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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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. 19.

The countywide budget recommendation is for a 6.9% levy increase to \$148.9 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 budget for the Library and Property Records and Taxpayer Services departments, as well as the recommended budgets for Law Library and the Board of Commissioners.

The Library has seven physical branches across the county, a Law Library at the Government Center campus, Library Lockers in Marine on St. Croix, Hugo, and Newport, and a digital branch that holds its website, catalog of materials, email, and online chat services.

The Library has improved service delivery with modified hours to two branches and the addition of a new digital streaming platform called Kanopy. The Library has enhanced its facilities and technology through programs like Extended Access at Valley Library and the replacement of public computers. Use of digital checkouts continues to grow for library users. Key factors impacting the 2026 budget are rising costs of materials, supplies, technology, and subscriptions; investments for improving access and reducing barriers to library services; and growing demand for legal clinics in the Law Library.

The Property Records and Taxpayers Services Department provides a wide variety of mandated and core services in five locations throughout Washington County. It is projected that in 2026 that the Property Records and Taxpayer Services Department will:

- Oversee property records of 121,000 parcels.
- Conduct 247,000 transactions in licensing centers.
- Support 193,000 registered voters.
- Record 41,000 documents.

The department's services are provided at the Government Center in Stillwater and service centers in Stillwater, Forest Lake, Woodbury, and Cottage Grove. Key factors impacting the Property Records and Taxpayer Services budget are housing market trends, administrative costs of the 2026 primary and general elections, rising technology usage and associated costs, and License Center operational costs.

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

- 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. Budget documents presented at the workshops may be found at WashingtonCountyMN.gov/Budget.