

Staying in Touch

A communication from the Washington County Board of Commissioners

Washington County Board presents legislative agenda

The Washington County Board of Commissioners adopted a legislative agenda, including items it wishes to see approved by the Minnesota Legislature that will impact the county and its residents.

“The county commissioners work closely with local legislators to advocate for projects and programs that impact Washington County,” said Commissioner Gary Kriesel, District 3. “We have a number of important legislative requests that make necessary safety improvements to state highways and trails, improve solid waste management,



Washington County commissioners met with legislators who represent the county in mid-January to review the county's legislative agenda.

and allow for the county to continue to effectively provide services on behalf of the state.”

Key points in the 2022 agenda are:

- Highway 36 and County State Aid Highway 17 (Lake Elmo

Legislative agenda
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Johnson will serve as County Board chair during 2022



Commissioner Wayne Johnson

Commissioner Wayne Johnson, District 4, will serve as the Washington County Board of Commissioners board chair for 2022, after being elected by the board in January.

Commissioner Gary Kriesel, District 3, will serve as vice chair for 2022.

Johnson was elected to the board in a 2018 election. He has called Cottage

Grove home since 1998. Johnson is married to Mary Beth and has a son Nate and a daughter Lexi.

Johnson was serving on the Cottage Grove City Council, to which he was elected in 2016, when he was elected to be commissioner for District 4. He also served on the Cottage Grove Planning Commission for three years. As a council member, Johnson served as the liaison to the Public Service Commission and Beyond the Yellow Ribbon network of Cottage Grove. He also

represented the city on the Cottage Grove Chamber of Commerce Executive Board.

Johnson grew up on a farm in southeastern Minnesota near the Iowa border. A graduate of Mable-Canton High School, he received an associate's degree in accounting at Iowa Lakes Community College. After entering the workforce, he completed his bachelor of science in accounting at Metropolitan State University in St. Paul.

Johnson owns Furnace Doctors and Dust Doctors in Little Canada.

Eliminating fees to make libraries more accessible to all

To make library services more accessible and equitable for all residents of Washington County, the Board of Commissioners recently voted to stop charging processing fees and to eliminate existing processing fees on library user accounts.

More than 3,000 Washington County residents will be able to use their library cards again. More than 1,000 of those users are minors who could be accessing free educational resources and assistance from the library. Overall, more than 7,000 residents had fees removed from their account.

Increasing Access to the Library

Removing processing fees is one way the library is making services more accessible and equitable for all residents of Washington County.

While Washington County Library does not charge daily late fines, the library does charge users for lost items through a replacement fee. Until Jan. 1, the library also charged an additional \$8 processing fee per item. If users returned lost materials, they could avoid paying the replacement fee, but processing fees would remain on their account.

Because processing fee charges remained on accounts even after overdue items were returned or



The County Board eliminated processing fees charged to users to assure better access to county libraries.

paid for, they created a barrier to access that was disproportionately felt by residents of lower socioeconomic means.

“The pandemic has required us to review and adjust,” said Commissioner Wayne Johnson, District 4. “The libraries became critical resources as schools became virtual and access to learning materials became more challenging. Library staff, the Library Board, and the County Board made the decision that those who need the library the most should not be prevented from accessing the tools they need to succeed. Books are key to success.”

Impacts of Eliminating Fines and Fees

Accessibility and equity have been motivating factors for area libraries to eliminate some fines and fees.

One concern that is often raised when libraries eliminate fines for overdue items is that without a penalty such as fines, library users

won't return materials when they're due. Research and reporting from other libraries show that eliminating fees often has a positive effect on the rate of returned materials.

In many cases, penalties such as the processing fee disincentivized patrons from returning overdue materials because if they did, the processing fee was charged to their account. In some cases, such as with children's materials, the \$8 processing fee was more than the replacement cost of the lost item.

Moving forward, library users will still be asked to pay a replacement charge for lost and damaged items. Users who don't return materials or don't pay replacement costs can still have their accounts blocked.

Residents may check the status of their account by calling their local branch or logging into their account on the Washington County Library website, WashCoLib.org.

Now hiring lifeguards at Washington County Parks

Summer lifeguard positions are available within Washington County Parks, including at Big Marine Park Reserve, Lake Elmo Park Reserve, Point Douglas Park, and Square Lake Park. Lifeguards must be 16 years old or older and have valid Red Cross Lifeguard certification.

