

ANOKA COUNTY News

VOLUME 2 - 2011

Reinventing Government

technology
Collaboration
Innovation
prepare
Teamwork LEAN
dynamic
Strategic
efficiency Budget
Mission adapt



The 2012 budget proposed by the county board will result in a reduction in the county portion of the property tax bill for most low and moderate value Anoka County homes. Despite losing almost \$6.9 million with the elimination of the Market Value Homestead Credit (MVHC) and another \$1.5 million in state aid, the county board cut spending and implemented other cost-saving measures to reduce the levy by \$8.1 million. The net tax levy of \$98,531,229 represents a 7.43 percent decrease, the first time in at least 30 years the levy has dropped.

“Like so many families today, county government is working hard to do more with less,” said Anoka County Board Chair Rhonda Sivarajah. “We are making innovative changes and implementing new efficiencies to stretch tax dollars as much as possible.”

Lean budget for 2012

The board faced a particular challenge this year when the Market Value Homestead Credit was repealed and replaced with a Homestead Market Value Exclusion. The new program excludes a portion of a home’s market value when determining the tax assessment. Homes valued at up to \$76,000 will receive a 40 percent exclusion to \$30,400, with a sliding scale that ends with homes valued at \$413,800. While the legislation lowers the taxable value for many homeowners, it shifts a larger share of the tax burden to properties that do not qualify for the exclusion, such as higher value, non-homestead, and commercial properties. Rather than make up the loss in revenue by increasing property taxes, county board members were committed to cutting spending and finding ways to save money, according to Sivarajah.

Among the cost-saving measures, a one-time voluntary separation program that will save \$1.5 million annually in salary and benefits. Positions held by the 97 employees who signed up for the program were left vacant for a minimum of two months. Future ongoing savings will result from not filling some positions and either restructuring or hiring replacements at a lower pay rate.

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Board Chair Rhonda Sivarajah
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Removing one-third of all light bulbs in county facilities saves more than \$92,000 in annual utility costs. A thorough assessment of the condition of all county buildings has made planning for ongoing maintenance more efficient and cost effective.

Anoka County also is investing in technology to save staff time and resources. An imaging project in the Economic Assistance Department allows staff to quickly access data that otherwise would have been stored in paper files. In the Sheriff's Office, the number of fleet vehicles has been cut and booking fees have been raised to more accurately reflect actual costs. County social workers are maximizing reimbursements received from state and federal sources for targeted case management, and 27 percent fewer juveniles are being placed in foster homes thanks to an innovative approach to working with families in crisis.

The capital equipment and building fund balances have been boosted with an aim to reduce the number of bonds issued for major projects. "We will be paying more on a 'cash as we go' basis," Sivarajah said. "That may mean delaying some projects or major purchases, but we believe it is the prudent way to do business."

Standard and Poor's recently reaffirmed Anoka County's AAA bond rating, the highest rating possible. The AAA rating means the county will likely be able to obtain the lowest possible interest rates on bonds to finance necessary capital improvement projects, realizing significant savings.

"Anoka County is committed to keeping taxes among the lowest in the state," Sivarajah said. "We are positioning ourselves for the future by investing thoughtfully and strategically to maximize the value of every taxpayer dollar, lowering our debt burden, and maintaining healthy reserves for the long term."

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and www.youtube.com/anokacountymn

Follow Anoka County on Twitter at www.Twitter.com/AnokaCounty

Growing jobs in Anoka County

More than 60 percent of Anoka County residents work at jobs outside the county. That's something Anoka County board members would like to change. "Job growth is a top priority," said Anoka County Board Chair Rhonda Sivarajah. "Government doesn't create jobs, but it can create a favorable environment where businesses can grow and prosper."

Anoka County is part of the Greater Minneapolis-St. Paul Regional Economic Development Partnership (Greater MSP for short), a new regional economic development initiative. The group aims to develop a coordinated regional economic development strategy with the goal of retaining and expanding area businesses and stimulating job creation and capital investment. Commissioner Sivarajah is a member of the Greater MSP Board of Directors.

"Our region has many assets yet we lag behind other areas of the nation in job growth," she said. "We have to do more to get on the radar of global companies when they are looking to relocate or expand."

