

BLUE EARTH COUNTY COMMUNICATOR

Effectively & Efficiently Delivering Essential Services



SPRING/SUMMER 2019

Building Project Brings Big Changes

Government Center expansion and renovation making steady construction progress.

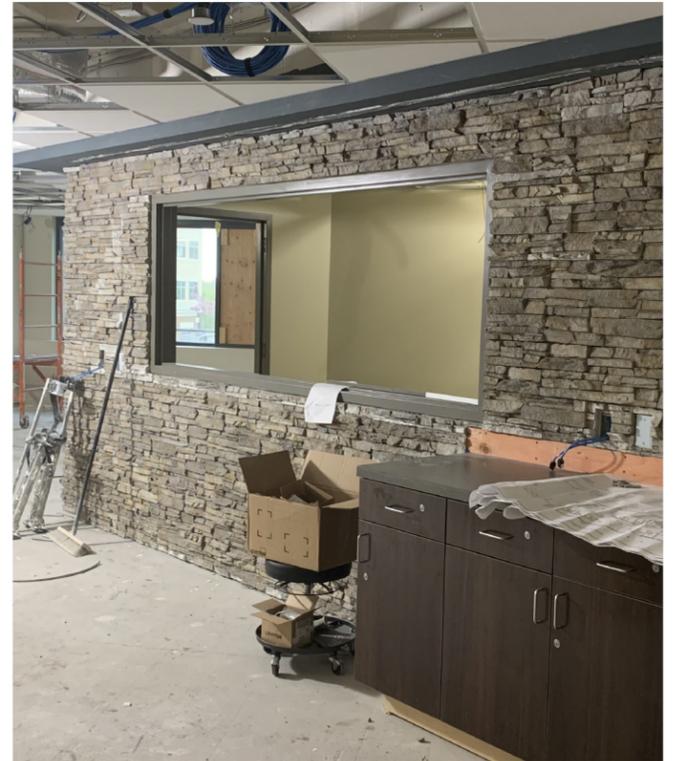
Blue Earth County's Government Center expansion and renovation project, located at 410 S 5th Street in Mankato, continues to make good progress. The project includes a new 344-stall parking ramp, 37,000 square foot building addition and complete renovation of the existing building. The ramp and building addition make up the first phase of the project and will be completed this summer. The second, the renovation phase, is scheduled for completion in the first quarter of 2020.

In an effort to reduce cost and shorten the length of the project, the County chose to complete the project in two phases instead of three phases as was originally planned. As a result, some staff and services are being housed in temporary locations. The Property and Environmental Resources (formerly Environmental Services) and Veterans Services staff can now be found in the Historic Courthouse. The Children and Family Services unit, a unit within Human Services, has temporarily moved their office to the Justice Center. Administrative personnel have also been temporarily relocated.

Occupancy of the new building addition is scheduled to occur this summer. The building addition will house the majority of the Human Services staff with the remainder occupying the renovated part of the building. Another exciting change is that the License Center, which is where citizens obtain drivers licenses, vehicle tabs, marriage licenses, and more, will have a new location on the first floor of the existing Government Center. Currently, the License Center is located in the existing building's lower level. The new location will be available and operational during the renovation phase. We are excited about the new location as it will offer easy access parking on 5th Street.

Blue Earth County recognizes there are many changes happening. We have created a website with construction updates and photographs, parking maps and department location maps. To view the site, visit www.blueearthcountymn.gov/GCProject. In addition, if you have an appointment, check the website or other communications provided to you to ensure you are arriving at the correct location during the transition.

Thank you for your patience and understanding through these changes. We are very confident the final project will assist us in effectively and efficiently serving the citizens of Blue Earth County.



Consolidated Departments Create a One-Stop Shop

The plan for the Government Center building and renovation project included a co-location of the former Environmental and Taxpayer Services Departments. This was identified to better serve our customers and residents by sharing nearby spaces and to promote cost-savings by sharing equipment.

At the end of 2018, staff changes led the County Board to take co-location to the next step by consolidating the two departments, which will now be known as the Property and Environmental Resources Department. The primary goal of the consolidation is to make services they provide stronger by becoming a single, more effective department with a common mission of providing the most efficient customer service possible.

