

# POLK COUNTY

## Newsletter

**INSIDE: Budgets  
are not always  
about taxes**

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**Fall 2023**



A Crookston resident fills out an entry for door prizes during the grand opening of the Polk County Family Resource Center co-located at the Crookston Public Library on June 1. **Tim Albrecht / Polk County**

## FRC OPENS IN JUNE

### Polk County Family Resource Center connects Crookston families with vital support services

Polk County families recently received a helping hand in the form of the newly opened Polk County Family Resource Center (FRC). The Center, co-located in the Crookston Public Library, held its grand opening on June 1 to a crowd of over 200 area residents.

Family Resource Centers are a way to link local families with various support services and assistance. “The FRC serves as a connector to current resources, like a one-stop shop or community hub,” says Victoria Ramirez, Polk County Social Services Manager. “This helps streamline and expedite services for families as opposed to having families

make several stops around town and re-explain their situation to several different people to access services from various providers.”

The Polk County FRC has several core services that are always available on specific days of the month. Each of the services provides answers to any questions and assists with forms and eligibility, job searches, WIC, and more.

FRC core services offered are Economic Assistance Program Support, Child Support Consultations, Career Force, Polk County Public Health WIC Consultations, The Lotus Center Peer Recovery, Crookston School District Help Me

Grow, and Tri-Valley Opportunity Council.

The newly added Help Me Grow provides resources for families to understand developmental milestones in the lives of their children, while the Tri-Valley Opportunity Council connects individuals to various services they offer including transportation, emergency assistance, and housing support.

“There is a lot of excitement and momentum from our community partners in developing the infrastructure of the FRC, we all have the same goals of strengthening families and

## Reese wins open county board seat

Following a special primary election in May for the vacant 1st District seat on the Polk County Board of Commissioners a special general election was held Aug. 8th. The seat was vacated after the passing of Jerry Jacobson earlier this year.

The two finalists for the board seat were Paul Reese and Michelle Cote. Of 3,299 registered voters across Polk County, a little more than 30 percent turned in a ballot.

Reese came out on top with 581 votes, or 57 percent, to Cote’s 441, or 43 percent, with one write-in vote. Reese joins fellow commissioners Warren Strandell, District 2 and County Board – Chair, Gary Willhite, District 3 and County Board – Vice Chair, Joan Lee, District 4, and Mark Holy, District 5.

Reese’s term is only for one year as Jacobson had already served three years on his four-year term. Regular elections will be held in 2024 for the District 1 and 3 seats.

“The entire Polk County staff welcomes Paul to the Board and we look forward to working with him for the rest of his term,” said Chuck Whiting, Polk County Administrator.



**Reese**

### TWO MONTHS IN

Reese's discusses his time on the Polk County Board

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## FRC

### From Page 1

promoting positive outcomes,” explains Ramirez. “Our community action partner, Tri-Valley Opportunity Council will be leading the development of the FRC’s Parent Advisory Council, this will play a huge role in what future programming will be available at the FRC. We will also work with parents to develop programming that they would like to see offered.”

Several other events have been held at the Crookston Center including Play and Learn which are fun for children while providing an environment that sets them up for both learning success and emotional development. Some of the activities at Play and Learn have included building S’mores, a scavenger hunt, arts and crafts, and reading.

In August the Polk County FRC held two events for kids returning to school. A backpack pickup event provided free school supplies along with backpacks to Crookston K-12 students and Shear Sisters in Crookston gave out free haircuts. Both events were a huge success according to Victoria, “More than 100 backpacks were distributed to Crookston youth and the back-to-school haircuts slots were filled within just hours of being posted on Facebook. We hope to expand these events next year to serve more families.”

On top of the back-to-school events, the FRC collaborated with Alluma and The Cove Youth Center. Alluma staff provided workshops on developing safety plans and coping skills in stressful situations. The workshops have been wildly successful with over 20 local youth participating in each event, says Ramirez.

Polk County is one of several counties in Minnesota offering or planning Family Resource Centers across the state. Scott County was the first to open in 2021 with Pine County being the most recent, opening in June shortly after Polk County. Ottertail, Sherburne, St. Louis, and Washington counties are in the preliminary stages of opening FRCs.

The FRC is funded using a portion of Polk County’s American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) appropriation. The ARPA funding is allocated to support children, families, and communities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Following COVID, families have been facing an increased number of stressors, isolation, and hardships which could lead to the risk of child abuse and neglect, explains Karen Warmack, Polk County Social Services Director.

“Polk County Family Resource Center will be available to provide essential services and resources to children and families,” says Warmack. “Programming will focus on providing social support, nurturing and attachment activities, increased knowledge of parent and child development, and social-emotional competence of children.”



Tim Albrecht / Polk County

**ABOVE:** An FRC volunteer paints a butterfly on a little girl at the Polk County FRC grand opening on June 1.

**BELOW:** Two boys play corn hole in the lawn area of the FRC, co-located at the Crookston Public Library.



A second Polk County FRC is currently in development in East Grand Forks, which will have its grand opening November 14th from 3-6 pm. The EGF School District has agreed to the use of space at the East Grand Forks Senior High Center, at 1505 Central Ave. NW, says Ramirez. “We will have a large enough space to have kid-friendly activity areas, a parent lounge area, office space, classroom space and we plan to have a diaper and hygiene pantry to help families with basic needs.”

Polk County FRC has future goals to develop sites in East Polk County, according to Victoria. “We want to be available and accessible to support and strengthen all families of Polk County.”

All services provided by the FRC are free to the public. Residents are encouraged to take advantage of the services during designated hours, which can be found on the Polk County website. They can also contact the FRC at [frcinfo@co.polk.mn.us](mailto:frcinfo@co.polk.mn.us) for more information.

# Budgets Are Not Always About Taxes

**B**udget season is almost as long as baseball season, just no one gets a trophy at the end of it. As of this writing, the County Board has approved a 2024 preliminary levy increase of 4% over the 2023 levy. As you will no doubt hear all local units of government about this time of year, the preliminary levy is the maximum levy to be considered by the time the final budget is set. For Polk County, the final budget and levy will be set on December 19.

All property tax owners will receive notice in a few weeks of what each local unit of government set their preliminary levy at and when the respective public hearing will be for their proposed 2024 budget. For Polk County, that hearing will be at 6 p.m., December 12, in the County Board room at the Government Center. Everyone is welcome to attend. To note, the final levy target between myself and the Board is around 3% over 2023 and I am confident we will get to that amount by the time the proposed budget is completed in a few weeks.

Normally in this article, I would start capsulizing the most important budget items affecting the tax levy, but this year is different. The most important budget item is not on the levy.



**CHUCK WHITING**  
Polk County  
Administrator

The future of Polk County's solid waste program is on the line. Actually, it is more than Polk County's as the County serves as the major regional center for several counties in northwest Minnesota.

The County's solid waste program is funded via fees generated through solid waste assessments, tip fees, and material sales. Three major aspects of the County's program are being advanced, expansion of the landfill near Gentilly, sort line robotics at the recycling facility in Fosston, and the regional hub and spoke concept with other regional counties to address new state requirements for construction and demolition debris landfills. As one can imagine, processing solid waste while remaining environmentally friendly and economical is not easy.

Working with our partner counties and state, inclusion in next year's legislative bonding bill will help pay for most of the cost but also set the standard

” The final levy target between myself and the Board is around 3% over 2023 and I am confident we will get to that amount by the time the proposed budget is completed in a few weeks.

— **Chuck Whiting, Polk County Administrator**

for meeting these new state environmental standards while remaining affordable locally. Read Environmental Services Director Jon Steiner's article closely (Page 8) and visit the project website at [nwregion-alhubandspoke.com](http://nwregion-alhubandspoke.com) for more complete information.

The rest of the 2024 budget is shaping up to be a transition budget. The capital improvement projects of the past three years are nearing completion and coming in under budget. Two capital improvement bonds were sold in 2020 and 2023, mostly to make building improvements. These included the Human Service Center in East Grand Forks, remodeling of the Red River Juvenile Detention Facility in Crookston, elevator improvements at the Government Center, and roof and

mechanical improvements at the Justice Center.

With remaining bond funds, additional improvements have been made to the Government grounds, tuckpointing, and electrical supply. Next spring the Government Center roof will be redone as well.