The group will keep new or existing businesses informed about business incentives available across the region such as financing opportunities, low interest loans, tax incentives, grants, training programs and other small business assistance programs.

"Anoka County has a great deal to offer potential employers: affordable land, an educated workforce, and an excellent

quality of life without the high cost of living," Sivarajah said. "We need to do a better job of sharing that message so we'll

be in the running when businesses are looking to expand or relocate."



THE MISSION OF ANOKA COUNTY IS TO SERVE CITIZENS IN A RESPECTFUL, INNOVATIVE, AND FISCALLY RESPONSIBLE MANNER.

FISCAL STEWARDSHIP

Anoka County believes in fiscal responsibility.

RESPECT FOR THE INDIVIDUAL

Anoka County values diversity.

THE CITIZEN AS CUSTOMER

Anoka County believes in high quality customer service.

ETHICS AND INTEGRITY

Anoka County values ethics and integrity.

BUSINESS FRIENDLY

Anoka County believes economic development is crucial for community success



A pleasant surprise

by Anoka County Sheriff James Stuart

As a nation, we have encountered new economic challenges and difficult times that impact each of us. In the face of difficulty, I think it is important to remain mindful of positive outcomes as well.

A unique circumstance that has occurred is that crime rates are generally down across our nation. Historical thinking indicates that in a time when our economy is struggling, the crime rate should be skyrocketing. However, that is not the case this time.

Research shows there are many factors for this reduction. One factor is there are more people in prison which reduces criminals' ability to increase their victim count. Another is that potential victims are becoming better at protecting themselves. As a society, we are becoming more aware of how to shield our families from assaults on us, our property, or even our identities. The nature of policing has also become more disciplined in the past two decades. Law enforcement as a whole has evolved and tends to be driven by the desire to reduce crime, and focus on "hot spots," rather than simply to maximize arrests and respond to calls for service. This requires that deputies have the time as well as the technology and infrastructure to support these efforts. Although there are more factors, these played key roles in reducing crime rates.

The numbers speak clearly: when we all work together, we can have an impact. Resist complacency; look out for your neighbors; call 911 even if you are unsure if you should; and remember that we are all in this together.

Let's Talk About It, Anoka County

Let's Talk About It, Anoka County is giving residents the chance to learn about mental health and wellness and suicide prevention.

Early recognition and treatment are critical to the successful long-term treatment of mental illness. "The earlier we can identify who is at risk, the less likely they will be to suffer serious, lasting consequences," said Anoka County Commissioner Robyn West, a member of the county's Human Services Committee.

A recent survey found 11-15 percent of Anoka County students in grades 6, 9, and 12 consistently



report feelings of sadness. Among the other findings:

- More than 17 percent of 9th graders report having suicidal thoughts in the past year;
- One-fourth of 9th and 12th graders say they hurt themselves on purpose.

Let's Talk About It , Anoka County is hosting a series of free public awareness and education events. The next event will be held in St. Francis in early December with a third event in Fridley in early 2012. For details, visit www.save.org/talk.



Lean Kaizen, a Japanese workplace philosophy that stresses incremental, continuous improvement has been introduced in the Anoka County Attorney's Office and Office of Child Support. Derived from the Japanese word "kai,"

staff members from both departments to identify and document the existing process used to determine paternity and establish child support. They found the process required 94 steps, more than 12 hours of processing time, and an average 176-day waiting period. With the Kaizen

Ideas borrowed from private industry making government more efficient.

Lean Kaizen

meaning change, and "zen," meaning to make better, Kaizen strives to make ongoing changes for the better. It has been adapted for use in private industry, where it is known as Lean Six Sigma, to ensure the production of high quality goods and services. Kaizen requires that all employees in an organization — line staff and supervisors alike — look for small, incremental ways to improve productivity, safety, and effectiveness.

The complicated and often contentious area of paternity and child support requires a high degree of cooperation between the County Attorney's Office and the Office of Child Support. A Kaizen consultant worked with 15

expert's guidance, the team took a close look at the existing process and recommended changes that ultimately cut the required steps to 70, the processing time to 10.4 hours, and the average wait time to 63 days. Many of the changes call for improving communications between departments, developing standardized processes, and eliminating duplication of effort.

The plan now is to explore ways in which the Kaizen philosophy can benefit other county departments and processes. The original Kaizen team will train other county employees who will then train their co-workers until the process is shared countywide.

