

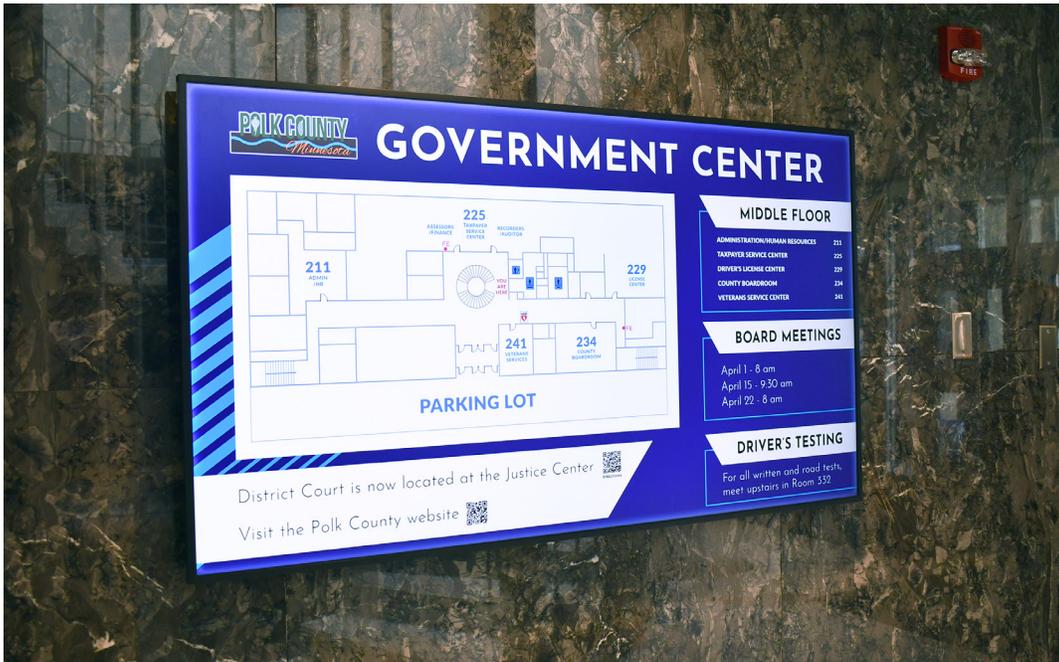
POLK COUNTY

Newsletter

**INSIDE: FRC
opens fifth
county location
in Fosston, MN**

See Page 11

Spring 2025



Tim Albrecht / Polk County

The new digital directory sign located on the middle floor of the Government Center in Crookston, Minn.

SIGN OF THE TIMES

New digital directory installed at Government Center

As you venture into the Polk County Government Center you may notice a big change. Gone are the signs advertising local events and board meetings, the directory, etc. In its place you can find a new digital sign.

Located just to the right of stairwell on the middle floor, the digital sign puts everything you need in one convenient place. Need to know where to buy a boat license? The sign has the answer. Where do you go for driver's testing? The sign has you covered.

The goal is to move Polk

County into the future and provide an easy-to-understand directory for anyone looking to conduct business at the Government Center.

Visitors to the Government Center were having trouble finding their way around the building, says Chuck Whiting, Polk County Administrator.

"We certainly noticed the need for something different following the pandemic. A video screen seemed much more flexible for the long term."

Currently, there is just the one sign on the middle floor, but two more signs will be

added in the near future on the other two floors, as well as a fourth next to the Driver's License Center.

The additional screens are a continued effort to provide quality service to county residents and more signs allows for a more streamlined directory for the public, says Whiting.

"Services is our purpose," he says. "We have several services here in the Government Center, and while there are only a few places to go in the building it should be clearer for the residents when they come here."



**CHUCK
WHITING**
Polk County
Administrator

Where am I? Where do I go?

We all ask where we're at or where we're going of ourselves from time to time, but I am guessing this may be what is going through the minds of our Government Center visitors here in Crookston.

We've noticed our internal building signage does not really help folks find what they are looking for. And I've learned determining new signage is not as easy as one might think.

So now, when you visit the Government Center you will notice video screens that we hope help you find where you are trying to get to for the purpose you came here. We know you are not visiting for cookies and ice cream; we want your time here to be as useful for you as possible.

During the pandemic when we had limited hours, we had placed a staff member in the entryway as we tried to comply with Covid restrictions and staffing

WHERE Page 3

Spring roadway safety



JIM TADMAM
Sheriff's
Notes

As the days begin to get warmer there are many safety concerns that come to mind. People will be sharing our roadways more and more. You may encounter walkers, runners, cyclists, motorcycles, golf carts, and ATVs. You will see an increase in farm equipment, such as tractors and planters on the rural roadways.

Be patient when you encounter pedestrians or slow-moving implements. Always remember to look twice when passing and do not pass on curves and hills.

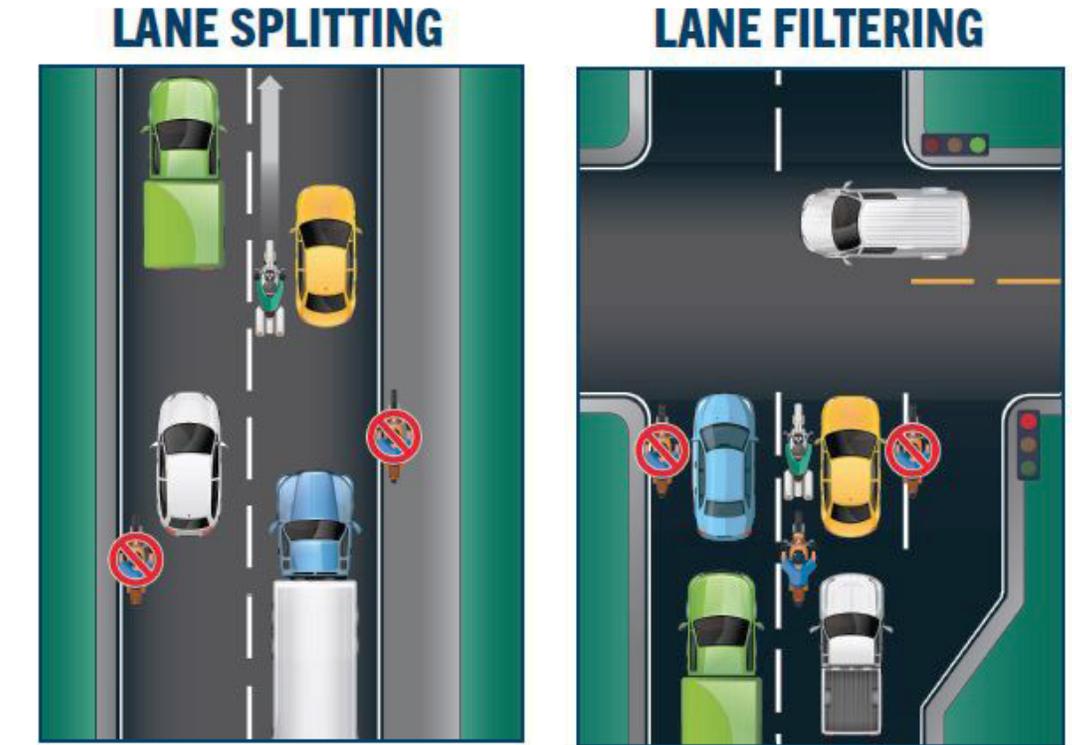
Make sure the implement is not coming up on a mailbox and or road sign because they will be stopping or driving into the other lane to clear the object. Remember implements are traveling at a low rate of speed.

Distractions are a big cause of crashes. Do your part to help everyone be safe. Slow down, put down your phone, and limit the distractions. We will be continuing to work our Towards Zero Death (TZD) speed enforcement and distraction enforcement in the coming months.

New Law

I would like to bring your attention to a new law for motorcycles. Lane splitting and filtering will be legal in Minnesota as of July 1, 2025. Motorists and motorcyclists need to be aware of this new law and how it will affect them to ensure it is enacted safely and respectfully on Minnesota roadways.

Lane splitting is allowed when two or more lanes of traffic are traveling in the same direction and traffic is moving. It allows a motorcycle to pass another vehicle in the same



Graphics courtesy of the Minnesota Department of Safety

Representations of proper lane splitting and lane filtering maneuvers for motorcyclists.

direction of travel and in the same traffic lane only under these conditions:

- ▶ At no more than 25 miles per hour.
- ▶ No more than 15 miles per hour over the speed of traffic in the relevant traffic lanes.