Cost of certification may be reimbursed upon successful completion of the season. Starting pay is \$15.64/hour. For more information, call 651-430-8245; email parks@co.washington.mn.us; or see www.governmentjobs.com/careers/washingtonmn

County works with watershed management organizations

Washington County maintains a close relationship with the watershed organizations that oversee the protection of water resources.

Watershed organizations are authorized in state law, and work to solve and prevent water-related problems. Their responsibilities may include control or alleviation of floodwaters, improving stream channels, addressing soil erosion, regulating improvements by riparian property owners, protecting and enhancing water quality, and protecting groundwater.

“Counties and watershed organizations all have unique boundaries,” said Commissioner Fran Miron, District 1. “Water, however, has much further reaching impacts and expansive boundaries. Water quality and availability is critical to everything we do.”

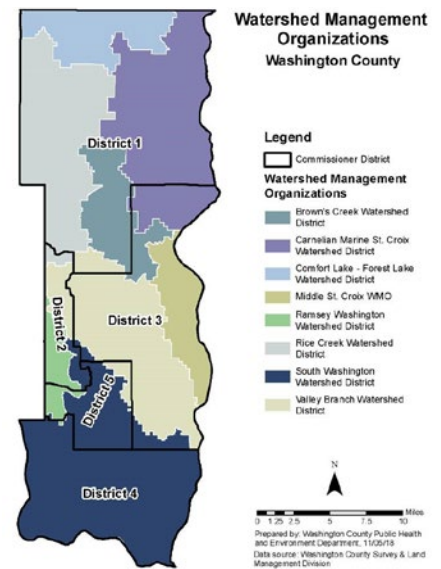
In Washington County, there are watershed districts, and one watershed management organization. Watershed districts are special purpose units of government, with levy authority; the board members, or managers, are appointed by the County Board. In Washington County, there are seven watershed districts: Browns Creek Watershed District, Carnelian-Marine-St. Croix Watershed District, Comfort Lake-Forest Lake Watershed District, Ramsey-Washington District, Rice Creek Watershed District, South Washington Watershed District, and Valley Branch Watershed District.

Metro Watershed District, Rice Creek Watershed District, South Washington Watershed District, and Valley Branch Watershed District. In addition, there is one joint powers board, the Middle St. Croix Watershed Management Organization.

These organizations work with the county, and other partners, including the Washington Conservation District, and cities and townships to ensure the most effective and efficient use of public resources to protect one of the county’s most precious natural resources: water.

Watershed organizations’ annual budgets are driven by the approved watershed management plans, which outline activities to carry out their plans. During the annual county budget process in fall 2021, the County Board reviewed selected projects from the watershed organizations, some of which were completed and some planned for 2022. These include:

- Browns Creek Watershed District: The new interchange at Highway 36 and Manning Avenue at the intersection of Stillwater, Lake Elmo, Grant, and Oak Park Heights, posed challenges with space and soils limiting how stormwater could be treated before it flowed into Long Lake, which is impaired. The



solution was storage ponds for the runoff, which will be used to irrigate Applewood Golf Course. The water reuse not only removes phosphorous from the water, but also saves groundwater. This project is a partnership with the county and the Minnesota Department of Transportation.

- Carnelian-Marine-St. Croix Watershed District and the City of Marine on St. Croix engaged residents to find options for reconstructing the 180-year-old village center while improving the quality of stormwater that flows to Mill Stream, a designated trout stream, and the St. Croix River. Four retention basins treat stormwater from 19.5 acres; two wetlands were restored, and a

Watershed
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Summer day camps back in Washington County Parks

Youth day camps return to Washington County Parks this summer. Camps run Monday through Thursday and will offer outdoor adventure and learning experiences for those ages 6-12. Practice survival skills, learn new

outdoor activities, and make memories in Washington County Parks. For more information and to register, see www.co.washington.mn.us/parks

Washington County recipient of financial reporting awards

Washington County has received awards for financial reporting.

One is the Government Financial Officers Association (GFOA) Certificate of Excellence in Financial Reporting Award for the county's 2019 Annual Comprehensive Financial Report, and one is the GFOA 2019 Award for Outstanding Achievement in Popular Annual Financial Reporting.

This is the 35th consecutive year the county has received the award for the comprehensive report. The award recognizes and encourages excellence in financial reporting by state and local governments. The county's consistent participation

in the program demonstrates its commitment to quality financial management practices and open and clear communication with its residents.

The board also received its second GFOA Award for Outstanding Achievement in Popular Annual Financial Reporting Award, designed to be readily accessible and easily understandable to the general public. It aims to reduce jargon and technical language to assist users in understanding the county's financial position.

