



COUNTY OF CHISAGO

2020 ANNUAL REPORT

Chisago County Government Center
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2020 was a unique and difficult year for many due to the COVID-19 Global Pandemic. Although much of the start of 2021 has been a continuance 2020, we are beginning to see the 'light at the end of the tunnel.' Here is a brief look at how *your* Chisago County government fared during 2020:

Public Works – In addition to the annual road and bridge maintenance, 2020 saw Chisago County Public Works reconstruct CSAH 25 (Olinda Trail) from Washington County to 296th Street, replace culverts and resurface CR 63 (Brunswick Rd) and CR 93 (500th St), construct roundabouts at TH 95 & CSAH 14 (Hemmingway Ave) and at TH 8 and CSAH 26 (Pleasant Valley Rd). The County also assisted Sunrise Township in replacing Bridge L5981 on 460th Street.

- The County continues the predesign and environmental assessment activities for the TH 8 reconstruction project between I-35 and Karmel Avenue in Chisago City.
- Work continues with the Auditor's Office on updating the Public Ditch system.
- Work with the Chisago County SWCD continues on efforts to eradicate the noxious weed Wild Parsnip.

Probation – Provides the Chisago County District Court and Citizens with researched-based practices designed to enhance public safety and promote offender rehabilitation. The Department works diligently to provide enhanced public safety through probation casework and field contacts.

- Adult probation officers supervised 1,828 clients and 2,008 cases in 2020.
- Juvenile probation officers supervised 135 juveniles and 175 cases in 2020.
- Juvenile probation officers appeared in approximately 108 court hearings in 2020.
- Adult probation officers appeared in approximately 118 court hearings in 2020.
- Probation supervised 622 clients on pretrial supervision in 2020.
- Probation completed 168 bail evaluations in 2020.
- Probation completed 20 mental health screens on juveniles in 2020.
- Probation completed 291 field contacts on juveniles and 384 field contacts on adult clients.
- Probation logged 11,611 miles for field contacts, trainings and meetings.
- Probation continues to develop and provide cognitive programming for the offenders supervised.

Recorder – The Department saw a 25% increase in recording documents for 2020, which was especially challenging due to reduced staffing because of COVID. The Department remained in compliance for the year ending at 98.02% with a requirement by the State to be at least 90%. Vitals records income remained flat because the public had a hard time getting documents notarized for processing due to the statewide shutdowns. The Department saw income increased because some counties remain closed to the public, while Chisago continued processing vitals that other counties would typically process. Chisago's online tract index known as LandShark did see an increase because it was the only way companies could complete tract index searches when the Government Center was closed to the public – this would not have been possible if the County had not gotten the tract index imaged and loaded into the system January 2020.

Land Notification began in 2020, which is a program where the public can sign up to receive alerts should a real estate document be filed within our Department against their name, business name or property identification number(s). This a free service that we are offering to the public to notify them of property fraud.

Assessor – The Department provides appraisal and classification of all the real and some personal property, responds to public inquiries regarding property, maintains records of all programs, and defends the appraisal and classification of property. It is responsible for the Administration of the State tax programs: veterans exemption, community service class, job Z, managed forest land class, restaurant on lakes class, aggregate resource preserve, homestead, relative homestead, disability homestead, wet lands,

prairie lands, open space, green acres, 2B rural land, agriculture preserve, property tax refund, exemptions from tax and abatements. The COVID pandemic caused considerable challenges in the administration in all facets of the office functions. Particularly during the appeal process where social distancing hampered inspections and boards of appeal meetings. Highlights for 2020 include:

- The new Vision CAMA system worked flawlessly in its' first full year for the 2020 Assessment.
- First full year of field inspections utilizing the new Vision field devices resulted in a significant improvement the number of inspections made despite the COVID restraints.
- There was substantial progress made in catching up on the Statutory Quintile inspection requirement.
- The County obtained a favorable decision that was revenue neutral after final disposition in our Shopko tax case.
- Continued work with MAAO and AMC on procedural reforms to the Minnesota property tax system through legislation, which has been hampered by COVID issues dominating the Legislative Agenda.
- The 2020 State Board of Equalization was excellent with no issued State orders or follow up issues for 2021.

