data, as it compares with their industry's state and national statistics, and on their progress in implementing a comprehensive safety program.

Washington County was one of the 244 employers to be honored through the awards program. In addition, over the past 34 years, Washington County has received the Minnesota Governor's Workplace Safety Award 33 times.

**Contact: Angie Nalezny, Human Resources Director, 651-430-6075**

**Photo Cutline: The Washington County Board of Commissioners recognized staff from the county's Safety Committee for receiving a silver achievement award in the Minnesota Safety Council's 2024 Minnesota Governor's Workplace Safety Awards.**

## **September 15 to October 15 is Hispanic Heritage Month in Washington County**

The Washington County Board of Commissioners declared Sept. 15 to Oct. 15 as Hispanic Heritage Month in the county Sept. 23.

Hispanic Heritage Month is a national month of recognition celebrating the rich histories, vibrant cultures, and enduring contributions of Americans whose ancestors came from Spain, Mexico, the Caribbean, Central America, and South America.

The board approved a resolution making the declaration Sept. 23, noting how the Latino and Hispanic community has played an integral role in shaping the social, economic, cultural, and political fabric of our nation. In the resolution, the board extended its appreciation to Hispanic and Latino community members and employees.

Hispanic Heritage Month is observed annually from Sept. 15 to Oct. 15 because Sept. 15 is the anniversary of independence for Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua. Mexico celebrates its Independence Day on Sept. 16, Chile celebrates its Independence Day on Sept. 18, and Día de la Raza is celebrated on Oct. 12.

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## **County to recognize Human Resources Professionals Day September 26**

The Washington County Board of Commissioners declared Sept. 26 as Human Resources Professionals Day in the county.

Human Resource Professionals Day serves as an annual occasion to celebrate the integral role of HR professionals in building and sustaining thriving workplaces. The board approved the resolution that made the declaration at its Sept. 23 meeting.

The Washington County Human Resources Department navigates complex challenges with empathy, integrity, and strategic foresight, ensuring the well-being and success of Washington County's most valuable asset — its employees. Staff consistently demonstrate exceptional skills in areas such as benefits, diversity, equity and inclusion, employee relations, employee engagement, human resource information systems, professional development, risk management, safety, talent acquisition, and fostering a positive organizational culture.

The board extended its gratitude to all of the county's Human Resources professionals and recognized their unwavering commitment to county employees and the success of the organization.

**Contact: Angie Nalezny, Human Resources Director, 651-430-6075**

## **October 6 to 10 is Customer Service Week in Washington County**

The Washington County Board of Commissioners declared Oct. 6 to 10 as Customer Service Week in Washington County. The board made the declaration and honored staff Sept. 23.

In 1992, the first full week in October was proclaimed National Customer Service Week by the U.S. Congress to recognize the work of customer service professionals throughout the year and the importance of that work in a wide range of businesses, including government.

All Washington County employees live out the county's mission every day, providing exceptional services that enhance quality of life and promote a safe, healthy, and welcoming community for all.

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