These remaining bond funds and healthy fund balances will help keep the 2024 levy in line. Even so, 2024 is a presidential election year meaning we will have three elections to process. We will also begin contract negotiations next year for employee groups starting in 2025, so there will be a lot of activity. And we will be one year closer to debt being paid off in 2026 for the jail. These are things to look forward to, but we will leave the pursuit of a trophy to the Twins!

## Please don't forget your building permits

We would like to remind you that Polk County Planning & Zoning requires building/land use permits for all construction projects in Polk County. If you are planning building/land use projects outside of incorporated cities, please contact Polk County Planning & Zoning staff prior to construction to determine setback and ordinance requirements that may apply. More information on building/land use regulations can be found on the Polk County website at [www.co.polk.mn.us](http://www.co.polk.mn.us) under the Environmental Services/ Planning & Zoning department tab.

People sometimes forget to apply for a building permit or don't think they need a permit

for a deck, small shed, septic system, etc. However, permits are required for almost any construction project within Polk County. Any land alterations or landscaping activity in the shoreland or floodplain zoning districts may also require permits. Septic system permits involve obtaining a design from a licensed septic contractor as well as verification of soils through the permitting process. All "fixing" of septic systems requires a land use permit.

Landowners are responsible for obtaining all permits for projects on their property, not contractors. Contractors securing permits on behalf of the landowner must still have the

landowner sign the permit application. Any contractor telling a landowner that a permit is not required please take the time to contact our office and inquire about your specific project.

Also, remember that land use/zoning permits that aren't obtained prior to construction are treated as "after-the-fact" (ATF) permits subject to three times the cost of the normal permit fee plus an additional \$150 penalty fee if applicable. The costs can add up quickly especially if a variance is required due to setbacks not being met. In certain situations, penalty fees may accrue to thousands of dollars or project may need to be reconstructed or moved. It is not the

best practice to simply do a project and ask for forgiveness. Many of these ATF situations result in wasted time and money for your construction project as well as possible structure removal or court fees.

So, make sure to apply for your land use/building permits early and plan projects ahead of time to avoid unnecessary delays or ATF penalty fees. Our office is more than happy to answer questions and assist you through the permitting process. For more information contact Polk County Planning & Zoning at (218) 281-5700.

**Jacob Snyder, Environmental  
Svs. Assistant Administrator**

# Two months down

## Reese reflects on short time on Polk County Board of Commissioners

A special meeting was held on Aug. 11 to swear in Paul Reese as the new Polk County Commissioner for District 1 following his win over Michelle Cote in the Aug. 8 election for the open board seat. Reese took his seat on the Polk County Board of Commissioners for the first time on Aug. 15.

His first couple months on the job have been a little bit of a learning curve, but he looks forward to serving the residents of his district and the entire county. There wasn't a lot of stress involved, but getting used to the format and the procedural nature of board meetings took a moment, says Reese. "I like understanding what is going on and when you're a person like me who likes to talk a lot it's a different approach to sit and listen to issues being brought to the board."

There have been a few surprises that were an eye-opener for Reese in his short time with Polk County. There are so many departments and a lot more moving parts than he realized, he says. "It's a big county and there are a lot of structures in place that most people don't think about."

"It appears we seem to be the spearhead county because of our size. Almost like a guidance county, so to speak. For example, the landfill project (NW Regional Hub & Spoke) that involves us and eight other counties seeking federal funding for a really big project. I've found it all very interesting."



Courtesy of KROX Radio

Judge Anne Rasmusson swears in Paul Reese as Polk County Commissioner of District 1 on Aug. 11 in the Board Room of the Polk County Government Center.

Outside of the board room Reese currently sits on the Polk County Fair Board, which he's been a member for 23 years, but was assigned to the Tri-Valley Opportunity Council and West Central Regional Water District as part of his commitment to the Polk County Board.

The Water District committee hasn't formed an official board yet, but he works in an advisory role currently, according to Paul. "The Water District is working on bringing water from the North Dakota side and delivering it to smaller communities within Polk, Norman, and Clay Counties."

Now that he's in office Reese has several goals that he hopes to accomplish during his tenure. Public Health, Social Services, and Law Enforcement are three areas he feels very strongly about and are most beneficial, so they deserve plenty of attention, he says.

His main focus though will be the budget and keeping ideas fresh within Polk County government. "In the short term I want to ensure

we aren't overbudgeting," says Reese. "I've been very straightforward about where I stood on things and that's very important to me that we aren't overextending ourselves."

"We have to have the citizens in mind and I'm big on not misrepresenting that. I want to tell them straight. If we're going to increase the levy to 10% and that's where it needs to be, then we go there. If we're going to be at 2% then give them 2% from the start. No back and forth. I don't care if it's a preliminary levy or not."

As far as long-term goals Paul wants to focus on ensuring there is turnover within the entire county structure so good, new ideas continue

coming in. Keeping people informed of what's happening in their community as well as the larger world around them is key to understanding government and one way to do that is via "younger folk," he says. "I feel strongest about our constitution and that we uphold it. The only way we can do that is from the ground up, and we do that locally. I ran because I believe in that structure."

Overall, he has had a ton of support from the other commissioners and everyone has been very welcoming across all of Polk County Government, says Reese. "It's been quite an enjoyable beginning and experience, so I'm happy about that. I thank everyone for that."

## County Board Meeting Times

8:00 a.m. on 1st  
Tues. of the month  
9:30 a.m. on the 3rd Tues.  
8:00 a.m. on the 4th Tues.

**All meetings are  
open to the public**

### County Commissioners

Dist. 1 — Paul Reese  
Dist. 2 — Warren Strandell, chair  
Dist. 3 — Gary Willhite, v. chair  
Dist. 4 — Joan Lee  
Dist. 5 — Mark Holy

# Telecommunicators are first step during crisis

I would like to highlight the Polk County 911 Dispatch Center and talk a little about what it takes to be a Telecommunicator (911 Dispatcher). A 911 call can be the result of many things such as health emergencies, a mental health crisis, fire, automobile or other vehicle accident, wellness check, calls regarding animals both wild and domestic, and many other situations. Telecommunicators are the first line of support when a 911 call is received. They are critical in all situations assisting the local law enforcement agencies, fire departments, and emergency management services that serve our community.

Telecommunicators must be able to maintain situational awareness, be aware of any crisis other dispatch center staff are working to resolve, the calls our officers in the field are responding to, and be ready to answer the next phone call and help callers in any type of crisis. They must be able to remain calm and focused while dealing with situations in what can sometimes be a high-pressure moment. They must remain objective, be reassuring, and portray a sense of authority when working to resolve the immediate issue.

They need active listening skills, and the ability to communicate effectively with callers to obtain details that are critical to the agency responding. Telecommunicators must be able to speak clearly. This is necessary to avoid miscommunications or misdirections that could delay an emergency response, or contribute to unnecessary death. Every minute counts when police, fire, or EMS are responding.

Requirements set by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension regarding criminal justice policies and procedures must be followed by telecommunicators. They are audited every three years to maintain compliance with ever-changing policies. Additionally, they must be cognizant of State of Minnesota Data Practice and Confidentiality laws and be recertified every year to maintain compliance.



JIM  
TADMAN  
Sheriff's  
Notes

## Training

Telecommunicators attend training both in person and virtually to hone and improve their skills, in topics such as stress management, interpersonal communication, and how to effectively resolve a variety of situations.

The minimum in-house training needed to become a Polk County 911 Telecommunicator is four months training with a trainer (behind the console) where you must learn:

- ▶ The geography of Polk County such as landmarks, lakes, parks, cities, and streets.
- ▶ The territories covered by the four ambulance services and 13 fire departments
- ▶ The officers and their unit numbers of the law enforcement agencies that cover Polk County
- ▶ How to properly document calls in the CAD system (Computer Aided Dispatch)
- ▶ The phonetic alphabet and 10-code
- ▶ How to obtain and disseminate information from different types of non-emergency and emergency calls for service
- ▶ Learn the numerous state websites where you can query, add, cancel, or modify warrants or stolen, missing objects, or people. And be able to read and understand any query returns when looking for probation or court restrictions for an individual
- ▶ The different roles of every level of the justice system.

## Common Questions

### We are often asked what happens when I dial 911?

When you call 911, your call is answered by a 911 telecommunicator whose first responsibility is to determine if this is a true emergency, if someone is injured, if there is a crime in progress, if there is a fire, etc. Once determined to be an emergency, the telecommunicator will handle your call. If the telecommunicator determines it

is not an emergency, your call may be put on hold for another 911 call of higher priority that is pending. Do not hang up and call back. You will lose your position in the waiting order. Calls on the nonemergency line are taken in the order they are received.