For example, a family buying a piece of bare land in rural Blue Earth County may have had to visit many staff in our offices – from understanding land uses, changing the legal descriptions, recording the property deeds, applying for a permit to construct a home, visiting with the assessor about property valuation, learning about septic systems, wells, and recycling, registering to vote, to finally paying property taxes – all within a few months' time. Now, these divisions will all be incorporated into the consolidated department.

There are many processes that cross-over as staff serve the same customer, and the now-consolidated department is looking forward to easier collaboration and offering a better customer experience.

Until the Government Center project is complete, the Property and Environmental Resources Department is located in the Historic Courthouse. Contact them at (507) 304-4251 or (507) 304-4381.



www.blueearthcountymn.gov

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or by submitting your comment online at
www.blueearthcountymn.gov/connect

Unmanned Aircraft Vehicle Joins the County

The UAV, also known as a drone, has already helped aid in a variety of situations.

In February 2019, the Blue Earth County Sheriff's Office, along with the Property and Environmental Resources Department, implemented an Unmanned Aircraft Vehicle (UAV), better known as a drone, to serve citizens. Drones are emerging as a cutting-edge, state-of-the-art technology for law enforcement agencies, and aligns with the County's commitment to implementing new technology to serve residents.

The Sheriff's Office has a trained staff of five registered pilots to fly and operate the drone, which is weather-resistant and is equipped with a zoom lens and inferred thermal imaging camera.

Drones can be used in a variety of ways, including:

- Search and rescue
- Tactical team calls
- Crowd control
- Apprehending fleeing suspects
- Disaster assessments like chemical spills
- Crime scene and serious automotive crash documentation
- Community education demonstrations

Although the drone is primarily being used by the Sheriff's Office, it is also being utilized by the County for land record surveys and ditch management. The main advantage in these situations is the overhead vantage point, which allows staff to see much more than can be seen from the ground. What normally must be inspected on foot in muddy or wet conditions that can take up to half a day to thoroughly examine, a drone accomplishes in just over an hour.

The drone has already been utilized for a range of activities, including assessments of ice dam flooding near Garden City and evaluation of a silo roof collapse.



Grant Money will be used to Identify Broadband Needs Across the County

Blue Earth County was awarded a \$25,000 Blandin Foundation grant to be used to research rural broadband needs. The foundation is a privately-owned organization that partners and advocates to strengthen rural Minnesota communities as they design and claim ambitious, vibrant futures. The grant, along with an additional \$25,000, which was set aside as part of the county's Information Technology Department budget, will be used to conduct a feasibility study to better understand the county's broadband needs, identify where broadband access is lacking throughout the county and recommend potential solutions to get our rural areas up to recommended state standards. County officials have hired telecommunication consultants with Finley Engineering to conduct the study later this year with plans to conduct resident surveys. Once the study is complete, county staff will be able to better work with area internet service providers on projects and plans for the rural community.

No More Vouchers: WIC Launches e-Cards



The Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program is making it easier for eligible Blue Earth County residents to access healthy foods using technology many of us use every day.

WIC is a federal program that helps pregnant women, new mothers, babies and children up to age five stay healthy. It provides nutrition information, healthy foods, referrals to other health or community programs, and breastfeeding support.

Since the 1970s, WIC had been using paper vouchers to be used on healthy foods, which needed to be signed and the signature compared to one on an identification folder. At times, the system could be cumbersome and time-consuming.

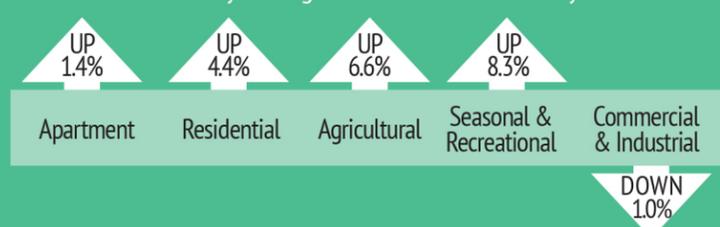
Now, much of that has changed thanks to a new paperless system.

In March 2019, the Blue Earth County WIC clinic program launched the e-WIC Card. The card, which works much like a debit card, has all eligible WIC foods loaded on to it, which makes for an easier, more flexible shopping experience. Transactions at the cash register are more efficient for both shoppers and retailers and normalizes the shopping experience for WIC participants who no longer need to redeem paper vouchers for their purchases.

