Picha, Richardson retiring after more than 40 years of service

Dwight Picha and Mike Richardson, two long-time City of Woodbury employees, are retiring.

Dwight Picha

Picha, who has served the city as Community Development Director for 43 years, is retiring Jan. 31. In his role, Picha leads a department responsible for providing planning, economic development, inspections, housing and code enforcement services.

Picha’s long-term vision for high-quality development and managed growth helped Woodbury mature from a sleepy suburb of 8,000 people to a thriving community of 73,000 during his tenure.

“Woodbury is well known across the region as a well-planned community, and nationally recognized as one of the best places to live, relocate and raise a family,” said Mayor Anne Burt. “This didn’t happen by accident. It was a result of Dwight’s thoughtful and deliberate planning, and consistent application of quality development standards.”

Of the 28,000 homes in Woodbury today, more than 91 percent were approved through the planning and inspection processes under Picha’s guidance. Of the more than 11 million square feet of places to work and shop that Woodbury offers today, more than 10 million of those square feet were planned for – and sometimes recruited by – Picha.

He also played an instrumental role in Woodbury’s commitment to preserving open spaces and creating the city’s extensive parks and trails system that is one of the best in the region.

Picha attributes the city’s success to a tradition of effective elected officials and their commitment to long-term planning, specifically the creation of its comprehensive plans, which are blueprints for future growth. The city recently completed its comprehensive plan for addressing future growth through 2040.

Picha started working for Woodbury under the leadership of the city’s first mayor, Orville Bielenberg, and has worked with every Woodbury mayor in the city’s history.

Mike Richardson

Mike Richardson, Woodbury’s emergency services commander, retired in December after 43 years of service with the city, including more than a decade as Fire Chief.

Richardson originally joined the city as a paid-on-call firefighter/EMT in 1976 before becoming fire chief in 1996. He became the city’s emergency

Council appoints 18 to citizen advisory boards

Eighteen residents were appointed to Woodbury advisory commissions by the City Council in December. All serve on a volunteer basis, and their terms are for three years, unless noted otherwise.

Those appointed were selected from a pool of 47 residents who applied for the advisory board vacancies in October. Council members interviewed candidates in November.

Advisory groups and those appointed include:

Audit and Investment Commission
- Blake Darlow (reappointed)
- Jeanine Kuwik
- John Lehman (one-year term)

Economic Development Commission:
- Emanuel Ekstrom (one-year term)
- Craig Johnson (two-year term)
- Kimberly Moore
- Eric Schurr
- Joseph Ward (reappointed)

Parks and Natural Resources Commission
- Greta Bjerkness (reappointed)
- Arin Kurttila (reappointed)
- Bruce Montgomery
- Rachel Nelson
- Student representative (one-year term): Jakob Neau (St. Croix Preparatory Academy)

Planning Commission
- John Jarrett
- Kay Kern
- Shannon Olsen (reappointed)

Student representatives (one-year term): Sydney Bramel (East Ridge High School) and Falan Walker (East Ridge High School)

South Washington Watershed District
- Michael Madigan (reappointed)

The Council also selected chairpersons for the commissions. They are:
- Aileen Lyle, Audit and Investment Commission
- Gina Kazmerski, Economic Development Commission
- Greta Bjerkness, Parks and Natural Resources Commission
- Jerad Ducklow, Planning Commission

As new appointees are named, the City Council wishes to acknowledge those who have completed their service on city boards and commissions. They include:
- Mark Lombardi and Greg Waibel, Economic Development Commission
- Joelle Moorhouse (student representative), Timothy Sullivan and Emily Wong (student representative), Parks and Natural Resources Commission
- John Chikkala, David Filipiak and Jacob Lambrides (student representative), Planning Commission

Residents interested in serving on any of the city’s advisory boards may apply for openings annually. Applications generally are accepted in October, with interviews in November. Commissioners’ terms begin in January.

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Woodbury Police piloting mental health crisis response program

The volume of mental health related calls to 911 has risen substantially over the years nationally, including here in Woodbury. These types of calls can be some of the most complex situations faced by law enforcement today.

Our Police Department is in the early stages of developing a Community Support Unit that will help improve the quality of service we provide for these calls. I want to share more about this program and how we intend to use it in the future.

In November 2018, Woodbury Police Sgt. Alanna Kopel began researching mental health crisis response programs at other law enforcement agencies and assembled a group of Woodbury police officers to help develop ideas for how a similar program could be best implemented here in Woodbury.