When you dial 911 from any landline telephone, any information about where you are located is immediately available to the telecommunicator. The phone company provides the following information when a 911 call is made: the phone number, the address where that phone is located, who owns the phone, and which emergency responders serve that area.

This information must always be verified! For example, you may have just moved, or you may be in a complex (such as an apartment complex), which lists only one main address. Also, you may be calling for a situation that is occurring elsewhere, so the telecommunicator will want specific address information about where the emergency is taking place.

**Wireless 911 Calls** – A wireless 911 call it is not the same as calling from a landline. While wireless technology is improving, the 911 dispatch center may not receive an exact location of the caller. Giving your location to the call-taker is vital. Every minute counts in an emergency.

**Do I have to give my name?** The telecommunicator is required to ask for your name and contact number. This is in case they need to call you back or the responders need to talk with someone who actually saw what happened. You do not have to give your name. Your call will be handled the same regardless if you choose to identify yourself. Your name and number are a great asset to first responders.

**Why do they ask me so many questions?** They're required to ask many questions in order to give responders an accurate picture of your situation. It is important to understand that responders may already be on the way while you are talking to the telecommunicator; information is being updated while they are enroute and as it becomes available. They need to ask the basic 4 Ws

for every call: Where, What, Who, and When.

## Four Ws

**Where?** This includes more than just the address. Where can mean the location of the patient, the apartment number, floor, suite number, or even the color of your house. The nearest intersection, or cross-street, to the address is critical in helping responders get there quickly. The more detail provided makes it easier and quicker for responders to find you.

**What?** This is the basic "bottom-line" of the call. What is the exact problem? What is the immediate problem? Are you in physical danger? Are there weapons involved? Is there a fire? Or do you just need information or a referral? Also, try to remain as calm as possible and focus on the task at hand.

**Who?** Who can mean who is making the call, who is injured, who is the suspect, who else is involved? This is to identify who the injured party is or who the patient is, as well as suspects involved in a crime, especially if they just left (so responding officers don't drive right past the bad guys!). This means clothing descriptions, names (if known), and last known location or direction of travel.

**When?** The time that an incident occurred determines whether the call requires immediate actions and becomes a high priority or if it is more of a routine type call and placed as a lower priority. In a serious injury, the first hour is critical in obtaining care and may be the difference between life and death.

Being a telecommunicator is a very rewarding job. They are the first step to getting help for someone in a crisis that can take many shapes and forms. Often called "The Calm Voice in the Chaos", they are critical to keeping our community safe and to sending help where it is needed. If you would like to learn more about being a Polk County 911 Telecommunicator please contact Polk County Sheriff's Office at 218-281-0431.

# POLK COUNTY FAIR RIDES AGAIN

The Polk County Fair opened to another rousing success over the summer, full of hours of grandstand entertainment, screaming ride-goers, and overstuffed foodies. Held July 5-9 in Fertile, the Fair has attracted county residents in droves for over 115 years and this year was no exception.

There was a slight dip in attendance after COVID, but the numbers have been steadily on the rise each year since. Approximate attendance at the Fair this year was estimated at 40,000-45,000 over 5 days, says Dan Grunhovd, Chairman of the Polk County Fair Board.

"We had a really good fair," he says. "Everything was up all over, from the grandstand to food numbers. Parking was full the entire fair. When you have five days of nice weather it's pretty easy to put on a good fair."

There were a handful of new events and activities, along with some updates to existing structures on the fairgrounds. "We had RORRring Racing



remote-control cars that took up one building," explains Grunhovd. "We remodeled the old horse barn with some grant money and money we saved up from the Department of Agriculture. That was a huge hit."

"We also had a brand-new petting zoo, we've had them (a petting zoo) in the past, but this was a step above. They had camel and pony rides, with all kinds of exotic animals on top of the regular animals."

Planning for 2024 will get underway in the next couple of months and there are always small improvements on the horizon that come together to create a great experience for fair goers. As far as future projects and attractions it's something that's always being fine-tuned and

looked at adding more," says Dan.

"The free stage is always full, and we try to focus on that quite a bit. We try to improve that every year," he says. "We're continuously working on improving existing buildings and the grounds around the fair. The next project is to build another new bathroom. We're going to try to step everything up a little bit."

Food is another area that is constantly being discussed. In 2023 there were around 42 food vendors, which is always being diversified, Grunhovd says. "There are usually a few that retire or move on, and we try to fill their spot with something we don't have. Our vendor coordinator works year-round to ensure we have a good variety."

The Polk County Fair will return in 2024 on July 10-14.

**ABOVE:** A fairgoer feeds a goat in the petting zoo at the Polk County Fair.

**LEFT:** A horse hides behind its many awards at the Polk County Fair.

Tim Albrecht / Polk County



# District Court to determine the future of regional water supply to West Central MN

In a big step towards ensuring sustainable water resources for our region, Polk, Clay, and Norman Counties will move forward with creating a new public water authority to serve the region. Before the end of October, the three counties intend to initiate judicial proceedings to authorize the West Central Regional Water District (WCRWD).

The initial request to commence judicial proceedings is expected to be filed in October in Polk County District Court. The three counties have selected AE2S, a consulting engineering firm, to be the engineer for the project.

If approved by the Polk County District Court, the WCRWD service area will include 30 cities and a rural and urban population of about 41,000 people. It is estimated the new water district could provide 1.85 billion gallons of water per year. The proposed service area includes the geographic boundaries of Polk, Norman, and Clay Counties, except for the Marshall and Polk Rural Water District service area in Polk County and the area served by Moorhead Public Service in Clay County. Access to a high-quality water supply will improve public health and

## BOUNDARY MAP

Proposed West Central Regional Water District Boundary

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bolster opportunities for future population growth and economic development in western Minnesota.

The City of Climax is already reaping the benefits of water from a regional water provider, WCRWD's sister system East Central Regional Water District (ECRWD) in North Dakota. Climax and Polk County leaders had the foresight to invest in transitioning the city's water source from local wells and a local water treatment plant to service from ECRWD. When the pipeline was constructed from ECRWD to Climax in 2022, Polk County prudently invested \$584,674 of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) federal funding to expand the pipeline — from an 8-inch line to one of 12 inches — beyond the needs of Climax to meet future water needs within the immediate region. Climax started receiving treated water from ECRWD in December 2022.

If WCRWD is approved through the judicial process, the first phase of the project will provide water to properties and municipalities throughout western Polk, Norman, and Clay Counties. Initial service could be provided to the cities of and regions surrounding Nielsville, Halstad, Hendrum, Perley, Beltrami, Borup, and Georgetown. Future phases of the WCRWD would extend service further into the counties.

The cooperative effort between Polk, Clay, and Norman counties to create the WCRWD will allow a new water supply to arrive sooner since higher quality drinking water is urgently needed due to water quality and quantity concerns.

Arsenic levels above the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) maximum contaminant level have been found in all three counties. According to the Minnesota Department of Health, 43% of private wells in Norman County, 39% in Clay County, and 21% in Polk County exceed the maximum contaminant levels established by the EPA. Long-term exposure to arsenic in drinking water can cause serious health problems. Elevated levels of manganese

have also been detected in public and private wells in the three counties.

In addition to safety concerns related to arsenic and manganese in the water supply, hard water is an ongoing issue. Minerals in the current tap water stain clothes and plumbing fixtures, as well as shorten the lifespan of appliances. The proposed WCRWD water system will soften the water and address the problem of aging infrastructure in the project area. Rehabilitating existing municipal or privately-owned water infrastructure such as treatment facilities, wells, and service lines can be cost-prohibitive for smaller communities. However, regionalization allows infrastructure operation, maintenance, and staffing costs to be spread over a larger population to make it more affordable.

As the process moves forward, updates will be provided to the Polk County Newsletter. You are also invited to stay informed about the WCRWD progress by checking out the project website. And if you are interested in receiving water from the WCRWD in the future, please fill out the survey on the website at [wcrwd-ae2s.hub.arcgis.com](http://wcrwd-ae2s.hub.arcgis.com).

## Values see an 18.9% increase

As determined by the Polk County Assessor for the purpose of assessing property taxes that will be payable in 2024, the 2023 valuation of real estate in the county now totals \$7,423,890,600.

This new total amount of valuation represents an increase of \$1,180,961,100 over 2022, or about 18.9 percent.