County Total Parcel Count	
Taxable Real Estate	26962
Exempt Real Estate:	1567
Personal Property:	187
Manufactured Home:	929
County Total:	29645

MARKET TRENDS		
	% Change from Last Year	Amount of New Construction
Residential	5.5%	\$63,992,700
Seasonal Residential Recreational	7.1%	\$2,291,300
Agricultural (2a)	3.7%	\$263,400
Rural Vacant Land (2b)	7.7%	\$0
Apartments	7.0%	\$5,475,400
Commercial	1.5%	\$5,176,500
Industrial	12.5%	\$142,200

County Auditor-Treasurer – In 2020, the Department continued to maintain voter registrations, process property transfers, manage expense payments and revenue receipts, calculate and collect property taxes and conduct financial report and internal audits. Department highlights include:

- The County received an unmodified (accurate and compete) Annual Audit for its 2019 finances with no findings and maintained its AA+ Bond Rating with Standard & Poors.
- In 2020, the County collected 98% of the County's share of the current year property taxes.
- In 2020, the Department collected and distributed \$57.5M of property tax to the taxing jurisdictions in the County.
- The Department received, monitored and disbursed the \$6.7M of CARES funds received for COVID-19 relief.
- 2020 was a Presidential Election year. The Department administers and oversees all election activities.
 - For the first time since 1992 the State held a Presidential Nominating Primary election in March 2020.
 - Voter turnout was at an all-time high in 2020
 - Our office trained over 320 election judges to work at the polls on Election Day
 - In the November 2020 General Election 34,685 (94.4%) registered voters cast a ballot in the election
 - That is an 33.4% increase over the 2018 election
 - 13,893 voters voted by absentee which is an 240.9% increase over the 2018 election



Environmental Services – The Department oversees planning, zoning and building codes, coordinates solid waste, recycling, household hazardous waste and septic programs, manages shoreland, wetlands, parks & trails, and water resources. Highlights from 2020 include:

- Issued 1,312 construction permits compared to 1,223 the in the previous year; maintained this heavy inspection load while also transitioning staff in both the Building Official and Building Inspector positions. New home construction was on par with 2019 issuing 136 permits compared to 133 in 2019. Department permit and construction related revenues exceeded \$895,000 (14%) over projections.
- Administered 26 Variance requests by the Board of Adjustment and Appeals; and administered 17 subdivision/plat request and 7 other Interim and/or Conditional Use Permit Requests through the Planning Commission. Carried out these functions while adjusting to Covid practices, and adjusting to public meetings under emergency declaration(s) protocols and procedural changes.
- Administered third revision of the Solar Ordinance; developed a short term rental licensing ordinance and license program; and initiated ordinance research for Shooting Ranges, One Acre Buildable, and Septic. Planning Commission reviews of other general zoning ordinance provisions during work sessions were halted due to Covid emergency declarations.
- Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) inspection program activity was intensive. Due to the pandemic, boating activity was very high, resulting in a record 19,458 watercraft inspections completed at 24 lakes in Chisago County and in the Comfort Lake Forest Lake Watershed District. The County found no new infestations of zebra mussels or spiny waterfleas. A new monitoring program for spiny waterfleas began on/in 11 lakes and early detection programs continued for zebra mussels through monitoring plates stationed at 15 lakes within the County.
- Monitored 18 lakes for conductivity, which is an alternative method to evaluate chloride levels in lakes. Test results show that the lakes monitored have low conductivity/chloride levels (often attributed to road salt treatments) that do not exceed the MN state water quality standards.
- The Chisago County Board approved the new Lower St. Croix Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan and Chisago County Local Priorities Appendix. This new plan replaces the former Chisago County Local Water Management Plan. With the new plan, 16 partners will work together on projects benefiting the entire watershed over the next ten years. Significant targeted state funds will be available for projects identified in the plan. The SWCD and County Environmental Services Department, along with the County Board of Commissioners, have been strong partners in this extensive plan development process.
- The Chisago Lakes Lake Improvement District removed cattail bogs from the channel between North Center and North Lindstrom Lakes. This facilitated boat navigation through the channel area, and allows boats to navigate 8 miles one way from the south end of Chisago Lake to the south end of South Center Lake (the longest stretch of navigation in the metro area, second only to Lake Minnetonka).
- The Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission (GMRPTC) announced Legacy grant recommendations benefitting Chisago County for the FY2022 funding cycle. The Sunrise Prairie Regional Trail is recommended for a 2.6 mile trail extension and connection from 410th street in North Branch to the City of Harris. Recommended grant award was \$1,182,282 with a Chisago County local match pledge of 15% (\$209,520).
- Completed construction of the Swedish Immigrant Regional Trail through Interstate State Park to Taylors Falls City Hall. This project included significant bridge installation and State Park environmental collaboration and considerations.
- Served a record 2,834 households (up 4.2% from 2019) at the County’s Household Hazardous Waste facility (North Branch) and generated \$37,500 in recycling cost reimbursements via the State’s Paint Care program.
- Administered 5-Unwanted Medications Disposal Program drop off locations in cooperation with local police departments and the Chisago County Sheriff’s Office, and collected in excess of 1,977.5 pounds of unwanted medications – almost 1 ton! Now in its 14th year, this pioneering Disposal Program has disposed of more than 19,777 pounds of medications protecting groundwater and landfill contamination.

Sheriff's Office – The Office had a challenging year in 2020, with changes in operations dealing with the COVID 19 pandemic but remained fully operational. In November 2020, the Sheriff's Office deployed a body worn camera program for all active patrol members. This program will improve transparency with the community as well as evidence collection aiding criminal prosecution. The Office also retired K9 Recon at the end 2019 and welcomed new K9 Ghost who is a 2 year old male, Belgian Malinois.

- Patrol – The division handled 47,374 calls for service in 2020. This is 10.5% increase in total calls for service from 2019.
 - Notables include:
 - Traffic Stops = 4,870
 - Driving Complaints = 1,263
 - Business, Park and Area Checks = 18,311
 - Medicals = 1,235
 - Suspicious Vehicle or Person(s) = 700
- Jail – The 2020 Average Daily Population was 31.71 inmates which is a 50% decrease from 2019. This decrease was in direct relation to the COVID 19 pandemic. Jail staff processed 1066 bookings within the year.
 - Other projects include: Implementation of video court systems for virtual hearings. Video systems installed in all programming rooms for virtual programs/classes. Agreement with Canvas Health Crisis Negotiations to accept suicidal inmates to Jail and have them evaluated prior to booking completion. Our in-house Treatment Program was upgraded to dual diagnosis for mental health and substance abuse.
- Dispatch – In 2020 the Office's Emergency Communication Division received 20,281 emergency 911 calls, with 14,973 of those received as wireless calls. In addition, 64,013 administrative calls were processed through the division.
 - Other updates include:
 - Stringent PPE/Pandemic measures were implemented to maintain a staffed and functional workplace during the Covid-19 crisis. This included station barriers, temporary minimum staffing, department access restrictions, enhanced workplace disinfection and strict PPE utilization and adherence. All staff were also fitted for N-95 masks.
 - Implemented mandatory COVID symptom interview process to protect responders and aid in statistical pandemic data reporting.
 - Upgraded phone system to implement enhanced cell location classes of service. This enables enhanced locating features to add specific units in a multiplex or office building, as well as showing floor numbers (where available and based on mobile device capabilities).
- Emergency Management (EM) – Emergency Management had a busy 2020. Although the "responding" side was slower, COVID-19 brought a whole lot of challenges and changes.
 - EM did assist Public Health with their EOC meetings and also worked closely with them along with our Public Safety partners: Law Enforcement, EMS and Fire departments, gathering PPE and getting it out to those organizations in need.
 - EM worked with the Chisago Lakes High School in making reusable face shields for all our partners and some of our elderly care facilities. EM also (with the help of deputies) were on call to run to St Cloud to pick up requested supplies for our nursing homes and deliver to Public Health. CARES funding allowed the purchase of some much needed equipment to prepare us for a better response, not only for COVID-19, but other County emergencies.