Lane filtering is allowed when two or more lanes of traffic are traveling in the same direction and traffic is NOT moving. It allows a motorcycle to move through traffic that is stopped, such as at a traffic light or traffic jam, only under this condition:

- ▶ No more than 15 miles per hour over the speed of traffic in the relevant traffic lanes.

Motorcyclists:

▶ It is your responsibility to determine if these maneuvers can safely be performed in a given situation.

▶ Do not perform them if you cannot do so safely and within the legal speed restrictions.

Motorists:

▶ Be aware of motorcycles sharing your lane in slow-moving traffic and when stopped at intersections.

▶ Do not impede their legal right to do so.

You will probably not see it in NW Minnesota, but if you are traveling in the larger cities, you will, so be cautious.

Mental Health

Mental illness does not discriminate. In any given year, one in four adults and one in five children experience a mental health disorder. Mental

illness is real, common and treatable.

If you are experiencing mental health and /or a suicide crisis, please call or text 988 to reach a trained crisis counselor.

For crisis assistance and referrals to crisis facilities contact Alluma by calling 800-282-5005. For non-crisis services, call their main line at 218-281-3940.

If you are experiencing a medical emergency, phone 911 /or call our Dispatch Center at 218-281-0431.

Be Safe.

County Board Meeting Times

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

All meetings are open to the public. Visit www.co.polk.mn.us/calendar to confirm dates & times.

Polk County

Commissioners

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

WHERE From Page 1

limitations. That practice ended and we went back to normal hours and staffing.

We realized that the entry-way presence helped direct folks where they wanted to go. Without that, we also realized our internal signage really didn't help.

In fact, additional signs taped to the walls, and others placed on tripods didn't get people where they wanted to go either. While it was always nice meeting people and helping them, the number of people searching really suggested we were missing the mark.

So, what to do? Much of our internal signage does not describe what people were looking for. For instance, if someone

needs a birth certificate, we have no sign for that. While records are in the Taxpayer Service Center, that title alone didn't seem like the place to go if someone was a bit unsure.

Even delivery drivers would get confused as to where to go since mail often included an office number, perhaps something an eagle eye could see, but more often than not the office was inside a suite of offices.

Anyway, many of us in the Government Center have met many nice Polk County residents and non-residents walking around looking for to go. But most of us aren't out in the hallways enough to catch everyone.

A video board has been placed where the old office signage was. We've had the sign up for several weeks now, and while it looks great, it is not perfect, yet. But as a video board we can change content, and we keep learning and improving. More emphasis

is on what someone is looking for, like a birth certificate, a fishing license, vehicle tabs or where to drop off a job application. As employees, we may be so familiar with our workplace that we do not see what you may see when coming into this building for the first time, or the first time in a long time.

I am sure every employee here will help direct anyone that is looking for where to go in this building, because I have seen them do it. But, we can still do better when we are not out in the hallway.

Upgrades

Continuing with theme of "where are we", the Board has approved some software purchases and contracted help to streamline internal processes. Last fall, Abdo Financial Solutions was engaged to help with staff transitioning and internal process development to improve

and ease workloads. With their help, some more contemporary methods have been brought into play for management, finance reporting, and budgeting. The process of finding a new Finance Director is also underway, and along with some software upgrades, some work efficiencies are expected. While the county is in good financial condition, an \$87 million operation does need tweaking from time to time.

And where are we going? As of this writing, so many things seem up in the air. We are watching closely to what is happening in St. Paul and Washington knowing that by budget time later this year we could have some serious issues to be ready for. The 2026 budget process will begin in a few weeks and conclude in December. Where we are going will be clearer when I write to you again in the fall. Until then, enjoy your spring and summer!

Get Yourself Tested (GYT) Kits

URINE SAMPLE THAT TESTS FOR CHLAMYDIA AND GONORRHEA



Available for pickup at
Polk County Public Health
Offices and at the UMC
Campus

Crookston ● East Grand Forks ● McIntosh ● UMC Campus

TOGETHER WE CAN *build a better future!*



Family childcare needed in county

There is a significant need for more family childcare providers in Polk County. This could be a great opportunity for individuals looking to make a meaningful impact on their community while benefiting from a flexible career.

Here's a breakdown of what might be helpful for those considering this path:

Community Need

There's a shortage of 622 childcare spots for children ages birth to 5 years old in Polk County. This presents a real opportunity for people to step in and provide quality care in their local community.

Benefits of Family Child-care

► **Close-knit Environment:** Families often prefer home childcare because it offers a more personalized, intimate setting for their children.

► **Smaller Group Sizes:** Providers usually care for 10-12 children, which allows them to give more individualized attention to each child.

► **Holistic Development:** Providers are responsible for creating activities that promote the physical, emotional, intellectual, and social development of the children.

► **Flexibility:** Family childcare providers enjoy flexibility in their hours.

Licensing Process

► **Timeframe:** The licensing process typically takes around 8-12 weeks.

► **Licensing Assistance:** Polk County Social Services provides guidance and support throughout the licensing process, from the application stage to the final approval. They can answer questions, help with paperwork, and ensure the home is compliant with state regulations.

► **Training:** Aspiring providers can access the required training programs to meet licensing standards. This helps ensure they

are well-prepared to offer quality care for children.

► **Grants:** There are startup grants available to assist individuals in setting up their childcare homes. These grants can be used to cover costs such as supplies, equipment, and other essentials.

► **Further Education:** There are opportunities for ongoing education to help providers expand their knowledge and skills in child development, safety, and early childhood education. This can include workshops, online courses, and other training programs.

Although the process may seem overwhelming initially, with the help of the Licensing Unit and the resources available, it can be an incredibly fulfilling and impactful role. Providing quality care for young children is both rewarding and essential for the community, especially as there's a significant need for childcare for infants and toddlers.

By contacting Polk County Social Services, individuals can get all the details about the application process, training, grants, and other resources to make the journey easier.

If you or anyone you know is interested, don't hesitate to reach out for more information! The licensors at Polk County is Annabelle Narlock (annabelle.narlock@co.polk.mn.us) and Barbara Durden (barbara.durden@co.polk.mn.us) or call at 218-281-3127.

Molly Paulsrud
Polk County
Social Services Supervisor



EMPLOYEE ANNIVERSARIES

<u>Hire Date</u>	<u>Employee</u>	<u>Department</u>
35 Years		
9/4/90	Patty Frydenlund	Environmental Services
30 Years		
1/9/95	Wade Burrack	Solid Waste
3/15/95	Jon Steiner	Environmental Services
25 Years		
3/13/00	Molly Paulsrud	Social Services
6/26/00	Michelle Quirk	Social Services
9/7/00	Beth Greenwood	Social Services
7/6/00	Lori Nystad	Public Health
10/05/00	Melissa Hesby	Social Services
10/12/00	Michael Norland	Sheriff's Office
20 Years		
7/1/05	Amy Ryan	Social Services
8/1/05	David Lehmann	Highway Department
10/19/05	Megan Starr	Social Services
15 Years		
10/4/10	Joanne Johnson	Information Systems
10/19/10	Julie Seeger	Public Health
11/4/10	Kelsey Helgeson	Public Health
10 Years		
1/2/15	Trisha Schuler	Social Services
2/1/15	Jacob Radtke	Highway Department
2/9/15	Casey Wilde-Olson	Taxpayer Service Center
5/4/15	David Morgan	Sheriff's Office
5/4/15	Sondra Kaiser	Sheriff's Office
5/18/15	Shelly Haugen	Social Services
6/1/15	Chad Erickson	Facilities Department
7/13/15	Pamela Dufault-Conklin	Taxpayer Service Center
8/3/15	Annalee Jones	Taxpayer Service Center
8/17/15	Susan Olson	Social Services
8/17/15	Kelly Plante	Solid Waste
10/19/15	Sarah Perkerewicz	Social Services
10/19/15	Ryan Wagner	Highway Department
10/26/15	Brady Stevenson	Highway Department
11/16/15	Nathan Muckala	Solid Waste
12/3/15	Daphne Johnson	Social Services
5 Years		
1/21/20	John Bannert	Highway Department
2/18/20	Jennifer Perreault	Taxpayer Service Center
3/3/20	Rose Eckstein	Facilities Department
4/6/20	Cody Magsam	Social Services
6/15/20	Travis Suedel	Highway Department
6/22/20	Ryan Osmondson	Solid Waste
7/1/20	Harrison Boucher	Taxpayer Service Center
9/8/20	Daniel Strandquist	Social Services
9/14/20	Alexis Enright	Social Services
9/21/20	Joshua Bakker	Information Systems
12/2/20	Josh Gilbertson	Highway Department
12/11/20	Matthew Solberg	Solid Waste

Redetermination of benefits coming for county ditches

Sandhill River Watershed District first to be assessed

At the March 18 meeting of the Polk County Board of Commissioners they approved redetermining benefits for all the county drainage ditches in the Sandhill River Watershed District. In the future they'll also discuss redetermining benefits in the rest of the county-wide ditches.