Of the new 2023 total valuation amount:

- ▶ 53.3% is for tillable agricultural lands.
- ▶ 7.5% is for all other agricultural property.
- ▶ 27.8% is for residential properties.
- ▶ 5.8% is for seasonal recreational properties.
- ▶ 2.2% is for commercial properties.
- ▶ 1.9% is for industrial properties.

▶ 3.4% is for building sites (rural homes and garages on 1 acre \*).

▶ 1.5% is for "all other" property classifications.

New construction accounted for \$28,881,900 of the total valuation.

The overall increase is mainly due to an increase in the valuations for agricultural, residential, and seasonal recreational properties throughout the county due to strong markets for each property type.

Note — the figures above are based on the 2023 PRISM 2 report (Final).

The valuation total does not take into account railroad or utility values.

\* — Included in "all other" agricultural property

Updated: September 28, 2023

**Warren Strandell, Chairman of Polk County Board of Commissioners**

**Welcome Back!**

**Beginning August 10**

WIC services are back in-person!

MINNESOTA **WIC**  
Women, Infants & Children Nutrition Program

**TOGETHER WE CAN** *build a better future!*

POLK NORMAN MAHONOMEN  
community health services

# Landfills look to the future

## Hub & Spoke System could revamp C&D management in Northwest Minn.

Polk County Resource Recovery Facility (RRF) has been pursuing grants to undertake a Phase III Project since 2021. Polk applied for a Capital Assistance Program (CAP) grant through the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) which would be funded as part of a Minnesota Bonding Bill (MMB). It was the hope that the Phase III Project would be included in any 2023 Bonding Bill. The main goal of the Phase III Project would be to install artificial intelligence robotic sorters (robots) into the Material Recovery Facility (MRF) to fill sorting positions that have gone largely unfilled over the last several years. Unfortunately, Polk County's project was not included in the 2023 Bonding Bill.

### Changes in MN C&D Rules

The MPCA is in the process of drafting new rules that will change the way in which construction and demolition debris (C&D) materials are managed. This effort has been underway since 2019, and this summer the MPCA stated its intentions to have these Draft Rules out for public comment by fall or winter 2023.

The main focus of these rule changes is to require all C&D materials, which are unable to be diverted for reuse or recycling, to be disposed of at a landfill which has a liner underneath and a leachate collection system (a system to collect water that comes into contact with the waste). All unlined C&D landfills would be required to close. In MN, most rural C&D landfills are unlined – including Polk and all neighboring counties.

In anticipation of the pending rule changes, Polk and several neighboring counties, including Beltrami, Cass, Clearwater,



**ABOVE:** Hubbard County's Josh Holte presents the NW Regional Hub & Spoke Project to House Capital Investment Committee

**RIGHT:** A map of northwest Minnesota showing the nine counties involved in the proposed Hub & Spoke system.

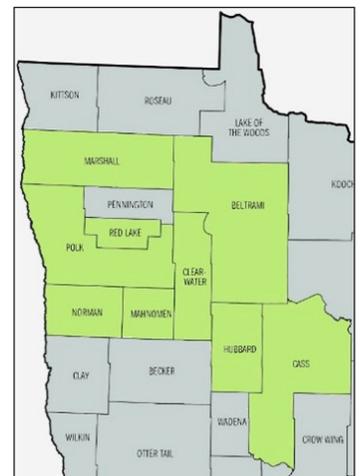
Hubbard, Marshall, Mahnomon, Norman, and Red Lake, collaborated on a regional solution.

Over last winter and spring, these nine counties obtained and completed an MPCA Grant-funded initiative to study the costs of unlined landfill closure vs. the cost to comply with the leachate/liner requirement. As expected, the costs to close the unlined landfills are very high, and the cost to come into compliance with the new rules is much more so. The cost to install a liner under each of these unlined regional landfills would require a tip fee significantly higher than the tip fee at the municipal solid waste landfill and RRF. The study also evaluated options and costs for waste diversion of various C&D materials and an alternative C&D management system – referred to as a Hub & Spoke system.

### NW Regional Hub & Spoke System

The study evaluated the costs of an alternative C&D management system – referred to as the NW Regional Hub & Spoke Project. The existing system of local unlined C&D landfills is the most convenient, cost-effective, and preferred option for managing these materials. However, if that option is no longer available as a result of those new rules, a Hub & Spoke system would be the most practical alternative.

Rather than each county having one or more unlined C&D landfills over the nine-county region, 12 of those landfills would be closed, and replaced with two regional lined C&D landfills (Hubs) and all other sites would install mini-transfer stations (Spokes) to continue and build upon that local collection opportunity. The Spokes would also



offer various waste diversion opportunities and services for other wastes. The Spokes would then be shipping the C&D materials received to the regional Hub or various processing facilities for reuse or recycling.

In the NW Regional Hub & Spoke Project (the name of the study initiative), the Hubs would be located at the Gentilly Landfill Complex (west Hub) and northern Hubbard County (east Hub). The other sites would put Spokes at the closed

## HUB & SPOKE

From Page 8

C&D landfill sites. The NW Regional Hub & Spoke Project is expected to be the pilot project for others to follow, and the statewide solution.

The study and much more information on the NW Regional Hub & Spoke Project can be found at [www.nwregionallhubandspoke.com](http://www.nwregionallhubandspoke.com).

### Funding the NW Regional Project

As indicated by the study, the Hub & Spoke system is still too costly and requires a heavy State subsidy to be implemented. As no other alternative has been identified since the MPCA rulemaking effort began, the Hub & Spoke system is deemed the only option for the state.

In addition, the Phase III Project which was not funded in 2023 to install robotic sorters at the RRF and upgrade the Organics Compost Facility at the landfill to an aerated static pile system to increase capacity is still needed. As many of the Spokes would be adding recycling and composting capabilities, further capacity at both facilities is needed. As such, the Phase III Project and the Hub & Spoke Project have been combined into one bonding request for 2024.

To be a practical alternative, the study determined that a 75% state cost-share would be required for the Hub & Spoke portion of the project, and a 50% cost-share was requested for the Phase III project. Combined, the NW Regional Project cost is \$84 million. A request for a state cost-share of \$61.5 million was filed for the MPCA CAP Grant in May 2023 and an MMB request in June 2023. Even at that level of subsidy, the tip fees for C&D material projects to be more expensive than the current tip fee at regional C&D Landfills.

### Grants, Funding Opportunities, and More

An application for a Federal Solid Waste Infrastructure For Recycling (SWIFR) Grant was filed in February 2023 for both



Polk County

Conceptual Rendering of a Regional HUB. Shown is the waste receiving area where materials that have been segregated for recycling/reuse are stored. Materials not able to be diverted are taken to the newly constructed lined landfill.

the Phase III Project at the RRF and Compost Facility and for the 9 County Regional Project. Each SWIFR Grant application sought the maximum \$4 million allocation. The \$4 million could be used as a stand-alone funding source, or used as the local match to any State funds received. While both applications were selected to advance beyond the first round of cuts, both applications ultimately failed to be funded. Both applications will be alive for the second round of funding at the end of 2023.

Since the applications were filed earlier this year for MPCA CAP and MMB funding from the State, much work has been done by the region on advancing and refining those proposals. Once submitted, the MPCA picked it up and made it their top priority for funding in 2024. The project was presented to the Commissioners of the nine counties involved on June 14, 2024.

The project was included on the Senate Capital Investment Committee Tour at the RRF on August 16. That tour focused on the robotics portion of the project and its tie to the NW Regional Hub & Spoke project. The House of Representatives Capital Investment Committee Tour was in the form of a presentation at Bemidji State University on September 14. This was a more comprehensive presentation of all components of the NW Regional Hub & Spoke Project. The Project was presented to the MN Solid Waste Administrators Association on September 21.

Polk and the Regional partners are working with other groups to advance the project and expand services. The NW Regional Project area includes large portions of three Tribal Entities: Leech Lake, Red Lake, and White Earth. The Project partners are in regular contact with these entities to coordinate the expansion of services into these areas. The partners are also working with other local private entities on possible collaborative projects that have the potential to be beneficial to all parties concerned. There are also additional Grants available that may be sought that could supplement or complement the Project.

The NW Regional Hub & Spoke Project is unique in many ways. It represents one of the largest initiatives related to solid waste undertaken in Minnesota – in terms of geographic area covered, scope of services offered, project complexity, and expected expense. It also represents a significant opportunity for our region to alter how waste is managed in the state and to take a proactive approach to shaping State policy and rules to fit our system instead of reactively shaping our system to State policy and rules.

