

WATONWAN COUNTY BOARD

January 20, 2026

9:00 A.M.

The Watonwan County Board of Commissioners met as the Ditch Authority for J.D. 26 on January 20, 2026, at 8:30 AM in the Commissioners' Meeting Room of the Courthouse, City of St. James. The following Board Members were present: Jim Branstad, Scott Westman, Bill Miller, Dillon Melheim and Jim Pettersen. Also present was John Kolb (virtually).

John Kolb from Rinke Noonan presented properties that were subject to potential acquisition and to discuss possible damages or compensation for acquisition of the interest proposed.

Miller moved, Melheim seconded, and the motion passed unanimously, to enter closed session at 8:32 AM pursuant to Minn. Stat. § 13.05, subd. 3(c) (3) for parcels 090310800, 090310900, 090310600 and 090310700.

Pettersen moved, Miller seconded, and the motion passed unanimously, to end the session closed at 8:46 AM.

Branstad moved, Melheim seconded, and the motion passed unanimously, to authorize John Kolb to present offers to landowners.

Meeting adjourned at 8:50 AM.

The Watonwan County Board of Commissioners met in regular session on January 20, 2026, at 9:00 AM. The following Board Members were present: Jim Branstad, Scott Westman, Bill Miller, Dillon Melheim and Jim Pettersen. The meeting was opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Pettersen moved, Branstad seconded, and the motion passed unanimously, to approve the agenda as amended.

Branstad moved, Melheim seconded, and the motion passed unanimously, to approve the minutes of the January 6th regular meeting.

Sherriff Jared Bergeman presented a list from the Madelia Police Department of Capital that the County will purchase. The list detailed proposed expenditures for equipment, vehicles, and technology upgrades intended to support law enforcement operations and enhance public safety.

Pettersen moved, Miller seconded, and the motion passed unanimously, to approve the \$76,538 Capital purchase from the Madelia Police Department.

Pettersen moved, Melheim seconded, and the motion passed unanimously, to approve the payment of bills as audited and filed in the County Auditor/Treasurer's Office as follows by fund: General Fund - \$469,562.03; Solid Waste Fund - \$2,157.69; Soil & Water Conservation - \$439.19; Ditch Fund - \$26,797.78; Agency Fund - \$345.00; Road and Bridge Fund - \$64,479.62; and to approve the December Expenditures and Disbursements Listing as presented.

Branstad moved, Miller seconded, and the motion passed unanimously, to approve the following:

RESOLUTION
CLASSIFICATION OF TAX FORFEITED LANDS
26-1

WHEREAS, The County Board of Commissioners of Watonwan County, State of Minnesota, desires to offer for sale certain parcels of land described as follows, that have forfeited to the State of Minnesota for non-payment of taxes as described as follows:

Parcel #1
131514320
Property Address - 255 FIFTH ST N
ARMSTRONGS ADDITION BLOCK-034 W 210' OF N1/2 OF BLK 34
LESS S 15' X W 165' OF N1/2
City of Butterfield

Parcel #2
141000650
Property Address - 90 FIRST AVE
ORIGINAL - DARFUR CITY BLOCK-005 LOT 4 EXC N 45'; LOT 5
City of Darfur

Parcel #3
201510480
Property Address - 717 SIXTH ST N
ARMSTRONG'S PARK ADDITION BLOCK-006 S 40' OF LOT 2; N 13' OF LOT 3
City of St. James

Parcel #4
202760910
Property Address - 405 SIXTH ST N
FIRST ADDITION BLOCK-064 E1/2 OF LOTS 5, 6; E1/2 OF S 24.5' OF LOT 4
City of St. James

Parcel #5
202760700
Property Address - 411 FOURTH ST N
FIRST ADDITION LOT-004 BLOCK-062 & N1/2 OF LOT 5; E70' OF S1/2 OF LOT 5; E70'
OF LOT
City of St. James

Parcel #6
202760720)
Property Address - 315 FOURTH AVE N
FIRST ADDITION BLOCK-062 W70' OF S1/2 OF LOT 5; W70' OF LOT6

City of St. James

WHEREAS, the said parcels of land have been viewed by the Watonwan County Auditor; and

WHEREAS, the County board considered the present use of adjacent lands, the productivity of the soil, the character of forest or other growth, accessibility of lands to established roads, schools, and other public services, their peculiar suitability or desirability for particular uses, and the suitability of the forest resources on the land for multiple use and sustained yield management.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Watonwan County Board of Commissioners hereby classify all parcels of land as non-conservation lands as provided for in Minnesota Statutes 282.01.

The Board was reminded of the County Board of Appeal and Equalization Meeting on June 15th at 6:30 PM.

County Engineer Michael McCarty requested the Board approve the final payment for the construction of bridges on Elm Creek Road in Madelia and on CSAH 27 southwest of LaSalle with a total of \$1,999,758.03.

Melheim moved, Miller seconded, and the motion passed unanimously, to approve the final payment for the construction of bridges on Elm creek Road and CSAH 27.

County Engineer Michael McCarty presented to the Board proposals evaluations for Bridge 83505 replacement. The following proposals were presented as:

Firm	Proposed Structure	Estimated Cost
Widseth	Box Culvert	\$32,260.00
LHB	Box Culvert	\$39,766.00
SEH	Box Culvert	\$42,850.00

Branstad moved, Miller seconded, and the motion passed 4-1 with Melheim opposed, to accept the SEH proposal.

Melheim moved, Pettersen seconded, and the motion passed unanimously, to approve the hiring of Deputy Sheriff Luis Martinez.

Westman asked if there were any recycling concerns. Pettersen and Branstad reported receiving calls regarding the dumpsters. Miller stated the same concerns were raised at the Odin City Council meeting and suggested waiting until July to evaluate the dumpsters.

Melheim moved, Miller seconded, and the motion passed unanimously, for a special meeting on Wednesday, February 25, 2026, at 7:00pm for public input regarding the elimination of the shotgun-only zone in Watonwan County for deer hunting beginning in 2026.

Branstad moved, Pettersen second, and the motion passed unanimously, to continue the regular meeting on 01/22/2026 at 2:30 PM in the Commissioners' room to discuss personal.

Meeting recessed at 10:07 AM.

The regular meeting continued January 22, 2026, at 2:30 PM. The following Board Members were present: Scott Westman, Bill Miller, and Jim Pettersen. Dillon Melheim and Jim Branstad were absent.

Pettersen moved, Miller seconded, and the motion passed unanimously to go into closed session at 2:35pm pursuant to Minn. Stat. § 13D.05, subd. 2(b) for preliminary consideration of allegations against an individual subject to the Board's authority.

Miller moved, Pettersen seconded, and the motion passed unanimously to open session at 2:50 PM.

Miller moved, Pettersen seconded, and the motion passed unanimously, to accept the Termination of Rebecca Senf, effective January 23, 2026.

Human Resources Director Crystal Reed presented to the board the AFSCME contract.

Pettersen moved, Miller seconded, and the motion passed unanimously, to approve the AFSCME contract for the period of January 1, 2026, through December 31, 2027.

Pettersen moved, Miller seconded, and the motion passed unanimously, to adjourn meeting at 3:02 PM.

Scott Westman, Chairman
Watonwan County Board

Susan Montemayor, Deputy Clerk
Watonwan County Board

ATTEST: Kelly Pauling
Watonwan County Auditor/Treasurer