MAP IT!

Anoka County's Geographic Information System (GIS) Department recently added digital plat and half section maps to its online GIS web mapping application content. The interactive mapping application provides public access to property lines, aerial photos, and other land records information. Users can also perform on-screen measurements, print custom maps, and create mailing labels.

Users also can use interactive maps to find information on road construction projects and locate parks, recreation centers, trails, and playgrounds. Learn more at www.anokacounty.us/gis.

High speed broadband project under way

Work to expand high speed fiber optic broadband connectivity across Anoka County kicked off this fall with an official groundbreaking ceremony for the Connect Anoka County project. The project will create a 286-mile fiber optic backbone linking 145 police, fire, public works, libraries, K-12 schools, colleges, city and town halls, and county and community buildings and also will give Anoka County the right to use dark fiber –



unused optical fibers that can be used for future services and expanded bandwidth – for up to 120 years. With this infrastructure in place, there will be more opportunities for collaborative efforts and shared services via fiber connections and expanded wireless governmental networks for public works, public safety, and other mobile staff.

County officials celebrate the Connect Anoka County groundbreaking. From left: Commissioners Rhonda Sivarajah, Matt Look, and Robyn West; County Attorney Tony Palumbo; Sheriff James Stuart; and Commissioners Jim Kordiak, Dan Erhart, Carol LeDoux, and Andy Westerberg.



Rush Line bus service to St. Paul continuing

The Rush Line Corridor Task Force has approved a second year of operation for Route 285 express commuter bus service between Forest Lake and downtown St. Paul, serving the communities of Columbus and White Bear Lake along the route. Route 285 travels along the southern portion of the RushLine Corridor, an 80-mile corridor that begins at Union Depot in downtown St. Paul and runs north generally following I-35E/35 and Highway 61 through Anoka, Ramsey, Washington, Chisago, and Pine counties to Hinckley.



Express bus service to St. Paul began in October 2010 as a one-year pilot project in an effort to provide service to commuters and demonstrate the potential ridership to St. Paul in the corridor. Between October 2010 and May 2011, ridership grew approximately 65 percent. Route 288 express bus service to Minneapolis operates along this same corridor up to the I-35W/35E split, continuing to downtown Minneapolis. This part of the Rush Line service has been operating for over three years. The Minneapolis route continues to be very successful, often running trips with standing room only.

For more information about Route 285 express bus service, go to www.rushline.org.



Consider less this holiday season

Less really can be more. This holiday season, give green gifts that require no wrapping; no guessing clothing sizes, no wondering if it will match or be liked!

Give personalized green gift coupons instead. Offer to run errands, baby-sit, mow the lawn, or shovel the sidewalk. Make your own gift coupons or call 763-323-5730 for a packet of five waste reduction gift coupons that you can personalize.

Like to shop? The Shop Used First! guide* lists resale outlets, thrift stores, and used product stores where you can find gifts for everyone on your list. (Don't forget to take along a reusable cloth tote to hold your treasures!)

Reuse gift boxes and bags, wrapping paper, and bows. Wrap packages with colorful pages from magazines, or use maps, posters, or calendars. Reuse craft paper bags decorated with cutouts from old holiday cards, or stencils and children's artwork. Wrap gifts in leftover fabric, scarves, handkerchiefs, or bandanas.

Make luminaries from empty food cans – no electricity or batteries required!

Every time you get *less*, you save time, space, and money. That's more time with friends, more space you can use, and more money for better versions of the things you really need. It all adds up to less resources used and less stress on your wallet.

So, what are you waiting for? Start getting *less* today!

*For copies of the *Shop Used First* and *No Waste Holiday* guides or the *Waste Reduction Gift Coupons*, call 763-323-5730 or visit:

www.AnokaCounty.us/recycle

Learn more at

www.getlesstoday.com

New at the Library

Help for job seekers at Anoka County Library

Looking for a job or just hoping to improve your job skills? The library can help! In collaboration with Anoka County WorkForce Center and MetroNorth Adult Basic Education, Anoka County Library is providing free classes on navigating the Internet for effective job searching and career exploration, as well as free computer classes in Microsoft Word, Excel, and Introduction to the Internet. These classes and the computer learning lab are made possible by a Library Service Technology Act grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services. Classes are held at the Rum River Library. Call 763-783-4847 to register.