Please visit our website at [www.nwregionallhubandspoke.com](http://www.nwregionallhubandspoke.com) or use the QR Code below to learn more about the issues, proposed solutions, and individual parts of the NW Regional Hub & Spoke Project.

**Jon Steiner, Environmental Svs. Director**

# 21-Day Rule

## Dock and Lift Transportation Spread AIS Across MN

Polk County AIS taskforce reminds lake property owners looking for used docks and lifts to be mindful of where the equipment is coming from. Lakes and Rivers that have Zebra Mussels can easily survive on docks and lifts and be transported from lake to lake by used equipment sales.

Minnesota Law requires that docks and lifts remain out of the water for at least 21 days after removal from a waterbody before they can be placed into another body of water regardless of if that lake is infested with Aquatic Invasive Species or not. In addition, anyone who transports a dock or lift from a water body should check for AIS, clean them prior to transportation or placing them in a new lake, and the dock/ lift shall remain out of water for 21-days. High-temperature water can kill some AIS species but allowing the dock or lift to dry for a 21-day period is what dooms AIS species. Water is the enemy, which can spread AIS throughout Minnesota and docks/lifts can harbor areas that remain wet for long periods of time.

Lake property owners play an important role in detecting invasive species and protecting the lakes we all enjoy. Everyone should have a vested interest in keeping our area lakes clean and AIS free!

Fall is a great time to help us identify if lakes have new AIS species so if you see something unusual then please contact the MN DNR or the Environmental Services Department at 218-281-5700. For more AIS information visit [www.co.polk.mn.us](http://www.co.polk.mn.us) or follow us on Facebook at Polk County Environmental Services.

**Jacob Snyder, Environmental Svs. Assistant Administrator**

## Pine to Prairie takes on drugs and guns

The Pine to Prairie Drug Task Force (P2P) Violent Crime Enforcement Team (VCET) is a multi-jurisdictional organization that focuses on mid and upper-level drug dealers, the investigation of violent crimes, seizing illegal guns and controlled substances, as well as disrupting gangs as they are identified.

P2P is comprised of Full Member, Associate Member, and Liaison Member agencies. Full Members provide a full-time investigator; Associate Members provide in-kind donations; Liaison Members are not fiscally able to provide either but agree to open their doors to P2P as cases arise and will provide help when needed. P2P works in all eight counties of northwest Minnesota; an area of 9,736 square miles.

Full Members include the Crookston Police Department, East Grand Forks Police Department, Thief River Falls Police Department, Polk County Sheriff's Office, Roseau County Sheriff's Office, Norman County Sheriff's Office, Pennington County Sheriff's Office/Thief River Falls Police Department, Lake of the Woods County Sheriff's Office, Marshall County Sheriff's Office.

While the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) regularly provided five investigators to the Task Force that level of support has been less in recent years because of staffing shortages. HSI provides a part-time investigator on a case-by-case basis.

Full Members each have two voting representatives on the advisory board: typically a

civilian (city council member or county commissioner) as well as the chief law enforcement officer (total 16). Associate and Liaison Members are advisory only.

The Red Lake County Sheriff's Office is an Associate Member, providing a cash contribution each year for confidential funds, but no personnel. The Kittson County Sheriff's Office and Ada Police Department are Liaison Members.

The Polk County Attorney's Office is the designated legal advisor and attends meetings and provides legal guidance as needed. The City of Crookston provides an in-kind donation of the city accountant to perform the duties of fiscal agent for P2P.

P2P utilizes an administrative assistant from the East Grand Forks Police Department approximately one day per week, to assist in statistics compilation, SAFES reporting, and grant reporting.

The commander's position is transitioning to a part-time position. This will allow the City of East Grand Forks to also fund a full-time TFO for caseload work while the commander splits responsibilities between EGFPD investigations and Task Force administrative duties.

The Polk County Sheriff's Office provides in-kind donations of a co-located office that houses three to four TFOs, the crime analyst, and all P2P files. Satellite offices are provided by the Roseau, Pennington, and Lake of the Woods Sheriff's Offices, as well as the East Grand Forks Police Department. The Task Force is split into a North

Team and a South Team with the team leaders responsible for three TFO's each.

There are frequent incidents of drug trafficking from Grand Forks that spill over into north-west Minnesota. A joint powers agreement has been signed between the border counties of both states, enabling P2P and Grand Forks Narcotics Task Force investigators to work in either state with full arrest powers.

Other than marijuana, methamphetamine continues to be the most abundant and easily acquired controlled substance. Minnesota is considered as an "illicit drug distribution center in the Midwest." Methamphetamine, heroin, fentanyl, and cocaine are being distributed by cartel organizations throughout the region through "mail, personal vehicles, trucks, and at music venues."

Local communities have seen an increase in drug-related vehicle accidents and overdoses as more drugs move into the community and synthetic drugs become more potent. In the last four years, the Task Force area has seen an increase in heroin and fentanyl overdoses. Several successful cases have led to homicide convictions from the hard work of the TFOs and aggressive prosecutors.

P2P works closely with Paul Bunyan VCET to the east and the Grand Forks Narcotics Task Force to the west for cases that spill over into those neighboring jurisdictions.

**Warren Strandell, Chairman of Polk County Board of Commissioners**

## P2P makes 49 arrests in second quarter

The Pine to Prairie Drug Task Force made 49 arrests in the eight-county area of northwestern Minnesota during the second quarter of 2023.

Those arrests resulted in the seizure of 14.2 grams of fentanyl, 284.2 grams of methamphetamine (meth), 69.3 grams of cocaine, and 5 weapons.

Significant cases included:

- ▶ The disruption of a major drug traffic organization.

- ▶ The arrest of three persons on charges of conspiracy.

- ▶ Assisting in the seizure of significant amounts of meth that had fentanyl mixes.

- ▶ Caught a previously convicted bomb maker and drug user who had a working explosive and stolen gun.

- ▶ Arrested a suspect as he exited through the basement window of a house. The house, which has been shut down, was known to be the location of the number one source of meth sales in the area.

**Warren Strandell, Chairman of Polk County Board of Commissioners**

## 2023 construction season winds down and moves to 2024 projects

The 2023 construction season is winding down and the 2024 season is already starting. The county let a couple of box culvert projects on September 1 and the contractor is looking to begin work at the end of October.

Here is a list of what has been accomplished to date:

- ▶ CSAH 17 – Business 2 to TH 2 – Overlay

- ▶ CSAH 20 – CSAH 17 to CSAH 19 – Overlay

- ▶ CSAH 46 – TH 102 to TH 2 – Grading/Aggregate Base/Turf Establishment

- ▶ CSAH 60 – TH 2 to CSAH 17 - Overlay

Base One stabilized aggregate surfacing on the following was scheduled for 2023 but will be completed in 2024:

- ▶ CR 267 – CSAH 20 to TH 75

- ▶ CSAH 63 – CSAH 60 to TH 75

- ▶ CSAH 67 – 3 miles W of CSAH 68 to CSAH 68

As stated above Polk County let contracts for the following 2024 box culverts

- ▶ CSAH 9 – 5.5 miles W. of TH 75 over the Burnham Creek

- ▶ CSAH 15 – in Fisher just south of TH 2

- ▶ CSAH 21 – West of TH 220 over the Grand Marais

Davidson is planning on starting work on

CSAH 15 at the end of October. The box culvert installation will take about three days during which traffic will be detoured east of Fisher. The road will be left gravel over the box until June 2024.

We have also completed flood work in three county ditches due to the April 2022 floods. Damage to CD 99, 103, and 126 was restored and riprap was installed to prevent future erosion from happening. A majority of the work was paid for by FEMA with the remainder being paid for by the County Ditch System. CD 99 outlet was also stabilized using Watershed and other funding sources.

**Rich Sanders, Polk County Engineer**

# UMC Graduates First NXT GEN AG Cohort

About a year ago the Polk County Board of Commissioners provided a grant to the Rotary Club of Crookston, which the club used to help fund a new education program at the University of Minnesota-Crookston (UMC). In early October, Mary Holz-Clause, University of Minnesota-Crookston Chancellor, appeared in front of the County Board to show them the results of that grant.

The grant was used to cover 75 percent of course costs for the first cohort of students in the NXT GEN AG pilot at UMC, which offers training to develop the next generation of rural professionals. The program is intended for students currently in the workforce and are either working toward a degree or have been previously.