Health and Human Services – Health and Human Services spent the majority of 2020 working through the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Over 80 variances/waivers were granted through the MN Department of Human Services, modifying the way services are administered. An additional 27 variances/waivers were granted through the Minnesota Department of Health, also modifying service delivery requirements. A significant benefit of many of these waivers was allowing services to be provided remotely through telehealth or other virtual platforms. This allowed services to continue for the majority of our Chisago County residents. There were also waivers that allowed individuals and families to stay on necessary food or financial programs without having to repeatedly re-

certify. These waivers ensure that families and children in Chisago County continued to get the food and financial support they needed to get through the challenges of the pandemic.

- MnCHOICES Assessors completed 1,023 MnCHOICES Assessments for Chisago County residents.
- Over 100 new Disability Waivers were opened for Chisago County residents in 2020. This brought the number of individuals served by disability waivers up to over 700. The Disability Waiver Budget for 2020 was \$39.8 million. The majority of those dollars are spent here in Chisago County.
- Veterans Services continued their public outreach efforts in spite of the pandemic. There were 309 office visits conducted, 109 new claims filed and 26 veterans signed up for VA medical benefits for the first time. Over \$18 million comes directly to veterans in Chisago County and \$15 million being spent here on medical care for veterans. This year there was an additional \$47,160 provided to veterans through relief grants.
- Over 2,400 individuals received support through the Income Maintenance Program. This includes cash, emergency cash, food support and housing support programs. Additionally, 108 families were served through the child care assistance program, helping to provide quality child care for families during these difficult times.
- 215 adults and 117 children received support and services from Chisago County Behavioral Health Case Managers.
- Adult and child protection received over 1200 reports of suspected maltreatment. Both areas continued to provide direct services and supports to individuals in spite of the COVID-19 pandemic, to protect some of the most vulnerable citizens in Chisago County.
- Foster care services licensed 86 adult foster homes, 27 traditional child foster homes, and 85 family/relative foster homes.
- Public Health continued to work to provide their ongoing services, in addition to dealing with COVID-19 challenges. They conducted Contact Tracing and the Investigation of reported cases, COVID testing, established a COVID-19 hotline and data dashboard on the County website. Additionally, they worked with local partners (long term care facilities, jail, law enforcement, clinics, churches, schools and local businesses and the community) to assist in their COVID-19 planning.
- Women, Infant and Children (WIC) enrolled 225 baby and prenatal clients into the program, and the Baby Café was able to continue virtual visits serving 185 mothers and babies.

Economic Development – The Chisago County HRA-EDA assists with business expansions and community development projects, encourages faster and more reliable Internet service, and promotes and maintains affordable housing opportunities. In 2020, the HRA-EDA:

- Served a total of 55 clients through the Small Business Development Center (SBDC). Of those, 19 were clients looking for counseling services, 22 had called in for assistance with state and federal COVID/CARES programs, and 14 met with an online marketing consultant sponsored by the HRA-EDA and SBDC.
- Administered \$2,959,303 in Small Business and Nonprofit Relief Grants to 236 small businesses and 31 nonprofits in Chisago County. The CARES Act Funds were administered on behalf of Chisago County, as well as Chisago City, Lindstrom, North Branch, Rush City, Shafer and Wyoming.
- The HRA-EDA continued to work toward better Internet services by working with Chisago Lake and Franconia Townships on a Border-to-Border grant, being the fiscal agent for the Chisago Lakes Blandin Broadband Communities \$75,000 grant, becoming a state certified Telecommute Forward Community, and funding fiber broadband to the Stacy Ponds Business Park.
- Business development highlights include A-1 Tire, Fox Valley Metrology, the IDEA Company, Revised Iron, North Star Insulation, the MidContinent facility and two additional Kwik Trips.
- The 84-unit Rosehill Senior Living apartments are under construction in Lindstrom. The housing development utilized the Property Assessed Clean Energy program (PACE) administered through the county. Other housing Silver Creek Senior Living (52 new units) in Rush City and Cherokee Place Apartments (48 units) in North Branch are now open.
- The HRA-EDA updated its branding and website to better market the County and its resources. To go with the website is a new monthly marketing newsletter. Attended virtual site visits and virtual events in efforts to market the industrial sites to realtors.

Attorney's Office – In spite of the obstacles presented by COVID-19, the County Attorney's Office continued to prosecute all crimes and offenses for the County and provide both consequences for juvenile delinquents and supportive services for youth and their families. In the capacity as legal counsel for various County departments, the Office works to keep children safe from abuse and neglect and pursue protection for adults by representing the County Health and Human Services Department. Additionally the

County Attorney's Office provides legal representation and advice for County departments, staff, and elected officials on a wide variety of issues.

- In 2020 the Office reviewed 1687 referrals and charged over 1128 criminal cases including adult and juvenile delinquency matters;
- Attorneys made a total of 9112 court appearances during the year, though due to the district court's transition to remote (Zoom) hearings many court appearances were accomplished through the use of technology. Two jury trials were held in-person in the courthouse with the use of strict COVID-19 protocols which helped to keep the jurors, attorneys and staff safe.
- The County Attorney's Office handled a total of 88 child protection cases (CHIPS, permanency and truancy) in 2020. The total volume of child protection cases were down slightly likely due in part to impacts of the pandemic and children not interacting with people who would be mandated reporters of maltreatment. The County in collaboration with schools and probation, navigated the obstacles of enforcing school attendance or engagement when children were no longer attending in-person school. Schools and the County worked to adapt to the changing landscape.
- There were 259 new civil files opened in 2020, including civil commitment, child support, paternity matters, requests for legal opinions, contract review, forfeiture and data requests; and open civil matters as of December 2019 totaled more than 2,631.

Information Technology & Facilities – The Department supports critical infrastructure and multiple facilities across the County providing high-quality services and programs. 2020 highlights/challenges include:

- Moved from Microsoft SKYPE to Microsoft TEAMS for the entire County, this was accomplished in 7 days, due to COVID Emergency Operations activation.
- Full suite of LinkedIn Learning is now available to every County employee and will be used to provide training with the ability to track who has completed the training.
- The option of remote work has been greatly enhanced, currently the County has ADDED:

a. Total New Remote Users	200
b. Total New Hardware	247
c. Total New Smartphones	82
- Upgraded 7 conference rooms with new technology to allow TEAMS meetings and conference calling with state of the art audio and video.
- The air handlers in the Courthouse, Center City PW, PSC, ECC, NB HHS facilities have had UV air scrubbers added which provides a very effective way of eliminating airborne viruses. All of the air handlers in all of the facilities have had their air filter capacity upgrade to more efficiently remove airborne particles.
- The facility cleaning schedules were brought into alignment with the new CDC recommendations, which has meant that every facility has some level of cleaning done two times a day.
- The entire probation department was relocated into the newly remodeled Room 100 area of the Government Center to provide more room for the staff.

Partnerships and Cooperative Efforts – The County continues to protect land and water resources fiscally through the Soil and Water Conservation District. Additionally, the County continues to fund the East Central Regional Libraries in Chisago County, the U of MN Extension Services, and the County's Agricultural Society (County Fair), and Historical Society.