Winter Jackets: Winter reading program for adults

Celebrate the joys of reading during our long winter months! The following authors will be visiting the Rum River Library Saturdays at 2 p.m. to talk about their books and the writing process:

Larry Millett	January 21
Sarah Stonich	January 28
Terry Mejdritch	February 4
Hartless Murderers	February 11
Kevin Kling	February 18
Monica Ferris	February 25



WINTER JACKETS
WINTER READING FOR ADULTS



Bringing local history to life

Anoka County Library &
Anoka County Historical Society collaborations

A Civil War Christmas
December 10: 10:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m.
Rum River Library

Quilt Facts, Folklore, and FABRICation
January 14: 2 p.m.-3 p.m.
Northtown Library

For more information about these and other library services visit www.anoka.lib.mn.us.



REACH FOR A BOOK. FIND SOMETHING MORE.



Don't let the cold weather keep you indoors this winter! Anoka County Parks are the place to be for cool winter fun, from cross country skiing by the light of the moon to skijoring with your favorite pooch. Whatever your interest, Anoka County Parks can help you get outside and moving all winter long.

Chillin' in the parks

Looking for something to do with the relatives in town for the holidays? Give them a taste of the recreational activities available here in the northland by signing up for the **Holiday Sampler** program offered Friday, December 30, from 1-3 p.m. at the Wargo Nature Center in Lino Lakes. Participants can try kick sledding, snowshoeing, cross country skiing, skijoring, and more. Cost is \$7/adult and \$5/youth (plus tax). Register at anokacountyparks.com or for more information call 651-429-8007.



Help your youngsters in grades 3-5 beat boredom during the holiday break by signing them up for the one-day **Winter Recreation Camp**. The day is jam-packed with winter activities including cross country skiing, snowshoeing, kick sledding, winter games, and more. Two locations: Choose either Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park in Coon Rapids Tuesday, December 27, from 9 a.m.-3 p.m. or Wargo Nature Center in Lino Lakes Wednesday, December 28, from 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Cost is \$25/person plus tax. Register at anokacountyparks.com or call 651-429-8007 for more information.

Visit anokacountyparks.com for more winter programming information.

Save the date:
"Snow Day"
January 28, 2012
1-4 p.m. @
Wargo



New laws impact public safety

by Anoka County Attorney Tony Palumbo

The Minnesota Legislature passed some noteworthy laws affecting public safety in 2011.

Until recently, some businesses were selling synthetic forms of marijuana known as Spice, K2, or bath salts, all of which are similar to marijuana. On August 1, those types of chemicals were outlawed and the sale or possession of those synthetic drugs is now a crime. The legislature also clearly stated that chemicals which are “analogs”—substances that are substantially similar to the chemical characteristics of dangerous drugs—are also outlawed.

A law passed this year made it easier to prosecute those who harm vulnerable adults. Now anyone, even those who are not caregivers, can be prosecuted for a gross misdemeanor if they inflict bodily harm on someone they know is a vulnerable adult. If a person harms a vulnerable adult seriously enough to

be a felony, registration as a predatory offender is required.

Juveniles age 15 years old and older who commit sex crimes against victims who do not live with them may be prohibited from living within 1000 feet or 3 blocks of their victim as a condition of their probation. Juveniles who are certified to stand trial as an adult may be held in a secure juvenile detention facility, in addition to a jail, while waiting for trial.

Owners of a motorcycle, truck, or recreational vehicle can now get disability plates if they are physically disabled, are the parent or guardian of a physically disabled minor, or have a physically disabled employee who uses that vehicle.

Although not sweeping changes, these laws represent the legislature’s attempt to deal with issues that law enforcement must face every day.

Are you a veteran?
(Or do you know someone who is?)

The Anoka County Veteran Services Office can assist with:

Health Care Benefits	Home Loans
Disability Compensation	Certificate of Eligibility
Dental Care	Property Tax Exclusion
Optical Care	Burial Benefit
Discharge Papers	Survivor Benefit

763-323-5290
veterans@co.anoka.mn.us
www.anokacounty.us/veterans



Anoka County Household Hazardous Waste Facility

3230 101st Ave NE, Blaine (off Radisson Road)

Cold Weather Hours: November-March

Wednesday 2-8 p.m. & Saturday 9 a.m.-3 p.m.