"We are excited about this honor as it represents the county's continual efforts to enhance financial controls and transparency," said

Commissioner Lisa Weik, District 5. "This award again shows our dedication to transparency, accessibility, and the production of a budget that is easily understood by our residents, providing access that is even more critical in these challenging financial times."

The board also received the GFOA's Distinguished Budget Presentation Award for the county's 2021 budget. The award marks the 24th consecutive year of receiving the award. To receive the award, the budget undergoes a number of peer reviews to determine if the quality of the document meets the nationally recognized standards for effective budget presentation.

Legislative Priorities *(continued from page 1)*

- Avenue) Intersection Project, an appropriation of \$15 million in state funds to match state, federal, and local funds, to build an overpass at the intersection to improve safety and functionality.
- Washington County Historic Courthouse Renovation, a request for \$2.5 million in state bonding for roof and dome replacement for the Historic Courthouse, which the county would match with \$2.5 million.
- Washington County Land and Water Legacy Program, support for the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council recommendation for the Legislature to fund the "Washington County Habitat and Restoration Partnership" proposal at \$4.2 million to protect more than 340 acres of land

- through conservation easements, and enhance 150 acres.
- Solid Waste Management that asks the Legislature to provide financial incentives to counties which have responded to the need for environmental protection and made investments to exceed state objectives for land-fill diversion.
- Community Correction Funding, a request for a 4% increase in funding for Community Corrections program the next two years to fill a state funding gap.
- County State Aid Highway 5 (Stonebridge Trail) and Brown's Creek State Trail Connection, a request for up to \$3 million to construct a trailhead and a trail connection from Stonebridge Trail in Stillwater to the trail for

- an entry that is ADA compliant.
- Licensing Service Fees, to increase the fees retained by deputy registrars for license transactions at licensing centers to help offset the costs of providing the service. Alternatively, Washington County supports legislation that authorizes deputy registrars to establish their own service fee for license transactions.

The board also supports funding of transitway capital maintenance through non-county sources, state bonding for the regional park system, local property taxpayer protection, and the expansion of Bus Route 363.

The legislative agenda may be found on the county's website at www.co.washington.mn.us by searching "legislative priorities."

Sheriff's Office teams with partners to combat auto thefts

Automobile thefts happen fast. Washington County residents are seeing the effects of increased car thefts over the past year as they occur all around the metro.

"The Sheriff's Office is working diligently to address this issue," said Sheriff Dan Starry. "We have dedicated units of our investigation and patrol divisions and are allocating resources to the prevention and apprehension of auto thefts."

The Washington County Sheriff's Office teams and patrol division partner with local and bordering agencies to work aggressively towards identifying and apprehending those responsible for car thefts around the east metro and prevent additional criminal acts. Through real-time information sharing, analytical and saturated patrols, and collaborative investigation, mul-

iple criminals have been brought to account and stolen vehicles have been recovered.

The Minnesota Department of Commerce found that in 2020, six out of 10 vehicles stolen in the metro area had keys in the vehicle.

Auto thefts are often "crimes of opportunity," meaning the perpetrator will more likely target a vehicle that offers a high reward with little effort and risk.

Prevent crime by reducing such opportunities.

- Always lock your vehicle and take your keys with you.
- Never leave your vehicle running unattended, even without

the key fob. The absence of a key fob in the vehicle won't prevent the criminal from driving away, but rather prevent the vehicle from restarting after it has been shut off.

- Close garage doors, even when at home. Make sure garage service doors and any interior doors leading into the home are secured.
- Remain aware of surroundings at all times while driving, specifically at stoplights and stop signs. Avoid distractions and keep doors and windows locked. When stopping, leave enough space to maneuver around other vehicles should a situation arise where you need to drive away quickly.

As always, if you see anything suspicious, out of place, or something just doesn't feel right, call 911.

County opens countywide food scraps drop-off in Mahtomedi



Washington County, in partnership with the City of Mahtomedi, has opened a food scraps drop-off site in Mahtomedi that is open to all county residents. The self-serve drop-off site is located behind the Mahtomedi Fire Department at 800 Stillwater Road and is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, unless otherwise noted.

"It's very positive for all when our county collaborates with Mahtomedi and cities throughout our county on projects, not only on this food scrap drop-off environmental initiative, but also on a wide range of partnerships," said Commissioner Stan Karwoski, District 2.