Redetermination of benefits is a process set forth in the Minnesota Drainage Code, Statutes, Chapter 103E. Redetermining of benefits for public drainage systems is a critical process that ensures landowners receive fair and accurate assessments while

enabling the county to meet its legal obligations.

As one of the county's largest infrastructure responsibilities, public drainage systems require ongoing inspection and maintenance. Drainage system costs, unless covered by other sources of funding, must be distributed equitably among those who benefit from them. Since landowners, collectively, possess a property interest in these systems, and the county, as the drainage authority, is legally required to inspect and maintain them, it is essential to ensure that drainage system expenses are shared fairly.

Many public drainage systems have not had their benefit rolls updated since their original construction in the early to mid-1900s—some over a century

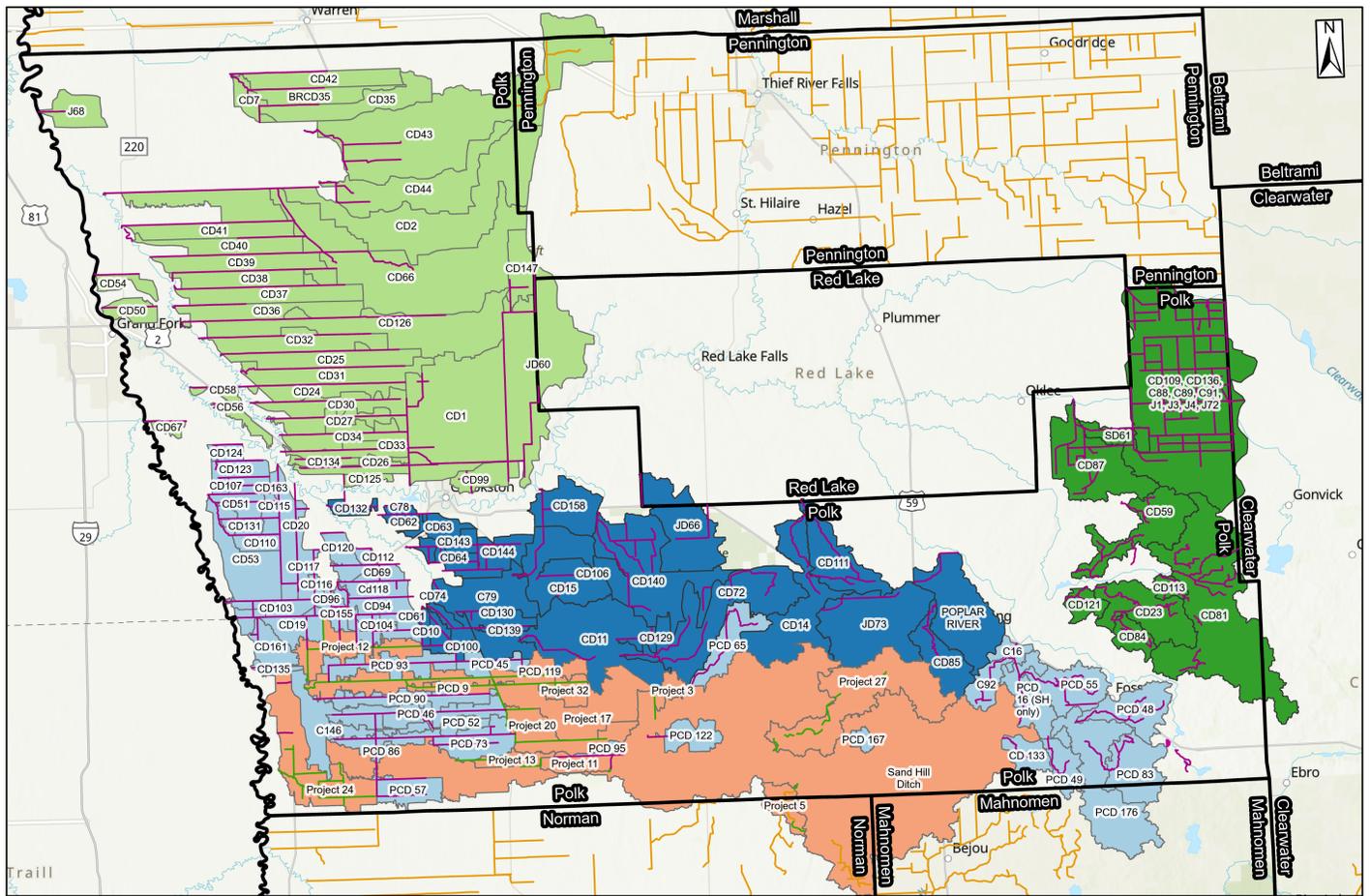
old. Over time, advancements in technology have greatly improved the ability to assess drainage patterns and land characteristics with precision. Additionally, changes in state laws have redefined how benefits are applied, often requiring the inclusion of lands not previously assessed, ensuring all benefiting properties contribute a fair and equitable share of drainage system costs.

Redetermining benefits also ensures that assessments reflect current market values. Many drainage systems were originally valued at a time when land was worth only a fraction of today's prices, and in some cases, their assigned economic value is now far below the actual cost of repairs. Since some actions under the Drainage

Code require benefits to exceed costs, outdated benefit rolls can place the county in a difficult position when essential repairs are needed.

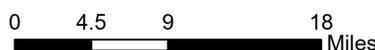
With Minnesota's public drainage infrastructure aging, maintaining and repairing these systems is more critical than ever. Redetermining benefits not only allows for more accurate and equitable cost distribution among landowners but also ensures the county remains in compliance with evolving legal requirements. This process ultimately strengthens the long-term sustainability of the drainage infrastructure while protecting the financial interests of landowners.

Rich Sanders
Polk County Engineer



- Polk Ditch Centerlines
- SHRWd Ditch Centerlines
- Surrounding Co Ditch Centerlines
- Approximate Watersheds
- Polk County Group 1
- Polk County Group 2
- Polk County Group 3
- Polk County Group 4
- SHRWd Group 1

Polk County Groups 1-4 Approximate Areas
H2Over Viewers
11 March 2025



P2P makes 198 arrests in 2024

The Pine to Prairie Drug Task Force made 198 arrests and worked on 250 cases during 2024. That's in the eight-county area of northwest Minnesota.

The arrests resulted in the seizure of 476 grams of cocaine, 50.5 pounds of marijuana, 31 pounds of methamphetamine (meth), 1.3 grams of heroin, 281 prescription pills, 237 fentanyl pills, and 39 grams of fentanyl powder.

The Task Force is made up of law enforcement officers provided by the counties and by the three major cities in the service area.

The mission of the Task Force is to identify, disrupt, and dismantle local drug manufacturers and distributors, and to assist local law enforcement agencies in violent crime investigations. The Task Force works to identify trafficking sources both local and regional and to assist in the apprehension of violent offenders in the eight-county area. It also works with other agencies in the greater region.

Polk County and the cities of Crookston and East Grand Forks each provide one officer to the team, while the City of Thief River Falls and Pennington County cooperate to provide an investigator. Other counties contributing full-time investigators to the team are Lake of the Woods, Marshall, Norman, and Roseau. While not committing a full-time member, Kittson and Red Lake counties assist as needed.

Polk County has two deputies who manage drug dogs. Marshall and Norman counties along with the cities of Thief River Falls and East Grand Forks each also have canine officers that are made available to the Task Force.

The Task Force receives approximately \$250,000 in state funding annually. The money is split between the cities and counties to reimburse them for a portion of the salaries of the investigators that they provide to the team. A portion of the grant is also

SIGNIFICANT CASES IN 2024

- ▶ The Pine to Prairie (P2P) Drug Task Force's Violent Crime Enforcement Team (VCET) assisted the East Grand Forks Police Department when shots were fired at an apartment building. Witnesses identified the shooter, who fled the scene before officers arrived. He was apprehended in Grand Forks.
- ▶ P2P officers made 24 undercover drug buys in 2024 resulting in the recovery of 42 pounds of meth and 2,000 fentanyl pills.
- ▶ In cooperation with the East Grand Forks Police Department, P2P officers dismantled a group that was distributing meth near the swimming pool.
- ▶ In Thief River Falls, 2P officers

seized 18 marijuana plants. In East Grand Forks, P2P officers seized 16.5 pounds of marijuana, 600 vape pens, and more than 2 pounds of BHO (butane hash oil).