No charge. Proof of residency required.

Learn more at www.anokacounty.us/recycle
763-323-5730

Investing in neighborhoods

Anoka County has received more than \$7 million since 2008 under the federal Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP). The funds have been used to rehabilitate 42 homes, demolish 13, and rebuild one in areas hard hit by mortgage foreclosures and blighted properties.

Anoka County cannot make a profit from the sale of the homes, according to NSP rules. “The sale price can’t be more than what we paid for the property plus rehabilitation costs,” said Anoka County Commissioner



NSP home in Coon Rapids before and after rehab.

Jim Kordiak. “Homes are available for purchase by low, moderate, and middle income families who meet all the program’s qualifications.”

Homes and vacant lots are available in Andover, Anoka, Blaine, and Columbia Heights. Learn more at www.anokacounty.us/homes or call 763-323-5764.

Keep Anoka County healthy.

Get your flu shot!

COMMUNITY IMMUNITY



Everyone six months of age and older should get the flu vaccine. Even if you got a flu shot last year, you should get one again this year. The virus that causes the flu is different every year. That's why you need a flu vaccine every year.

Those most at risk for becoming seriously ill from the flu include:

- people age 65 and older
- young children
- pregnant women
- people with certain health conditions such as asthma, diabetes, and heart disease

The Anoka County Community Health Department recommends that everyone take preventive actions every day to stop the spread of germs:

- cover your cough
- stay home if you are ill
- wash your hands
- get the flu vaccine

Boost our community's immunity! Get your flu vaccine today!

For more information call the Anoka County Immunization Information Line at 763-323-6100 or visit the Minnesota Department of Health website at www.health.state.mn.us and click on the "Find a Flu Shot Clinic."

Compost site open two weekends in January

Although Anoka County's two compost sites have closed for the season, the Bunker Hills site will reopen for two weekends in January to receive leaves and yard waste along with Christmas trees and evergreen garland. Acceptable yard waste includes leaves, grass clippings, garden waste, weeds, brush, logs, and stumps. Variable fees apply. Go to www.anokacounty.us/recycle for details.

The Bunker Hills compost site, located on Hanson Blvd. one mile north of Main St. in Coon Rapids, will be open:

Saturday, January 7 and 14 from 9 a.m.-4:30 p.m. and

Sunday, January 8 and 15 from noon-4:30 p.m.

Residents are asked to remove all wire from evergreen boughs and garland. Christmas trees should be free of tinsel, all ornaments, and stands. Note: Most garbage haulers offer Christmas tree collection as part of their service. Contact your hauler for pickup information.

Both the Bunker Hills and Rice Creek Chain of Lakes compost sites will reopen April 1, weather permitting. Learn more at www.anokacounty.us/recycle.

Ramsey Northstar Station on track for 2012 construction

Funding is in place for the \$13.2 million Ramsey Northstar Station, allowing construction to get under way in the coming months, with completion scheduled for the end of 2012.

Several funding sources are pooling resources to get the job done. The state is contributing \$4 million; the Met Council has committed \$1.3 million; the Counties Transit Improvement Board is granting \$3 million; the Anoka County Regional Rail Authority has approved \$1.3 million; and the City of Ramsey is contributing \$3.6 million.

“I’m glad we were able to complete the funding package and get started on construction when prices are favorable,” said Anoka County Commissioner Matt Look, chair of the county’s Regional Rail Authority. “The benefits of adding this station will begin immediately with construction jobs and will continue for decades as part of the region’s economic development efforts.”

The station is expected to average more than 200 rides per day, adding 52,000 rides per year to the commuter rail system. Fares have not yet been set by Metro Transit, the operator of the line. Metro Transit offers several incentives for commuters and reduced fares for weekend riders. Learn more about using the Northstar line at www.metrotransit.org/northstar, or by calling 612-373-3333.

“The benefits of adding this station will begin immediately with construction jobs and will continue for decades...”
Commissioner Matt Look

The station is a focal point of a transit-oriented development plan called The COR at Ramsey. Anticipated benefits of The COR when it is fully developed include:

- 3,900 jobs
- \$3.5 million annually in local tax revenue
- 1,500 residential units, including senior and young professional
- Parking ramp with 590 spaces and 200 more scheduled

To learn more about The COR, contact Heidi Nelson at the City of Ramsey, 763-433-9817, or hnelson@ci.ramsey.mn.us.