The program is entirely online and asynchronous, meaning students attend when they can, and instructors are available to provide any assistance virtually. It's an accelerated program that is 21 credits, which can then be used as a springboard to a degree, says Holz-Clause. "This is an onramp and meant to be a beginning. If they find something they like they can continue toward a full degree."

Sixteen students enrolled in November of 2022 and 9 finished the program in June, with two members already converting to degree-seeking students. This exceeded UMC's usual online completion rate and was above the national industry average.

Part of the focus of the program was attracting area employees so they could develop into leaders who would stay within the community. Several of the students came from area businesses, such as CHS, New Flyer, and Land O'Lakes, says Mary.

The NXT GEN AG program at UMC was designed after surveying 100 different ag-industry companies in Polk County and across Minnesota for feedback on what they're looking for in prospective or already existing employees. "We felt we needed to listen directly to the clients," says Holz-Clause. "That's always been part of the Crookston philosophy. We started from scratch to create a program that would build competencies area employers are looking for."



**Jess Bengtson / University of Minnesota**  
Anthony Lane, New Flyer's Control Systems Technical Lead receiving his certificate from Chancellor Mary Holz-Clause.

NXT GEN AG's aim is to develop important competencies, including leadership, team building, and listening skills. These are all the abilities employers are looking for in their employees and oftentimes university programs don't emphasize those areas, says Mary. "We went in with that mindset and reversed everything we've done in the past and started over. The curriculum is designed to inspire confidence in students."

As part of the reinvention of the education system UMC looked at how a student shows they have the competent skills needed to be a leader, and how those skills can apply directly to the student's career, explained Mary. "Everything they did applies to the workplace. Each time they take a class, take a test, or have an assignment it corresponds back to their workplace."

The program will be going through somewhat of a rebrand with future cohorts. Despite the name of NXT GEN AG, the first

iteration only included one ag-based class, says Holz-Clause. "Some students in the first cohort worked in the ag industry but focused on finance so they needed a finance degree. We want the program to be a little

more flexible moving forward." UMC wants to launch a second cohort in the fall of 2024 and shifting the focus of the concept will allow students to home in on whatever they like, she says.

You're invited to join the  
POLK COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH  
NORMAN-MAHONOMEN PUBLIC HEALTH

## Workplace Well-Being Collaborative

WHEN: Beginning Winter 2023 | Meetings 1-2 times per month  
WHAT: A group of businesses & employers in Polk, Norman & Mahnomen Counties looking to strengthen their workplace & offer opportunities to gain well-being for their teams.  
Healthy employees cost less & help you save money. Utilizing tools and common practices to build wellness into your business will help to recruit, retain and create sustainable workplace wellness.

Contact [amanda.lien@co.polk.mn.us](mailto:amanda.lien@co.polk.mn.us) or call Polk County Public Health at 218-281-3385 to get started! [Join us!](#)

**SHIP**  
statewide health improvement partnership

**Polk County**  
PUBLIC HEALTH  
WE PUT HEALTHY IDEAS TO WORK

**POLK NORMAN MAHONOMEN**  
community health services

**TOGETHER WE CAN** build a better future!

## EMPLOYEE ANNIVERSARIES

<u>Hire Date</u>	<u>Employee</u>	<u>Department</u>
<b><u>35 Years</u></b>		
1/4/88	Shawn Sebenaler	Environmental Services
4/15/88	Ricardo Ramon	Social Services
5/9/88	James Tadman	Sheriff's Office
9/1/88	Arla Meyer	Finance Office
9/12/88	Lynette Lindgren	Social Services
11/1/88	Clarisse Miller	Social Services
11/21/88	Randy Beggs	Social Services
<b><u>30 Years</u></b>		
1/4/93	Darin Carlstrom	Public Works
9/7/93	LeAnn Holte	Social Services
9/16/93	Jill Sonsteli	Public Health
9/20/93	Cherie Chaput	Social Services
10/4/93	Scott Buhler	Attorney's Office
<b><u>25 Years</u></b>		
7/6/98	Darcy Bjorgo	Finance Office
9/1/98	Michael Leblanc	Public Works
<b><u>20 Years</u></b>		
1/6/03	Gregory Widseth	Attorney's Office
11/6/03	Gail Strom	Environmental Services
11/10/03	Rebecca Nelson	Finance Office
<b><u>15 Years</u></b>		
2/20/08	Denise Zier	Social Services
3/26/08	Andrew Ricklefs	Sheriff's Office
3/27/08	Jacob Snyder	Environmental Services
5/21/08	Sara Preusser	Social Services
6/18/08	Angel Korynta	Public Health
<b><u>10 Years</u></b>		
2/7/13	Michael Klasse	Environmental Services
3/1/13	Kathy Reitmeier	Public Health
4/24/13	Rick Baskerville	Facilities Management
5/6/13	Jeremy Tofstad	Environmental Services
6/10/13	Codi Lehmann	Public Health
6/17/13	Ashley Jacobson	Social Services
8/1/13	Mark Hudon	Sheriff's Office
8/2/13	Zachary Folkert	Sheriff's Office
9/3/13	Erin Dimich	Social Services
9/23/13	Jerami Sullivan	Social Services
9/26/13	Mark Gunderson	Environmental Services
10/2/13	Alicia Caputo	Social Services
11/18/13	Victoria Davidson	Social Services
12/16/13	Kevin Berg	Sheriff's Office
<b><u>5 Years</u></b>		
1/9/18	Ethan Nagel	Sheriff's Office
1/15/18	Alecia Helms	Administration
2/12/18	Chelsey Shykes-Folkert	Social Services
2/20/18	Sabrina Strutz	Sheriff's Office
4/02/18	David Wandschneider	Sheriff's Office
4/09/18	A.J. Kasprick	Attorney's Office
3/13/18	Camron Herriman	Public Works
7/23/18	John Bjorgo	Public Works
7/23/18	Melissa Ulman	Public Health
8/06/18	Dylan Hensch	Environmental Services
8/06/18	Sarah Mielke	Environmental Services
9/05/18	Karli Wilson	Social Services
10/01/18	Sarah Ihrke	Environmental Services
10/08/18	Chase Jones	Environmental Services
10/22/18	Clifford Wardlaw	Attorney's Office
11/15/18	Wendi Dalrymple	Finance Office
11/19/18	Andrew Dessellier	Assessor's Office
11/19/18	Amy Erdmann	Taxpayer Service Center
12/17/18	Barbara Rood	Facilities Management



**Michelle Strezishar / Polk County**  
Patrol Deputy Matthew Erlandson and Sheriff James Tadman pose for a photo after Erlandson took the Oath of Office during the Polk County Board meeting on July 25.

## Sheriff's Office welcomes its newest patrol deputy

The Polk County Sheriff's Office welcomed their newest deputy into their ranks on July 18. Patrol Deputy Matthew Erlandson was given the Oath of Office by Polk County Sheriff James Tadman during the Polk County Board of Commissioners meeting on July 25.

Erlandson, a native of Fergus Falls, MN, attended Fergus Falls High School before joining the Law Enforcement Program at Alexandria Technical and Community College.

An interest in law enforcement has always been there from a young age, says Erlandson. "I've always looked up to law enforcement officers. I wanted a rewarding career where I could help people and I'm excited to get to know the

Crookston community."

Out of college, he joined Clay County Corrections in Moorhead, MN, as a Correctional Officer where he worked for a little over a year. Erlandson was attracted to the area by a friend within the Crookston Police Department who spoke highly of the area and Polk County Sheriff's Office.

Matthew has had a great time adjusting to Crookston becoming very familiar with the area quickly. He's excited to start a new chapter in his career with the Sheriff's Office and learn as much he can, he says. "Everyone at the Sheriff's Office has been very welcoming. It has been a very smooth transition and I already feel at home."

# Polk County gets permits for landfill expansion

The Polk County landfill near Gentilly has been working on obtaining the required permits for the future expansion of its mixed solid waste (MSW) landfill. As part of our 2017 landfill permit, a wetland survey and review by regulatory entities determined the presence of wetlands in the future expansion area, and both the Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) and US Army Corp of Engineers (USACE) asserted regulatory jurisdiction (each requires a permit).

A subsequent flora/fauna study that was required also indicated the presence of a state-protected plant known as the Sterile Sedge (*Carex sterilis*) which is associated with Calcareous Fen wetlands which are a protected wetland (that wetland is not present at the landfill). A Rate Natural Community (RNC) designation was placed on a part of the expansion area. Both the plant and RNC require MN Department of Natural Resources (DNR) approvals. Mitigation is required for the SWCD/USACE wetland impacted and DNR-regulated plant and RNC impacts.