▶ One multi-county dealer was arrested after a two-month investigation in Polk and Pennington counties during which undercover officers bought and seized 38 grams of meth. The dealer received a 98-month sentence.

▶ A burglar has been watching obituaries in Polk, Marshall, Red Lake and Pennington counties and then targeting their estates during the funeral.

▶ One search warrant resulted in the recovery of four guns in one arrest.

used for training and to purchase necessary equipment.

The Task Force is guided by a 14-member advisory board. That board is made up of East Grand Forks Police Chief Mike Hedlund (president), Crookston Police Chief Darin Selzler (vice president), Polk County Sheriff Jim Tadman, Pennington County Sheriff Seth Vettleson, Thief River Falls Police Chief Marissa Adam, Crookston City Council member Clayton Briggs, East Grand Forks City Council member Mark Olstad, Polk County Commissioner Warren Strandell, Roseau County Sheriff Steve Gust, Assistant Roseau County Attorney Mike Grover, Norman County Sheriff Ben Fall, Lake of the Woods County Sheriff Gary Fish, Lake of the Woods County Attorney James Austad, Marshall County Sheriff Jason Boman, and Marshall County

Commissioner Jim Duckstad.

Advisory board (non-voting) members include Polk County Attorney Greg Widseth, Red Lake County Sheriff Mitch Bernstein, Ada Police Chief Steve Hager, Kittson County Sheriff Matt Vig, U.S. Border Patrol Supervisor Erik Gubbels, Homeland Security Investigations Supervisor Josh Goldberg, and fiscal agent/board secretary Kathy Carlson.

Warren Strandell
Polk County Board Commissioner



POLK COUNTY
Minnesota

POLK COUNTY BOARD MEETINGS ARE NOW STREAMING.

FIND US ON YOUTUBE

 **@PolkCoGov**

YouTube



tip 411



HELP FIGHT DRUGS & CRIME.

Send an anonymous tip to the Pine to Prairie Drug Task Force. Text keyword P2PTIP to 847411, add a space, type in your tip information, and hit send.

DOWNLOAD FREE

P2Ptip app

for iPhone or Android



A service of
Pine to Prairie Drug Task Force

New water district draws closer to start

Main transmission line to be built this fall or early next year

Since last fall the West Central Regional Water District (WCRWD) has made great progress toward becoming Minnesota’s first new water district in nearly 40 years.

The district’s proposed service area includes 30 cities and rural areas with a population of about 40,000 people. It is estimated WCRWD could provide 1.85 billion gallons of water per year. The service area includes the geographic boundaries of Polk, Norman, and Clay counties, except for the area served by Marshall Polk Rural Water System in Polk County and the area served by Moorhead Public Service in Clay County.

One of the initial phases of the project will consist of main transmission line which will be constructed this fall or early next year, pending funding approval, and will span between Climax and Nielsville.

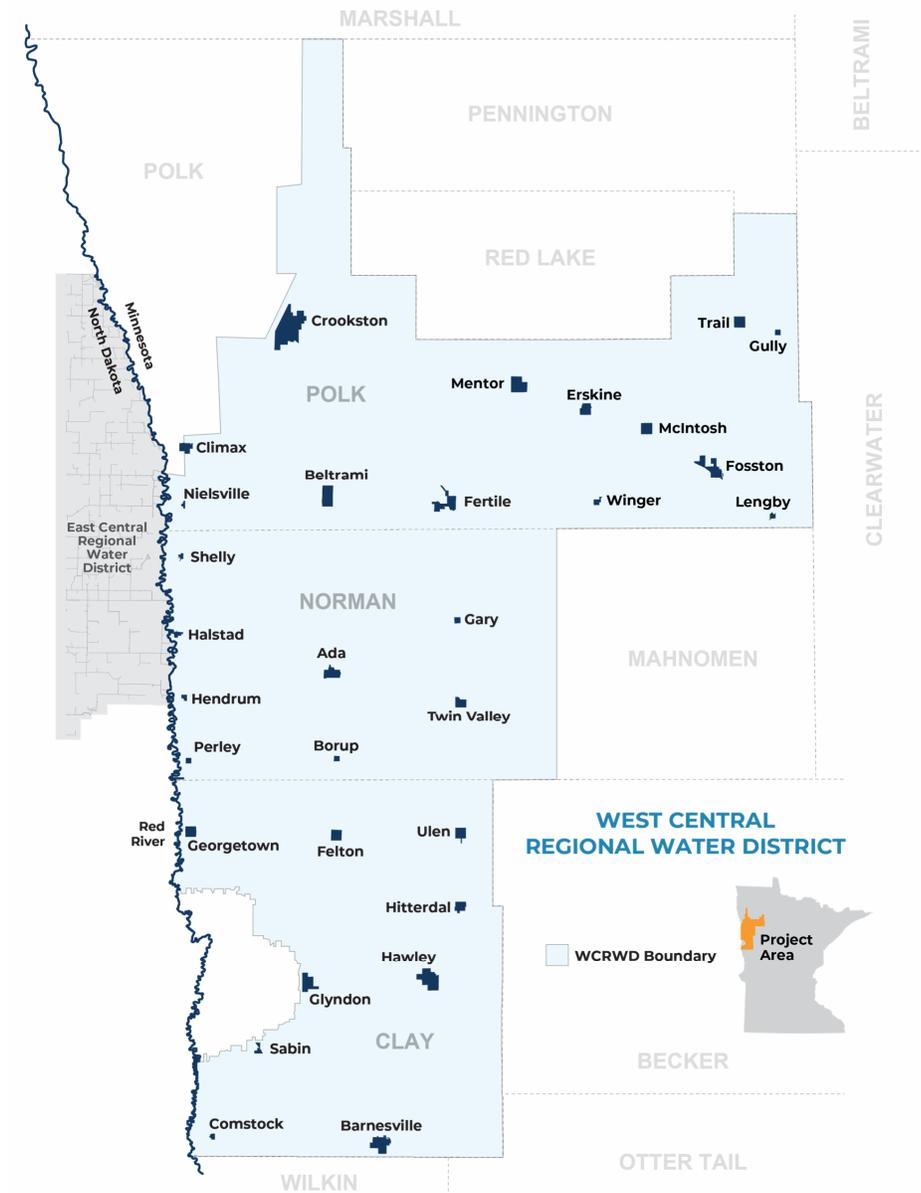
Judicial Process

WCRWD held its first hearing in Clay County District Court, where the preliminary survey results were submitted. The survey to gauge interest in receiving water from the project received overwhelmingly positive feedback. As a result, the Court issued an order to move forward with a detailed engineering survey for the project. WCRWD and AE2S, the court-appointed engineering firm, are now finalizing the survey. Don’t be surprised if you receive another official mailer from WCRWD in your mailbox in the near future.

Gauging Interest

As part of ongoing outreach efforts, approximately 6,000 informational mailers have been sent to residents in Zone 3 of the WCRWD. This area includes all of Norman County, the southern portions of two townships in Polk County stretching from the Red River to near Highway 32, and parts of Clay County from Kragness to Hitterdal. In parallel, project organizers have met with 11 local water service providers identified in a preliminary engineering survey. Follow-up questionnaires are now being distributed to these providers to help evaluate both feasibility and interest in the proposed regional water system.

Outreach to cities has begun, with the goal of securing Memorandums of Inclusion for participation in the detailed



engineering survey and planning process. If your city hasn’t been contacted, someone from the team may be reaching out soon to schedule a project meeting. Both rural and city residents (even if you are not in Zone 3), who are interested in receiving water from the WCRWD are encouraged to complete the survey at the end of this article. The survey results help the project organizers identify the cities and water systems that serve residents who are interested.

Legislative Request

On the legislative front, House File 1438 and Senate File 1174 were introduced during the 2025 Minnesota Legislative Session. This legislation requests \$9.7 million in funding for the WCRWD.

If approved, the funding would be used to build out phase 1 of the project which aims to both serve cities and interested rural customers as well. Design work for Phase 1 of the project is expected to begin shortly and will include project routing, hydraulic considerations, easement acquisition, and permitting.