Contact the Blue Earth County WIC office at (507) 304-4163 for application information.

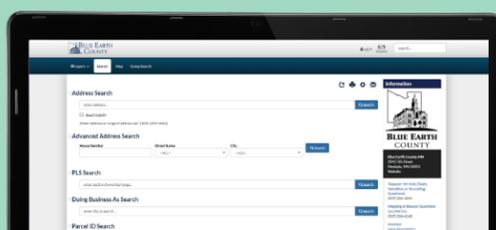
Market Valuation Trends

Property values are an important component of the property tax process for taxes to be paid next year, in 2020. Here are the changes for major property types compared to the 2018 assessment. Please note these are county averages and local markets may be different.



Property Statements

Property tax statements are available 24/7 online by visiting the county's website at www.blueearthcountymn.gov/propertyinfo entering the property address, and navigating to the link under View Notices and Statements.



Immunization Records

The Minnesota Immunization Information Connection (MIIC) is an informational system that combines a person's immunizations into a single record, even if they were given by different health care providers in the state.

To request you or your child's MIIC record, visit www.blueearthcountymn.gov/immunizations and complete a MIIC Immunization Record Request or call (651) 201-3980.

Are You Sure That's Recyclable?

Up to 25% of items in your home recycling bins actually belong in the trash.

Have you ever tossed something in the recycling bin, not knowing whether or not it belongs there, but hoping it can somehow be recycled? That practice is known as 'wishcycling' and it's starting to cause problems for the complex machines that make curbside single-sort recycling possible. It may seem like a small detail - a wrong item in the recycling bin - but it represents a global problem that's preventing thousands of tons of recyclables from ever seeing a second life. That's probably got you thinking, 'so what should and shouldn't belong in the recycling bin?' Below are some of the most common recycling mistakes so you can avoid making them in the future.



Recycling is often sorted through a series of belts and bins. During the process, shreds of paper essentially become litter and can become mixed with non-paper materials. Watch for seasonal county shred events to dispose of these tiny pieces or put them in the garbage.



Oil from pizza, which usually ends up on the bottom of a pizza box, can contaminate an entire batch of paper, making it impossible for the recycling center to recycle the batch. Next time, tear off the not-greasy top, which can be recycled, and throw the bottom in the trash.



Items like wood, concrete and construction debris can damage equipment and are a safety hazard. Next time you're working on a project around your house or getting creative with crafts, be sure to place the wooden components in the garbage.



Takeaway coffee cups have a mixture of paper and plastic in their inner lining, designed to make them both heat and leak-proof. The plastic can't be recycled and the coffee residue in cups and k-cups contaminate other recyclable materials, making them better suited for the trash can.



Plastic bags can get tangled in machinery; they've even been known to shut down entire recycling facilities. Instead, take them back to a local grocer to be disposed of, and don't forget to unbag recyclables. Items should be loose in the bin.



Contamination is created when the wrong materials are put into the system, like food in the recycling bin, or when the right materials are prepared in the wrong way, such as when residue is left in containers. Always remember to empty, rinse, then recycle.

Hybrid Squad Vehicles will be Introduced in September

Three hybrid gas-electric vehicles will be joining the Blue Earth County Sheriff's Office patrol fleet. The 2020 Ford Police Interceptor Utility with hybrid powertrain, is not the first purpose-built hybrid patrol vehicle, but it is the first one large enough to accommodate all the gear needed for today's police operations. The hybrid SUV comes with standard all-wheel drive that handles well in big snowstorms, ice storms, and flooding. It has a 0-60 mph time of 7.27 seconds, can come to a complete stop from 60 mph at 132.4 feet, and has anti-lock disc brakes with calipers, pads, and rotors. The 2020 Ford Police Interceptor Utility has a combined highway and city MPG of 24, but the real fuel savings will be coming from being able to keep the battery charged at a scene without the engine running. Typical patrol vehicles need to stay running to keep the battery charged to run lights, computers, radios, and other items that draw current. In the hybrid SUV, if the charge starts to get low on the batteries, it will run the engine just long enough to give them a boost. The purpose-built patrol SUV comes with the wiring for police equipment, vinyl seats, cages, and other necessary equipment tweaked for police driving. Watch for these new hybrid SUVs on county roads in September.

