

Aitkin County Board of Commissioners
Request for County Board Action/Agenda Item Cover Sheet



To: Chairperson, Aitkin County Board of Commissioners Date: 11-7-13

Via: Patrick Wussow, County Administrator

From: Patrick Wussow, County Administrator

Title of Item:

2014 Legislative Priorities

Requested Meeting Date: 11-12-13 Estimated Presentation Time: _____

Presenter: Patrick Wussow, County Administrator

Type of Action Requested (check all that apply)

- For info only, no action requested
- For discussion with possible action
- Let/Award Bid or Quote (attach copy of basic bid/quote specs or summary of complex specs, each bid/quote received & bid/quote comparison)
- Approve/adopt proposal by motion
- Authorize filling vacant staff position
- Request to schedule public hearing or sale
- Request by member of the public to be heard
- Item should be addressed in closed session under MN Statute _____
- Approve under Consent Agenda
- Adopt Ordinance Revision
- Approve/adopt proposal by resolution (attach draft resolution)
- Other (please list) _____

Fiscal Impact (check all that apply)

- Is this item in the current approved budget? Yes _____ No _____ (attach explanation)
- What type of expenditure is this? Operating Capital Other (attach explanation)
- Revenue line account # that funds this item is: _____
- Expenditure line account # for this item is: _____

Staffing Impact (Any yes answer requires a review by Human Resources Manager before going to the board)

- Duties of a department employee(s) may be materially affected. Yes No
- Applicable job description(s) may require revision. Yes No
- Item may impact a bargaining unit agreement or county work policy. Yes No
- Item may change the department's authorized staffing level. Yes No



Supporting Attachment(s)

- Memorandum Summary of Item
- Copy of applicable county policy and/or ordinance (excerpts acceptable)
- Copy of applicable state/federal statute/regulation (excerpts acceptable)
- Copy of applicable contract and/or agreement
- Original bid spec or quote request (excluding complex construction projects)
- Bids/quotes received (excluding complex construction projects, provide comparison worksheet)
- Bid/quote comparison worksheet
- Draft County Board resolution
- Plat approval check-list and supporting documents
- Copy of previous minutes related to this issue
- Other supporting document(s) (please list) _____

Provide (1) copy of supporting documentation NO LATER THAN Wednesday at Noon to make the Board's agenda for the following Tuesday. (If your packet contains colored copies, please provide (4) paper copies of supporting documentation as we do not have a color printer or copier.) Items WILL NOT be placed on the Board agenda unless complete documentation is provided for the Board packets.

AITKIN COUNTY ADMINISTRATION

Aitkin County Courthouse
217 Second Street N.W. Room 130
Aitkin, MN 56431
218-927-7276
Fax: 218-927-7374

TO: Aitkin County Board

FROM: Patrick Wussow, County Administrator

RE: 2014 Legislative Priorities

DATE: November 6, 2013

The County Board discussed the 2014 legislative priorities at their October 22 meeting. The attached list is provided as a starting point, based upon those conversations. Department Heads, employees, and citizens are encouraged to share their ideas prior to and throughout the legislative session.

Aitkin County 2014 Legislative Platform

Top Priorities

State of MN to Collect its share of Property tax

The County Board and AMC both would like the State of MN to collect the State General Tax through an electronic process that it has in place with the collection of sales tax, while the tax remains in place. The **objective** is to eliminate the State General Tax.

PILT

With recent downturn in timber markets and property values PILT is important to the County's ability to provide the benefits of public land.

1. Maintain (important)
2. Increase (Inflationary adjustments)

Magic Act

Much of MS 282 and other statutes that apply to County land are outdated; but there is no consensus among Counties to do any overhauling. Currently most interpretations of statute lean toward prohibiting a practice if not specifically allowed by statute. Elements of the "magic act" would increase flexibility in providing benefits from County Administered lands by allowing projects/practices not specifically addressed by statute.

WCA Wetland Banking

Aitkin County supports legislative efforts to create recommendations for the development of a fee program, administrated by BWSR, which will allow for maximum public value for wetland mitigation projects by giving developers the opportunity to purchase credits (that BWSR could use to recreate wetlands anywhere in the state) in lieu of acre for acre replacement within the county.