If you’re interested in receiving water service from WCRWD in the future, please let us know by completing the survey at wcrwd-ae2s.hub.arcgis.com, calling 701-526-4217, or emailing wcrwd@ae2s.com. Your response is essential in helping us identify areas where there is demand and interest for water supply.

Warren Strandell
Polk County Board Commissioner

SANTAS HELPERS

The Polk County Sheriff's Office/Emergency Management took part in the annual Shop With A Hero event on Dec. 17. Local public safety stars partnered with Walmart Crookston in sponsoring our Shop With A Hero event.

The Polk County Sheriff's Office was joined by the Crookston Police Department and Crookston Area Ambulance to take children shopping.

The kids had a public safety hero as their shopping buddy while they cruised through the store with their Walmart gift cards. Their choices varied from toys and electronics to a few sugary treats. Some children purchased gifts for siblings.

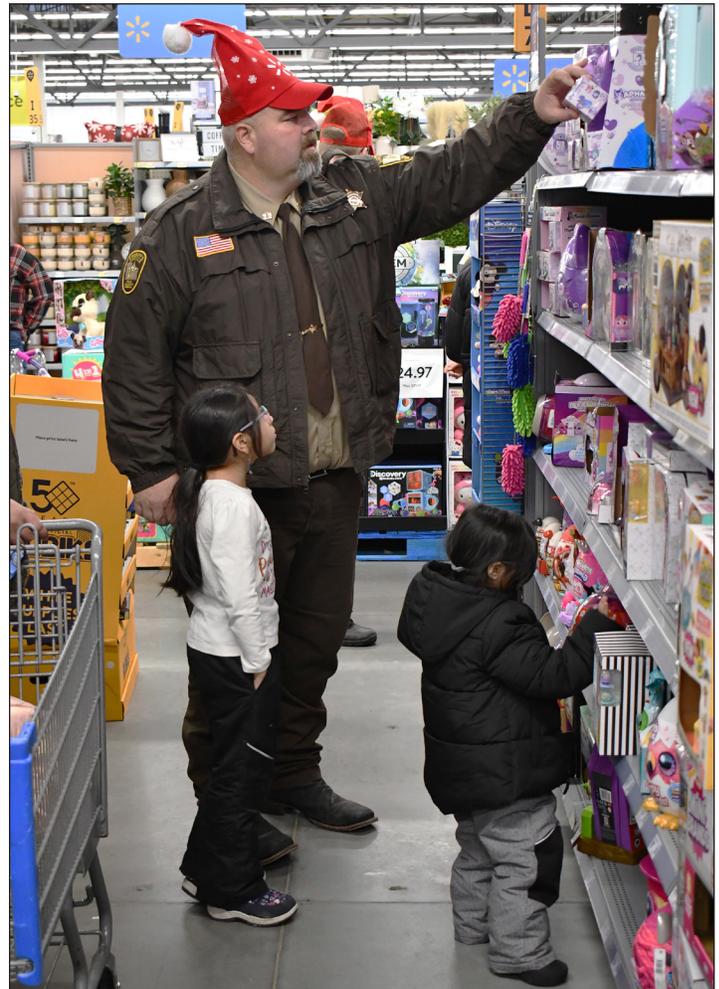


TOP: First responders from the Polk County Sheriff's Department, Crookston Police Department, and Crookston Area Ambulance pose for a group photo with area children before participating in the annual Shop With a Hero event.

ABOVE: Polk County Sheriff's Department Chief Deputy Norland laughs with shoppers.

RIGHT: Polk County Sheriff's Department Captain Haugen helps a shopper get a toy off the top shelf.

Tim Albrecht / Polk County



County taps into youth for public health engagement

By Meredith Moran

NACo County News Staff Writer

(In February, Polk County Public Health was featured in a National Association of Counties – County News article.)

If youth have something to say, Polk County, Minn., wants to hear it. Members of the Polk County Public Health Youth Advisory Board provide feedback on existing and new public health programming and make the county aware of emerging community needs for youth.

In return, the teens get a better understanding of how policy works and the government's role in public health, according to Sarah Reese, Polk County Public Health Administrator and Director.

"By engaging youth in our policies, our practices, our services, our procedures, we're getting a fresh perspective, energy, information and certainly knowledge that we wouldn't have otherwise," Reese said. "Our work, much of the time, is with youth or partners that work with youth, so it was important for us to hear it right from their lived experience."

Using Their Voice

Public health priorities that have been identified by Youth Advisory Board members include mental health and reproductive and sexual health, according to Reese.

Halle Nicholas, a high school junior on the Youth Advisory Board, said the board's discussions around youth mental health and substance use have been particularly powerful for her.

"I think that being able to use my voice to advocate for those that may feel like they are not heard is very important," Nicholas said.

Polk County Public Health also uses the youth perspective to tailor their social media content and messaging, Reese said.

"What speaks to them? Are we speaking the language and appealing to them in the way that they want to?"

"It could be marketing, it could be messaging, it could be a program that people are thinking about, so whatever is on the minds of public health staff, they can bring that to the Youth Advisory Board for them to provide feedback."

Giving Back

Thirty years ago, Reese served as a youth representative on Polk County's health services advisory committee (the committee was made up of adults and had one designated position for youth). In 2018, health services advisory committees were no longer required as part of governance, and Polk County Health took



Tim Albrecht / Polk County

Several members of the Polk County Public Health Youth Advisory Board are appointed at the Nov. 5, 2024, meeting of the Polk County Board of Commissioners.

a step back to assess the county's public health needs.

As a result, the department created the Youth Advisory Board, seeing it as an opportunity to merge civic engagement and leadership development, Reese said.

"One of the key things from the beginning was to give back to the students too, in some way, shape or form," said Kirsten Fagerlund, who is a member of the Polk County Health community wellness team.

"Speaking to what's current and what's on the minds of the youth, but also providing some leadership development, public speaking, maybe some parliamentary procedures, how to run a meeting, how to mediate and moderate differences amongst them."

Youth Board

The Youth Advisory Board is made up of high school students across Polk County — public health staff aim to engage two to three students per school district to get a more comprehensive youth perspective, according to Reese. Students at public and private high schools, as well as teens at the Red River Valley Juvenile Center in the county, are encouraged to participate.

Some members have been nominated by their school counselors or school leadership team, and current members share who among their peers could potentially bring a new perspective to the board, as well, Reese said.

"We are one of the largest geographic counties in Minnesota and really have some unique differences across the county," Reese said. "So, we've been really intentional to try and have representation from all school districts in Polk County."

Polk County Public Health staff also use Minnesota Student Survey data to as-

sess what youth are wanting to see in the public health space, according to Reese.

'Safe Person'

The 2019 Minnesota Student Survey found that adult mentorship was important to youth, particularly those who struggled with mental health issues, so the Youth Advisory Board created a "Safe Places to Land" initiative, which provided adults in school settings with a kit on what to do when a student confides in them and how to show they care — at some schools, Youth Advisory Board members identified teachers or coaches, but others identified janitors, cafeteria staff and receptionists as that "safe person," Reese said.

"Surprisingly enough, a lot of times, it's those other people that are in the building every day that create that culture of safety," she said.

Youth Advisory Board members are encouraged to listen to their peers and share their perspectives as well, "to bring all youth voices to the table," Fagerlund said.

"We're pretty clear in that they are representing their peers, so to listen and open their eyes at the culture of their school and their environment a little differently, and to bring that back to us," Fagerlund said. "And then also just to think wide, as youth."

"They're thinking about their school, their peers, but then also to think about peers in their county, in Northwest Minnesota, and then to think globally too — especially when we talk about justice and ethics and thinking about the plate of life that another student might have that they're not familiar with, but to put themselves as much as they can into that person's world, and to think about the services and the world that helps them be healthier."

New septic system fix-up grant program available

Polk County Environmental Services is pleased to announce the availability of a cost-share grant program that is available to property owners in Polk County that have an existing noncompliant septic system. Funds are intended to fix septic systems that are currently failing codes or functionality. These dollars are made possible through a grant received from the Minnesota Clean Water Legacy Act.

There is a limited amount of

funding available and preference for funding will be determined based on household income status, condition of existing system, and proximity to priority surface waters. Income restrictions do apply. A major goal within the fix-up program aims to fix "imminent public health threats". Polk County uses HUD low-income guidelines to group funding grant contributions.