Take regularly for:
**Effective, lasting relief
from gas pains.**

The cure for the common commute.  Metro Transit 

Noteworthy

- **Barb and George Carley** received the Volunteer of the Year Award from the National Association of County Parks & Recreation Officials for serving as volunteer campground hosts at the Bunker Hills Campground. The Carleys retired after 17 years with Anoka County Parks, contributing more than 70,000 volunteer hours.

- **Don Ilse, Anoka County Human Services Division Manager**, has received the Jack Young



Don Ilse

Award for Excellence in Corrections from the Minnesota Association of Community Corrections Act Counties. The award is given to individuals who have furthered the mission of community corrections and made outstanding contributions to the development and improvement of the field.

- **Anoka County Commissioner Dan Erhart** has been appointed to the Minnesota Racing Commission by Governor Mark Dayton. The commission is charged with regulating the state's horse racing and card club operations to ensure that it is conducted in the public interest. Erhart's Racing Commission term runs until January 2, 2017.

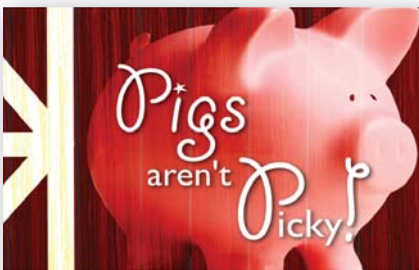


Commissioner Dan Erhart

- **55 volunteer drivers** logged 170,053 miles and contributed 10,749 hours of service this year with the Anoka County Volunteer Driver program. The drivers took 1,900 regular passengers on more than 7,000 trips to veterans' medical facilities in St. Cloud, Maplewood, and Minneapolis; medical clinics in Coon Rapids and Fridley; and other necessary appointments. Passengers are veterans, seniors, or county clients.



Volunteer drivers who drove the most miles last year are (from left) Bob Swenson (9,125 miles); Dennis Lubke (19,412 miles); and Herb Wildung (11,455 miles).

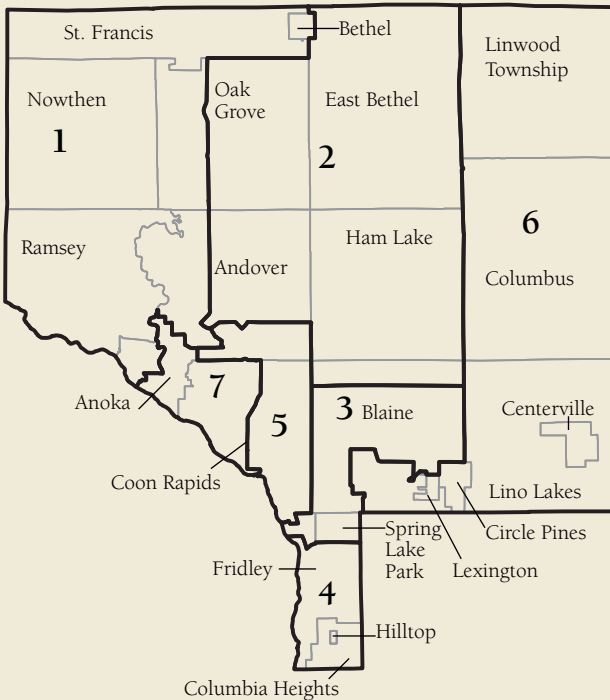


- Find out how students at an Anoka County elementary school are turning their leftover lunch into food for an area hog farm. Go to <http://tinyurl.com/3nue3cq>.

Anoka County
2100 3rd Ave.
Anoka MN 55303

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Anoka County Board of Commissioners 763-323-5700



Matt Look
District 1



Andy
Westerberg
District 2



Robyn West
District 3



Jim Kordiak
District 4



Carol LeDoux
District 5



Rhonda
Sivarajah
District 6



Dan Erhart
District 7

Board meetings are generally held the second and fourth Tuesdays of the month at 9:30 a.m. in Room 705 of the Anoka County Government Center in Anoka. Watch board meetings live at www.anokacounty.us.