Appraisers Licensure Requirements - Unintended Mandates

Aitkin County seeks legislation to be fully funded, repealed or modified. Legislation approved in 2013 requires that every individual who appraises property for tax purposes, be certified at a level of Accredited Assessor or Senior Accredited Assessor by 2019. In counties that have adopted county-wide-assessors, all employees maintain at least a Certified MN Assessor licenses. The new legislation will require an additional certificate which will require excessive licensure and added expense of approximately \$5,000 and 5-6 weeks of training for each employee to attain the necessary training in just Aitkin County. This will be similar for most counties in Minnesota. Aitkin County is acutely aware of this expense as we have a retired County Assessor on the County Board who can provide additional details.

Transportation Funding and Distribution

Aitkin County supports sustainable annual increases in gas tax and motor vehicle registration fees to keep pace with annual construction inflation. Aitkin County supports the current constitutional formula for distribution of the highway user tax distribution fund.

Legislative Positions by Department

Road & Bridge

Transportation Cost Control

Aitkin County supports efforts at the local, state, and federal level to control the rapidly increasing cost of road of bridge construction through the re-examination of mandates that currently apply to transportation projects.

Bonding Programs

Aitkin County supports continuing state funding for local roads and bridges through Local Bridge Bonding and the Local Road Improvement Program.

Wetland Mitigation

Aitkin County supports continuing state funding from non-transportation funding sources for wetland mitigation of county highway projects as provided by the 1996 amendments to the Wetland Conservation Act.

Road Construction Permitting

Aitkin County supports the efforts of state and federal regulatory agencies to streamline current environmental permit requirements for road construction projects.

Aid for Beaver Damage and Containment

Aitkin County supports funding for counties with large beaver control issues to preserve and protect county roads and property owners by funding damage caused by beavers and by funding county containment programs for beavers.

Ten Ton Roads

Aitkin County supports a statewide initiative that will build a comprehensive statewide system of 10-ton local roads to connect to major transportation routes. The system will provide greater transportation efficiencies for farm and forest-to-market roads.

Eminent Domain

Aitkin County supports the current balance in statutes between landowner rights and public agency eminent domain rights as those rights relate to transportation projects.

Aitkin County does not support statutory changes that require public agency reimbursement of landowner attorney fees in eminent domain proceedings.

Great River Road Bonding

Aitkin County supports state financial assistance to complete the third and final phase of the Great River Road National Scenic Byway Improvements on Aitkin County State-Aid Highway 21.

Health & Human Services

Simplifying Health & Human Services Programs

Administrative simplification has the potential to dramatically improve efficiency and effectiveness. It is a critical component to creating a more sustainable health & human services system.

Aligning Funding with Outcomes for Vulnerable Populations

Achieving expected outcomes has become increasingly difficult due to an unsustainable rate of growth in health care and long term care spending combined with decreasing State revenues. Investments must be strategically re-focused in programs that cost-effectively achieve desired outcomes.

Tribal Court Ordered Child Placements

The Agreement on Indian Child Welfare dated February 22, 2007 obligates local social service agencies (counties) to pay for the cost of foster care of Indian children who are placed by tribal court order. Aitkin County supports legislative action to remove the costs of tribal court ordered child placements from the property tax levies of Minnesota counties as it creates disproportionate property tax impacts on Minnesota counties.

Promote Health in all Minnesota Counties through Statewide, Stable Funding for SHIP

The Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP) was launched in 2008 to reduce health care costs and chronic disease rates through local partnerships led by public health. Funding for SHIP was cut by 70% in 2011. For the program to help all Minnesotans live healthier, longer lives SHIP needs to be funded statewide again from a stable source.

Preventing disease is the most common sense and cost-effective way to improve health outcomes and reduce health care costs.

Making healthy choices easier related to smoking, activity levels and nutrition will impact rates of cancer, heart disease, diabetes and other chronic and expensive-to-treat conditions.

Jail Health Care Costs

Make the appropriate statutory changes to allow for inpatient treatment for inmates to be covered by MA. This is allowable under the federal rules and other states are doing this, but a statute change is required to do it in Minnesota. Also allow for public health care program eligibility to continue when an inmate is in custody but not yet convicted of a crime (this change was made for the GAMC program, but change over the last few years mean GAMC essentially no longer exists and other public programs do not allow for this, they end when a person is incarcerated).

Environmental Services/Planning & Zoning

Environment and Natural Resources

Chapter 394 Planning and Zoning Laws

In order to promote the health, safety, morals, and general welfare of the counties within the State of Minnesota, Aitkin County supports legislation that would prevent any changes or legislative acts that alter or change any section, subdivision or subitem of Minnesota Statutes Chapter 394 without going through the rule making process and having support of the Minnesota Association of Planning and Zoning Administrators.