Households must not exceed these income guidelines, must be the landowners homestead

(not a second dwelling or rental), and applicants will be required to pay any match requirement upfront if approved. No holding tank septic systems can be installed and SSTS for new construction of a dwelling does not qualify for the program. The County will provide a cost share grant contributing 60% and up to 80% of installation cost up to a maximum of \$12,000 grant dollars.

To learn more about this program, please call Polk County

Planning and Zoning at (218) 281-5700. Program applications can also be found on our website at www.polkcountymn.gov under the Environmental Services and Planning and Zoning Department page. The deadline to apply for the Septic System Fix-Up Grant Program is May 15th, 2025. After this date, remaining funding will be available on a first come first serve basis.

Jacob Snyder
Polk County Assistant
Environmental Services Administrator

ROAD CONSTRUCTION UPDATE

Well, it's the middle of April and the temperatures are warming slowly. For the most part winter was tame. Road restrictions are on so make sure your weight is in the allowable range. With the warming temperatures, I am pretty sure they will be coming off soon.

One way to maintain our roadways is to apply bituminous overlays. They typically last 15 to 20 years. This year we are trying a different process called hot in-place recycling using the Dustrol, Inc. process. They will mill up two inches of bituminous and run it thru a pugmill where they add bituminous asphalt cement (oil) and then conveyor it into a paver and repave the roadway. The cost is very similar to a traditional overlay without using more aggregate resources.

The roadways we are using this process on are:

- ▶ CSAH 9 from Red River of the North to TH 75 in Crookston
- ▶ CSAH 19 from TH 75 to the East County Line
- ▶ CSAH 45 from TH 32 to CSAH 12 in Mentor

Polk County will also be grade widening CSAH 12 from TH 32 in Fertile to CSAH 41. With this project we will be widening the shoulders to 5 feet, flattening the inslope to a 1:4 instead of 1:3, and providing a 10-foot-wide ditch bottom in most areas.

We are also hoping to replace some township bridges with box culverts and possibly replace the bridges north of TH 92 in Chester Township and on our CSAH 6 over the Lost River.

If you have any questions concerning this year's construction program, please give our office a call at 218-281-3952 and talk with either Darin Carlstrom at ext. 8254 or Richard Sanders at ext. 8253.

Rich Sanders
Polk County Engineer

Public Health receives renewal of state breastfeeding-friendly recognition

In April 2025, Polk County Public Health received a Certificate of Recognition for renewing their recognition as a Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace by the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) for its contributions to the health of parents and their babies.

MDH recognizes workplaces and county health departments that have demonstrated their commitment to supporting breastfeeding families by creating a workplace lactation support program. MDH recognizes organizations that have taken a leadership role to improve breastfeeding rates and meet Healthy 2030 goals.

Breastfeeding is a foundational way to ensure that babies receive optimal nutrition during the first formative years of life. Studies show that infants who are breastfed have better health outcomes as they grow.

The designation acknowledges Polk County Public Health's commitment to acting as a model for the community by supporting healthy families and receiving the business benefits of supporting breastfeeding employees. It's achieved by adopting a written policy and educating staff about it; ensuring adequate break time for breastfeeding employees; providing a clean, private place to pump breast milk; and demonstrating a strong commitment to supporting breastfeeding in the workplace.

This is MDH's recognition program, which was created and is supported by the state Women, Infants and Children program (WIC) and the Statewide Health Improvement Partnership (SHIP). To learn how to apply for recognition, visit health.state.mn.us/breastfeedingfriendly.

Tammy Conn, IBCLC, and Sarah Reese,
Polk County Public Health Director

Social Worker Month Recognition



Photo Courtesy of Victoria Ramirez

The Polk County Board of Commissioners recognizes the Social Services Department during Social Worker Month in March.

BIGGER AND BIGGER

FRC opens fifth county location in Fosston, MN

The Polk County Family Resource Center just keeps getting bigger and bigger. After opening their new pop-up location at the Knutson Community Center in Fertile they followed that up with a second Crookston location and kept going with a third in Fosston.

The new Crookston location, a partnership with the Crookston Public School District, at Washington School, opened on March 10 and the Fosston facility just opened on April 16.

Second Location

With a second location in Crookston the FRC is able to offer additional office hours and more space for hygiene and diaper closets, which are concrete supports to families in need, says Polk County Social Services Manager Victoria Ramirez.

“Washington School is a great location; it is centralized in the City of Crookston,” says Ramirez. “It is accessible for families and already has a very family-friendly atmosphere. The Polk County Family Resource Center is a nice addition to the family-centered services already being offered in the building.”

Similar to their other locations, FRC staff offers assistance with completing applications, resources and referrals to community partners, and opportunities for families to connect and engage with other parents.

Several residents have stopped by the Washington School location to see what services and supports are available, but the FRC would like to reach more residents in the county. “Our second location in Crookston is still very new, we are trying to market and let people know it’s there along with the additional days and hours staff is available for them.”

Third City

The FRC didn’t stop with one new location though, the Fosston



Above: Brandi Knutson, Family Resource Center coordinator with Tri-Valley Opportunity Council, cuts the ribbon at the grand opening of the Family Resource Center in Fosston located at the Fosston Library/Aurora Center for the Arts on April 16.



Left: A mural has been painted on the wall along with children's art projects in the play area.

Tim Albrecht / Polk County

location is located at the Fosston Library/Aurora Center for the Arts Building making it the third city in Polk County with a dedicated resource center.

It’s early in the process but staff is available every Wednesday from 12 pm to 6 pm offering their usual support to county residents, Ramirez says.

Getting a location in the eastern part of the county was important for Polk County Board Commissioner Joan Lee. “Our residents need to feel valued and connected no matter where they reside in the county.”

“The FRC can be a ‘one stop’

for our residents to get questions answered and receive the help they need,” she says. “It will also provide an opportunity to network with other families.”

Growing in Fertile

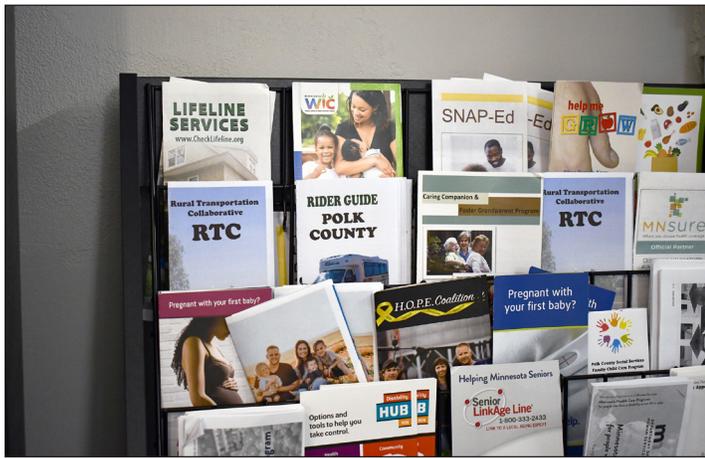
Opening in August of last year, the Fertile FRC is in its infancy and still working to build partnerships with local services providers, including the City of Fertile, Lake Agassiz Regional Library-Fertile, and the Fertile-Beltrami School District.

They’re constantly looking for new ways to engage parents

and the community of Fertile, say Ramirez. “We recently helped the Fertile-Beltrami School District host a “Community Resource Fair” during parent-teacher conferences. It was a great way to let families know about the various community resources and service providers in the area.”

Office hours in Fertile are from 10 am to 12 pm every first and third Wednesday of the month.

One of the core services they offer is Job Club, a partnership



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with CareerForce. They offer assistance for job seekers looking for advice, tips, resources, and local job leads.

Where From Here

They want to continue building upon the foundation they've created across several communities, says Ramirez. "As funding opportunities become available for the Polk County Family Resource Center, we can look at expanding the number of days and hours our staff can be available to the public."

Their consistently looking years down the road and hope to see all the sites thriving. Some long-term goals include,

operating five days a week and later evening hours to support working parents' schedules.

One of the biggest drives of the FRC from its inception is getting parents involved in the development of programs and activities offered at their locations.

They have an established Parent Advisory Committee, with representation from all areas of Polk County. These parents are offered opportunities to build and exercise parent leadership skills and help develop the FRC's services, programs, and activities they want to see offered to other parents in their community.

"We would love for each site to become a cornerstone in their community. A place where families and community gather," expresses Ramirez.



Tim Albrecht / Polk County

ABOVE: Polk County Social Services employees Samantha Stern and William King hosted a Take and Bake event during the grand opening of the Fosston FRC.