Polk filed the applications for the wetland permits in 2019. It has been a long, frustrating, and expensive process. However, Polk has now received approvals from the SWCD and DNR for their three permits.

Polk has recently come to an agreement with the USACE on its permit - pending completion of their permit process. To do so, Polk modified its orderly expansion plan which provided disposal capacity for nearly 50 years. Instead, Polk decreased its requested wetland impact by reducing the size of the footprint – and thus the magnitude of its wetland and plant impact.

The modified application provides capacity to reach 2038, which allows for the required landfill capacity for the next permit due in 2027. This capacity also allows for the necessary time to do additional studies on areas north of the landfill for expansion that may avoid or minimize future wetland impacts.



**ABOVE:** AMP Robotics Technician putting Micro-Jet system into service on Polk MRF PET line

**RIGHT:** A map of the original permit request through Phase 24. Modified request within the yellow border with wetland in shaded areas.

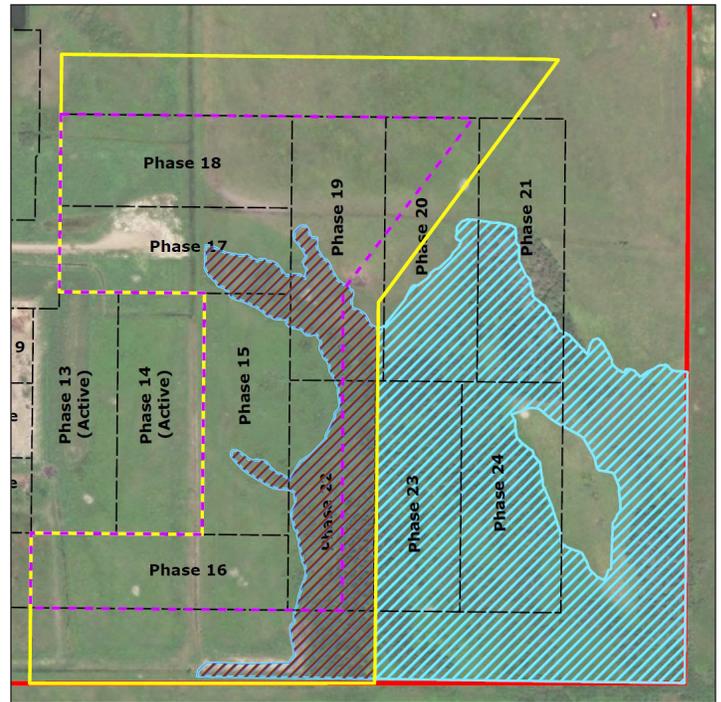
**Polk County**

These permits come as the clock was running out on the Polk County landfill and all the counties it serves. Polk must construct a new MSW landfill cell in the spring of 2024. Any new cell has an associated wetland impact – so failure to secure those permits would have been catastrophic to Polk and the northwest region of Minnesota.

**Resource Recovery Facility (RRF)**

The Polk Resource Recovery Facility (RRF) in Fosston has been faced with multiple challenges in 2023. Staffing shortages, retirements, and escalating costs – basically what every local business and public sector entity is facing. In addition, lagging steam sales and depressed recyclable material sales markets are doing heavy damage to the budget.

Much of the Phase III Project which Polk has been trying without success to obtain state bond funds, would provide



some relief. A more effective bag opener would allow Polk to capture more recyclables from the garbage than is currently possible. Installation of robotic sorters would lessen the impact of staff shortages by ensuring recyclable materials are being retrieved for sale when the Material Recovery Facility (MRF) is operating.

As it relates to robotics, after the failed 2023 bid to secure state bond funds, Polk began the process of requesting proposals for lease-to-own options to incorporate robots into the

quality control (QC) areas of the MRF. While in the process of doing its due diligence, AMP Robotics, one of the vendors being considered to fill this niche at the MRF, approached Polk with a research & development (R&D) proposal to install a new technology in the facility. AMP Robotics refers to this technology as Micro-Jets.

The Micro-Jet is comprised of its newest generation of Artificial Intelligence (AI) system mated to a compressed

# Polk-Norman-Mahnomen CHS recognized by USDA

They're the only MN WIC clinic to receive Gold Breastfeeding Award this year

The United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service (USDA-FNS) awarded Polk-Norman-Mahnomen Community Health Services (CHS) the Gold Breastfeeding Award of Excellence. Polk-Norman-Mahnomen CHS WIC is the only Minnesota WIC clinic earning this recognition this year.

The Minnesota Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) prioritizes breastfeeding support for families, and Polk-Norman-Mahnomen CHS WIC earned a top spot among clinics in Minnesota, and the nation, for its commitment to breastfeeding. Some of their efforts include:

- ▶ A Peer Breastfeeding Program featuring three peer counselors, who are available to support breastfeeding parents 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

- ▶ Offering Mama's Milk Connection, a monthly, breastfeeding support group.

- ▶ Hosting a Rock N' Rest Tent at community events and county fairs for families to feed their children, change diapers, and learn about breastfeeding supports.

- ▶ Offering an "Anytime, Anywhere" business pledge for local businesses and providing assistance for businesses to support and promote breastfeeding.

"At Polk-Norman-Mahnomen WIC, we are routinely checking in with our breastfeeding parents and families to celebrate successes and work through barriers during their breastfeeding journey," said Sarah Reese, PNM CHS Administrator and Polk County Public Health Director. "We have a longstanding commitment to supporting healthy families whether it is offering one-on-one support with a mother, or assistance with policy and practice changes in



Tim Albrecht / Polk County

The United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service awarded Polk-Norman-Mahnomen Community Health Services, including Polk County Public Health and Norman-Mahnomen Public Health, the Gold Breastfeeding Award of Excellence.

worksites or community needed to build a landscape of support for babies and families."

USDA-FNS WIC leadership visited Minnesota to present Polk-Norman-Mahnomen WIC the Gold Breastfeeding Award of Excellence on August 18 at Wonderful Life Foods in Crookston, Minn. The local family-owned natural food store and deli was the first business to sign the Polk-Norman-Mahnomen "Anytime, Anywhere" business pledge, showing their commitment to breastfeeding parents.

The Minnesota Department of Health – Minnesota WIC Program is a nutrition and breastfeeding program that helps eligible pregnant women, new mothers, babies, and young children through partnerships with local WIC agencies and vendors across the state of Minnesota.

"Polk-Norman-Mahnomen CHS WIC's amazing commitment to support breastfeeding among WIC families and the community is what WIC is about," said Kate Franken,

Minnesota WIC Program Director. "Breastfeeding requires support, and the WIC peer counseling program is a proven way to show up for WIC parents every step of the way during their breastfeeding journey. We are proud of and grateful for the hard work Polk-Norman-Mahnomen CHS WIC staff are doing to support breastfeeding in their community."

"USDA celebrates Polk-Norman-Mahnomen CHS WIC Program for an exemplary breastfeeding program with the Gold Award in Breastfeeding Excellence," said Dr. Vista Suarez Fletcher, FNS Midwest Regional Administrator. "Over the last year, they have met rigorous core components of the WIC Breastfeeding Support Model for a successful peer counseling program."

The award comes during National Breastfeeding Month. This year's theme: *This is Our Why*. MN WIC and breastfeeding organizations take this time to share why supporting breastfeeding is important

work, celebrate mothers and lactating parents, and promote breastfeeding in any amount.

## About the Award

The Breastfeeding Award of Excellence recognizes local WIC agencies that support WIC moms' breastfeeding goals through exemplary breastfeeding promotion and support activities and serve as models for other local agencies to strengthen breastfeeding among WIC participants.

"USDA established the award program to recognize local WIC agencies that have provided exemplary breastfeeding promotion and support to WIC moms," said Dr. Vista Suarez Fletcher, FNS Midwest Regional Administrator. "The intent is to provide models to help other WIC clinics strengthen their breastfeeding programs to increase breastfeeding initiation and duration rates nationwide."

FNS is awarding 135 WIC Breastfeeding Awards of Excellence in 2023.

**AWARD Page 15**

## LANDFILL From Page 13

air system instead of its robot. While its application is much more limited than its robotic offerings, in QC applications the Micro-Jet system is preferred.