Inverse Condemnation

Aitkin County opposes any legislation which would further restrict, hinder or impair a local unit of government's ability to contract for services, or which would require a local unit of government to compensate a private business/contractor for claimed lost business due to a local unit of government's decision to contract for services.

Program Administration

Aitkin County opposes any state statute, policy or rule changes that result in increased County workload or program costs without commensurate increases in state funding.

Vacation Rental by Owner

In order to protect the public health, safety, neighboring property values, and conserve the economic and natural environmental values of shorelands, Aitkin County opposes any legislation which would restrict, hinder or impair a local unit of government's ability to establish regulations on the use of vacation/private homes as rental property to a transient population.

Land

Forest Land Taxation Policy

Lower timber prices have reduced timber volume from private lands impacting loggers and forest industry – tax policies that encourage active, sustainable forestry practices could provide incentives to good stewardship

1. Remove cap on SFIA payments
2. Look at alternative strategies such as WI MFL program

Land Exchanges

Streamline the process for administrative land exchanges (between Co & State) especially those involving Trust Fund lands. The current laws are extremely cumbersome and add to the cost. These swaps could increase efficiency and reduce costs for all by consolidating areas of fragmented ownership.

Administration

Remove Fiscal Disparities

Aitkin County would like the current Fiscal Disparities aid program (for the taconite relief area) to be eliminated.

Taxation of Local Governments Purchases

Aitkin County and AMC support the exemption of local government purchases from the state and local sales and use taxes.

Open Meeting Law

Aitkin County and AMC support more effective and efficient public notice alternatives and authority to utilize technological tools to conduct needed business; examples include delinquent taxation notices, publication of minutes, etc.

Mandate Reform and Removal

Aitkin County and AMC oppose the implementation of mandates and costs on counties without full and stable funding from the federal or state government. If mandates are not accompanied with commensurate funding, they must be removed in order to prevent property tax increases.

Economic Development

Statewide Property Tax

Aitkin County is concerned with the ever increasing Commercial State property tax on our businesses. Many businesses in Aitkin County pay significantly more to the State Property tax than they do to the local jurisdictions. Not only does this property tax continue to increase but there does not seem to be any accountability for this tax. The State does not hold a Truth in Taxation or similar type hearing nor does the state collect the tax. The State requires the county to collect the tax then turn the collected money over to the State, reducing any accountability on a significant amount of the property tax our businesses are paying. At the very least, the State should collect their own tax and be subject to the same standards that Counties and Cities are in informing the tax payers on their property taxes.

Fiscal Disparities

Aitkin County commercial properties located in the Taconite Relief Area (TRA) are subject to the Fiscal Disparity Tax. Similar to the Commercial State Property Tax, this tax has been increasing disproportionately more than what the local jurisdictions property taxes are. Businesses that are subject to the Fiscal Disparity Tax feel the formula used to distribute the tax should re-examined to determine if it is fair to all jurisdictions in the TRA and if the formula reflects today's current economy and conditions.

Assessors

Property Tax Working Group

Support the recommendations of the Property Tax Working Group, especially the idea of reducing the number of classifications. Everyone who contacts the Property Tax System would appreciate a simpler system for a variety of reasons, including cost of administration. It takes more time to properly classify a property with 55 choices versus the 4 choices that the Group recommends. Consider opposing the Group's idea of a statewide computer system which would decrease local control, potentially increase cost through decreased competition among the computer cooperatives, and cause increased costs through the data conversion process. Also consider opposing the Group's recommendation to switch away from a tax capacity based system since it works and people are used to the system. Changing tax capacity to mill rates would cause lots of confusion for a minimal benefit.

State Funded High Quality Aerial Photography Program

Provide a state funded high quality aerial photography program such as Pictometry. The State already funds the purchase of aerial photography for forestry programs. They also have funded the LIDAR program for all to use. The majority of Minnesota counties already have Pictometry. State funding would shift the burden off the local taxpayers for a program that benefits the public as well as State and local government agencies. The benefits of a product such as Pictometry include greater public safety efficiency, assessment efficiency, as well as permitting and compliance efficiency. Anyone would have an easier time navigating and recreating in the outdoors with such a product available.