TOP: A rack full of flyers for different services offered throughout Polk County.

Would you enjoy a work-at-home career in child care?

Polk County families are in need of Family child care homes (previously called daycare homes). Children under school age, infants, and toddlers of working families have the greatest need for child care. Parents choose home family child care for many reasons.

- Family child care offers a more close knit setting than a larger day care or center (which are also limited locally).

- Family child care usually consists of one provider caring for up to 10-12 children in the comfort of their own home. Providers are required to do day to day activities with each age group which provide for the physical, intellectual, emotional and social development of children.



The licensing process for a Family child care is less complex than opening a center. It takes roughly 6-8 weeks to obtain training, background studies, and complete the inspection of the child care home. Licensing for Family child care is a very thorough process. Family child cares are licensed by the State of Minnesota to comply with health and safety regulations, however, Polk County Social Services can help with the application process and will be the agency that works with a new applicant on licensing and will make a final recommendation to the state. The goal of the Polk County Licensor is to make sure that a licensed provider meets all requirements to ensure that they will provide quality and safe care to children. The Licensor is also available to answer questions and guide a new applicant through the whole process.

Polk County is in need of individuals who have the special gift of caring for children

There are many resources to assist you if you are interested in this career. Start-up grants are available.

More information can be found on the Polk County website
www.co.polk.mn.us/269/Child-Care-Licensing

If you would like to speak to someone or receive additional information, please contact

Polk County Social Services Licensing Unit
612 N. Broadway, Rm #302, Crookston, MN 56716
218-281-3127
pccs.intake@co.polk.mn.us



SHERIFF HOSTS FISH FRY-DAY

ABOVE: Polk County Sheriff James Tadman hands a bag of meals to a resident in the drive-thru line. Sheriff Tadman hosted the fish fry April 4 at Sacred Heart School in East Grand Forks, MN.

MIDDLE RIGHT: Several volunteers prepare meals for the drive-thru line.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Students prepare fish to be fried.

BELOW: Sheriff Tadman takes a moment with his wife Stacy, who volunteered at the event.

Photos by Michelle Strezishar and Tim Albrecht / Polk County



SOLID WASTE FACILITY UPDATES

Many changes related to solid waste are set to begin in 2025 – in Polk County, the northwest region of Minnesota, and the state overall. Whether the changes are to facilities, programs, or laws, they all will have an impact. Polk County and the north-west Minnesota have been very active in these areas of change. Several of these areas of change have been indicated in previous newsletters.

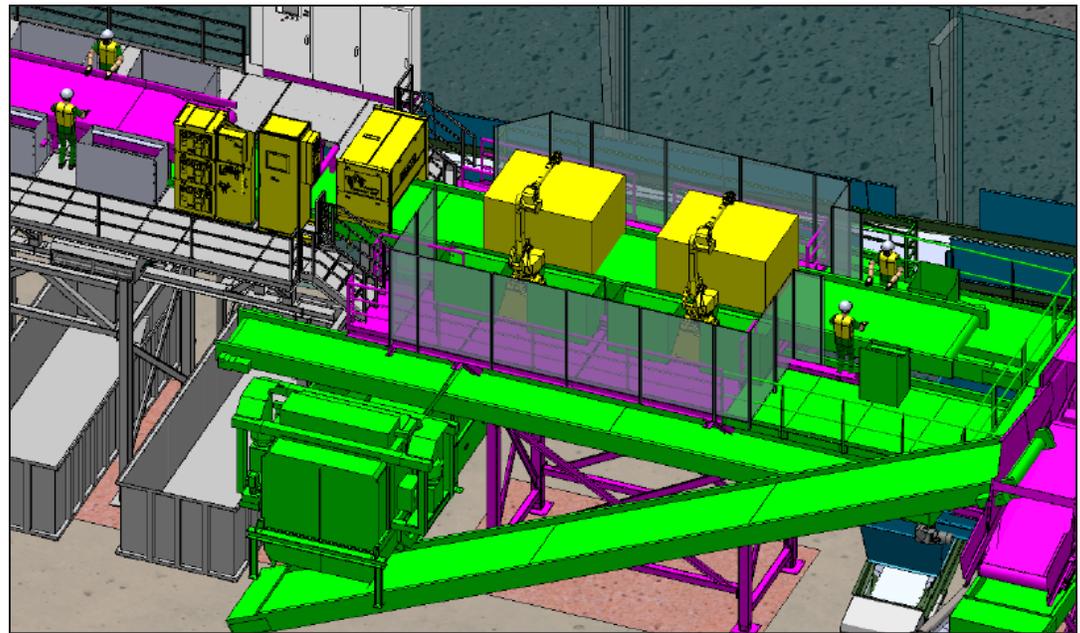
Polk was awarded, and has now executed, two grants from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) in 2024. Those grants totaled over \$2.35M in State funds and required a match of \$700K in local funds.

The goal of the grants is to make additional improvements to the Polk County Resource Recovery Facility (RRF) – specifically the Material Recovery Facility (MRF) which processes both waste and recyclables from the six County partnership (Beltrami, Clearwater, Hubbard, Mahnomon, Norman and Polk) and to the Organics Material Compost Facility (Compost Facility) at the Polk Landfill Complex. Both projects are scheduled to occur in the fall of 2025.

Recycling Grant

The first grant, the Enhanced Recycling Project (Recycling Grant), was to make changes to the MRF to improve processing efficiency and to recover more materials from both the waste and recycling streams. Two pieces of equipment are featured in the Recycling Grant: (1) a specialized bag opener, and (2) a double-deck screener.

Many of the recyclable materials not recovered from the waste stream are lost due to the garbage bags being punctured but not releasing the contents of the bags for the down-stream recycling equipment to identify and remove those materials. The specialized bag opener to be integrated by this grant into the MRF will hold those bags in-place while the cutter slices through the bag and liberates the contents.



Courtesy Photo

Computer generated rendering of the new Artificial Intelligence scanning system and Robotic Sorters which will be added to the Polk MRF to identify and remove specially designed compostable bags with organics.

The double-deck screen will be integrated into the MRF on the ‘fines’ line – the part of the waste and recycling stream that is under 3 inches in size. This stream contains many recyclable materials that would be captured and recycled if not for their smaller size, ultra-thin, or ultra-light characteristics.

The top screening deck of this equipment will capture these small recyclable materials and redirect them back to the sorting equipment they otherwise were avoiding. The lower deck of this equipment will screen out the very fine materials (i.e. grit) from the other materials on the deck.

The material that does not fall through the lower screening deck will be rich in glass material that meets glass recycling market requirements. The grit that passes through the lower screening deck will continue to be used as Alternative Daily Cover at the MSW Landfill.

Compost Grant

The second grant, the Co-Collected Organics Composting Project (Compost Grant), was to make changes

to the MRF and to the Organics Compost Facility located at the Landfill Complex.

The changes to the MRF included reconfiguration of some equipment to allow for the installation of robots. Two robotic arms would be paired to an artificial intelligence system to identify and remove specialized compostable bags from the waste stream. Residents in the six County Partnership would be able to separate the organics fraction of their garbage at home for the purpose of composting.

Under this new program, residents would utilize specially designed compostable bags to place their food scraps into. When these small compostable bags are full of organics, they simply tie a knot in the bag and place the full bag of organics into the same trashcan or garbage cart they currently put their bagged household trash into.

The garbage collector picks up the trashcan or garbage cart which contains both bags of trash and bags of organics and brings them to the Polk RRF.

The robots at the MRF would identify and remove those specialized bags of

organics as they pass by with the rest of the garbage. The robots would pick that bag of organics off the belt and drop it down a chute to be aggregated and sent to the Compost Facility at the Landfill Complex.

A similar program is currently being implemented in Ramsey and Washington Counties. More information on the Ramsey/Washington County Program can be found at: <https://foodscrapspickup.com>.

Compost Facility improvements under the Compost Grant would be to construct large bunkers that allow compost to be processed more quickly and increase the compost facility capacity by going from a passive windrow compost process to an aerated static pile compost process.

The advantage of the aerated static pile compost process is that air is blown into the compost pile to create a more efficient and uniform compost rate throughout the pile that does not rely on turning the composting material frequently.

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New Law

Changes to laws have occurred, or are scheduled to progress, in 2025. In 2024 two significant law changes occurred, though the changes have not gone into effect yet, related to Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) concepts. The EPR concept is that the manufacturer(s) of a specific product are responsible for managing the material after its intended use – specifically its reuse, recycling, or composting.