To get started, residents are encouraged to sign up at www.co.washington.mn.us/foodscraps and pick up a free starter kit at one of three locations – the Environmental Center in Woodbury, the Northern Yard Waste Site in Hugo, or Mahtomedi City Hall. Kits

include a kitchen collection pail, 10 compostable bags, and program information.

Residents may bring food scraps in a certified compostable bag to any drop-off site in Washington County. Locations include the Mahtomedi site, the Northern Yard Waste Site, and the Environmental Center. Hours vary by location. See the county website for hours and additional program information.



Washington County part of redistricting process

Redistricting is the act of redrawing geographic boundaries within a state from which voters elect their U.S. Representatives, state legislators, county commissioners, and local officials. The process of redistricting uses 2020 Census data to draw new boundaries that will be in effect for the next 10 years.

The process has been underway at the state legislative level to draw state, congressional, and legislative district boundaries, which were to be completed Feb. 15. The next step is for municipalities to create their election precincts, which will set the stage for the county to determine county commissioner districts, expected to occur in April.

The County Board is expected to conduct a workshop in March

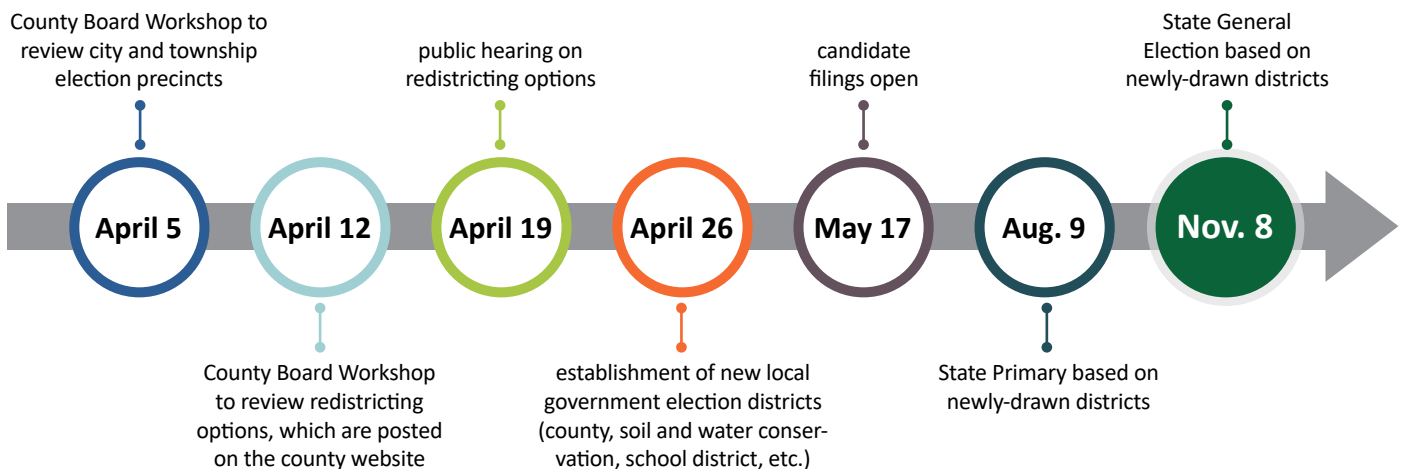
to review the new congressional and legislative districts and review the city and township election precincts at a meeting April 5. Another workshop will be conducted April 12 to review redistricting options for county commissioner districts, which will be posted on the county's website for public comment. A public hearing will be conducted on those options April 19. The board is expected to adopt commissioner and soil and water conservation district boundaries April 26.

The public is invited to participate in the workshops and board meetings, and to review information on county redistricting on the county website at www.co.washington.mn.us, by searching "redistricting."

Redistricting of county commissioner districts is required if they are no longer contiguous, vary in population more than 10% from the average commissioner district population, or the districts are not as close to equal in population as possible. Factors that the commissioners may consider when shaping districts include the number of communities in a district, as well as the population, and the geographic size of the district.

Washington County gained almost 30,000 residents between 2010 and 2020, which affects the shape of the commissioner districts. Population growth in cities ranged from 902 people in Oakdale to 13,141 people in Woodbury.

Relevant dates in the 2022 redistricting process



Cottage Grove Ravine Regional Park facility rentals available

Reserve the multipurpose room at the new Ravine Landing at Cottage Grove Ravine Regional Park for events from wedding receptions to birthday parties. Included with rentals are chairs, tables, kitchenette, built-in audio and video technology, Wi-Fi, coat closet, indoor gas fireplace, covered

picnic area, fire pit, and a view of the nature trails.