Unlike robots with many moving parts, which require maintenance and repair, the compressed air system has no moving parts to maintain and replace. In addition, the Micro-Jet can be incorporated into existing plants, such as Polk's MRF, quickly, economically, and with minimal retrofitting of existing equipment. Polk County MRF is the first and only application of a working AMP Robotics Micro-Jet system in existence.

The Micro-Jet has been so successful in its current application – removing contaminants from Plastic #1 – PET (soda & water bottles) – that Polk and AMP are working on R&D of three more Micro-Jets on the Plastic #2 and Plastic #5 QC stations. If those applications are equally successful, Polk would look to purchase these units as part of the Phase III / NW Regional Hub & Spoke Bond request if funded in 2024.

### Other

Part of the Phase III Bonding request from 2023 which is now part of the NW Regional Hub & Spoke Project is addressing the source separated organics material (SSOM) compost facility. The work on the compost pad and eliminating the gas under the compost

sump liner scheduled for 2023 will now occur in 2024 or 2025 – depending upon the results of the 2024 Bonding Bill. If the Hub & Spoke Project is funded in 2024, Polk would modify the compost facility to add aerated static pile (ASP) technology. Using ASP would greatly increase compost capacity on the compost pad and reduce the amount of time, labor, and fuel needed to move compostable material through the composting process.

An ASP system is a compost management process. It has a high capital cost but results in a low operational cost and significantly reduces the amount of time needed to compost materials. In an ASP system air is blown through perforated pipes in the bunker floor to control oxygen levels. A sprinkler system above adds water as need-

ed to ensure optimum moisture levels. Thermocouples and software track moisture, oxygen, and temperature levels and make automatic adjustments to maximize the composting process. This would allow the existing compost pad to only be used for finishing and screening the compost instead of for the entire process.

### More Information

You can see video of the AMP Micro-Jet system in action, and additional information on other portions of the entire Hub & Spoke Project such as the ASP system, by visiting the NW Regional Hub & Spoke website at [www.nwregionalthubspoke.com](http://www.nwregionalthubspoke.com) or via the QR code below.

**Jon Steiner, Environmental Svs. Director**

## AWARD From Page 14

### Polk-Norman-Mahnomen CHS WIC Breastfeeding Support

Polk-Norman-Mahnomen CHS WIC is part of a public health department that earned a gold designation from the Minnesota Department of Health as a Breastfeeding Friendly Public Health Department. This requires a public health department to complete ten steps to strengthen its ability to promote and support breastfeeding.

The Polk-Norman-Mahnomen CHS WIC team features staff with diverse educational backgrounds and training. There are three peer counselors located across the three counties available to support program participants with their breastfeeding needs. All pregnant and breastfeeding women are offered a breastfeeding peer counselor at their first WIC appointment to develop a trusting relationship through their WIC journey.

Polk-Norman-Mahnomen CHS WIC is a member of the Polk County Breastfeeding Coalition. This partnership allows them to share resources and identify gaps in breastfeeding

promotion and support in the community.

### MN WIC Breastfeeding Support

Breastfeeding is a priority in the WIC program. WIC helps participants breastfeed successfully by:

- ▶ Offering food benefits for breastfeeding participants to meet their unique nutrition needs.
- ▶ Providing nutrition education, breastfeeding counseling, breast pumps, and other supplies.
- ▶ Providing peer breastfeeding support.

The Peer Breastfeeding Support Program features parents with personal experience breastfeeding their own children, who are recruited from the communities they serve, and trained to help WIC participants with common breastfeeding issues. Parents with a MN WIC peer counselor have significantly higher breastfeeding initiation.

USDA-FNS and MN WIC celebrate the parents who breastfeed, along with the partners, family members, and friends who support them on their journey.

Learn more about the MN WIC program on the Polk-Norman-Mahnomen Women, Infants & Children (WIC)

website.

The national breastfeeding initiation rate for WIC participants was 71.6% in 2020.

The Polk-Norman-Mahnomen County WIC

breastfeeding initiation rate for local participants was 81.1% in 2021 & 2022.

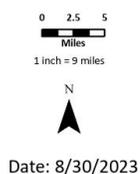
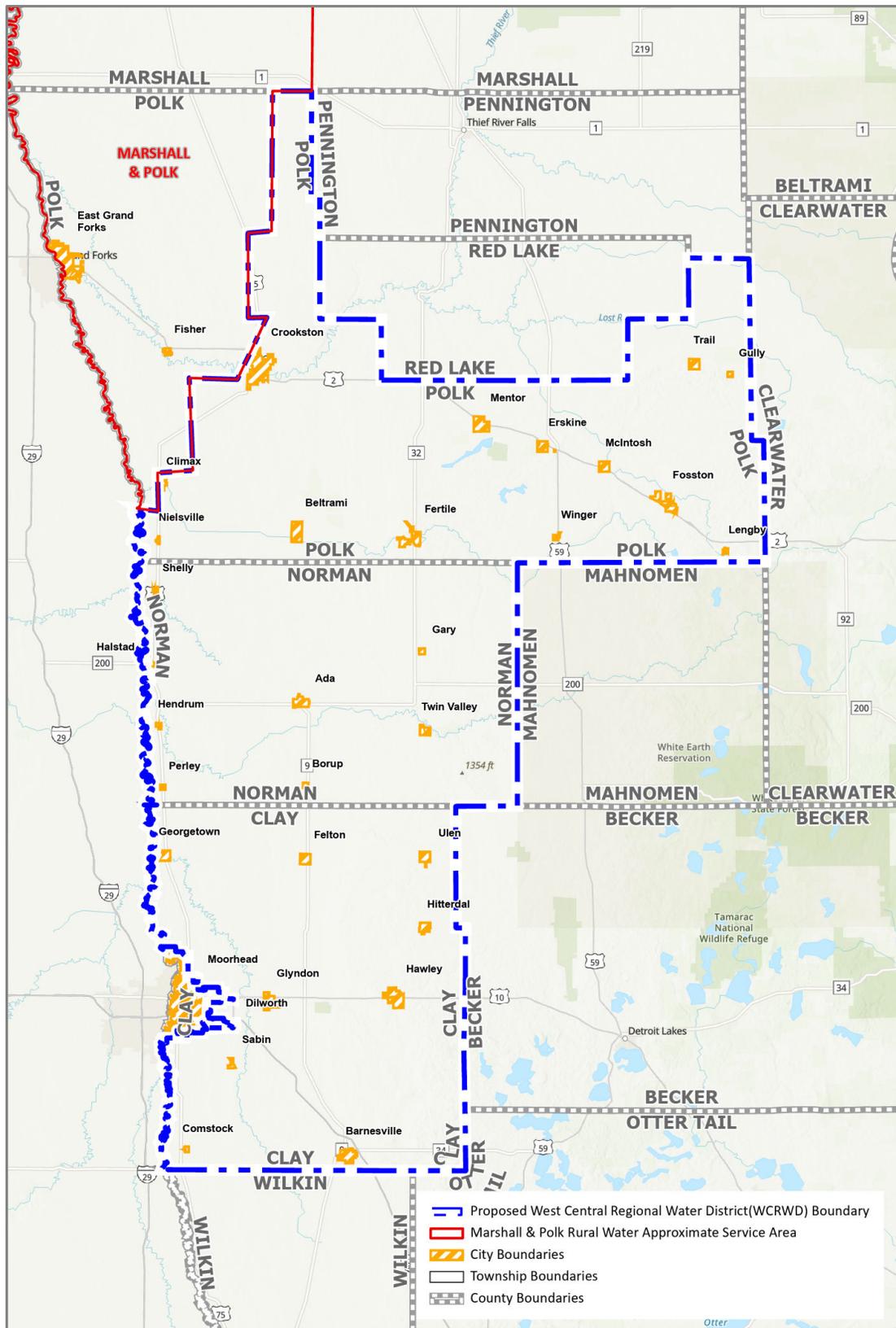
The Minnesota breastfeeding initiation rate for WIC participants was 79.6% in 2021.

## Community Baby Shower



**Polk County Public Health**

Polk County Public Health recently hosted Community Baby Showers in our East Grand Forks, Crookston, and McIntosh offices in partnership with BluePlus/BlueCross BlueShield Minnesota. The events were great for conversation and connection with new parents and families in our community. We had food, drawings, free professional photos by Tiffany Biermaier Photography, made homemade baby rattles, and staff provided education, resources, and connections to future family supports. Thank you to all who participated!



Date: 8/30/2023

## EXHIBIT A WEST CENTRAL REGIONAL WATER DISTRICT