The first law targets boat wrap (the blue or white plastic film wrapped around boats and pontoons for winter storage). The producer of boat wrap is required to organize a stewardship organization and adopt a plan to manage discarded wrap.

The stewardship program, on behalf of the boat wrap manufacturers, is responsible in managing its collection, reuse or recycling. The guidelines and processes are currently being identified and soon thereafter will be implemented.

After September 2025 it will be illegal for a producer of boat wrap to sell wrap in Minnesota unless they participate in the stewardship plan. By 2030 the stewardship organization must document at least 50% of all boat wrap sold in Minnesota was collected for reuse or recycling, and by 2035 that requirement raises to 80%.

Second Law

The second law targets ‘waste packaging’, which includes an extensive list of materials including: cardboard, paper, plastic bags/film, containers (aluminum cans, glass jars, plastic bottles and steel cans), juice pouches, milk cartons, packing peanuts, etc.

The list is very diverse, as waste packaging includes not only those materials routinely collected in residential



Courtesy Photo

Computer generated cross-section rendering of the new double-deck fines screen which will be added to the Polk MRF. Materials cascade downward, and separate themselves into three fractions based on their ability to fit through the holes in the grey (upper) or brown (lower) decks. Materials that don't fall through the grey deck are sent back to the MRF for processing. Materials that don't fall through the brown deck are glass-rich and will be sent to glass recyclers. Materials that fall through the brown deck are sent to the landfill for reuse as cover material.

recycling programs, but most to the other materials found in the household trash (plastic bags, films, odd-ball plastics, foils, tubes, etc.).

Compared to the boat wrap EPR, the Waste Packaging EPR is wide-sweeping and extremely complex. The law makes the manufacturers of these materials responsible for their collection, transportation, processing and end use (reuse, recycling, composting, etc.).

To accomplish this initiative, the manufacturers of packaging are required to self-organize into a funding and implementation organization called the Producer Responsibility Organization (PRO). The PRO is expected to accomplish the goals that are established in a plan established by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA).

The MPCA's plan is based on the direction of an Advisory Board (AB) which consists of an 18-member appointed Board representing specific interests established by this EPR Law. To date, that AB has been appointed and has met once while the MPCA has released Requests for Propos-

als (RFPs) to do the required infrastructure needs assessments.

More information on the Waste Packaging EPR can be found at: <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/air-water-land-climate/extended-producer-responsibility-for-packaging>

C&D Rule Revisions

The MPCA is likewise expected to continue its process to adopt new rules to regulate the disposal of construction and demolition debris (C&D) at unlined C&D landfills.

The process officially started in 2019 with the appointment of a Rule Advisory Panel (RAP) tasked with making recommendations to the MPCA on draft rules. The RAP process ended in 2023.

The MPCA embarked on several regional workshops held at eight locations around the state in 2024 – locally they were held in Detroit Lakes and Bemidji. From that point the MPCA stated it would take the comments and input received at these workshops, combined with the RAP input, and draft those new rules.

It was intended that the draft rules for C&D would be released for public review by the

end of March 2025. That has not occurred to date, though it appears the MPCA intends to put out an ‘overview’ of the draft rules by early May 2025.

Nearly every C&D landfill in rural areas of MN is unlined, and all statements from MPCA to date have indicated that the intent of the new rules would be to require their closure. At present the MPCA has not identified any viable alternative to unlined C&D landfills for most rural communities and has provided no financial assistance to convert any unlined landfills.

Hub & Spoke Project

In response to the MPCA initiative to close unlined C&D landfills, a group of counties self-organized to form a partnership known as the Nine County NW Regional Group (9-Co Group) made up of: Beltrami, Cass, Clearwater, Hubbard, Mahnommen, Marshall, Norman, Polk, and Red Lake, and including portions of Leech Lake, Red Lake, and White Earth Tribal Nations.

The 9-Co Group has applied for, received and completed an MPCA Grant to undertake

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a study to determine costs of compliance with intended new rules and alternatives for the 9-Co Group. The alternative system that resulted is known as a Hub & Spoke (H&S) system.

Simply put, most small unlined C&D landfills would close and be replaced with small mini-transfer stations (Spokes). In addition, two unlined C&D landfills would convert to lined C&D landfills to serve as regional lined C&D landfills (Hubs) for the 9-Co Group.

Because the cost is prohibitive, State Bonding funds were sought. Because the application contained funding for C&D landfills, the MPCA removed the 9-Co Group's project from their recommendation to the Governor for inclusion in his Bonding Request for 2024.

Ultimately, the MN Legislature did not put forward a Bonding Bill for the 9-Co Group H&S project to be included for funding. Application was made for the 2025 legislative session. Revised bills for the H&S project have been drafted and are currently awaiting introduction which is scheduled to occur the week of April 21st. In the House, the bill is HF3212. In the Senate the Bill is SF3404.

The MPCA recently informed the 9-Co Group that it has reconsidered its opposition to funding Hubs and would not oppose funding a Hub in the 9-Co service area. All local legislators in the 9-Co Group had all previously expressed support for the H&S project, but acknowledged that the current budget projections make funding this expensive project difficult.

PFAS Testing at RRF

The concern over all aspects of a group of chemicals known as PFAS and PFOS, or the 'forever chemical', continues to draw interest and concern. Very little is known about this man-made pollutant which seems to be found nearly

everywhere and within nearly everything.

A focus on PFAS is concentrated on three areas in MN: generators or PFAS chemicals, waste disposal facilities, and wastewater treatment facilities. Generators are responsible for putting the PFAS into existence, and the waste and wastewater systems are the receivers of the end products that contain PFAS.

From last fall to last winter Polk was one of three RRFs in MN that was included in a PFAS study to represent part of the spectrum of facilities in operation (the other RRFs include Prairie Lakes RRF in Perham and HERC RRF in Minneapolis).

The intent of the study was to provide information to the public and regulators about the RRFs role in managing PFAS by testing both the stack and ash system at these RRFs.

Because the knowledge and understanding of PFAS is limited and still emerging, it is difficult to compare facility testing results and determine the meaning of those results. However, the preliminary testing numbers indicate significant reductions in PFAS levels appear to be occurring.

A final report which puts these results into context should be released soon. Its expected, based on a limited number of other facilities who have conducted some PFAS testing, that PFAS destruction at RRFs at some significant level is occurring.

If our study documents the same type of result, it would cement RRFs as a primary or preferred waste disposal solution to the PFAS issue.

Other Projects

Polk County RRF is required to conduct a full compliance stack test for its air permit every three years. In the two off-years, Polk RRF is required to conduct a relative accuracy and testing audit (RATA) to ensure its continuous emissions monitoring systems, and reports generated off of them, are accurate. 2025 is a full stack test year. The Polk RRF stack test will be conducted on the week of April 21st.

The Polk RRF air permit expires in Dec 2025. Application for renewal is due six months prior to expiration. Polk is currently working on the application for renewal of its Air Permit.

Polk continues to work with the MPCA on completion of many parts of its landfill permit. This has been a very long and frustrating process. Plans for the landfill that were required as part of the 2015 Permit application – permit issued in Feb 2017 – still have not been approved. Those Plans were verbally agreed to be approved following an Oct 2022 meeting.

The permit modification for the compost facility – to allow Polk to accept certain materials and sell the compost produced – were submitted in 2020. The requirements for implementing that 2020 permit modification were found in those landfill plans which were agreed to in Oct 2022 but still have not been approved.

The 2024 Permit Modification filed in May 2024 to allow for a revised MSW landfill footprint based on the wetland permits received still have not been approved, despite the Phase 15+ MSW landfill cell it was intended to allow having been constructed in the summer of 2024.

The result of the MPCA withholding these approvals has been the inability for Polk to sell the compost produced, loss of revenue, and if not issued very soon it will impact the compost improvements that are part of the 2024 Compost Grant.

The Polk landfill permit expires in Feb 2027. Application for renewal is due six months prior to expiration. Polk is beginning work on that

application currently – which is hindered by the outstanding issues related to its current permit and modifications not acted upon.

The Legislature continues to consider bills related to the management of rechargeable batteries, carpet, recycling program funding, and solid waste taxes. Other regional initiatives to address rechargeable batteries, sharps, pharmaceuticals, cannabis waste, and vape pens are ongoing.

Revising local ordinances to reflect changes in these laws and programs is also on the radar. 2025 is shaping up to be a very busy year.

Jon Steiner
Environmental
Services Director



Polk County Social Services
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