In October 2019, we dedicated a full-time position to our new Community Support Unit, Detective Adam Sack, and provided support from several other officers and detectives who have volunteered to help with this project in addition to their regular duties.

The unit is focusing its initial efforts on cases involving mental illness and substance abuse by addressing some of the underlying causes of these types of emergency calls for service. Right now, our primary actions are conducting early interventions and conducting ongoing case management, and connecting people to meaningful resources.

We are learning from other communities that have initiated similar mental health collaborations such as the Cities of Bloomington, Brooklyn Park, Duluth, Minnetonka, Plymouth, South St. Paul, St. Paul and West. St. Paul. We are also partnering closely with Washington County’s new Crisis Response Unit, Washington County Adult Mental Health, the state’s Department of Veterans Affairs, and numerous other mental health and substance abuse care providers to ensure that people who call 911 in Woodbury are getting the aftercare and resources they need.

In addition to partnering with area agencies and communities, in some situations we are conducting follow-up meetings with the Woodbury Police Department Community Support Unit and a Washington County Crisis Response Unit social worker. Other cases are passed along directly to service providers for immediate follow up.

The intent is to bridge the gap between 911 calls for a crisis situation and connecting the people in crisis – and their families – to the help they need to cope with these situations for the long term.

Early results are positive

Since October 2019, our new Community Support Unit has engaged on more than 30 different cases and is receiving notes of gratitude from residents who are involved in these crisis situations.

We are now doing a better job at connecting people with the resources they need when, in previous years, this extra step of compassion and care may have been overlooked.

Looking ahead

We are working diligently to continue to build and expand our partnerships with care providers and improve our processes as we learn. In February 2020, a small group from the Woodbury Police Department, Cottage Grove Police Department, Washington County Crisis Response, and Washington County Adult Mental Health will be attending a training program at the nationally-recognized police/mental health collaboration learning site at the Los Angeles Police Department to bring back ideas and tools we can use to further our own collaboration.

How to get help

The Washington County Crisis Response Unit provides mobile crisis mental health services for adults and children experiencing a crisis. These interventions are face-to-face, short-term, intensive mental health services conducted by trained mental health professionals and practitioners. To learn more about these services offered by Washington County, visit www.co.washington.mn.us/2923/Crisis-Response.
Plowing crew’s goal is to clear city streets in 8 hours

In an average winter, Public Works crews plow city streets about 25 times. Each time they are called out, plow operators clear the equivalent of 780 miles of one-lane roadway. That’s about the same as driving from St. Paul to Cincinnati, Ohio! And that doesn’t include the 579 cul-de-sacs that also must be cleared.

When they hit the streets during winter storms, Woodbury’s Public Works crews have a mission: To complete plowing and sanding of all city roads and cul-de-sacs at least once within eight hours.

Plowing activities begin in Woodbury whenever icy or slippery conditions make driving difficult. Roads adjacent to schools and primary streets, such as Tamarack Road, Woodlane Drive, Lake Road, Bielenberg Drive and Hudson Road, are given first priority for plowing. Residential streets and cul-de-sacs are cleared next.

“Our goal is to have the primary roads cleared before the morning and evening rush hour,” Streets Supervisor Tim Thurmes said. “Heavy accumulations or high winds sometimes make that impossible, though.”

How you can help

- Observe Woodbury’s winter parking regulations. Don’t park your car on the street between 2 a.m. and 6 a.m., or after a 2-inch snowfall. This not only ensures more effective plowing but also helps you avoid a citation.
- Don’t allow children to build snow forts and tunnels adjacent to the curb, or play in the snow banks adjacent to the curb or snow piles in cul-de-sacs. It can be difficult for the plow operators to see children.
- If trash/recycling pickup day coincides with plowing activities, make sure your trash can and recycling bin are well behind the curb or in the driveway so the plow will not hit them. Plows are required to push snow back to the mailboxes, curbs and road edges to keep the road wide and passable.
- Keep sleds and toys away from the street.

For more information about plowing procedures, visit woodburymn.gov. Questions should be directed to the Public Works Department at 651-714-3720 or email publicworks@woodburymn.gov.

Avoid the “second shovel”

Place snow from end of driveway on this side.

Clear this area of snow to form an opening in which the snow from the road can land after plowing.

Clear snow around mailboxes and set trash and recycling bins back from the road.

Purchase dog license by March 31

Now is the time to purchase your dog’s license for 2020-2021. Identification through licensing your dog is important. Sometimes dogs wander or become lost. The license tag helps animal control officers locate the owner of any pooch they may pick up.