Understanding Highway's Terminology

The Highway Department is busy with summer road projects but understanding what they're actually doing can be another story. We're breaking down what some of their most commonly used terms really mean.

Box Culvert: A rectangular channel made of reinforced concrete installed under roads, trails or railways to drain water from one side to the other. They can range from 6 to 16 feet wide and can be used as short bridges.

Bituminous Overlay: A paving method that protects and enhances a deteriorating road by adding a new layer of blacktop. Typically, a 1.5 to 2.5-inch layer is placed over the existing road to add strength and increase ride quality on minor-to-modestly damaged roads.

Soil Surcharge: A method of compressing weak, soft, and sometimes deep buried soil by placing several layers of sand or soil over the area. The additional weight squeezes water out of the underlying weak soils making it denser and stronger, so it can support new construction on top of it. This process typically takes about a year and is more cost effective than digging out and replacing soft soils.

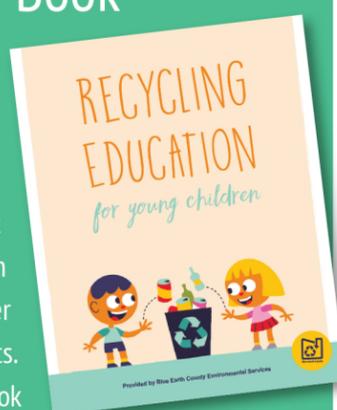
Geotextile Fabrics: A strong, synthetic material used to stabilize loose or soft soil, prevent erosion and build slopes steeper than normal soils allow for.

Facility Open for Summer

The Household Hazardous Waste Facility and Product Reuse Center, at 651 Summit Ave in Mankato, is open now through October for its summer hours.
 Tuesdays Noon - 6pm
 Second Saturday of the Month 8am - 12:30pm
 The facility is permitted to accept wastes from households only from Blue Earth, Nicollet, and Le Sueur Counties. For a list of accepted items, visit www.blueearthcountymn.gov/hhw

Youth Activity Book

Help children learn about recycling by downloading our Recycling Education Activity Book. They'll cut and color their way through the pages to discover recycling tips and fun facts. Download the activity book at www.blueearthcountymn.gov/recyclingedu



2019 Construction Project Updates

CSAH 1 (Old Highway 66): This portion of road, from CSAH 90 to Gwynn Avenue in Mankato, is in its second year of reconstruction. Work in 2019 will include final construction of reinforced soil slopes, road and trail grading, curb and gutter work, storm sewer drainage, and pavement. Another section of the road, between CSAH 9 and 90 will receive soil surcharge ahead of its future reconstruction. Work is expected to be complete by late fall.

Madison Avenue (CSAH 17): Aroundabout will be constructed at the intersection of Madison Avenue and Haefner Drive as part of a cooperative project between the County and the City of Mankato. Construction will begin in early June and is expected to be completed by early fall.

Rapidan Dam: Primarily funded through the DNR Dam Safety Program, the dam's west retaining wall will be stabilized and reinforced with concrete. Work is expected to be completed this fall.

Kern Bridge: Plans are underway to salvage the Kern Bridge, which is located south of Mankato and is 145 years old. The historic and regionally significant bridge, the longest of its type remaining in America, is co-owned by Mankato and South Bend Townships. The structure's support system is failing and needs to be removed before it collapses. The county is leading a federally funded cooperative project to salvage and disassemble the bridge this fall for use at a future location.

CSAH 10 & 14: Work will include shoulder widening, the installation of drainage culverts and tile crossings, regrading of the ditches, recycling the existing pavement, and adding new pavement. CSAH 10 reconstruction is anticipated to begin this summer (pending permits) and will take place one mile east of Vernon Center to CSAH 1. CSAH 14 reconstruction, south of Pemberton from MN Highway 30 to CSAH 4, is currently underway and is expected to be completed this fall.

Summer Reading Program is Blasting Off

The 2019 Summer Reading Program will be out of this world!

