

MEETING MINUTES
WATONWAN COUNTY HUMAN SERVICES
 January 21, 2026

CALL TO ORDER

The Watonwan County Human Services Board met in regular open session, in the community room, located in the Watonwan County Human Services building, in the city of St. James, MN, on **Wednesday, January 21, 2026, at 9:03 A.M.**, pursuant to notice given as required by law. The meeting was called to order by Board Chairman, Bill Miller.

ROLL CALL

ATTENDEE NAME	TITLE	STATUS
Jim Pettersen	Commissioner – District 1: <i>2026 Board Vice Chair</i>	Absent
Bill Miller	Commissioner – District 2: <i>2026 Board Chair</i>	Present
Jim Branstad	Commissioner – District 3	Present
Scott Westman	Commissioner – District 4	Absent
Dillon Melheim	Commissioner – District 5	Present
Kimberly Hall	Citizen’s Representative	Present
Chris Knoll	Citizen’s Representative	Present
Amy Pluym	Director	Present
Erin Marks	Accounting & Support Services Supervisor	Present
Jodi Halvorson	Financial Assistance Supervisor	Present
Barb Salmela-Lind	Community Health Services Manager	Absent
Joan Stordalen	Social Services Supervisor	Present
Katy Goldschmidt	Social Services Supervisor	Absent

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

A motion was made by Branstad seconded by Hall to approve the minutes of the **December 17, 2025**, meeting. Motion carried unanimously.

CORRECTIONS / REVISIONS / ADDITIONS to agenda – so noted.

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

Branstad motioned, Melheim seconded, and the motion carried unanimously to approve the **amended** agenda.

NEXT REGULAR BOARD MEETING will be held on **Wednesday, February 18, 2026, at 9:00 A.M.** (Location: Watonwan County Human Services, Community Room, 715 2nd Ave. S., St. James)

DIRECTOR’S REPORT OF AGENCY OPERATIONS – Amy Pluym

- Provided an overview of 2025 program data. Knoll would like the minutes to reflect that the board acknowledges and appreciates the work that the administrative staff (accounting and clerical) provides to the agency.

Other

- At yesterday's Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC) meeting, updates were provided regarding state injunctions and appeals relating to Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP), Minnesota Family Investment program (MFIP), and the Social Services Block Grant.
- Due to safety concerns, this week's Minnesota Association of County Social Services Administrators (MACSSA) will be online only.
- Meetings have begun with the Manager for Children's Residential Crisis to review the contract and continue with its (contract) development.
- Working through changes to the lunch break and attendance policy changes.

INCOME MAINTENANCE / CHILD SUPPORT UPDATES – Jodi Halvorson

Income Maintenance

- The annual Fraud Prevention Investigation Report for SFY 2025 (ending June 30, 2025) has been received. Watonwan County receives a \$35,000 annual grant to fund the fraud investigator position and necessary equipment. This past year, 27 fraud cases were investigated, resulting in \$74,436 in overpayments, cost savings, Administrative Disqualification Hearing (ADH) credits, and criminal case outcomes. The county's cost-to-benefit ratio was \$9.39, well above the state average of \$6.21 and the cost benefit ration goal of \$3.00.
- A temporary restraining order is in effect preventing the freeze of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and childcare funds. A separate court ruling has also temporarily stopped enforcement of the Supplement Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) pilot for counties required to complete large-scale, in-person SNAP eligibility reviews.
- Beginning July 1, 2026, the state is expected to take over non-emergency medical transportation from the counties. Although details are still emerging, counties anticipate maintaining some involvement in transportation approval and coordination.

Child Support

- Nothing new to report.

PUBLIC HEALTH UPDATES – Barbara Salmela-Lind absent

- Nothing new to report

SOCIAL SERVICES UPDATES

Children's Unit - Joan Stordalen

- **Workforce Impact:** Staff are feeling the strain of ongoing community challenges. Recent detentions have left some families with limited support, increasing stress and instability. This has significantly affected child protection cases, as children who understand the potential consequences of parental involvement with authorities may be reluctant to share concerns out of fear that doing so could lead to further harm.
- **Childcare Recruitment:** Licensor, Melissa Schallock and Stordalen will collaborate with Brianna Sanders, City of St. James Economic Development Director, to host a Lunch and Learn on childcare recruitment. The sessions will provide an overview of the childcare licensing process and will also promote the City of St. James' \$5,000 forgivable loan program for individuals currently working through the licensing process.
- **Motivational Interviewing:** Child Protection case managers are now using Motivational Interviewing skills with families and documenting their use in SSIS. These activities are revenue-generating, and new revenue from the state will be tracked once payments are received.

Adult's Unit – Katy Goldschmidt absent

- Nothing new to report

PERSONNEL

- Branstad motioned, Melheim seconded, and the motion passed unanimously to approve the **Probationary Appointment** of **Karli Dellaca**, Health Services Program Aide.
- Miller motioned, Knoll seconded, and the motion passed unanimously to approve the **Probationary Appointment** of **Crystal Laxen**, Registered Nurse.
- Melheim motioned, Branstad seconded, and the motion passed unanimously to End Probation, and move to **Permanent Status** of **Jessica Veenstra**, County Agency Social Worker Team Lead.

STAFF TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

- Nothing new to report.

COMMITTEE MEETING REPORTS

Brown County Evaluation Center – Westman

- Nothing new to report.

CHS (Community Health Services) Advisory Committee – Knoll

- Nothing new to report.

Enterprise North Inc. – Pettersen

- Nothing new to report.

LAC (Local Advisory Council) – Hall

- Nothing new to report.

MRCI (Managed Resources Connections Inc.) Board of Directors – Miller

- Nothing new to report.

SCHSAC (State Community Health Services Advisory Committee) – Melheim

- Nothing new to report.

VFC (Visions for Families and Communities) Collaborative – Branstad

- Miller will be attending the February 11, 2026, meeting in Branstad's absence.

MONTHLY FINANCIAL CLAIMS

- Melheim moved, Hall seconded, and the motion passed unanimously to accept the following quilt donations:
 - Robin Koenig donated 19 quilts.
 - Keith Brekken donated 6 quilts.
 - Augustana Lutheran Church - St. James, donated 6 quilts.
 - Temperance Lake Ridge - Sherburn, donated 5 quilts.
- Melheim moved, Branstad seconded, and the motion passed unanimously to approve the monthly claims in the amount of \$311,964.25, which includes the monthly credit card payment of \$7,179.03.

CONTRACTS / AGREEMENTS / POLICIES

- Nothing new to report.

OTHER

- Knoll moved, Miller seconded, and the motion passed unanimously to approve the appointment of a second 3-year Citizen's Representative term for Kimberly Hall.
- Knoll announced his intent to run for the Minnesota Senate in District 21.

ADJOURNMENT

Having no additional business, Melheim motioned, Branstad seconded, and the motion carried unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 10:08 A.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Erin Marks, Accounting & Support Services Supervisor

Dated:_____

Bill Miller, County Commissioner – Board Chair

Dated:_____