Licenses also are required to use Woodbury’s off-leash dog park, Andy’s Bark Park. Licenses are required for all dogs six months and older, and should be purchased prior to March 31, 2020. After March 31, the license fee doubles. New residents of Woodbury must license their dog(s) within 60 days.

The license period started Jan. 1, 2020, and will end Dec. 31, 2021. The fee is $10 for each spayed or neutered dog, $18 for each non-altered dog. In order to be processed, documentation from a veterinarian must be provided to verify rabies vaccination expiration date.

As in previous years, you can use the attached application to purchase your license by mail or you may come in person. Licenses can be obtained at Woodbury City Hall, 8301 Valley Creek Road from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday through Friday. Please bring a printed copy of your dog’s most recent rabies vaccination certification. Credit cards (MasterCard, Visa and Discover) are accepted in person only; however, payment of cash or check will expedite service.

License applications also are available on the Woodbury website at woodburymn.gov/doglicense. If you mail in the application, you must include a copy of the rabies certificate and a check payable to the City of Woodbury. Mail to: City of Woodbury, Dog License, 8301 Valley Creek Road, Woodbury, MN 55125.

Questions? Call Administration at 651-714-3500.
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Time to renew your dog’s license
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Reserve a park shelter or building beginning Jan. 15
Looking for a place to hold a graduation party, family reunion, business meeting or celebration in 2020? Woodbury’s outdoor park shelters are available for rent beginning Jan. 15. Building spaces are available to rent year-round. The City of Woodbury also offers many different locations and spaces suitable for groups of all sizes at Central Park, Eagle Valley Golf Course, Ojibway Park and HealthEast Sports Center.
Call the Parks and Recreation Department at 651-714-3583 or reserve online at woodburymn.gov/parkrentals.

Early voting for presidential primary begins Jan. 17
In 2016 legislation was passed creating a presidential nomination primary in Minnesota. This will be Minnesota’s first presidential primary since 1992.

What does this mean?
Voters will be able to cast ballots Tuesday, March 3, or vote early in-person or by mail beginning Friday, Jan. 17.

Where do I vote?
To find your polling place for the March 3 primary, visit the Secretary of State’s website at pollfinder.sos.state.mn.us.

In-person absentee voting has relocated and will take place in the lower level of Central Park, 8595 Central Park Place, in Woodbury beginning Friday, Jan. 17, through Monday, March 2, from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday. Voting will also be available on Saturday, Feb. 29, from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. Find additional information and absentee voting locations across Washington County at www.co.washington.mn.us.

What is on the ballot?
Each major political party has a separate ballot for this election and voters must choose which party’s ballot they want. According to the Minnesota Secretary of State’s Office, a voter’s choice of party ballot will be recorded and is private data. However, a list of who voted in a presidential nomination primary and the political party each voter selected will be provided to the chair of each major political party. How someone voted on the ballot will be confidential.

By law, only major parties can participate in the primary. The chair of each major party submits a list of candidates for the party’s ballot no later than Dec. 31, 2019.

The presidential primary replaces the presidential straw poll that used to be held during the precinct caucus. Precinct caucuses will take place Feb. 25 to conduct other party business.

The statewide primary election will take place Aug. 11. Candidates for U.S. Senate and other local races will potentially be on this ballot. The general election is Nov. 3.

Questions should be directed to the Washington County Elections Division at 651-430-6790.

After the primary
After the primary, party delegates will go to a national convention where a final candidate is nominated. A state’s delegates must use the presidential primary results to guide their vote on the first ballot at this convention.

The presidential primary replaces the presidential straw poll that used to be held during the precinct caucus. Precinct caucuses will take place Feb. 25 to conduct other party business.

The statewide primary election will take place Aug. 11. Candidates for U.S. Senate and other local races will potentially be on this ballot. The general election is Nov. 3.

Questions should be directed to the Washington County Elections Division at 651-430-6790.

Keep sidewalks clear of snow
If you own property adjacent to a public sidewalk, city ordinance requires that you maintain the sidewalk by clearing snow and ice within 12 hours after it stops falling. If you have a contractor clearing the snow and ice from your sidewalks and driveway, remind them to also include the clearing of the public sidewalk(s) adjacent to your property.

Be aware that sidewalks not cleared within 12 hours may be abated, meaning the city may hire a private contractor to clear the sidewalk at the cost of the adjacent property owner. The cost of removal varies, but typically exceeds $200 and may include administrative costs as well. If you have questions, contact Matt Novak, senior code enforcement officer, at 651-714-3553 or matt.novak@woodburymn.gov.