3... 2... 1... You're invited to blast off with the Blue Earth County Library as they shoot for the stars and host the 2019 Summer Reading Program. Children newborn to age 17 will have the chance to win prizes for time spent reading and participate in twice weekly programming in June and July. Sign-up online or at county libraries in Mankato, Lake Crystal, or Mapleton. Events listed below are all held at the Mankato Library location unless otherwise noted. Special events will also be offered at the Lake Crystal and Mapleton locations. Please visit us online at www.beclibrary.org for more details and a complete list of events.

Date	Event	Time	Ages
June 11	'The Magic of Reading' with Michael Madden	10:30am	All ages
June 13	HyVee's KidsFit	10:30am	All ages
June 18	The ScienceTellers present 'Aliens: Escape from Earth'	10:30am	4 & up
June 18	Tipi Life	6:00pm	All ages
June 20	Minnesota Zoomobile	10:30 & 11:30am	All ages
June 25	Mike Prestby presents 'Take me to your Readers!'	10:30am	All ages
June 27	The Hasse Family Petting Zoo	10:30am	All ages
June 29	Airplane Rides <i>Sign-up required. Held at Mankato Airport.</i>	8:00am - noon	8-17
July 2	Alfy's World of Robotic Puppets	10:30am	All ages
July 9	'An Outrageously Good Time' with Bob Kann	10:30am	All ages
July 11	A Musical Storytime with Stephen Shaskan	10:30am	All ages
July 16	'Launch and Light' with Peter Johnson	10:30am	7 & up
July 18	'One World, Many Stories' with Randy Christensen	10:30am	All ages
July 23	Dr. Bruce Giebink's ENTotaining Insect Program	10:30am	4 & up
July 25	The Dollipops	10:30am	All ages
July 27	Arn Kind's Vietnam: The American Dilema	10:30am	11 & up
July 30	The Reptile & Amphibian Discovery Zoo	10:30am	All ages

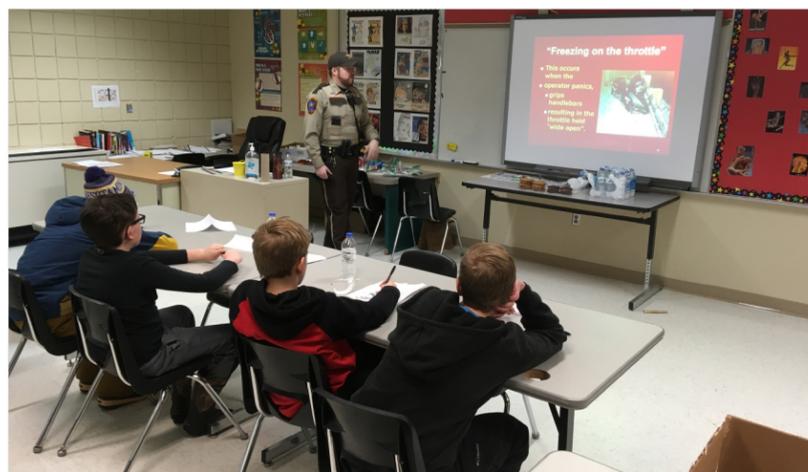
Training Our Youth to be Safe

Youth safety training program being offered by Sheriff's Office.

The Blue Earth County Sheriff's Department is hoping to make the county's youth a little safer. The office has a team of instructors who teach youth safety training for both snowmobile and ATV drivers. The Safety Training Instructors become certified by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources by attending training classes of their own.

Earlier this year, the Sheriff's Office conducted a snowmobile safety class at St. Clair Public School. Students who attended reviewed information they learned throughout the online modules, then displayed their knowledge through a practical performance riding course. Students who successfully completed the review and performance course were allowed to be certified with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

If you or someone you know may be interested in snowmobile or ATV safety training, upcoming classes offered by the county's Sheriff's Office will be advertised on the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources website and on the Blue Earth County Sheriff's Office Facebook page.



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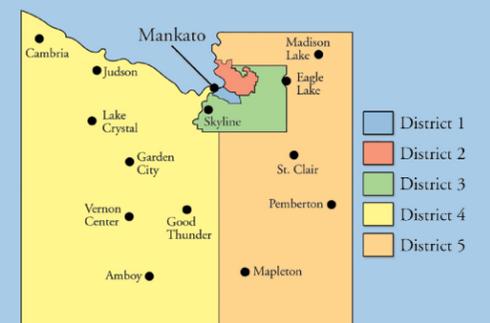
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