Hours of use are 9 a.m. to 10 p.m.; the capacity is 40 for a seated event and 80 people for a standing event. Schedule an event online at ww.co.washington.mn.us/parks or call the park office at 651-430-8226.

Washington County Board of Commissioners

Washington County Commissioners develop policy and make decisions and laws that govern the county. Commissioners encourage calls or emails on any issue related to county government. For service-related questions, visit the county website at www.co.washington.mn.us or call 651-430-6000 (TTY - 651-430-6246).

County Board Meetings

The County Board generally meets most Tuesdays at 9 a.m. Meetings take place at the Washington County Government Center in Stillwater. Agendas and directions to the building are posted online at www.co.washington.mn.us. See the county's website calendar for details on the meeting schedule. Contact the Office of Administration at 651-430-6001 for more information.

Cable Television/Webstreaming

Board meetings are webstreamed live, and may be accessed from the county's website under "County Board." The webstreamed meetings are also archived on the county website. Board meetings are cablecast on government access channels throughout the county. Meetings are shown several times throughout the week. For schedules, contact local cable access channels or see the county website at www.co.washington.mn.us and see "County Board" and "Board Meeting Guide."



Left to right, Gary Kriesel, Fran Miron, Lisa Weik, Stan Karwoski, Wayne A. Johnson



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District 4 - Wayne A. Johnson

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District 5 - Lisa Weik

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*Washington County is an equal
opportunity organization
and employer*

Vision

A great place to live, work and play...
today and tomorrow

Mission

Providing quality services through
responsible leadership, innovation
and the cooperation of dedicated
people

Values

- Ethical: to ensure public trust through fairness, consistency and transparency
- Stewardship: to demonstrate tangible, cost-effective results and protect public resources
- Quality: to ensure that services delivered to the public are up to the organization's highest standards
- Responsive: to deliver services that are accessible, timely, respectful and efficient
- Respectful: to believe in and support the dignity and value of all members of this community
- Leadership: to actively advocate for and guide the County toward a higher quality of life

Goals

- To promote the health, safety, and quality of life of citizens
- To provide accessible, high-quality services in a timely and respectful manner
- To address today's needs while proactively planning for the future
- To maintain public trust through responsible use of public resources, accountability, and openness of government

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Postal Customer



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Watershed *(continued from page 3)*

- 300-foot-long channel to the St. Croix River was stabilized.
 - Comfort Lake-Forest Lake Watershed District will restore the ecology and hydrology of a wetland adjacent to Bone Lake by excavating 1.5 acres of manure-laden wetland soils to remove this source of excess nutrients and restore the natural ecology of the wetland.
 - Middle St. Croix Watershed Management Organization used a grant and city funding to stabilize a bluff failure in the City of Lake St. Croix Beach. A key goal was to preserve as much vegetation as possible in front of the riprap work.
 - The Ramsey-Washington Metro Watershed District used funds at 33rd Company in Woodbury for a dry creek bed and to plant native plants to help with drainage and filter stormwater before it enters a wetland and, eventually, Carver lake. The project also funded a rain garden at a private residence in Woodbury to capture runoff before it enters Battle Creek Lake.
 - The Rice Creek Watershed District has promoted stormwater reuse for irrigation for more than a decade, beginning with Oneka Ridge Golf Course in Hugo in 2012. It continues that work with projects at Waters Edge, Hugo City Hall and Lions Park, and the County State Aid Highway 8 boulevard.
 - South Washington Watershed District highlighted the McQuade Ravine Stabilization project, constructed in 2021 to remove an estimated 250 tons of sediment and 210 pounds of phosphorous per year.
 - In 2020, the Valley Branch Watershed District and Washington County performed emergency pumping at several landlocked basins in the Valley Branch Watershed District to protect homes, roadways, and sewage systems. The district has partnered with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to complete a comprehensive planning study on nine landlocked basins in the district.
- In addition, Washington County, along with several of the watershed partners, has been engaged in the One Watershed One Plan planning and implementation. The lower St. Croix watershed covers two-thirds of Washington County and runs north into southern Pine County. The county participates along with 15 other local governments to develop basin-wide and region-wide planning goals for the Lower St. Croix Basin.
- For more information on watershed organizations in Washington County, see the county's website www.co.washington.mn.us and search "watershed organizations."
- For more information about Lower St. Croix One Watershed One Plan, see <https://www.lsc1w1p.org/>